It is written, "Speak to Aaron...When you light the lamps, towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.” Aaron did so” (Numbers 8:2-3). Rashi cites the Sifrei in stating, “This demonstrates Aaron’s virtue, in that he did not deviate.

The book Otzarot HaChida states, “We may raise the question: Why would he want to modify anything? Furthermore, why did Scripture congratulate Aaron here for not having changed anything? Did he change something elsewhere?”

Rabbeinu Shlomo Astruc states concerning our parsha, “This means that even if the lamps could be arranged and lit by a simple priest – as we read in Parsha Tetzaveh: ‘Aaron and his sons shall arrange it’ [Exodus 27:21], and also here: Beha’alotcha [literally, ‘when you cause to light’] not behalotcha [‘when you light’], meaning that he can order others to light it – he nevertheless performed the mitzvah himself.”

Furthermore, no order is given to light the lamps in this passage. We are only told that when they are lit, the seven lamps must cast light towards the face of the Menorah, meaning that the lamps were lit on their own. Despite all this, Aaron hastened to perform the mitzvah himself. Even if the idea is correct, however, the expression “he did not deviate” is inaccurate. That is what the Chida stated.

Let us first try and explain the Chida’s statement on the expression “he did not deviate.” To do so, we shall begin with another concept, namely serving Hashem. There are two ways in which to serve Hashem when given the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that can only be done by one person, not two. The first way is that as soon as we see an opportunity to perform it, we jump at it much like someone who discovers a valuable object. In that case we will perform the mitzvah immediately.

Even if others also try to seize the opportunity, we will prove ourselves to be stronger and the merit will be ours. The second way of serving Hashem consists of looking for other people to perform a mitzvah when the opportunity presents itself, in order to confer merit upon them. That is, we do not perform the mitzvah itself, but not because we don’t value it. Rather, it is because we want other people to benefit from it. The first way is more precious to Hashem, for the Mechilta states: “If it [a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately” (cited by Rashi on Exodus 12:17). That being the case, it is obvious that when the opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself, we should hasten to do it. We should not leave it for others to do. This is pleasing to Hashem, for it demonstrates that we are strongly connected to performing mitzvot.

Now that we have established this point, let us return to the subject of lighting the Menorah. At the beginning of Parsha Beha’alotcha, Rashi cites the Sages in stating: “Why is the portion dealing with the Menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the leaders? For when Aaron saw the dedication offerings of the tribal leaders, as the Midrash states (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:6; Sifrei ibid.).) Actually, why did this cause Aaron so much distress? The answer is that there are many lofty concepts pertaining to the offerings of the tribal leaders, as the Midrash states (Bamidbar Rabbah 13), and it was something that was done only once for all the generations. Therefore when Aaron realized that he lost the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, he was very upset. Hence to calm and console him, Hashem gave him the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, for in this way he could elevate himself more and more each day. That being the case, his mitzvah was greater than theirs, for they could only perform it once, whereas Aaron had it as a constant and eternal mitzvah, one that was performed each day. Although the obligation to light the lights did not fall on Aaron specifically (since his sons, ordinary priests, could also light them), Aaron learned that he alone should light them, for it was a mitzvah that presented itself to him, and he couldn’t pass it up. Hence Aaron is praised for not having deviated (shina, which can also mean “learn”), for not telling himself that another person could do it. He himself hastened to seize the opportunity to perform this mitzvah, and it is to his glory that he modified nothing about it.

What we learn here must be applied to other mitzvot, such as the mitzvah of tzeddakah. Sometimes we have an opportunity to perform this mitzvah, but decide to send money in the mail or through another person. We may even think that since other people are richer than ourselves, yet they have not given tzeddakah, we should refrain as well, supposedly to give them the opportunity to give. From this week’s parsha we must learn to jump at such an opportunity and quickly give. We must realize that if we hurry and do it ourselves, Hashem will greatly appreciate it.

The same applies when someone sees a holy book lying on the floor, and other people have also seen it. In that case, merit is bestowed upon the first person who hurries to pick it up. We shouldn’t think that we can leave it up to others, especially when we are the first to notice and point it out. Tremendous merit is conferred upon a person in this case, since his actions can encourage other people to do the same, meaning that he will accrue the merit of having awakened people to this mitzvah.

The same applies to promptly going to synagogue. We shouldn’t say, “There’ll be a minyan in any case, so why should I hurry to be among the first ten men there?” On the contrary, it is because of the one who hurries that there is a minyan. It is very important to cherish this mitzvah and not to count on others to fulfill it. Instead, a person should hurry to be among the first ten men in synagogue.

The verse, “The leaders brought the Shoham stones” (Exodus 35:27) confirms that hastening to perform mitzvot without hesitation is important to Hashem. The Sages have said that the letter yud is missing in the word “leaders” because they displayed idleness with regards to the work of the Sanctuary, since they did not hasten to bring their offerings (Yalkut Shimoni, Nasso 612). From here we learn that the leaders did not value this attitude. In fact they should have demonstrated an example to all the Children of Israel, since they were their leaders. They should have immediately brought their offerings without delay.

From here we must also learn a lesson with regards to the construction of a yeshiva or synagogue. When we donate money for this mitzvah and there are people who jump at the chance to give a large donation, others will also feel like giving, and these donations will be due primarily to those who gave first.
The Praise of Both

It is written, “Take the Levites from among the Children of Israel and purify them” (Numbers 8:6).

This week’s parsha deals with the consecration of the Levites among the Children of Israel to serve Hashem in place of the firstborn. Once Moses, Aaron, the Levites, and the Israelites did everything that Hashem commanded them to do, it is written: “As the L-RD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did for them” (v.22). Rashi explains that this is written in order “to praise those who performed [this rite] and those upon whom it was performed, [for] none of them objected.” In his book Ohr Chadash, Rabbi Chaim Ephraim Zaitchik finds this surprising, and he states: “Each time that I come to this parsha and Rashi’s commentary, I have difficulty understanding just where is the praise of those who perform and of those upon whom it was performed. Why would anyone object to it, and what would prevent him from doing so? What difficulty existed here, such that people were liable to be opposed to an order from Hashem? Reflecting upon this, we see that something great was accomplished here. When a single person does something, we can determine if it is difficult to do, and whether we should be surprised by it or not. Yet when it is the entire community that receives an order, even if it is the simplest or hardest thing to do, the greatest praise that can be bestowed upon the community is that everyone mobilized themselves to participate and nobody avoided it…. Twenty-two thousand Levites formed an extremely long line facing 600,000 Israelites, yet no one remained in their tent or walked away. Each Levite lowered his head before every Jew, and every Jew placed his hands on a Levite. Furthermore, if anyone would have preferred to remain in his tent and rest for a few days, the Levites would not have been consecrated, for Moses was told: ‘You shall assemble all the congregation of the Children of Israel’ (Numbers 8:9). If a single person was missing, this order could not have been carried out, and the laying of hands and waving would have been useless, for an action that is performed by the entire community has a completely different effect.”

The Levites served in the Sanctuary between the ages of 30 to 50, and in the Mishnah we learn: “At 50 – for counsel” (Perkei Avot 5:22). Rabbi Ovadia Bartenua notes that for a Levite, “From the age of 50 years he shall return from the host of the service and he shall serve no more, and he shall minister with his brothers in the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 8:25-26). How will he minister with them? By giving them advice. The Chafetz Chaim said that at the age of 50, a person has acquired a great deal of wisdom and experience, and he is able to give advice to others. Therefore much more should he give advice to himself? What is the best and most fitting advice possible? To prepare provisions for the path that leads to a world that is entirely good.

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita writes that three things presented difficulties to Moses, and therefore Hashem showed them to him. These were the Menorah, the new moon, and creeping things. Moses had so much difficulty with the Menorah, however, that it was made by itself. Why was the Menorah more difficult to understand than anything else? The answer is that the Menorah and its various parts allude to the body and its limbs, and the oil alludes to the soul. Moses had difficulty understanding how the physical body could be a single entity and completely attached to Hashem alone. Although the soul would certainly help in this regard, the body is nevertheless completely material! Hence Hashem told him to strike it with a hammer, which represents the diligent study of Torah. The harder we work, the more we become like a single entity before Hashem. He will then protect us against the evil inclination and lift us to great heights.

Doing His Will Wholeheartedly

It is written, “Towards the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light” (Numbers 8:2).

Only six lamps cast their light towards the Menorah itself, which consisted of the central branch.

In his book Yichahen Pe’er, Rabbi Chanoch Tzvi of Bendin cites Rabbi Ovadia Sforno in stating that because the six branches were dependent on the seventh and joined it, the seven lamps suddenly combined and generated a tremendous light. The branches on the right represent those who take the right path in the Torah, dealing with matters concerning eternal life. The branches on the left represent those who take the left path, for they concern themselves with this transitory life. If they all yield before Hashem and solely want to do His will, then everything will shine with tremendous light and abundance.

Everything was Given by a Single Shepherd

It is written, “According to the vision that the L-RD showed Moses, so did he make the Menorah” (Numbers 8:4).

As we know, the Menorah symbolizes the Torah, which is why it was fashioned from as single piece of metal, not from various parts that were connected together. Even the cups, knobs, and flowers were fashioned from the same piece of gold. This teaches us that the entire Torah is the root of all the Halachoh, general and particular rules, and the details of the Oral Law, as well as every novel concept that a Torah scholar will ever be led to say. All this was given to Moses on Sinai, and every novel teaching or explanation has its roots in the Torah, for “there is nothing that is not alluded to in the Torah.” Thus the words, “According to the vision that the L-RD showed Moses” are precise. They mean that just as Hashem revealed the Torah in its entirety to Moses on Mount Sinai, “so did he make the Menorah” from a single piece, a symbol and allusion that this very same Torah contains everything.

Those Who Benefited and Those Who Suffered

It is written, “The mixed multitude that was in its midst lusted exceedingly, and the Children of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Who will feed us meat?’” (Numbers 11:4).

The Midrash cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as saying: “Did they indeed need meat? Surely they could taste all the delicacies of the world in the Manna! Whoever longed for meat obtained the taste of it. Whoever longed for fish obtained the taste of it. If a person longed for rooster or pheasant or peacock, he obtained the taste of whatever he asked for. Why then were they dissatisfied? For no other reason than they sought some excuse for returning to Egypt. Yet in spite of all this, G-d said to Moses: ‘What do they ask for? Meat? Tell them that I will give them meat and that they will not eat of it for only one or two days, but for a full month.’ Hence it is written, ‘You shall eat [meat] not one day…but up to an entire month.’ At that time G-d gave them meat. Whoever had not been dissatisfied in the presence of G-d ate and enjoyed it, while he who tried to provoke G-d ate it and was probed by it and it passed out through his nostrils” (Bamidbar Rabba 7:4).

The Children of Israel Also Wept Again

It is written, “The mixed multitude that was in its midst lusted exceedingly, and the Children of Israel also wept vayashuvu [again]” (Numbers 11:4).

A proverb states, “A rebel repents only in order to lead his wife and children to deny everything.”

According to the Chatam Sofer, we must use this proverb to explain the above verse. At first there was only the mixed multitude, the erev rav, with their desires. Yet later on they reflected and repented so as to entangle the Children of Israel in these desires. Because they repented (vayashuvu), “The Children of Israel also wept again.”

You Called Him a Faithful Servant

It is written, “Not so is My servant Moses; he is faithful throughout My house” (Numbers 12:7).

Were the other prophets and tzaddikim not faithful? With regards to Moses, what can this be compared to? It is like a store whose owner hired a guard to

– Ma’ayonot HaNetzach
appointed to lead the great Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem.

home that Rabbi Ezra Attia was able to progress in Torah, eventually being

took over some of the household chores so as to ease her load. It was in this

was a very devoted woman who loved to help the Rebbetzin. In fact she

and repaired garments so her husband could study Torah without having to

from an old, manual sewing machine that she had purchased. She sewed

penniless, they began their life together with a common goal, which was to

The fiancé, who was fatherless, Rabbi Ezra signed for himself. They were

signing to become her husband. Indeed, a Sefer Torah was drawing close to her!

When she awoke in the morning, she understood that Heaven was telling

match, she had a dream in which she saw a Sefer Torah approaching her. 

Rabbi Ezra Attia, the matmid, was destined to be her fiancé. Indeed, a Sefer Torah was drawing close to her!

When she awoke in the morning, she understood that Heaven was telling

match, she had a dream in which she saw a Sefer Torah approaching her.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Pesach Sheni

It is written, “Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: ‘Any person who becomes unclean from [contact with] the dead, or is on a distant journey…. In the second month, on the fourteenth day toward evening, shall they prepare it. With unleavened bread and bitter herbs shall they eat it’ ” (Numbers 9:10-11).

The fourteenth of Iyar is called Pesach Sheni because it was on that day, in the era of the Temple, that those who could not bring the Passover offering on the fourteenth of Nissan (due to impurity or because they were on a journey) could bring it. Although the fourteenth of Iyar is not a festival, in the era of the Temple it was a day of joy for those who fulfilled the mitzvah of bringing the Passover offering, and therefore it was not an ordinary day. Hence tachnun is not recited in the prayers of this day. Some people have the habit of eating matzah that is left over from Passover, in remembrance of the Passover offering that was eaten with unleavened bread. It is called Pesach Sheni because this Passover takes place in the second (sheni) month, Iyar. In the Yerushalmi, it is called Pesach Katan (“Minor Passover”).

The mitzvah of the Passover offering differs from other offerings, for all other offerings are brought at a specific time, and they can no longer be brought after that time has passed.

As for the Passover offering, although it is to be brought at a specific time, if circumstances beyond one’s control prevent it from being brought at the correct time, the Torah has allowed us to bring it at another time. Why the exception? It is because the Passover offering differs from other offerings. That is, for all other offerings that are obligatory on the community or the individual, if a given offering has not been brought, then a positive mitzvah has not been fulfilled. However no punishment is mentioned in that case. With regards to the Passover offering, however, if a person intentionally sins by not bringing it, his punishment is severe, for his soul “shall be cut off from his people.” Since the punishment of the person who neglects this mitzvah is so grave – to be cut off from the source of life – how much greater is the reward given to the person who performs it? This is because the degree of Hashem’s goodness is greater than the degree of His severity. When the Children of Israel brought the first Passover offering in the desert of Sinai, among them were people who, due to circumstances beyond their control, could not bring the Passover offering at the right time. They went to find Moses and Aaron, saying: “Why should we be excluded” (Numbers 9:7). They thought, “Even if we’re not going to be punished because we didn’t bring the Passover offering, since we couldn’t do so, why should we be deprived of the great reward that this mitzvah brings?” Why does Pesach Sheni fall on the fourteenth of Iyar? If it was simply meant to enable people to become purified, two weeks would have sufficed for all kinds of impurity. The Ya’avetz, Rabbi Yaakov Emden, states that it is because the Children of Israel ate the matzah which they had brought with them from Egypt until the fifteenth of Iyar. This proves that the holiness of Passover and matzah extends until that night. The miracle of the exodus from Egypt and the eating of matzah extends to that very night.

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Beha’alotcha begins with the preparations for the service of the Sanctuary and the first journeys of the people according to its encampments and banners around the Sanctuary. Just as the order is given for oil to be collected for the lamps in Parsha Tetzaveh (which follows the instructions for building the Sanctuary in Parsha Terumah), so too is the order given for Aaron the priest to kindle the lamps in Parsha Beha’alotcha (which follows the appointing of the Sanctuary in Parsha Nasso). Similarly in Parsha Emor, we find the passage concerning the perpetual lighting of the lamps after the offerings of the festivals are described. Parsha Beha’alotcha continues with the purification of the Levites in preparing Aaron’s assistants for the service of the Sanctuary. Before the people begin journeying in the second year of the Exodus, the parsha recalls Hashem’s order that the Passover offering be brought at the appointed time, namely the first month (or the second month in case of unavoidable circumstances). For their journeys, the Children of Israel are commanded to follow the signs of Hashem’s cloud and to assemble for departure at the sound of two trumpets. During one of their journeys, the people begin to complain and weep so much that Moses becomes distressed. Hashem then sends quail to the people, and Miriam is struck with leprosy after Moses is disparaged. Only when Miriam returns to the camp do the people leave Chatzerot for the desert of Paran.

Reasons for the Mitzvot

Pesach Sheni

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EShet Hayil

A Sefer Torah Approached Her

Rebbetzin Bolissa, the wife of the gaon Rabbi Ezra Attia Zatzal (the former Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef), possessed a love for Torah that was famous. In her youth, before meeting the man who had been suggested to her as a match, she had a dream in which she saw a Sefer Torah approaching her. When she awoke in the morning, she understood that Heaven was telling her that her suggested match, Rabbi Ezra Attia the matmid, was destined to become her husband. Indeed, a Sefer Torah was drawing close to her! The engagement took place on Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5668 (1908). Signing for the fiancé was her father, the kabbalist Rabbi Avraham Selim. As for the fiancé, who was fatherless, Rabbi Ezra signed for himself. They were married in Jerusalem on Nissan 11, the eve of Shabbat HaGadol, and went to live in a one-room apartment in the Bucharim neighborhood. Completely penniless, they began their life together with a common goal, which was to build a home of Torah. They lived off the earnings the Rebbetzin made from an old, manual sewing machine that she had purchased. She sewed and repaired garments so her husband could study Torah without having to worry about money. Her mother-in-law, who lived with them at the time, was a very devoted woman who loved to help the Rebbetzin. In fact she took over some of the household chores so as to ease her load. It was in this home that Rabbi Ezra Attia was able to progress in Torah, eventually being appointed to lead the great Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem.
Rabbi Yossi said, “I was once traveling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Eliyahu of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door until I finished my prayer. After I finished praying, he said to me: ‘Peace be with you, my master!’ I replied, ‘Peace be with you, my master and teacher!’ He said to me, ‘My son, why did you go into this ruin?’ I replied, ‘To pray.’ He said to me, ‘You should have prayed on the road.’ I replied, ‘I was afraid that travelers might interrupt me.’ He said to me, ‘You should have said an abbreviated prayer.’ I therefore learned three things from him: One must not go into a ruin, one may say the prayer on the road, and if one does say his prayer on the road, he should recite an abbreviated prayer. He also said to me, ‘My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin?’ I replied, ‘I heard a Divine voice, cooing like a dove and saying: “Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burned My Temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!”’ He said to me, ‘By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, only three times each day does it exclaim this! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into synagogues and schoolhouses and respond, “May His great Name be blessed,” the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says: “Happy is the king who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father!”’

– Berachot 3a

In the Light of the Haftorah

Standing on the Right

It is written, “He showed me Joshua, the High Priest, standing before the angel of the L-RD, and the Satan was standing on his right to accuse him” (Zachariah 3:1).

We know that the Satan is the evil inclination, found on the left, and that the heart of man is the good inclination, found on the right. That being the case, why is the Satan standing on the right of Joshua the High Priest? The Chafetz Chaim states that the objective of the Satan, the evil inclination, is to make a person fall and to veer him off his path from the left. If a person attains his goal, the evil inclination will not give up, for it will again try to make him stumble. If the evil inclination sees that it does not have the strength to veer a person to the left, it will approach from the right, meaning that it will try to convince him to perform a mitzvah, and then lead him from a mitzvah to a sin. A person must therefore be vigilant and keep his eyes open. He must understand what it really wants, and even when it pushes him to do a mitzvah, not to listen to it. Actually, the mitzvot that come from it contain hidden traps that lead to sin. Hence the verse tells us that the Satan could not veer Joshua the High Priest to the left, which is why it stood at his right, as if to speak to him of good things. However the verse reveals its true intention, which was “to accuse him.” A person must therefore learn to recognize the methods and tricks of the evil inclination in order not to get caught in its traps.

– Kol Tzofayich, Part I

A True Story

The Goral HaGra

It is written, “Why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” (Numbers 12:8).

Not long after the passing of Reb Moshe Feinstein Zatzal (who died in the United States on the 13th of Adar II, 5746 and was buried two days later in Jerusalem), a man began to experience terrible migraines that doctors were unable to treat. He quickly went to see some great rabbis and asked for their blessing. When one Rav heard that his migraines had begun at the same time as Reb Moshe’s funeral, he asked the man if he had ever said something that constituted an affront to Reb Moshe’s honor. The man said that he had not. The Rav then advised him to perform a Goral HaGra, and the lot fell on the verse: “Why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” At first glance, these words meant little to the man, until he suddenly remembered what happened during Reb Moshe’s funeral, which he attended along with a huge crowd. He was put off by the long series of eulogies given during the funeral, for that day was Shushan Purim, and the mitzvot of the holiday awaited. The man thought that it wasn’t right for anyone’s funeral to deter from the joy of thousands of people on Purim, and he even expressed this opinion to others! Realizing that this was the cause of his problem, the man gathered a minyan and went to Reb Moshe’s grave to ask for forgiveness in their presence. Soon afterwards, his migraines disappeared.

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Shalom Eliezer Halberstam of Ratzfert

The saintly Rabbi Shalom Eliezer Halberstam Zatzal, the son of Rabbi Chaim Halberstam (the founder of the Sanz dynasty), was born in the year 5622. From his youth, people could see that he was destined for greatness. He studied with his father and received his education from him, until his passing in 5636. Rabbi Shalom Eliezer then studied with his brothers (who led Chassidic communities), men such as Rabbi Yechzekel Shraga of Shinova and Rabbi Baruch of Gorlitz. At the age of marriage, Rabbi Shalom Eliezer wed the daughter of the saintly Rabbi Mordechai Dov of Hornostepiel. It was at that point that he became known as a miracle worker. Many people came seeking his advice, and when they couldn’t help them by natural means, Rabbi Shalom Eliezer would employ supernatural means, meaning miracles. His home was open at all hours of the day, crowded with people who sought his aid. He eventually became the Rav and Rebbe of Turna, and a few years later he went to live in the small town of Ratzfert in Galicia, where he served as the Rav and Av Beit Din, leading the community until the Holocaust. During the war, he was transferred to a ghetto like every other Jew, and from there he was sent to Auschwitz.

It was in Auschwitz that Rabbi Shalom Eliezer revealed his tremendous holiness and purity, encouraging his brothers not to yield before the Germans, but to give their lives for the sanctification of G-d’s Name. On Sivan 16, 5704, Rabbi Shalom Eliezer Halberstam gave his own life in this way. May his merit protect us all.