

Parsfiav Ki Savo 5772

LOOKING DOWN AND LOOKING UP

Yeshivos need help. This is not meant as an appeal, but merely a statement of fact (although, for any who do extend help, we say: *tavo alav berachah* [let a blessing fall on his head]). And it's nothing new. For years, many of even the greatest Torah institutions have contended with a massive financial struggle to survive. R' Baruch Ber Leibowitz, R' Elchanan Wasserman and R' Shimon Shkop are just a few of the legendary figures who were forced to take leave of their beloved institutions for extended fundraising trips to rescue their *yeshivos* from dire straits.

Why this phenomenon seems to be such a steadfast fact of life is actually a matter of considerable depth. There is much insight we may glean from the section of curses and blessings in this week's *parshah*, which contains a parallel situation of sorts:

THE MOUNTAINS AND THE VALLEY

The setting for the pronouncement of these utterances was the area of Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eival, as the verses state (*Devarim 27:12-14*): "The following (tribes) shall stand on Mt. Gerizim to bless the nation... Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, Yissachar, Yosef and Binyamin. And the following shall stand on Mt. Eival (to preside) over the curses: Reuvein, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan and Naftali. And the Leviim shall answer and say to every man of Yisrael, in a raised voice..."

The Mishnah in Sotah (7:5) provides more details of the workings of this great spectacle:

"Six tribes ascended to the summit of Mt. Gerizim, and six tribes ascended to the summit of Mt. Eival, while the Kohanim and the Leviim, as well as the Aron (Holy Ark)

would stand below, in the center. The Kohanim surrounded the Aron, the Leviim surrounded the Kohanim, and the rest of Yisrael stood on either side... They (the assemblage in the center) turned their faces toward Mt. Gerizim and commenced with a blessing: 'Blessed is the man who does not fashion an idol or molten image,' and the congregation on either side would answer, 'Amen!' They (the middle assemblage) would then turn their faces toward Mt. Eival and commence with a curse: 'Cursed is the man who fashions an idol or molten image' (*Devarim 27:15*), and the congregation on either side would answer, 'Amen!' (The procedure would continue as such) until they completed all of the blessings and curses (listed in ch. 27 of *Devarim*)."

The key players in this elaborate ceremony seem to be the cohort of Kohanim and Leviim. While the tribes stood on the mountains' peaks, the ground-dwellers below recited the actual blessings. The welfare of the entire nation was thus dependant on their pronouncements.

R' Moshe Shternbuch (*Ta'am Vada'as*) points out the apparent irony of this situation. The Leviim do not receive an inheritance in the Land, as Eretz Yisrael is apportioned amongst the other tribes. From a purely materialistic standpoint, it certainly seems that the tribes are much better off. They are wealthy landholders, laden with abundant possessions, with the luxury to revel "each man under his grape vine and under his fig tree" (*Melachim I 5:5*). The Levite family, on the other hand, is totally preoccupied with the Divine Temple Service and lacks agricultural opportunity or the ability to achieve real material success. Their livelihood is much at the mercy of others, as they depend on the special gifts and donations of the people. The arrangement of this ceremony even seems to bear out the contrast in status; the "well-to-do" tribes are situated

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high above, perched on the mountains' crests, while the Kohanim and Leviim remain below, peering up at their more "successful" brethren.

And yet, it is precisely these "middlemen" who deliver the blessings. That is, both the physical and spiritual welfare of all of the people in fact emanates from the people on the "bottom." If the nation fulfills the conditions contained in the blessings, it will merit to be showered with the success promised through the Levites' pronouncements. And if, G-d forbid, they violate the precepts...

R' Shternbuch perceives herein a vital lesson that extends well past the setting of this ritual and the principals involved in it. As the Rambam declares (*Hilchos Shemitah V'yoveil*, 13:13): "It is not only the tribe of Levi (that is accorded elevated spiritual status); rather, any single individual...

who dedicates himself to Hashem's Service and the pursuit of Divine knowledge... and casts off from himself the yoke of material pursuit, which is the domain of the multitudes — such a person becomes imbued with the highest degree of sanctity..." The *b'nei* Torah of all generations who eschew material gain in order to devote themselves to immersion in Hashem's Torah — they follow in the footsteps of the Leviim. The multitudes may at times look down on them from the vantage point of a higher position on the socio-economic ladder; but it is really through the merit of their Torah study that the rest of Klal Yisrael and the world attains sustenance. "The entire world is sustained in the merit of My son (the sage, R') Chanina; but Chanina My son — he suffices with a mere *kav's* worth of carobs" (*Berachos 17b*).

STAYING HUMBLE

The precarious financial situation of the *yeshivos* and the Torah scholars who inhabit them can be better understood in light of this idea. As the modern-day manifestation of the tribe of Levi, the Torah scholars are perforce governed in a similar way. Why, in fact, were the Leviim subjected to such a lifestyle, whereby they were basically beholden to the goodwill and handouts of others? R' Aharon Kotler explains (*Mishnas R' Aharon*, vol. II, pp. 14-15) that the chief role of the Leviim was actually to serve as the teachers of Torah and the *halachic* decisors of the nation. "They shall impart Your statutes to Ya'akov and Your Torah to Yisrael" (*Devarim 32:10*). A prerequisite for attaining truth in Torah study is the attribute of humility; it was on account of their humble traits that the *halachah* always follows the opinion of Beis Hillel (*Eruvin 13b*). As we saw previously from the Rambam, both the Leviim of old and the Torah scholars of today are accorded special status; as such, there is a concern that a trace of pride could seep in, thus interfering with their most essential task. And so, the Divine Will instituted a built-in mechanism to safeguard their humility; by constantly having to "*mutcher*" (scramble) for sustenance and support, they will be cleansed from undue and harmful pride.