



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Vayakhel 5768

One of the foremost *talmidim* of the Vilna Gaon was R' Zalman Volozhiner (brother of R' Chaim Volozhiner, originator of the Lithuanian yeshiva system). Many things have been said about R' Zalman. He was a tremendous, holy *tzaddik*; his diligence in learning was unparalleled; he was as fluent in the entire *Tanach*, *Shas*, *Medrash*, and *Poskim*, as we are in the *Ashrei* prayer.

One area in which R' Zalman most certainly did not excel was physical strength; he sat and learned Torah for hours on end, hardly eating or sleeping. Surely, R' Zalman did not possess burly biceps.

Yet, consider the following testimonial regarding this noble soul (*Toldos Adam*, ch. 15): One time, in the course of his learning, R' Zalman needed to consult a certain rare volume. He knew that the *sefer* was located in a particular room, but there was one obstacle: a large dresser blocked the way. The prospect of moving the dresser was quite daunting; normally, it required three people to lift it. R' Zalman, however, *needed* that particular *sefer*.

Contemplating his dilemma, R' Zalman turned his thoughts to a *possuk* in Devarim. The *possuk* tells us, "It (the Torah) is not in Heaven" (30:12); Torah is attainable on earth, precluding the necessity to reach Heaven to find it. The Gemara (*Eruvin 55a*) infers from this verse, however, that *had* the Torah been in Heaven, we would have been obligated to go there to acquire it. Through this terminology,

Chazal emphasize the degree to which a person must exert himself to attain proficiency in Torah.

R' Zalman, thirsting for the clarity that he knew the volume would provide, began reciting this *ma'amar Chazal* over and over again, concentrating on its message with increasing intensity. Suddenly, he rushed over to the dresser and single-handedly lifted it into the air, clearing the way to his beloved *sefer*.

How could a Talmud scholar, most likely devoid of any muscular power of note, be capable of hoisting a piece of furniture which normally required the efforts of three men, simply because he wanted to?

The answer to this question may lie in this week's *parsha*. When the donated materials for the *mishkan* were assembled, Moshe Rabbeinu called upon the builders to begin their work. The *possuk* (*Shemos 36:2*) states:

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה... אֶל כָּל אִישׁ חָכֵם לֵב אֲשֶׁר יָתַן
ה' חָכְמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ לְקַרְבָּה אֶל
הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ :

"And Moshe called...to all the wise of heart, whose hearts had been imbued with wisdom by Hashem; anyone whose spirit had yearned to approach and participate in the task."

The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras Habayis*, ch. 7, footnote) calls our attention to a remarkable lesson within this verse. How did the builders know how to perform the intricate tasks required for fashioning the *mishkan*? They

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simply yearned to know, and their hearts *automatically* were filled with the pertinent knowledge. When a *Yid* has a real and burning desire to accomplish something in Torah study or service of Hashem, Hashem grants him the ability to attain higher levels. When a person aspires to levels which are beyond his innate capabilities, Hashem helps him to achieve his goals; even if that means granting him superhuman strength or special knowledge.

The Mishnah in *Berachos 5:1* states:

אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כבוד ראש.
חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת
ומתפללים, כדי שיכוננו את לבם למקום.

“One may only begin to *daven* if he is in the proper, serious frame of mind. The pious men of yore would meditate for a full hour before beginning to pray, in order to properly direct their hearts to Hashem.”

The Gemara (*ibid. 32b*) depicts the full scope of the devotion of these pious men. They would meditate for one hour prior to prayer; they would pray for one hour; and then they would meditate for an hour *following* prayer. Since they followed this routine for *shacharis*, *minchah*, and *ma'ariv*, they would end up dedicating *nine hours each day* to prayer. If the overwhelming majority of these pious men's waking hours were spent immersed in these devotional activities, when did they have time to become *talmidei chachamim*?

The Gemara answers that these men were granted special *Siyata D'Shmaya*, and were able to accomplish in a short time what another person would accomplish after many consecutive hours of intense toil. R' Aharon Kotler (*Mishnas R' Aharon, vol. 1, p. 71*)

perceives another manifestation of our theme within this Gemara. The pious men possessed an overwhelming desire to know Hashem and become close to Him; therefore, Hashem blessed them with an uncanny ability to attain knowledge of His Word.

All too often, people become complacent with mediocrity. Goals such as completing *Shas*, improving a particular *middah*, or strengthening our observance of *mitzvos* seem unrealistic and unattainable. However, Chazal assure us that if we foster a true yearning to attain higher levels, and remain diligent and consistent in this endeavor, Hashem will afford us the ability to accomplish well beyond our wildest dreams.

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