

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Aramaic words of the Gemara (Talmud) were difficult for Levi Mecklowitz to pronounce, but even when he was able to read them, the whole effort just seemed so pointless. Most of the cases the Gemara discussed were obscure, situations that never have happened and never will. Why bother wasting time with all this "nonsense"? He didn't plan on spending the rest of his life learning.

The year was 1956 and most people in their midteens were starting to make plans to go to college. If learning Gemara were only a passing stage in his life, then why bother? But Levi had a chavrusa (study partner), Naftali Gross, who just would not let Levi give up. Instead of allowing him to slip through the cracks, Naftali pushed his friend and constantly encouraged him, urging him to persevere and to review over and over. Because of Naftali's efforts, Levi received decent grades on his test. However, Levi still did not see the point in any of it. He would have preferred if Naftali would have left him alone and allowed him to drift through the year. He had only two more years left and then he would be done forever with Gemara.

On one particular day the two chavrusas were supposed to be learning a Gemara in the beginning of Maseches Bava Metzia. Levi had staggered into yeshivah late that day and his rebbi had reprimanded him for his tardiness ... again. Levi mumbled something about oversleeping and missing the bus but his rebbi had heard that excuse too many times already and cut him off before he had a chance to finish. He handed him his Gemara (which had been gathering dust sitting on the shelf for the past few days) and hurriedly encouraged him to go start learning with his chavrusa Naftali.

Levi, who had no doubt woken up only a short while before, grabbed his Gemara and walked away. Blah blah blah blah ... Levi thought to himself. If the rebbi tells me one more time how lucky I am to have a chavrusa like Naftali... Each passing minute was becoming more and more torturous for Levi. This year had proven to be much worse than previous ones. He had not expected it to be so bad. It was only the middle of October and Levi could not bear the thought of remaining in yeshiva for eight more months. He sat down next to Naftali, who as always was perky, upbeat and enthusiastic. "So, Levi, are you ready to begin the new topic" "Yea ... thrilled ..." Levi's response dripped with sarcasm. There was no worse place he could have imagined himself being than in the beis midrash. "Layma masnisin delo k'Ben Nanas — Let us suggest that the Mishnah is not going like Ben Nanas ..." Naftali repeated it once more and nudged Levi to look inside as he embarked on yet another adventure in the Gemara. But this time Levi's patience would not last long.

"What did you say!?" Naftali looked up, puzzled, and noticed for the first time that it was not disinterest but anger in Levi's expression. "I said, Layma masnisin delo k'Ben Nanas — Let us suggest that the Mishnah is not going like Ben Nanas ..." "Ben Nanas?" asked Levi with a cynical smile on his face, "Is that really his name? Ben Nanas?" Naftali stared at his friend. "This is stupid!" Levi continued. "Who really cares if the Mishnah is going according to Ben Nanas or not? Tell me! Tell me! What possible difference could it make if our Mishnah goes like Ban Nanas?"

With that outburst Levi stood up and stormed out of the yeshivah building. After an initial moment of shock, Naftali got out of his seat and ran after his chavrusa. But it was too late. Levi was nowhere to be seen. Naftali tried to run over to Levi's house but he wasn't sure which one it was. Levi was always quiet about what went on at home. His rebbi tried to call and Naftali left many messages but Levi Mecklowitz was never heard from again. Fifty years later Rav Naftali Gross was sitting at the head table at his yeshivah's dinner. Many of the alumni had come to honor their rebbi who had served for many years as head of Yeshivas Ohavei Banim. Two generations of talmidim, over 200 alumni, had come to pay tribute to the man who had taught them and nurtured them, helping them develop into bnei Torah.

Reb Naftali's speech was riveting. He wove together intricate pieces of Gemara and developed a theme of a yeshivah's responsibility to its talmidim. His talmidim nodded to each other throughout the talk; this is why they loved him so much. He made them feel like they were a part of something larger than themselves; they felt connected not only to the yeshivah but to the entire Torah world. After he finished, throngs of his talmidim walked up to the dais to compliment him and thank him for his inspiring words. One by one they approached their rebbi, waiting to be recognized. His smile and warmth endeared him to all. Soon everyone was able to have a chance. No one was dismissed with just a greeting. Rather, each one was spoken to in a personal manner. "How is your daughter managing with her new teacher? Did that business deal work out as you had planned?" It was amazing that he had managed to maintain such a close connection with each of his students.

"Meat or chicken?" The waiter, a man in his 60's whose face showed that he had had a difficult life, asked. Reb Naftali glanced up, "Chicken, please." But as he did, Naftali's eyes locked onto the waiter's eyes. Reb Naftali looked deeply into those eyes and noticed that they had begun to fill with tears. The waiter tried to avert his face from Reb Naftali's gaze. "Levi?" A moment passed and suddenly the waiter began to cry.

"Yes, Naftali, it is me, your chavrusa from way back in Yeshiva ... I now know ..." "You now know what?" Naftali pressed on, as he struggled to find his friend from so many years ago in the tired body of a 65-year-old man. "Naftali, I now understand the difference it makes if our Mishnah goes like Ban Nanas." And with that the two men embraced. (R. Y. Spiro, *Touched by A Story* 4, p. 127) There many different lessons which we can learn from this story. Now, as we stand ready to receive the Torah on the Yom Tov of Shavuot, it is worthwhile to examine one aspect of the story. The Midrash tells us "There is no honor, other than Torah" (Shemos Rabbah 38:5) In other words, a person is only worthy of honor according to their Torah knowledge. There are other bases for honoring others; however let us focus on this one basis of honor: Torah knowledge.

In explaining its statement that "There is no honor, other than Torah [knowledge]", the Midrash explains the example of Yavetz, a person described in Divrei-HaYamim (Chronicles). Yavetz is described as a person who due honor due to the fact that he had toiled in Torah. Thus we see that the true measure of honor a person deserves, is based on his level of effort in Torah study. Therefore, we can all be honored according to our efforts, even if all of us may not be on the level of the Chafetz Chaim, for example. As we celebrate the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, we must all examine our own lives and critically look at our own individual efforts to learn and toil with the Holy Torah. Are we fitting for the honor due a person who truly toils to his greatest potential in Torah learning? **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."