

YOUR HONOR

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

This week's parsha concludes with the gifts and offerings brought to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) by each of the princes of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

The Torah enumerates every facet of each prince's gift even though they are all identical. Nachmanides (R' Moshe ben Nachman; 1194-1270; of Gerona, Spain; one of the leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages; successfully defended Judaism at the dramatic debate in Barcelona in 1263) comments that while the Torah does not contain any extraneous information - some laws are encoded within and derived from the existence of a superfluous letter - the Torah needs to relate the same narrative twelve times for us to understand how Hashem (G-d) bestows honor upon those who fear him. The tribal leaders were all ready on the same day to offer their sacrifices. They could not bring them simultaneously; one would have to precede the other. But it was unacceptable to elucidate the components of the first prince's gift, mentioning him by name, and then simply acknowledge that the other princes brought the same gift, for this would diminish the honor due each prince.

Therefore, Hashem mentioned each one by name, gave each one his own day and listed all the elements of each gift. Rabbi Yechezkel Levinstein (1884-1974; "Reb Chatzkel", as he was known, was the mashgiach/spiritual mentor of two of the most illustrious Yeshivos in the world, Mir (Poland) and Ponovezh (B'nai Brak, Israel)) notes that the Torah going to such efforts in order to give appropriate honor demonstrates the lengths we must go to uphold the honor of others in our daily affairs.

Once, Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer (d. 1953; Rav of Slutsk, and later Rosh HaYeshiva/Dean of Yeshivas Eitz Chaim in Jerusalem) was up into the late hours of the night with his disciple, Rabbi Dovid Finkel, when a knock on the door disturbed their concentration. A young man entered, asking the elder Rabbi for some of his time in privacy. With a welcoming smile, Reb Isser Zalman jumped up and escorted his guest into a side room. After a few minutes, Rabbi Meltzer stormed out of the room, visibly upset. "How can I be lenient with such a law?" he muttered to himself, as he walked into another room, closed the door, and remained in solitude for a considerable period of time. Rebbitzin Meltzer became concerned for her husband's health; such stress was harmful at his age. She prevailed on his student to check on her husband's well being. Rabbi Finkel trembled as he slowly entered the room.

His mentor was sitting on a bed, deep in thought, holding his head. Rabbi Finkel asked, "What happened?" but Rabbi Meltzer firmly insisted that he immediately be left alone. Soon after Rabbi

Finkel stepped out to rejoin Rebbitzin Meltzer, the door burst open, as Reb Isser Zalman swiftly crossed the room to rejoin his guest. From within that room they heard the master of the house demand, "This can't happen. We cannot allow the murder of a Jewish girl. Absolutely not!" The young guest understood and took leave of the house.

Rabbi Meltzer then explained to his bewildered wife and student that the young man is engaged to be married to a young lady from a distinguished family. The bride-to-be was recently informed by her doctors that they questioned if she would ever be able to bear children. Because of the Torah's mandate to have children, the future groom had come to ask if he should preemptively break off the engagement. "My dilemma was great: on the one hand a situation of doubt with a biblical commandment requires stringency...but what of her embarrassment and pain? I eventually ruled they should be married because her inability to have children is subject to doubt, in contrast to her shame and humiliation she would suffer if the engagement were broken, which is certain. Causing the embarrassment of a fellow Jew is also a Biblical prohibition, which our Sages teach us is tantamount to murder! I then blessed him that Hashem should grant them children, and asked that he invite me to the bris (ceremony of ritual circumcision) next year."

Such is the impact of one who genuinely feels the need to maintain the dignity of his fellow Jew. And Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer did attend the bris the next year!

Have a good Shabbos!

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