

WHY DID THE YOUNGER BROTHER GET THE BETTER JOB?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 507, The Faithful Unfaithful Wife. Good Shabbos!

Why Did The Younger Brother Get The Better Job?

There is an interesting Medrash in the beginning of Parshas Nasso. Parshas Nasso begins with the Almighty's command to Moshe Rabbeinu to "also count" (gam hem) the descendants of the family of Gershon [Bamidbar 4:22]. Rashi comments on the words "gam hem" -- "just as you were commanded regarding the descendants of the family of Kehas -- to determine how many there are who reached the age of Service."

The Medrash Rabbah connects the instruction to count the descendants of Gershon with the pasuk [versel: "yekara hi m'peninim v'chol chafatzeha lo yisvu bah" [Mishlei 3:15] ([The Torah is] more precious than diamonds and nothing is of as much value as [the Torah itself]). What is the connection between these two pasukim?

The Kli Yakar in our Parsha explains: Logically, the descendants of Gershon -- who was the first born of Levi -- should have been counted first. Yet, Kehas was counted before Gershon. Why? The Kil Yakar suggests that the reason why Kehas was counted first was because the job of the children of Kehas was to carry the Luchos [Ark of the Torah]. To indicate the primacy of Torah, Kehas was counted first, despite the fact that he was younger.

But the question remains -- why was Kehas, the younger brother, given the job of carrying the Luchos that represented Torah? This job should rightfully have fallen to the firstborn (Gershon).

The Kil Yakar suggests that the reason why Kehas pre-empted, so to speak, his older brother with this honor was so that no one could claim that exclusive rights to occupy oneself with Torah belong only to the firstborn. This demonstrated that all Jews are equal regarding Torah. No one has "first dibs" or "exclusive rights" regarding the "Crown of Torah". Torah is available for every Jew to come and partake of it, as the Rambam writes: The Jewish people possess three crowns. The crown of the priesthood belongs to the descendants of Aharon. The crown of kingship is restricted to the family of King David from the tribe of Yehudah. However, the crown of Torah is available to all takers. [Talmud

Torah 3:1]

This is the interpretation of the pasuk in Mishlei: Torah is more precious than peninim -- meaning greater than the crown of the Kohen Gadol who enters "lifnai v'lifnim" [into the innermost sanctum of holiness -- e.g. the Holy of Holies]. We now understand the Medrash's link between the pasuk highlighting the fact that the younger brother (Kehas) was given the opportunity to carrying the Luchos and the pasuk in Mishlei emphasizing the fact that access to Torah is not restricted by lineage or by age.

Father - Son versus Master - Slave Relationship

The Sefas Emes goes one step further than the Kli Yakar. If Torah is dearer than even the Kohen Gadol -- and this idea is buttressed by the Talmudic statement that a Mamzer Talmid Chochom [a Torah scholar of blemished lineage] has precedence over a Kohain Gadol Am haAretz [ignorant High Priest] -- then why, he asks, can a Talmid Chochom not enter the Kodesh Kadoshim [Holy of Holies]?

The Sefas Emes answers that a person may have one of two possible relationships with the Ribono shel Olam. He can have a slave-master relationship or he can have a son-father relationship. We allude to this idea in the Rosh HaShannah liturgy when we approach G-d "whether as children or whether as slaves". If a person's relationship with the Almighty is that of a slave, then proximity makes all the difference in the world. We can tell who the most important slave is by observing who has proximity to the master. L'Havdil, in the White House, the office closest to the president houses his most important advisor. Someone down the hall is not as important. Someone who is stuck somewhere in the Executive Office building across the street is a 'nobody'.

However, the relationship of son to father is totally different. A son can be 6000 miles away, but he is still "my son". Distance does not make a difference regarding a son.

The prime "Eved" (servant) in Klal Yisrael is the Kohen Gadol. G-d demonstrates this by allowing only the Kohen Gadol to enter into the Kodesh Kadoshim. L'Havdil, the Kohen Gadol has the "office next door". A Talmid Chochom -- one who learns the Almighty's Torah and knows the Almighty's Torah is His son. Through Torah we can become the closest to the Ribono shel Olam. If we have that relationship of Torah with Him, then distance does not mean anything because we have entered into a Father-son relationship.

Torah is "more precious than the one who enters 'lifnai v-lifnim'". If he is more precious, then why can't he come in? The answer is because he does not need to come in. He has the closeness of a son wherever he may be.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this

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