

Now you shall command Bnei Yisrael. (27:20)

Not Moshe, just, *V'atah*, "Now you." Indeed, the Torah does not mention Moshe *Rabbeinu's* name in this *parsha*. This is by design, because, in his defense of *Klal Yisrael*, following the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe pleaded that they be forgiven. If not – *m'cheini na mi'Sifrecha asher Kasavta*, "Erase me from Your Book that You have written" (*Shemos* 32:32). When a *tzaddik* issues forth a declaration it is not ignored. Thus, one *parsha*, the one which usually is read around the seventh of *Adar*, which is Moshe's *yahrzeit*, is missing his name. From the time that the Torah records Moshe's entering the scene in *Sefer Shemos*, until the end of the Torah – this is the only *parsha* that is missing his name. He sacrificed his name in this *parsha* out of his abiding love for *Klal Yisrael*.

Hashem turned to Moshe and said, "*V'atah Tetzaveh*; Now you shall command." As a result of Moshe's request to have his name withheld from the Torah –as a result of his extreme devotion to his nation, Hashem said, "You" be the one to issue the command. No name, but "you," because Hashem always acknowledges and rewards sacrifice.

Mesiras nefesh, sacrifice, for *Klal Yisrael* is not uncommon. Jews from all walks of life have sacrificed themselves for Hashem, for Judaism, and for *Klal Yisrael*. What is more difficult to come by is to live a life of sacrifice. *Kiddush ha'chayim*, sanctifying life, is the form of sacrifice that seems to be more demanding. We are prepared to fight to the death to sanctify Hashem's Name. Are we likewise prepared to live a life of commitment and devotion, regardless of what Hashem asks of us?

The *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*, was once traveling by train together with the *Imrei Emes*, *zl*, of *Gur*. Word spread that these two Torah giants were traveling together. As a result, Jews gathered at every stop to gaze at these holy men and receive their blessing – even if it was through a railcar window. At every stop, the *Gerrer Rebbe* went to the window and blessed those who had congregated at the station. The *Chafetz Chaim* demurred, claiming that this world is only a vestibule before the next world. The honor and acclaim one receives in this world diminishes the reward that he would otherwise receive in *Olam Habba*, The World-to- Come. "Why should I benefit from imaginary *kavod*, esteem?" he asked.

The *Imrei Emes* replied, "For *Klal Yisrael* (to give a Jew satisfaction), I have long ago been *mevateir*, conceded, my *Olam Ha'zeh* (This World) and my *Olam Habba* (World-to-Come). The *Chafetz Chaim* went to the window at the next stop.

One need not be a Torah giant to express his love for and commitment to Hashem via self-sacrifice. The following story demonstrates that even an ordinary Jew, who was not raised in a strong Torah-oriented background, who did not descend from an illustrious pedigree, gave up his life to proclaim commitment to Hashem. After all, a life in which we must renege our conviction is not a life worth living.

For many years, Jewish boys in Russia (from the young age of six years old) were subject to the evil decree of the Cantonists. Boys were taken captive and forced to serve in the Russian Army for up to twenty-five years, during which time they were physically and emotionally abused and subject to anti-religious laws in which Torah, Kosher and *Shabbos* were strictly prohibited. The *Tzemach Tzedek* would often visit these brave soldiers to encourage and offer them emotional and spiritual support. He would reiterate to them, "A person should give up his life, rather than renege on his *Yiddishkeit*. Even if the Czar himself instructs you to turn your back on your religion, you should sacrifice your life, rather than listen to him!" (In most cases, this was wishful thinking, since these men had been snatched as children, and, as a result, had little to no Jewish upbringing which would inculcate them with strong Jewish conviction and commitment.)

Among the soldiers listening to the *Rebbe* was a sailor named Shimon Levin – a Cantonist who had been held captive for most of his life. He was an excellent soldier who enjoyed being in the Russian Navy. His friends were impressed by his bravery and ensuingly dubbed him Semion Bodri – Shimon the Brave.

Shimon received a high commission as a Naval officer, stationed at a base near the Black Sea. One day, his base was informed of important news. The Czar was vacationing nearby and planned on touring the base! As the most powerful person in the country, the Czar injected a sense of fear and awe in every soldier. In his honor, the base was cleaned to a fault. Mistakes were not tolerated in the Russian Army. As part of their welcoming performance, one of the officers would perform an act of extreme bravery in honor of their esteemed guest. Shimon Levin was selected to perform the act of bravery.

As everyone watched with bated breath, Shimon stood at the bottom of the tallest ship mast on the sea. He climbed up the mast without stopping, and, when he reached the very top, he dove into the sea! He immediately swam back to the boat, climbed up and saluted the Czar.

The Czar was enraptured. He was thrilled. "Semion Bodri, I want to reward you at a celebration tomorrow!" the Czar declared. The next day, with many officers and important guests in attendance, the Czar announced, "Semion Bodri! Due to the bravery you demonstrated yesterday, I am promoting you and elevating your rank to admiral in the Russian Navy!"

"But I am Jewish and, according to Russian law, I cannot hold a position higher than an officer."

The Czar was surprised and embarrassed, "So, you will change your religion and become an admiral – now!"

Shimon immediately replied, "I must first carry out the same act of bravery that I did yesterday." Shimon ran up the ship's tall mast and climbed to the top. Shouting so that everyone could hear, he declared: "Your majesty, for twelve years I have served in the Russian Navy, and I love my job. However, more important than all this, I am a Jew! I have always observed *Shabbos* and kept

kosher during these twelve years. I will never stop being a Jew. I will never leave Hashem. *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad!*"

Shimon took one last dive into the sea – only this time he did not emerge from the water. He had publicly given up his life *Al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name. This way, the Czar could not force him to renege his *Yiddishkeit*. Shimon's greatest act of bravery was performed in death. May his name be a blessing.