

דַּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת:

*Speak to Aaron and say to him: "When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the menorah."*

The *Parasha* begins this week with a seemingly out of place command to Aharon regarding the kindling of the Menorah. Many commentators wonder "why is this section placed here?"

Rashi writes that this story connects to the previous unit from the end of *Parashat Nasso* where all the *Shevatim* brought a *Korban* in honor of the dedication of the *Mishkan*. All *Shevatim* except one were included in the celebration. As Rashi writes:

למה נסמכה פרשת המנורה לפרשת הנשיאים, לפי שכשראה אהרן חנוכת הנשיאים חלשה דעתו, שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה, לא הוא ולא שבטו

*Why is the portion dealing with the menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the chieftains? For when Aaron saw the dedication [offerings] of the chieftains, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication -- neither he nor his tribe.*

Certainly Aharon could not have been bothered by the *Korbanot* the *Nessiem* were offering since Aharon, as the *Kohen Gadol*, had ample opportunity to sacrifice and perform service to G-d every day. The sacrifices of the *Nessiem* were one time only. This did not bother Aharon.

What did bother Aharon, as Rashi states was *שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה* - that he was not **with them** in the dedication.

Aharon became more concerned as he waited for his invitation to this spectacular dedication event. As each day passed the thoughts of inadequacy began to run through his head. "Why am I being excluded? Perhaps because of my participation in the golden calf I am not being asked to join? Maybe I have some other fault and therefore I am not being included? Why have they not asked me to join?"

These thoughts were not confined to the inadequacies of Aharon as an individual. Rashi writes that Aharon thought he was being excluded not only because of his possible individual issues but also because of the group he associated with - *לא הוא ולא שבטו*. "Maybe there is something wrong with the people I hang out with? Maybe Shevet Levi is not good enough to be asked to join?", he thought. Even the *Kohen Gadol*, the holiest person of Bnei Yisrael, was upset and troubled about being excluded from this national celebration!

Moreover, the *Nesseim* didn't mean to exclude Aharon and his Shevet. It's not like they deliberately decided to not include Aharon and Shevet Levi. They probably just didn't think about it. Or they determined that Shevet Levi and Aharon have enough to do and they didn't want to be burdened with another responsibility, not taking into account how they would feel about not being included. It could be likened to a group of people sitting together at a table and another couple sitting alone at a different

table. The couples don't mean to exclude the couple sitting alone, they are just not aware or observant of their surroundings. The couple, however, feels alone and isolated.

There is a powerful lesson to learn here from this Medrash - everyone, even the Kohen Gadol, can feel like they are excluded. As a community, like the Nesheim, we don't purposely exclude others from our social groups. We do have to ask ourselves, though, if we are actively including others who are different than we are? Do we make an effort to invite individuals or families who may be dissimilar to ourselves? Do we associate and include groups who dress differently or act in other ways which one is not accustomed?

We need to be more sensitive to and inclusive of all types of people even if it means stepping out of our social comfort zone. By making these connections our lives, the lives of others, and our community will be enriched.