

But they shall not come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die. (4:20)

Bnei Kehas were blessed to be participants in a very auspicious service: transporting the holy vessels which include the *Aron Hakodesh*, Holy Ark. One who works with nitroglycerine cannot take any chance. His every movement must be precise and organized. Thus, great care was exerted to see to it that *Bnei Kehas* approached their service in the *Mishkan* in the most orderly manner. It is forbidden for anyone other than a *Kohen* to gaze upon the holiest vessels in their uncovered state. Thus, the *Kohanim* were given the sole responsibility of inserting these items into their wrapping prior to their transport. Furthermore, the Holy Ark was not to be touched even in its wrapping, but carried by means of its staves, which were inserted along its sides.

As a result of this stringency concerning the vessels, *Bnei Kehas* were taking a chance whenever they entered into the *Mishkan* to perform their duty. One error could spell death. Yet, according to one opinion in the *Midrash*, the danger neither frightened them nor held them back from vying for this service. They were eager to chance the danger as long as they had the opportunity to carry the Ark. The *Midrash* says: "Hashem says, 'As I did for *Bnei Kehas* (protected them), because they feared Me, and (as a result) I appointed distinction to them, and I warned them to take heed not to do anything that would precipitate their untimely demise, likewise, anyone who fears Me I will honor and not excise his name from the world!'" In other words, those who devote themselves to Torah, who embrace the Torah with their very beings, despite the challenges that might come their way, Hashem promises to protect them.

This applies to anyone who pays respect to the Torah – even a gentile. He may not be from the Abrahamic seed, but, if he respects the Torah and its disseminations, Hashem will shine His countenance upon him. The following story gleaned, from a biography of a great *tzaddik*, saintly Torah scholar of Tunisia, supports this idea.

The entire Jewish community of Tunis was asleep; yet, in one house, despite the lateness of the evening and the exhaustion of the individual, one person, **Chacham Tzemach Tzarfati, zl**, Chief Rabbi of Tunis, scholar par excellence, was preparing to recite *Tikkun Chatzos*, the prayer mourning the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, which preceded the beginning of his daily learning schedule. Suddenly, the candle which had been burning so brightly went out, throwing the room into pitch darkness. There were no matches to be found in the *Rav's* house. It was one of those nights where nothing seemed to be going right.

The thought of wasting the rest of the night without learning was too much to bear. The *Rav* was going to look for a match, a candle, anything to light up his house. We have become so accustomed to modern day conveniences that we lose sensitivity to what it must have meant to learn, work, by the light of a candle. The *Rav* walked all over town looking for a light, to no avail. Finally, he saw a light coming from a bakery. He immediately ran over; perhaps he could obtain a

light from the bakery that would allow him to learn until the sun rose.

A Muslim guard stood watch over the bakery. When he saw the city's Chief Rabbi standing by the door, he lifted the heavy wooden beam which served as the door's lock and allowed the *Rav* to enter. The *Rav* thanked him profusely for letting him in, and then proceeded to ask for a light. The guard gave the *Rav* a burning candle, bid him good night, and returned the heavy wooden beam to its place.

Ten minutes later, the *Rav* was back. The light of the candle had blown out. The guard lifted off the beam and gave the *Rav* a light, only to have the *Rav* return again. The wind was reaching the flame, despite everything he did to protect it. The Muslim guard was not so quick to lift off the heavy beam again. After all, he wanted to sleep, and the *Rav* was returning for the third time. Seeing that the guard was not overly excited to open the door again, the *Rav* cried out, "*Yehi Ratzon*, it should be the will of Almighty G-d, that you should merit to become wealthy commensurate with the weight of this beam!" (This is how much gold he should amass.)

The guard understood that before him stood a holy man who was revered and admired by not only the entire Jewish community, but the entire general community as well. He moved with alacrity to lift the beam, lit the candle, and personally carried the lit candle to the home of the *Rav*!

The next day, as the guard was reviewing an accounting of the number of bread and rolls sold in the bakery, he was approached by a stranger, who inquired how much he earned per day. "Five coins," the guard replied. I have a job for you which requires great discretion. I am willing to pay you twenty-five coins a day if you will work for me. Remember, discretion is a must. Can you do it?" "Yes! Yes!" The guard replied. "Then let us go," the man said.

A blindfold was placed over the guard's eyes, as the man led the guard on a path for about three-quarters of an hour, when they arrived at their destination: a small non-descript house. The guard's blindfold was removed, as he was led down to a small room which had various paintings covering most of its walls. The man quickly removed a large painting which had been concealing a small, hidden doorway. The man opened the door, and the guard almost passed out when he saw sacks and sacks filled with gold coins. There was a king's ransom in this room, an unimaginable amount of money. His job was to take the gold coins from the sacks and place them into treasure chests. At the end of the day, the guard was paid, blindfolded and taken back to the bakery. Not bad for a day's work. End of story? No!

A few weeks later, as the guard was going to work at the bakery, he saw the signs for a real estate auction. Apparently, a man had died, leaving over a small house, which no one seemed to want. There were no inheritors, so the property was put up for sale. When the guard saw the address of the house, he became curious, and lo and behold, it was the home belonging to the elusive rich man from whom he had not heard again.

Suddenly, everything came back to him: the *Rav's* blessing; the wealthy man's sudden appearance; all of that money. He decided to bid on the house. Since no one else cared about a small house situated almost nowhere, he was able to purchase the house for practically nothing. He obtained the keys, opened the door, ran to the painting that covered the concealed entrance to the "vault," and there he found the *Rav's* blessing in all of its glory: thousands and thousands of gold coins; a heavy beam's weight in gold! End of story? Not yet.

When *Rav Tzemach* became old, he decided to move to the Holy Land. His travels took him through Turkey, where he spent a few days resting in Istanbul. One day, as he walked through the cultural district, an Arabian Sheikh, sitting in a beautifully appointed carriage, pulled up alongside him. The Sheikh descended from the carriage and bowed to the *Rav*. "Will the *Rav* please join me at my palace? I would like to repay my debt of gratitude to him." the Sheikh said.

Rav Tzemach did not recognize the Sheikh, but, nonetheless, agreed to join him. As soon as they arrived in the privacy of the Sheikh's palace, the Sheikh closed the door, and, in the privacy of his home, prostrated himself before the *Rav*. He kissed the feet of the *Rav*, as he reminded him of the events that took place on that fateful night years earlier: "I am that watchman whom the *Rav* blessed with great wealth. Please take this small token of my appreciation." He then handed the *Rav* a leather moneybag containing a wealth of gold coins – sufficient to live out his days in splendor, studying Torah without any financial worries.

This was the reward garnered by *Rav Tzemach* for his unparalleled devotion to Torah study, and the incredible reward warranted by a non-Jew for the tremendous respect he accorded to the *Rav* and Torah.