



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בהעלתך תשס"ח 5768 Parshas Beha'aloscha

MIRACLE GROW

INTERESTING CONVERSATION

When it comes to dialogue, people tend to appreciate equilibrium; the reaction of one party should be proportionate to the statements of the other. For example, if you tell someone that you had meatballs for supper last night, and he replies, "Oh," that is generally perceived as an acceptable response. However, if someone, upon being informed that you ate meatballs last night, responds, "WOW!! That is just SOOOOO NIFTY!!!!!" he may be greeted by looks of perplexity.

Nevertheless, the Medrash relates a conversation between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu which at first glance appears no less puzzling. Hashem instructs Moshe to choose a *Kohen Gadol* from the tribe of Levi. In response to Moshe's query as to the exact nature of the procedure, Hashem instructs him to use the *shemen hamishchah* (anointing oil). Moshe's response to this directive is somewhat baffling. He declares in wonderment, "How beloved is the tribe of Levi before You!"

On the surface, Moshe Rabbeinu's reaction appears a bit disproportionate. Apparently, he asked a technical question, and received a practical answer. What was so earth-shattering about this information that caused Moshe Rabbeinu such intense joy and amazement?

We may be able to achieve some clarity by first examining an aspect in this week's *parshah*, which touches upon a very interesting characteristic of the *shemen hamishchah*.

AHARON'S PRAISE

After delineating Hashem's instruction to Aharon to light the *menorah* in the *mikdash*, the *possuk* tells us (*Bamidbar* 8:3) that Aharon indeed fulfilled the

command. Commenting on the need for an explicit verse testifying to Aharon's compliance, Rashi quotes from Chazal: "The *possuk* is relating the praise of Aharon; it tells us that he did not deviate whatsoever from Hashem's directive."

However, the Maharil Diskin is still (initially) unsatisfied with this explanation. He asks (in paraphrased form): Frankly, what's the big deal that Aharon didn't institute any changes from what he was told? Shouldn't it be expected that a person (especially of Aharon's stature) would follow Hashem's instructions?

The Maharil Diskin prefaces his explanation with a Mishnah from Tamid (3:9), which deals with some particulars of the *menorah's* accoutrements:

אָבֹן הַיְתֵה לְפָנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה וּבָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מַעְלוֹת, שְׁעָלֶיהָ הַפְּתוּ עוֹמֵד וַיִּמָּטֵב אֶת הַנִּירוֹת.

"There was a three-step staircase in front of the *menorah*, fashioned from stone. The *Kohen* would ascend these steps in order to prepare the *menorah* (for the kindling service)."

According to the Bartenura, the steps provided the *Kohen* with the necessary height to comfortably officiate at the *menorah*, which stood three cubits high. (A cubit is more than a foot).

The Maharil Diskin provides us with two pieces of information which seem to eliminate the need for Aharon to employ this 'booster':

1) The Leviim were rather tall people. The implication of the Gemara in Shabbos (92a) is that they were each 10 cubits tall.

2) When Dovid was preparing to fight the wicked Golyas, he donned King Shaul's personal coat of armor, which fit him (*Shmuel I*, 17:38), despite the fact that Shaul was the tallest member of the Jewish nation (*ibid*. 9:2). How was this youth able to fit into garments which were size XXL? From here, the Medrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:9) concludes that the

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shemen hamishchah — with which Dovid Hamelech was anointed — possessed a truly amazing quality. Any individual upon whom the oil was applied would instantly increase in height.

Given these two factors, Aharon must have been *really tall*. He hailed from the tribe of Levi; and he had been anointed with the *shemen hamishchah*. Surely, for Aharon, the steps leading up to the *menorah* were unnecessary.

The Maharil Diskin therefore understands the aforementioned Rashi based upon these factors. Indeed, Aharon did not need to ascend steps in order to reach the *menorah*. In fact, he was technically exempt from this part of the *menorah*-lighting process (*Derech Sichah*, p. 417). Nevertheless, to avoid differentiating himself, he adhered to the regular procedure of using the staircase; and for this, he was praised.

HEADS UP

These factors present a patent difficulty regarding the serving of the *Kohen Gadol* in the *mishkan*. The *mishkan*'s height was 10 cubits. The *Kohen Gadol* — a member of the tribe of Levi — was 10 cubits high; he would just fit. However, he was anointed with the *shemen hamishchah*, causing him to grow even taller. How, then, could any *Kohen Gadol* officiate in the *mishkan*? Wouldn't he bump his head on the ceiling?

R' Yonasan Eibshitz (*Nefesh Yehonasan*, *parshas Tetzaveh*) explains that, given these dynamics, it must be that the accommodation of the *Kohen Gadol* in the *mishkan* was nothing short of miraculous, defying the laws of physics. (The *Bais Hamikdash* exhibited similar phenomenal accommodations. For example, the Gemara in Megillah 10b delineates the dimensions associated with the placement of the *aron hakodesh* in the Holy of Holies. On whichever side one would measure, there would be 10 cubits between the *aron* and the wall, despite the fact that the entire width and length of that room was 20 cubits by 20 cubits. Rashi explains that the *aron* did not take up any physical space whatsoever.)

Why was Moshe Rabbeinu so amazed upon learning that he should anoint the *Kohen Gadol* with the *shemen hamishchah*? R' Eibshitz explains that Moshe was well aware of the elongating properties of the *shemen hamishchah*. When he heard that the *Kohen Gadol* was to be selected from amongst the jumbo-sized Leviim, and that he was to be anointed with the *shemen hamishchah*, Moshe immediately identified the inherent difficulty: As an already-tall Levi, the use of the special quick-growth oil meant that there would be no way to fit the new *Kohen Gadol* into the *mishkan* without resorting to a suspension of the conventional laws of physics.

Given the fact that Hashem was nevertheless intent on picking a candidate specifically from the tribe of Levi, regardless of the constant miracle that it would entail, Moshe realized that the tribe of Levi must be especially beloved to Hashem. Hence the amazed exclamation: "How beloved is the tribe of Levi before You!"

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