

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

14 Sivan, 5769 Vol. 10, No. 32

Parashas Naso

“THESE ARE THE COUNTINGS OF THE FAMILY OF KEHAS...THAT MOSHE AND AHARON COUNTED...” (BAMIDBAR 4:37)

There was a slight difference in how Aharon was invited

THE MIDRASH (Bamidbar Rabbah 6:8) describes the census of the tribe of Levi. Moshe counted each of the three major Levite families, Kehas, Gershon and Merari, as instructed by Hashem. Moshe also invited his brother Aharon to join him in the census, but there was a slight difference in how Aharon was invited for the counting of each of the three families. Hashem commanded Moshe to invite Aharon when He instructed Moshe about Kehas, the first family. However, Hashem did not specifically mention Aharon in the original command for the other two families. As a result, while Moshe did, out of respect for his older brother, invite Aharon for the next census, that of Gershon, he did not mention to him that it was in the name of Hashem as he had done for the family of Kehas. Since Moshe was including Aharon by his own initiative, Moshe felt he could not relay the invitation as coming from Hashem.

Our sages teach us that this was a mistake – Hashem had indeed wanted Aharon to join Moshe for the tally of all three families – and Moshe was taken to task for this seemingly slight error of not saying the request in Hashem’s name. Moshe should have known that the initial command was meant to cover all three families, and Moshe should have presented it to Aharon that way. This is why for Gershon’s census the Torah omits the words “through Moshe’s hands.” Although Moshe took the initiative to invite Aharon as a sign of respect, he did not say it in Hashem’s name, and he is therefore punished by having his own name omitted in that family’s count.

Let us try to comprehend where Moshe erred

Let us try to comprehend where Moshe erred. From the type of punishment meted out, a diminishing of Moshe’s honor in the Torah, it seems to indicate that Moshe didn’t feel, to the fullest extent, the depth of how much honor was due Aharon. Had he been completely possessed with that feeling, he would have thought, “How is it possible that Aharon not be invited?” despite any theories or reasonings to differentiate between the families. This drive to honor Aharon would have brought him to the correct conclusion: that Hashem’s command at the outset was meant to cover all three families.

Moshe was making a *halachic* decision. How would his feeling of respect for Aharon – a purely emotional element – affect Moshe’s intellectual decision-making process? Furthermore, Moshe did have a great deal of respect for Aharon. He argued with Hashem for seven days that Aharon should be the leader in his stead and Moshe brought Aharon with him to count Gershon specifically because of his enormous level of respect for Aharon. Whatever Moshe was lacking must have been indeed a tiny level of defect. How could this small deficiency have caused Moshe to decide the *halacha* incorrectly?

Our intellect and our emotions are not easily divided

Our intellect and our emotions are not easily divided. Our appreciation of *mussar* and ethical concepts cannot be separated from our *halachic* reasoning. Even for a towering giant such as Moshe Rabbeinu, a greater appreciation of a proper feeling or *mussar* concept – a slightly deeper appreciation for the respect for Aharon – will change one’s understanding of Hashem’s will. Let us reinforce the emotional concepts within us through the inspirational study of *mussar*, with a stirring melody and vivid imagery, and we can be more confident that our actions will reflect the true will of our Creator.