

The one who has said of his father and mother, “I have not favored him”; his brothers he did not give recognition, and his children he did not know.” (33:9)

As Moshe *Rabbeinu* blesses *Shevet Levi*, he details their qualities and the perfection of their souls, which they exhibited while standing up for the Glory of Hashem and His Torah. They withstood enormous challenges to their spiritual persona and emerged better people, to the point that their individual personal lives had no meaning to them. They lived for Hashem. When Moshe stood in the midst of the Jewish camp following the tragic sin of the Golden Calf, he called out, *Mi l'Hashem eilai!* “Who is for Hashem should come forward and stand by me!” It was the tribe of *Levi* that surged forward. At Moshe’s order, they raised their swords and slew the idolaters – even if they were close family. Their loved ones had become Hashem’s enemies. *Shevet Levi* answered the call. They responded to *Mi l'Hashem eilai*. This tribe demonstrated unprecedented commitment.

It is, therefore, strange that when we read *Bircas Moshe*, our quintessential leader’s blessing, we are surprised that, to the consummate appellations attributed to these spiritual giants, Moshe adds, *Ki shamru imrasecha u'Brischa yivtzoru*, “For they observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved.” These words are anti-climactic. Every Jew is obligated to observe Hashem’s word and preserve His covenant. What did *Shevet Levi* do that was so unusual? They acted in much the same manner that is expected of every ordinary Jew. It is like saying that the spiritual giant, the greatest, most eminent scholar of the generation, observes *Shabbos*. Is this all there is to say about him/them?

Horav Avraham Zelmans, zl, *Rosh Yeshivah* in Novarodok, derives an all-important lesson concerning *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. Regardless of one’s spiritual stature, even if he is the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, someone who has the ability to catalyze great and mighty achievements, who can – and does – withstand the greatest challenges – even he must concern himself with what may appear to be an insignificant *mitzvah*, a simple spiritual endeavor. He may not say, “I will do bigger and better things.” He is obliged in the most menial, as well as the most sublime. One may not say, “I do not have the time for *davening* in the morning. I am busy throughout the night with important communal activities. I am writing my *shiurim*, lectures, etc.”

There are individuals whose lives are devoted to the basic *mitzvos* – *shul*, a little learning, *tzedakah*, *Shabbos*, etc. They do not get involved in the larger communal issues. They do not protest, give *mussar*, “stick out their necks” to take on those who would usurp the Torah-way. On the other hand, there are those gifted individuals whose innate talent and personality render them prime candidates for communal leadership. They are always in the thick of things, in middle of the fray of activity. They can be called upon 24/7 to answer the call of someone in distress. When it comes, however, to the basics – such as timely *davening*, attendance and participation, learning a daily minimum, helping someone who will not garner much attention, they are suddenly deficient.

The Torah is teaching us that an *adam ha'shaleim*, complete man, does it all. Only one who has successfully adhered to the criteria of, "For they observed Your word and Your Covenant they preserved," can go on to be among those who are *Mi l'Hashem eilai*. One does not happen without the other.