

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

B'HA-ALO-T'CHA 5785

Our Parsha opens with the mitzva of kindling the lamps of the Menorah by Aharon (8:1-4). Rashi (8:2, s.v. B'HA-ALO-T'CHA), quoting the Midrash (Tanchuma 5), wonders why this topic is mentioned here when the subject had already been discussed earlier (Sh'mot 27:21, 30:8). "Why is the Parsha of the Menorah juxtaposed to the CHANUKAT HAN'SI'IM (the special offering brought by the leaders of each tribe)? Answers the Midrash: "When Aharon saw the daily dedication offerings by the N'si'im, he felt disheartened, because neither he, nor his tribe, took part in this ceremony. Gd assured Aharon, saying: Do not worry, your portion is greater than theirs, for you are to light and attend to the Menorah every morning and evening."

Ramban (ad loc.) immediately questions the basic assumption of this Midrash and raises two basic questions:

1) Why was Aharon depressed by the offerings of the Princes at the dedication of the Mishkan? During the Y'mei HaMilu'im ceremony (Vayikra 8:1-36) which preceded the inauguration, he and his children enjoyed seven days of exclusive attention, offering all of the korbanot on each of

those days.

And 2) How would the obligation to kindle the Menorah specifically be a consolation for Aharon more so than any of the other special sacrificial performances he would be given later?

Ramban, unable to find a satisfying explanation of this Midrash according to the p'shat, instead advances what has become a well-known answer. He suggests that the consolation would eventually come to pass at a future time, when the descendants of Aharon, the Chashmona'im, would rededicate the Temple and kindle the Menorah, an event that would be commemorated by the Chanuka festival even after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. This momentous future assignment would certainly eclipse that of the offerings of the Nesi'im.

Rav Soloveitchik, however, proposes another quite novel solution to the above questions without having to push the promise of consolation to some 1100 years later. The Rav suggests that Aharon was dejected by something else entirely. The offering of the ketoret (incense) was restricted by the Torah in that it could never be brought voluntarily as a N'DAVA (a donative offering). Yet, in the sacrificial offering of the Nesi'im, there was a HORA'AT SHA'A, a one-time directive, that allowed

each of the tribal princes to do so, but not Aharon (see Bamidbar 7:14). Aharon naturally took this to mean that the offerings brought by the Nesi'im were more significant than his. He felt a qualitative inequality between their roles in the Mishkan's dedication. Hence, Aharon's despondency and depression.

Now, the incense offering was no small matter. The Talmud relates (Yoma 26a) that the kohen who was given this privilege was guaranteed wealth and prosperity. Moreover, the Midrash (Tanchuma T'tzaveh 15) declares that "Of all the sacrifices, none is more beloved by HaShem than the ketoret." There are numerous ancient sources that attribute to the ketoret various metaphysical powers that can protect against both physical and demonic dangers. No wonder Aharon felt terrible when this opportunity was not afforded him as well.

According to this understanding though, how are we to understand HaShem comforting Aharon by telling him that he alone is responsible for the kindling of the Menorah? The Rav responds by reminding us of something amazing that is not evident from the text here. Elsewhere, the Torah is quite clear (Sh'mot 30:7-8) that every lighting of the Menorah, morning and evening, also included the incense offering. In fact, the

rituals of the Menorah lighting and ketoret offering were actually comingled, intertwined, as it were. As the Talmud elaborates (Yoma 14b-15a, 33b) and codified by Rambam (Hilchot T'midim 6:4), after the first five of the seven lamps of the Menorah were prepared, the incense was offered, and only after, were the remaining two candles readied.

HaShem therefore informs an unhappy Aharon that since with every lighting of the Menorah, there must also be an accompanying ketoret offering, and since the preparation of the lamps of the Menorah takes place before any of the daily sacrifices are brought, his lighting of the Menorah along with the incense ritual would precede the daily sacrifices of the Nesi'im. Aharon is thus consoled when HaShem tells him that his portion is greater than that of the Nesi'im as he is obligated with the Menorah lighting which, entwined with the ketoret, is that which enables the Nesi'im to offer their one-time precious ketoret offering.

According to Rav Soloveitchik then what made Aharon's kohanic role unique was his being tasked with two responsibilities: the Menorah and the Incense. Is there though some deeper message that this twin offering was meant to convey and teach? The Rav believed that both symbolized and hence come to say something about

the phenomenon of knowledge. There are two orders of knowledge: the revealed and the hidden, both the ultimate province of the Almighty. The revealed, the exoteric wisdom, is that which we find in Creation, in the physical entities of our world below as well as in the astral spheres above. It engages man in scientific inquiry and invention, and leads to medical advances and technological marvels. Our Torah is also part of Gd's revealed wisdom to be studied and practiced. The Menorah, with its seven branches, is that holy vessel which symbolizes the seven branches of all revealed knowledge, that "light" which illumines and discloses to man's rational faculties the enormous mysteries of the cosmos. This revealed knowledge is presented to man by his Maker as his great existential challenge and mission.

The hidden and esoteric is the second order of knowledge, and is represented by the ketoret. This is a dimension of the Divine mystery that is real, but simply unknowable to man. It exists in the realm of Gd's infinite omniscience and is not accessible to man's mortal intelligence no matter its genius. That it exists, delivers a dual powerful and necessary message to man. First, it engenders humility on the part of humankind. No matter how much we think we know, no matter how brilliant a person may be, he must

stand in awe, overwhelmed and with head bowed before the mysterium tremendum of Gd's numinous reality. The more we explore the known, the more we discover the unknown. And second, as much as we try to grasp and make sense out of the often-turbulent events of our life - and inevitable fail in that vain attempt - we must accept that what often appears unfair and arbitrary, chaotic, cruel and unjust, is part of Gd's inscrutable wisdom whose hiddenness makes it impossible for us to decipher and comprehend what HaShem's plan is. But a plan, there is! And we are beckoned to trust and believe that somewhere, somehow in that hidden wisdom, there lies a Divine design and purpose.

And it is the ketoret, with its ethereal secret combination of incense fragrances, that transports us to a different realm, that of the transcendent and mysterious - the hidden. We cannot know it, but we can experience its presence, and that's enough!

Aharon and his descendants would be entrusted to enlighten the people with this life-changing understanding of the phenomenon of knowledge and how its two orders undergird all of existence, giving man meaning and purpose, trust and consolation. After all, to them, the tribe of Levi, was assigned the role of teacher. "They

**[the Levites] shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel; they shall place incense before Your Presence, and burnt offerings on Your Altar" (D'varim 33:10).**

**The Temple sadly does not stand, and the holy kohanim do not currently function, but the message of the Menorah and the Ketoret thankfully remains! 🙌**