

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Nasso

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Chavah *bas* Ya'akov *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Which Came First?

In the sixteenth century lived the great sage R' Menachem Azaryah of Pano (Italy) – known by his acronym as the “Rama Mipano” – whose *halachic* and Kabbalistic classics are revered and studied even today.

The Sign

One time while delivering a *shiur* (lecture), the contemporary R' Yitzchok Zilberstein quoted from the responsa of the Rama Mipano. That prompted one of the attendees to approach the Rav afterward and relate to him the impact that particular volume had on the life of one of his relatives.

Apparently, this relative had had a very saintly father, of whom it was purported that he attained levels of Divine Inspiration. So it was that as this relative's wife was expecting, his father appeared to him in a dream to convey certain instructions. “A son will be born to you,” his father informed him, “and I ask that you name him ‘Menachem Azaryah.’”

To prevent his son from dismissing the proceedings as a “meaningless dream,” the father offered a “proof” of sorts. “When you awake,” he continued, “you will encounter a ‘sign’ as a reminder of this request: the volume of **R' Menachem Azaryah's** responsa will be lying on the floor.” Lo and behold, the morning light revealed that very *sefer* (book) lying in this unconventional location. Some time later a son was indeed born to this man, and the father dutifully named the child as per the request of his nighttime visitor.

While duly impressed, the story did leave R' Zilberstein wondering about one point in particular, as we shall delineate below.

With All Due Respect

One of the topics featured in this week's *parshah* is the Levite census, which yielded the number of Levites among its three principal families – Gershon, Kehas, and Merari – that were eligible for Temple service. Interestingly, we find a difference in the way the Torah refers to the tasks of one of these families. When speaking of Gershon and Merari, the verse uses the term “*avodah*” to refer to their labor (*Bamidbar* 4:23 [*Gershon*], 30 [*Merari*]). When referring to the mission of Kehas, however, the Torah employs the word “*melachah*” instead (*ibid* v. 3). Why the switch?

The Ohr Hachaim (*Bamidbar* 4:3) explains that the very different nature of the job of Kehas accounts for this deviation of nomenclature. As mentioned toward the end of this week's *parshah*, the other two Levite families were able to use wagons to carry the Mishkan (Tabernacle) items with which they were charged. The members of Kehas, however – who were tasked with transporting the Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark) – could only “carry on their shoulder” (*ibid*. 7:9). “*Melachah*,” the Ohr Hachaim explains, connotes a more focused, calculation-based task than standard “*avodah*.” Gershon and Kehas carried the other Mishkan implements; while sacred and

important, for these items mere “*avodah*” would suffice. The transportation of the Aron, however – which housed G-d’s tablets and served as the abode and embodiment of Torah – there was a need for “*melachah*.” In the manner of loyal servants bearing their Master on their very shoulders, the task demanded a substantial measure of deference and deliberateness.

Indeed, this notion is reflective of the overall concept of according the Torah due respect. As the Mishnah teaches in Avos (4:6):

רבי יוסי אומר, כל המכבד את התורה, גופו מקבד על הבריות. וכל המחלל את התורה, גופו מחלל על הבריות.

“R’ Yose said: Whoever honors the Torah – he himself will receive honor from people. But whoever disregards the Torah – he will (eventually) be dishonored by others.”

This Mishnah is actually the source for many of the *halachos* we observe regarding the way we treat *sefarim* (holy books of Torah content). Rabbeinu Yonah on his commentary to this Mishnah lists some of the practices included in the Mishnah’s injunction: not sitting on a seat or bench upon which *sefarim* rest and not placing *sefarim* on the floor!

Getting back to the aforementioned dream, we seem to have a bit of an issue. How could such a method be employed to lend veracity to the naming request? Didn’t the strategic placement of a *sefer* onto the floor entail a blatant disregard for the Torah’s honor?

Consulting the Wise

R’ Zilberstein, bothered by the notion, presented this very question to his brother-in-law, R’ Chaim Kanievsky. The sage had a much different view of the entire affair and put matters into perspective.

In his view the events must have transpired somewhat differently than had been assumed until now. That is, it could not be that the departed grandfather-to-be “arranged” for this *sefer* to fall to the floor just to ensure the fulfillment of his request; as stated, this would amount to a denigration of Torah. What must have really happened, explained R’ Chaim, was that the *sefer* had *first* fallen to the floor even before the grandfather got involved. Now, while the (living) owner presumably had not done so purposefully – and may not even have been aware of it – this de-facto debasement to Torah occurred on his premises (perhaps even due to some carelessness on his part). As such, a certain danger of retribution was lurking, as this violation had occurred on his watch.

And so the concerned grandfather, from his ethereal station, devised a solution, one that could effect an atonement for this mishap. He appeared in a dream to his son and relayed the important instruction: Call your child “Menachem Azaryah,” the name of the sagacious author of the fallen volume. Thereby, the dishonor that had been inflicted (albeit inadvertently) on this Torah figure and his work could be rectified through the show of respect of utilizing his name (*Aleinu L’shabayach, Bamidbar 12:6*).

The above may provide a timely lesson. As we prepare to receive the Torah anew, we can try to utilize the upcoming Yom Tov of Shavuot to strengthen our appreciation for – and deference to – the Torah and the sages who impart its sacred teachings.