

THE GREATNESS OF AARON

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BEHALOSCHA

In this week's portion of the Torah, Be-haloscha, we find that a compliment was paid to אהרן הכהן הגדול Aaron the High Priest, "ויעש כן אהרן" "And Aaron did as he was commanded." Our sages, in commenting upon this phrase, remark להגיד שבחו של אהרן שלא שינה "The Torah pays tribute to Aaron because much to his credit he did not change anything from that which G-d had Commanded."

The question which immediately comes to mind is what exactly do the Rabbis mean by this "שלא שינה" "Aaron did not change." Is the High Priest of Israel to be commended for not "changing" — for not altering anything of that which G-d had directed? Would we expect otherwise of any Jew, let alone the spiritual leader and guide of all Israel, the one charged with performing the most sacred duties and rituals of our faith? No, the Rabbis by their remark of "שלא שינה" wish to convey a most profound moral lesson to all of us.

My friends, before Aaron's appointment to the office of High Priest, he was an ordinary member of the community of Israel. He was, however, extraordinarily venerated and loved by all, because our Rabbis tell us, he was not only an "אוהב שלום" a "lover of peace," but also a "רודף שלום" "He went out of his way to pursue and search for peace. Wherever and whenever conflict and discontentment were to be found with respect to husband and wife, a conflict which

TORAH & SERMON MANUAL

threatened to disrupt the "שלום בית" the tranquility of the home and cause estrangement between the two partners, Aaron voluntarily assumed the role of peacemaker and conciliator and successfully managed to heal the breach to the satisfaction and delight of both parties concerned. He was an "אודהב את" "אהבריית" A lover of humanity — of people of all levels. Young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak, cultured and untutored were treated equally — were helped and given advice by Aaron. He exemplified the principle of "ומקרנ לתורה," all peoples hold him in such high esteem, in such high regard, that merely by his gracious manners and kind words he was able to attract and draw closer to the laws and principles of G-d.

When Aaron was elevated to the rank of High Priest, a position which brought him honor and fame, wealth and power, one might think that this promotion to high office would perhaps effect a change in Aaron's simple ways and habits, — that he might consider it below his station to associate with former acquaintances; that he might no longer mingle with the common people nor take an interest in their problems and hardships; that he might feel it below his dignity to fraternize with the masses. But no, the Torah testifies that although Aaron rose in rank, he never assumed a lofty bearing "שלא שינה," his success never changed him. It never made him arrogant. He was the same Aaron despite his rise in power and fame.

My dear friends, unlike Aaron, today it can be said of very few people who have risen to great heights of either fame, power, wealth or scholarship that "שלא שינו" that they have not changed their humble bearings.

W E E K L Y P A R S H O S

You and I know people who were once simple, plain, ordinary individuals. However, when by the grace of G-d these very same people ascended the ladder of fame and leadership — when their status and rank changed, their character changed. They now consider themselves superior to others. They now refuse to recognize past acquaintances. They walk, so to speak on stilts, trying to tower above others. They become swollen and inflated with the air of haughtiness. Yes, that is human nature. An average person becomes powerful and he oft-times forgets his former friends. The great philosopher of antiquity, Aristotle, once remarked, "If you want to know the true character of a person, give him a crown." — Yes, promote him to a lofty position and then you can ascertain his true value, his genuineness of character.

Likewise, my friends, we have all experienced friends or relatives who, through the sudden accumulation of wealth have become social snobs and look down upon us with haughty indifference. People who now belong to the so-called smart social set, who try very hard to deny or forget their past, since their former abject poverty is somewhat embarrassing. They have climbed into a richly-coated shell and do not want to sympathize and help others who are still in the same position they themselves formerly were in.

The story is told that when the first ancestors of the famous Rothschild family became wealthy offer a few lucrative business deals, he moved his family to a mere spacious home. A custom tailor brought a few sets of new garments for all the members of the family. When one of the servants wanted to throw away Rotschild's old tattered garments, Rotschild intervened saying, "please do not throw away my former poorly-made old garments. I want you to hang them

TORAH & SERMON MANUAL

right in the very same closet with my new, richly designed garments, so that when I go to the closet to take out a new garment, I will always see before me my old clothing and I will be reminded of my poor past. Let these old garments serve me as a constant reminder that I was once poor but through the grace of G-d I became immensely wealthy.”

This is the lesson of Be-haloscha beautiful ethical lesson. May we be inspired by this thought, to make the Torah a constant personal guide for our daily lives. Amen