

Parsha Ponders

Mishpatim / Shekalim | February 16, 2023 | 27 Shevat 5783

*Unreceived benefits*¹

ואל-משה אמר עלה אל-יקוק אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא ושבעים מזקני ישראל והשתחויתם מרחק
[Hashem] said to Moshe: “Go up to Hashem, you, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders of
Israel. And they shall prostrate from afar”²

The Torah describes the giving of the Torah in a striking fashion. Moshe is told to go up to Mount Sinai, and he is to be followed by the generation’s leaders and elders. Aharon is told to follow, and Aharon’s sons Nadav and Avihu soon after³. The seventy elders come next. They each had their boundary of how far up the mountain they could go. However, something glaring is missing in the verse. Or rather, some people are missing. As is known, Aharon had two other sons: Elazar and Itamar. Why are they seemingly excluded⁴? Why didn’t they get the honor to go up Mount Sinai? This is a problem which bothered many commentators, as these other two sons were definitely prominent in the nation⁵.

Unfortunately, this event had grave consequences. Those that followed Moshe and Aharon ended up behaving inappropriately. They were all liable to a heavenly death, but Hashem delayed their punishment for a better occasion⁶. Hashem knew all of this in advance. If Aharon’s other sons, Elazar and Itamar, had been commanded to also go up the mountain, then they would have perished as well. Aharon would have had no descendants, and Hashem didn’t want to completely erase Aharon’s Kohanic line⁷.

We can only imagine the pain that Elazar and Itamar felt at that moment. Their brothers, father, and uncle were all being accorded this special opportunity. They, despite their prominence and stature, were being inexplicitly excluded. They surely would have been greatly disappointed. They had no idea that this was all for their benefit. They only realized the truth after tragedy struck and their brothers Nadav and Avihu died, as well as the seventy elders. They then realized that their “rejection” was really their salvation.

We can apply this to our own lives. Many times people go through difficult or even painful situations. Things seem hopeless and perhaps without reason. Sometimes people expected to receive something and then they don’t. The one comfort is that everything Hashem does is for our benefit⁸. We can safely assume that the reason we didn’t get what we sought, or the reason we experienced that trial, was for our benefit.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Ayeles HaShachar to Exodus 24:1, by Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman

² Exodus *loc. cit.*

³ See Be’er Yosef to Leviticus 10;2

⁴ Cf. Abarbanel *ad. loc.*, who says that they were included in the seventy elders

⁵ See Eruvin 54b

⁶ See Rashi to v. 11

⁷ The Ayeles HaShachar quotes this from the Tur al HaTorah *ad. loc.* I found the same in Moshav Zekeinim *ad. loc.* in the name of the Tur’s father the Rosh (although, it doesn’t appear in the Rosh’s commentary on the Torah).

What’s fascinating is for some reason it’s word for word what the Tur says

⁸ See Berachos 60b and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 230:5