

Parsha Ponders

Beha'alochecha | June 21, 2019 | 18 Sivan 5779

The three pillars of a positive character¹

דבר אל-אהרן ואמרת אליו בהעלותך את-הנרת אל-מול פני המנורה יאירו שבעת הנרות: ויעש כן אהרן אל מול פני המנורה העלה נרתיה כאשר צוה יקוק את-משה

Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you ignite the lights, let them illuminate towards the center of the Menorah². Aharon did so; he ignited its lights towards the center of the Menorah, as Hashem commanded Moshe³

This week's *parsha* begins by discussing the Menorah, including its make and how it was lit⁴. The Torah uses an unusual way to describe the lighting of the Menorah wicks: בהעלותך. Literally, with your raising up the lights. There are many things learned from this, but one of them is the fact that Aharon was instructed to construct a three-step block of stone in front of the Menorah⁵. Meaning, the verse is telling Aharon and his descendants to "go up" to light the Menorah, using these steps. The next verse teaches us that Aharon properly constructed these steps. We could say that this was a practical necessity, in order to reach the top of the Menorah⁶. Why though were there specifically three steps⁷? Also, was there any more significance to this steppingstone?

One possibility is it's a metaphor for character development. When we are told that Aharon made these steps, it's not only saying that he finished this construction project. It's also telling us he fulfilled the intrinsic purpose of these steps. The Menorah represents the Torah⁸. Aharon was told to correct and develop his character traits before being worthy of lighting the Menorah. This is because דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, proper character is a prerequisite for the Torah⁹. Meaning, proper character traits are not part of the six-thirteen *mitzvos*. Rather, a proper character is the foundation for the *mitzvos*¹⁰. That would mean without them, there would be no foundation for a person's Torah fulfillment to rest on.

We are taught¹¹ that anyone with the following traits are from among the students of Avraham: a generous eye, a humble spirit, and a moderate appetite. Anyone who possesses a stingy eye, a haughty spirit, and a limitless appetite is among the students of the wicked Bilaam¹². There are those¹³ that explain that these three positive character traits contain within them all the possible positive character

¹ Based on Be'er Yosef to Numbers 8:2-3

² See Rashi ad. loc.

³ Numbers loc. cit.

⁴ See Rashi and Ramban ad. loc. for an explanation for why this appears here of all places

⁵ Midrash Aggadah and Sifrei Bamidbar ad. loc. (brought by Rashi loc. cit.). The fact that was was this stone in front of the Menorah is taught in Tamid 3:9 and codified in Mishneh Torah Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 3:11

⁶ Bartenura and Tiferes Yisroel ad. loc. Yachin § 81

⁷ Melech Shlomo ad. loc. in the name of the Ra'avad leaves this question unanswered. Bartenura suggests its origin comes from the three times עליה is mentioned with regards to the Menorah. Twice here, and once in Exodus 27:20

⁸ See Rabbeinu Bachaye to Exodus 25:31

⁹ Vayikra Rabbah 9:3, brought in Yalkut Shimoni § 34; Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 1; Otzar Midrashim Midrash Hashkem § 23, brought in Yalkut Shimoni loc. cit.

¹⁰ Sha'arei Kedusha 1:2

¹¹ Avos 5:19

¹² See parshas Balak

¹³ Maharsha to Bava Basra 89b

traits. The same is true for the opposite traits. They correlate to jealousy, honor, and lusts, which drive a person out of this world¹⁴. Any other negative character trait is just a branch or subclass of these traits¹⁵.

We can say then that these three steps towards the Menorah were to hint to character perfection. This is a metaphor for *דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה*, proper character being a prerequisite for the Torah. The three steps correspond to these three positive character traits that are found in the students of Avraham. As the pillars of having a proper character, these three were necessary to approach the Torah, represented by the Menorah. This was the praise of Aharon when the Torah said that he made the steps. Meaning, he perfected his character in these three traits.

The Rambam notes¹⁶ that many philosophers claim that it's incredibly rare for a human being to perfect their character in their lifetime. However, he points out that our books of the Prophets are filled with people who perfected their character. He says¹⁷ that included in this list was Moshe, our teacher. *Chazal* say¹⁸ that there is one time in the Torah¹⁹ where Aharon is mentioned before Moshe. This is to teach us that Moshe and Aharon were equal in stature. This means that Aharon as well was perfect in his character. We in fact find evidence that he had achieved the three character traits of the students of Avraham.

Having a generous eye is the opposite of being jealous. We see how far Aharon was from jealousy, in that he was overjoyed to hear his younger brother would become the leader of the Jewish people²⁰. Only someone of humble spirit can pursue peace as much as Aharon did²¹. He would personally encourage quarrelling friends to make up, and for estranged husband and wife to reunite²². Someone with lusts has an unlimited appetite. Aharon went to the furthest extent to avoid any unnecessary or extraneous pleasure²³. Once he achieved these three character traits, which encompass all positive character traits, then he was worthy to approach the Torah. Then he was ready to light the Menorah.

Good Shabbos

¹⁴ Avos 4:21

¹⁵ Shenei Luchos HaBris Torah ShiBeKesav parshas Korach Torah Ohr § 24

¹⁶ Shemoneh Perakim Chapter 4

¹⁷ Ibid Chapter 7

¹⁸ Tosefta Kerisos 4:7; Bereishis Rabbah 1:15; Tanchuma Yashan Bereishis § 5; Mechilta Masechta D'Pischa § 1

¹⁹ Exodus 6:26. See Rashi ad. loc.

²⁰ Exodus 4:14. The Be'er Yosef stresses that Aharon had been the leader of the Jewish people for many decades, and had no hesitation to hand over the position to his younger brother

²¹ See Avos 1:12

²² Avos D'Rabbi Nosson 12:3. Kallah Rabbasi 3:4

²³ The Be'er Yosef proves this from the story in Horiyos 12a and Kerisos 5b about Aharon not wanting to illegally benefit from the anointing oil