

BEHÁ'ALOSCHA

THE SEVEN TRAITS OF CHARACTER

A

Aharon's Disappointment

The first Rashi in this *parsha* asks a strange question. Why does the *mitzva* of lighting the *menora* immediately follow the story of the twelve *nesi'im* who brought *korbanos* for twelve days to inaugurate the Mishkan? Rashi explains that when Aharon saw the twelve days of dedication and sacrifices, he felt bad that he and his tribe were not included in this inaugural ceremony. Hashem said to Aharon, "I swear by your life that you have a greater merit than they do, because you light the *menora*. The other *nesi'im* can't do that."

The Ramban asks an obvious question. Aharon and his children did all the *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash. They brought daily *korbanos* on the outer *mizbei'ach* and the *ketores* on the inner *mizbei'ach*. Of all the parts of the *avoda*, why did Hashem pick that of lighting the *menora* to console Aharon? Furthermore, why was Aharon upset when he wasn't included? He was going to be responsible for running the daily service of the Mishkan forever. The *nesi'im* had twelve days, and Aharon had forever. Also, he himself was involved in their sacrifices as the *kohen* who helped prepare those *korbanos*, so why did Aharon feel left out?

Seven Levels of Heart

The Shem Mishmuel discusses the two pillars of the human personality—the heart and the mind. People are a combination of emotion and intellect. Both are important, fundamental parts of our being that we must use in our service of Hashem. According to the Maharal, the numbers seven and eight have a certain significance. Seven represents the seven levels of a person's heart: *chesed*, *gevura*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus*. These are the *middos*, the aspects of a person's character.

The first level of emotion is *chesed* (kindness), the trait of being a kind and concerned person. It represents how we understand Hashem. Hashem appears to us primarily as the source of kindness. He gives us our very lives. This is an amazing act of kindness, to give us life and to support our vital systems. The first *midda* a person is supposed to develop is *chesed*. He should concern himself with helping people, giving life to those who are less fortunate.

The second *midda* is *gevura*, which means strength. More than strength, it means courage and bravery. This world is filled with spiritual danger. A person must have courage and steadfastness to endure the tests and difficulties of this world.

The third *midda* is *rachamim*, compassion, also called *tiferes*. *Chesed* is open-ended. We do for others without thinking to control our *chesed*. *Rachamim* is similar to *chesed*, but it is balanced with thought. How should I help this person? Maybe I should limit my help so that the person can develop some independence. Open-ended, unlimited kindness is great, and sometimes necessary, but can be harmful in certain cases. *Rachamim* balances kindness with strength of character; it is the ability to say no in order to focus the kindness in good ways. This combination of *chesed* and *gevura* is a beautiful character trait, so it's called *tiferes*, beauty.

Netzach, the fourth *midda*, means eternity. When a person

makes a commitment, he or she must make it eternal. When a man and woman make the commitment of marriage, it is an eternal commitment. When we make a commitment to Hashem to keep His Torah and *mitzvos*, it is an eternal commitment. Even though a person lives only seventy or one hundred years, this does not mean that when he dies it is all over. People have an eternity about them. Our character has to reflect that. We are in this world developing and perfecting our character. This perfection will last forever, and when we go to the next world and into the times of Mashiach, our life will be with the character that we develop in our current state.

Hod means luster. The perfected human character has a luster to it. It's not just the actual things that we do with good character, but also the saintliness and spirituality we thereby produce. This spiritual halo develops around us when we do the right things and feel the right emotions. This is godliness that accompanies us.

Yesod is the sixth characteristic. *Yesod* means foundation. We are not just good in some places and cases, but in all situations. The idea is to be so good that our goodness and justness is fundamental to who we are. We see what is right and we do it no matter where we are or who we are with. These traits are not superficial things, but rather reach deep into our fundamental essence.

Malchus, the seventh level, is the concept of majesty. When we develop these characteristics, we become rulers over ourselves. Instead of being subject to our wild emotions, we control them and deliberately use them to serve Hashem. This is how we achieve majesty, which is the goal of being in this world. Hashem wants us to have dignity and rulership over ourselves. In this way, we also become kings over the whole world. These are the seven levels of good character, which Chassidus and Kabbala emphasize.

Aharon and the Nesi'im

These seven levels are of *lev*, emotion. Chassidus teaches that Aharon's main focus was on the heart. He didn't just focus on his own development, but also shared it with others. He helped others develop their emotional depth and wellbeing as well. Chazal refer to Aharon as *ohev shalom v'rodeif shalom* (Avos 1:12). He loved and pursued peace. Peace means all seven levels of the character working in harmony. Aharon is the leader of the Jewish People in character development and *middos tovos*. Aharon wore the *choshen* with the twelve tribes inscribed on his heart. His heart is the heart of Israel, and he teaches the Jewish People how to be pure and good.

All the service in the Mishkan, which was primarily the responsibility of Aharon and his children, was focused on the *lev*, on loving Hashem. Even today, without a Beis Hamikdash, when we come to Jerusalem and to the Kotel, we have an emotional reaction. We feel a desire to come close to the place and to find Hashem there. This is an expression of the natural love people feel for God. The Mishkan is the place of people's love for God and God's love for Israel. This was represented by the *keruvim*, the two angelic figures on top of the *aron hakodesh*. Chazal say they were usually in a loving embrace, representing the love of Israel for God and the love of God for Israel.

The dedication of the Beis Hamikdash is called *yom simchas libo* (Ta'anis 26b). The day on which God's heart was happy was the day His dwelling on Earth was completed. It was an expression of the people's love for Hashem and of His love for them. Aharon was the high priest, the prime actor and doer in the service of the Mishkan. His service focused on love of Hashem and of Israel.

Aharon's love for the Jews was part of his love for Hashem. He spent so much time pursuing peace because he wanted every Jew to love every other Jew. After all, if God loves Israel so much,

surely He wants Israel to love Israel. My beloved's beloved is my beloved as well. Aharon was the epitome of love of Hashem and Israel and having the balanced personality of Torah and *middos*.

The twelve *nesi'im*, princes, of Israel were probably chosen for their role because they were great scholars. Generally, the Torah prefers the political leadership of Israel to be connected to the highest intellectual levels. The Torah gives great political power to the Sanhedrin in Yerushalayim. The seventy-one leading scholars of Torah didn't just enact and interpret laws. They also declared war. They were responsible for appointing the king. They would even prosecute a king for betraying the trust of his office. Although you might think that scholars would be lost in their ivory tower of scholarship, Hashem says that the great Torah scholar is a great political leader. He will make good decision about who should be king. He will make the proper decision of when to go to war and when to desist.

The world of action must be connected to the world of Torah. We don't want a split in our society between the thinkers and the doers. Whatever we do as the nation of Israel should be done according to Torah. If the scholar knows the Torah best, then he has to know the practical side of life. The Sanhedrin is therefore the most powerful institution.

The twelve *nesi'im* of each tribe were probably the greatest Torah scholars of their tribes. The word *nasi* literally means elevated. He is elevated above the tribe to the highest political position. It also has a connection to *nesias rosh*, which means to appoint someone to a high position. It comes from the concept that this person's face will be recognized now that he holds an important position. People will be looking to him for leadership.

Nasi doesn't mean prince. It means a most elevated and prominent person, the person playing the leading role in a society. According to Chassidus, though, it also means his thinking, his brainpower. Aharon represents the *lev* of the people. The *nesi'im* represent the mind, the thought power of Israel.

The *Avoda* Character Development

Aharon's prime function was to perform the service in the Mishkan, to help people develop good character. The Shem Mishmuel says that development of character is indeed an *avoda*. *Avoda* as used in Torah refers to the sacrificial rites of the Mishkan. *Avoda* also means plain, hard physical work. The same word can mean the exalted service of God through sacrifices or menial labor, the lowly work of a slave. Working on one's personality is also an *avoda*. It is an exalted service of Hashem, and it is difficult work.

Aharon carried out the *avoda* of the Mishkan, and provided leadership for the Jewish people to develop good character, to find love for people in their hearts, in the seven levels of their personality.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that every good trait is counterbalanced by a bad one. Being kind to people is wonderful, and it is opposed to the trait of selfishness. Being courageous is a positive trait, but cowardliness and fear of challenges is negative. Many people are shortsighted. There is a struggle within us between having a good personality and having a bad personality. It's difficult, it's an *avoda*, but this work of perfecting our personalities is a noble service of Hashem.

We find that Aharon did play a role in the inauguration of the Mishkan. During the first seven days of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Aharon and his children were required to be in the Mishkan the entire time the sacrifices were being brought. Moshe was busy with the actual service, and the twelve *nesi'im* were bringing their sacrifices each day.

These seven days represent the seven *middos tovos*. Aharon and his children stayed at the Mishkan to focus the holy energy of the Mishkan into people's personality. The place of service of God would be the place of man's perfection of his personality. Rambam writes in Moreh Nevuchim that prophecy, the ultimate

connection to God, begins with *middos tovos*. There was only one exception: Bilam, who prophesied despite his serious shortcomings. Aside from him, though, wicked people do not receive direct messages from Hashem. A *navi* must have a pure heart, and then Hashem might speak to the person. But someone whose heart is blemished with bad character cannot be a prophet.

Aharon was sitting in the Mishkan for seven days. In order for the Shechina to come to the Mishkan, people needed to have good character. This is the first seven days. According to Maharal, the number eight is beyond *middos*; it represents the mind. The three elements of the mind are *chochma*, *bina*, and *da'as*. These refer to knowledge, understanding, and being inspired to understand and know new things. *Da'as* is creativity. These top three levels correspond to the numbers eight, nine, and ten. On the eighth day, Aharon stopped sitting in the Mishkan, because the seven days of *lev* were completed. The princes of Israel continued through day twelve, because these elevated leaders of Israel represent the mind of Israel. They go past seven, into eight, and beyond.

E

The Connection between Mind and Heart

The Shem Mishmuel explains an important idea. Many of us suffer from the conflict between emotion and mind. Our minds often dictate one thing while our emotions want another. Ideally, the emotions and mind should work in harmony. If my mind wants me to do something because it makes sense, then my emotions should be galvanized to energize me. If my emotions are pushing me in a good direction, then my mind should be able to get on board with the decision. It should work this way, but it's not always so easy.

There is a *pasuk* that describes Aharon at the inauguration of the Mishkan: “*K’shemen hatov al harosh yoreid al hazakan zekan*

Aharon sheyoreid al pi middosav. Like the good oil on the head that rolls down on the beard, the beard of Aharon, as it rolls down onto his clothing” (Tehillim 133:2). This *pasuk* may be speaking of the *shemen hamishcha*, the inauguration oil. It says it is placed on Aharon’s head and rolls down his beard and onto his clothing. The word used here for clothing is *middos*, which we know also means character.

The Shem Mishmuel suggests a Chassidic interpretation of this *pasuk*. Olive oil, according to the Gemara (Brachos 57a) and Chassidus, represents wisdom. The Gemara considers it brain food (see Horiyos 13b). If you want to sharpen your mind, you should eat olive oil.

The anointing oil is placed on the head of the *kohen gadol* and the king at the time of their respective appointments. This represents the hope that he will be granted Godly wisdom to make the right decisions. The verse says that this oil rolls off his head down his beard and onto his clothing, his *middos*. The Shem Mishmuel says this oil connects the mind and the heart, the intellect and the emotions.

The *pasuk* says that on the eighth day (of the inauguration), Moshe called Aharon, his children, and the elders of Israel (Vayikra 9:1). Why call this assembly? Moshe wanted to combine the intellectual and emotional leadership of the Jewish People. Aharon would take leadership at the level of emotion, while the elders and scholars would take leadership at the level of intellect. By bringing these two types of leaders together, Moshe was declaring that, in order for us to succeed, we need the leadership of *kohanim* and *zekeinim* to work together. Only then will this nation be holy. Only then will this Mishkan succeed in bringing the Shechina.

Aharon's Roles

This idea is important for all of us. We see that the first seven days were dedicated to *tikkun hamiddos*. Only on the eighth day did it move into fixing the mind, *tikun haseichel*. Chazal tell us, “*Derech erez kadmah laTorah*. Good character should precede learning Torah” (Vayikra Rabba 9:3). When we send our children to elementary school, our main goal should be to teach our children *derech erez*, how to be a Torah personality. Children are instinctively selfish. They grab and don't share, and sometimes they steal. We have to teach them to share. We have to teach them the good character of Israel. Only when they get older, as teenagers, do they begin to bloom on the intellectual level.

According to Kabbala, in the forty-nine days of the Omer, we prepare our character before we receive the intellectual gift of Torah on Shavuot. According to Chazal (Kiddushin 29b), a person should get married and only then will he grow in the higher levels of Talmud Torah. Marriage provides a workshop for perfection of *middos*. Only after this perfection of the *middos* can a person achieve intellectually in Torah. We have to develop and focus our personalities to make ourselves good and pure people, and then move on to the intellectual heights and exploration of the Torah.

The Shem Mishmuel now explains the Rashi with which we began. When Aharon saw the *nesi'im* bringing *korbanos*, he realized that they each had different roles. Their focus was on the mind, and his was on the heart of the Jew. He felt bad. He asked himself, “Why can't my responsibility include the development of the mind?” But Hashem told him not to feel bad because he will light the *menora*. Ramban explains that this is the *menora* of the Mishkan and of the holiday of Chanuka as well, which outlasted the Mishkan. Hashem told Aharon, “You are mistaken. It looks like you are only focusing on the heart, while they are focusing on the mind. But your children will achieve a focus on the mind as

well. Right now, Moshe is the main mind of Bnei Yisrael, and there are *nesi'im*, too. From the tribe of Levi, we already have Moshe, who will be mind of the people. But in the future, Moshe will not be here. Then the *kohanim* will teach Torah as well, in addition to being paragons of good heart.”

“*Sifsei kohen yishm'ru da'as, v'sorah yevakshu mipihu*. The lips of a *kohen* guard wisdom, and people will seek Torah from his mouth” (Malachi 2:7). *Kohanim* will also play the role of teacher of Torah in Israel. These *nesi'im* are only here for twelve days, but the *kohanim* will be permanent teachers of Torah. This is what Hashem told Aharon—you will be able to do both.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. List the seven basic Jewish character traits and explain each one.
2. What does the number eight represent?
3. How does Chassidus interpret the *pasuk* that anointing oil dripped from Aharon's beard onto his clothing?

EXERCISES

1. Focus on one character trait each of the seven days of the week. Be aware of it, use it, and develop it.
2. On Shabbos, put all the seven traits together.

Answers and Exercises

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