

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Rivkah *bas* Rephael Yehoshua *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Pointing in the Right Direction

PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSCHA 5776

Did you ever notice how parents react to the exploits of their toddlers? Let us say, for example, that on the way to the babysitter, the young child – of his own accord – picks up his coat and even puts it on. Most likely, his parents will be beside themselves with joy. “Hooray!” they might exclaim, and clap enthusiastically over the little one’s display of prowess and acumen.

But if an adult was to do the exact same thing – put on his coat before going outside – no one would even bat an eyelash. And for good reason. After all, such is expected of a grown-up; he receives no special commendations for performing basic tasks.

Congratulations for Compliance

And yet, there seems to exist an example in this week’s *parshah* of an individual who is given accolades for what appears to be fairly standard behavior. The *parshah* opens with some details regarding the lighting of the Menorah in the Sanctuary: וַיְדַבֵּר ד' אֱלֹהִים לְאַהֲרֹן, דַּבֵּר – “And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you light the lamps, the seven lamps should illuminate toward the face of the Menorah” (*Bamidbar* 8:3). The directive refers to the arrangement of the lighting. The Menorah of the Temple is comprised of seven branches: three on either side of the central stem (the term “*p’nei hamenorah*” in this *passuk* refers to this central lamp). Aharon was thus instructed to direct the lights of the branches such that they should face toward the central lamp.

The Torah proceeds to report that Aharon adhered to the command: “*Vaya’as kein Aharon – Aharon acted accordingly*” (*ibid.* v. 3). Commenting on the need for the Torah to provide this information, Rashi states: שֶׁל אֶהְרֹן שְׁלֵם שְׁנָה – “This relates the praise of Aharon, (informing us) that he did not deviate (from the instructions).”

Aharon, of course, was a righteous individual of towering spiritual stature. There is no lack of his attributes to hold up and applaud. For example, we find that Chazal exhort us to follow the example of his sterling character. As the Mishnah states (*Avos* 1:12):

הָיָה מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אֶהְרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבָן לַתּוֹרָה.

“Be from the disciples of Aharon: Loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them close to Torah.”

So it certainly seems surprising that, of all potential qualities, the *passuk* here chose to emphasize this particular item. Is it really so extraordinary that Aharon lit the Menorah in accordance with Hashem’s directive? Would we have thought otherwise? Why, then, is such praise extended to Aharon for merely doing as he was told?

The truth is that many commentators grapple with this issue, providing any number of explanations. (In fact, this was the subject of a Mishnas Chayim article of a previous year [5768], where the innovative approach of the Maharil Diskin was advanced.) Due to space constraints, we will suffice here by presenting the novel approach cited by R' Zalman Sorotzkin in his Torah commentary *Oznayim LaTorah*.

Pinpoint Location

What, exactly, did the instructions entail? As stated above, the matter seems to involve the directional placement of the wicks within the lamps; on either side of the central stem were three lamps, the flames of which should each face toward the center. R' Sorotzkin points out, however, that the wording of the *passuk* would seem to imply that there is more to it than that. According to this arrangement, there are really only *six* lamps that are affected (three on each side of the central one); why, then, does the *passuk* include all *seven* lamps in the directive: אֶלְמֹול פְּנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנְּרוֹת הַמְנוֹרָה? This would seem to imply that the entirety of the Menorah is involved in the directional arrangement of the lamps.

It must be, then, that these instructions issued to Aharon entail much more than the placement of the wicks towards the central lamp. R' Sorotzkin explains that the additional requirement relates to a classic Kabbalistic concept that speaks of a “*Mikdash Shel Ma’alah* – Upper Sanctuary.” Even while the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Yerushalayim, there was another, corresponding Mikdash in the Heavens Above. Thus, the directive regarding the lighting of the Menorah requires that the flames of its lamps – all seven of them – should face toward the exact celestial “location” of the Menorah in the Heavenly Spheres.

Now, truth be told, this did not present such a challenge for the officiators in the Beis Hamikdash of Yerushalayim. That was a permanent structure, which was situated here on earth directly below the “location” of the *Mikdash Shel Ma’alah* in Heaven. As such, the Menorah’s lights were basically fixed in position right where they should be, facing the proper Celestial point.

It was in the times of the portable Mishkan (Tabernacle) that an issue arose. Here, the terrestrial Sanctuary was constantly on the move, being dismantled and transported from one place and erected in another. As such, the *kohein* (priest) who would light the Menorah in the Mishkan could not simply rely on the fact that the flames would automatically face the proper Celestial location. Rather, he had to be able to discern – from wherever he stood on earth – exactly where the Menorah in Heaven was situated. Obviously, this could not be achieved by any ordinary person, as it required an intimate knowledge and familiarity with the Celestial spheres. As such, only an individual whose soul was extremely refined and pristine, whose essence was lofty and elevated, could possess such spiritual sensitivities to pinpoint this location.

This, explains R' Sorotzkin, was the essence of the praise accorded to Aharon. He was not commended simply for following instructions, but for the fact that he was capable of carrying them out. In other words, his ability to successfully execute this service indicates his lofty spiritual stature; for it was only *because* of his exalted level that he could so precisely fulfill his task.