

Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael on the Choshen Hamishpat (Breastplate of judgment) on his heart. (28:29)

Aharon *HaKohen* merited to wear the breastplate on his heart due to the manner in which he accepted Moshe *Rabbeinu's* appointment as the leader of the Jewish People. Prior to Moshe's entrance on the scene, Aharon had been the *Navi* and leader of the Jewish people. Suddenly, his position transformed from leader to assistant. Not only did Aharon not complain, but the Torah says *V'roacha v'somach b'libo*, "He will see you and he will rejoice in his heart" (*Shemos* 4:4). Aharon's humility was such that he manifested no ego whatsoever when he lost his position to his younger brother. This is an incredible level of brotherly love. I think it goes further and deeper. Aharon truly rejoiced when he saw how happy Moshe was. "He will see you" – When Aharon will look at your face, he will be filled with joy over your good fortune. When he sees your joy – he, too, will be happy.

Some people live for themselves, and some very special people live to provide for others. Someone who lives for others does not view his "contribution" or "deferment" to them as a sacrifice, but rather, as something he enjoys doing. *Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita*, underscores this idea (cited by Rabbi Binyamin Pruzansky, *Living Higher*) by relating a poignant story.

Bar mitzvah boys wait and look forward to that august moment in which they pass through this momentous rite of passage. Sadly, when the Covid epidemic was raging, many *bar mitzvah* boys had to settle with little to no fanfare. During the initial stages, the *shuls* were closed and receiving an *aliyah*, being called up to the Torah, was, for the most part, impossible. Former Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*, Rabbi Lau, was asked to address a group of *bar mitzvah* boys via Zoom. One must appreciate the mindset of these boys. This was the moment for which they had planned, strived and prepared for quite some time. At this young age, it was supposed to be their greatest moment. Alas, now it was but a dream.

The Chief Rabbi began by telling the group about his past. He was a young Holocaust survivor, who was, at an early age orphaned of his father and mother. The Nazis had murdered his parents in Treblinka. The young Yisrael Meir was spared certain death when his older brother placed him into a sack and smuggled him into Buchenwald. Following the liberation, he and his older brother, two children alone in the world, emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, where they hoped to make their home. Like all boys, Yisrael Meir's *bar mitzvah* was coming up; he prepared his *parashah* well. He was not *laining*, reading the Torah, just for himself, but also for his parents and all the family members who the Nazis had murdered. Word went out that one of the youngest survivors of the Holocaust was reading the Torah in honor of his *bar mitzvah*, and the *shul* quickly filled to capacity, the excitement palpable.

The time came, and the young boy ascended to the *bimah*, draped in his *tallis*, prepared to demonstrate how well he had prepared. When he reached the *bimah*, he became aware of a

developing issue. Apparently, an elderly man who served as the *shul's* regular *baal korei*, Torah reader, was miffed that this young man was replacing him at the *bimah*. The man was lonely and, other than *laining* in *shul*, he had very little in life. The reading of the Torah was very important to him, and he was not prepared to give it up – especially on a *Shabbos* when the *shul* was packed with visitors from all over.

The *gabbai*, sexton, who was in charge of the Torah reading, as well as the leading of the *tefillos*, asked the man, “Did you forget that this week is a *bar mitzvah*, and the boy will read the Torah?” “You should have informed me earlier,” the *baal korei* countered. “I spent an entire week preparing to *lain*!” “You are absolutely right,” the *gabbai* said, “but the boy has spent months preparing for this moment.” The *baal korei* would not budge, “You cannot do this to me. I read the Torah every week to a small crowd. Finally, I have a week when I can show off my talents to a large crowd, you take it from me!” “You do not seem to understand,” said the *gabbai*. “The crowd is here today to listen to the *bar mitzvah* boy read the Torah – not you. The young boy is an orphan. He has nothing – no parents – no family. It is his first big day! Let it be.”

Rav Lau said, “I saw the pain in the elderly man’s eyes. He, too, had nothing. He was in his twilight years and all alone. I had my entire life ahead of me. I went over to him and said, ‘I am still young, and I pray that I will have many more opportunities in life to read from the Torah. You should *lain*, and I will receive an *aliyah*.’” The *gabbai* looked at me and nodded. It was okay to let the man read the Torah. When I saw the look on the *baal korei's* face, I immediately knew that I had done the right thing.”

Rav Lau looked at the boys and said, “You must ask yourselves as you enter into the yoke of *mitzvos*: ‘What will be my first *mitzvah*?’ I know that my first *mitzvah* was giving up my spot to an elderly Jew to whom it meant so much. Indeed, I have had many forums for speaking publicly. Remember: When you give up a little to help a fellow *Yid*, you never lose out.”

Aharon *HaKohen* taught us well to always think of the other fellow. After all, what else are we here for?