

Diversity Within Unanimity

Parshas Behaaloscho

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The task assigned to Aaron the High Priest to kindle the Menorah in the Mishkan compensated him for not having been included in the dedication of the altar by the chiefs of the twelve tribes. This is indicated by the sequence of the two sections, the one dealing with the dedication offerings and the other with the lighting of the lamps (Midrash quoted in Rashi Bamidbor 8:2). It is obvious that one Mitzvah cannot replace another. Aaron's urge, then, to participate in the dedication could not have been satisfied by merely performing a different Mitzvah. Unless, this assigned Mitzvah of kindling the Menorah was directly related to the dedication performed by the tribes. Upon reflection one indeed finds a significant connection between the two observances.

In the section dealing with the dedication offerings a lengthy report is given of the performances, enumerating the procedures twelve times, in connection with the respective tribe on each of the twelve days of dedication, (Bamidbor 7:12-83) This seems utterly superfluous. Since the procedures were exactly the same on each of the twelve days it would have been sufficient to mention it once. One learns, however, from the Midrash (ibid. 13:14, see also RaMBaN) that though the procedures were identical, each tribe head used a different approach, his own unique style, NUSACH and nuance. In addition to the general concepts and thoughts surrounding the offerings which apply to all, each tribe referred to events applicable to its own unique calling in life.

When Yaakov conferred his blessings upon his sons "he blessed them every one according to his blessing" (Braishis 49:28), i.e. each according to his particular quality, requirement and future destiny (see Rashi, Rashbam and Sforno ibid.). The same diversified blessings are later bestowed upon the tribes by Moshe (Devorim 33:6-26). IN the spiritual realm, too, each tribe developed in a particular style, a certain meaning that was unique, which was manifest at the dedication offerings. The Torah, therefore, enumerates separately each tribe and the procedure on its day to indicate the legitimacy of each of the twelve approaches.

There is one danger, however, in allowing and encouraging such diversity. Seeing twelve different styles in the observance of the same Mitzvah may

eventually lead to a strange, unauthorized, non-Torah approach, undermining and negating the demands of Torah, and still speaking in the name of Torah, and rationalizing that it is only a unique style. Aaron the High Priest was thus summoned not merely to kindle the Menorah but "to cleanse and kindle the Menorah" (Rashi Bamidbor 8:2). The candelabrum is symbolic of the light of Torah to illuminate the path of life, "For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light" (Mishlei 6:23). Styles and customs may vary, as long as they express the authentic philosophy of Torah. However, the Menorah light must be cleansed of foreign, non-Torah, influence. There must be an authority to differentiate between a legitimate expression of genuine Torah ideology and novelty that undermines it. Aaron who was bound with strings of love to each of the twelve tribes, and wore the name of each on the breastplate on his heart to express this inextricable bond, he was the right person for this task to cleanse the Menorah as well as light it. In his towering greatness, embracing the holiness of ALL the tribes, whom he represented in his AVODAH, he was able to sense what is authoritative and authentic and what is strange and foreign, what is pure and fit for lighting and what is negating and to be discarded and cleansed from. This task amply recompensed him, for it meant assuring the authenticity of the twelve vehicles of AVODAH.

The Meshech Chochma points out, interestingly, that only for the first kindling, it was Aaron exclusively who performed the Mitzvah. Afterwards, LEDOROS, however, it is the preparation, cleansing and arrangement of the Menorah, that was assigned to Aaron and his sons, exclusively, "Yaarocho oso Aaron" (Shemos 27:21). The actual kindling could be done by a non-Kohain.

Were this cleansing not a symbol of differentiating between the authentic "light" (Torah radiance) and foreign ideologies, it would have been deemed below the dignity of the honorable Kohain Godol to perform the task.

The HAFTORAH, too, implies such a role assigned to the Kohain Godol. The first vision of the prophet Zechariah, that of removing the unclean garments and garb clean ones (Zechariah 3:4, 5) seems to be the harbinger of the second vision, of the gold Menorah with its seven lamps, (4:2). Cleansing the Menorah of foreign elements, and purifying it of strange ideologies, must precede the actual kindling of the Menorah, in order that its rays should truly enlighten the world.

In a broader sense, the charge is extended to every Kohain, and every Torah instructor. "For the priest's lips are to keep (YISHMERU) knowledge,

and they are to seek the law at his mouth..." (Malachi 2:7). YISHMERU literally means they should watch and guard. The KOHAIN, the Torah instructor, must not only TEACH, but also guard against the CHEAT; He must protect the Torah from those who would distort and falsify it, emasculate and dilute it, misrepresent and pervert it. The Torah giants have always been vigilant against impostors who would want to hold on to its fringes and speak in its name. From the early Tanaites fighting the Sadducees to modern day Torah scholars battling against the various shades of reform.

In our times these reform movements became more vociferous, seeking recognition in Israel, calling it "pluralism". Torah Jews must stand guard. It is the fulfillment of the awesome duty to cleanse the menorah, so that it emanates genuine Torah radiance.

Diversity? Certainly! But only within the precincts of legitimate Torah expression. Authentic Jewish law is full of diversity. Almost every page of the Talmud is fraught with debate and controversy. Abaya vies with Rovo, Resh Lakish disagrees with Rav Yochanan, Rav disputes with Shmuel, Rav Huna debates with Rav Chisda. Yet they are all within the framework of authenticity. In Jewish life there are Sephardim who follow in most cases the RaMBaM, whereas the Ashkenazim follow the Rosh and Tur. Then there are myriads of differences in customs between one group of Orthodox Jews and another. They do not undermine but complement each other. Together they form a symphony of elegant and harmonious servants of the Al-mighty.

One of the spices used in the KETORES in the Mishkan was called KESHOT, its required measure: twelve Manah. Said Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky, z.l. playing symbolically on the work KESHOT, which also means "the truth"; "The truth is with all twelve tribes together".

The multifaceted approaches of the twelve tribes, and the parallel routes within each, inspires to carry the yoke of Torah with majesty. This sense of diversity within the overall Torah embrace strengthens the adherents in their unanimity. "Just as their physiognomies are not similar so are their thoughts not similar" (Jerusalem tal. Brochos 9:1). Yet, just as among the multifarious facial profiles one can easily detect the genuine Jewish TZURAH (image), so can the sensitive person easily distinguish the genuine Jewish ideology.

