

Haran died in the lifetime of Terach his father. (11:28)

Haran was the brother of Avraham *Avinu*. Very little is written about him, because he did not live very long, and, for all intents and purposes, he did not seem to have achieved very much. This is the first mistake. When we judge a person's life accomplishments, we must do it with a lens that sees far beyond our first impression. Also, we must take into consideration that Hashem rewards every person in accordance with his own personal barometer of values. Thus, if a person devotes his life to material pursuits, the chances are that his reward will be material in nature. A person whose overriding concern has been his spiritual dimension will be rewarded in kind. He might be poor and have very little material bounty to speak of, but his spiritual satisfaction and pleasure are immense; thus, it is all worth the effort amid what seem to be deprivations.

This idea may be noted from the life of Haran. Indeed, Haran went down in history as the first person to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name. His brother, Avraham, was teaching the world about monotheism, and Haran became a believer – indeed, originally, one of the very few who took Avraham's rhetoric to heart. We all know the story. Avraham battered all of the idols of his father, Terach, and placed the hammer in the hand of the largest idol. When Terach saw the destruction, he asked his son what had occurred. Avraham explained that a dispute had broken out among the idols and the biggest one settled it in the way that he knew best. Terach knew that his son was making jest, since how can an idol made by man have power? On the other hand, such talk could hurt the idol business. Avraham might have been his son, but business was business!

Terach proceeded to King Nimrod, who immediately decided to put Avraham to a test. He was going to throw Avraham into a fiery cauldron. If his G-d would protect him, then he would emerge unscathed. Otherwise, he would receive his just punishment for shattering the idols. As we all know, our Patriarch materialized from the flames unharmed. His brother, Haran, was a spectator to this sanctification of Hashem's Name. When he saw his brother's miraculous deliverance from certain death, he became spiritually energized and declared that he, too, believed in Hashem. Nimrod said, "Fine, you can also take the fire test." Haran was not so lucky. His faith was superficial and not worthy of a miracle. Nonetheless, he died as a result of his declaration of faith in Hashem. He is, therefore, the first person to give up his life to sanctify the Name of the Almighty.

Clearly, this is an impressive distinction, an item to be listed on his spiritual resume, but did he receive any reward for this act of faith (superficial faith, but faith, no less)? The **Chasam Sofer, zl**, explains that Haran, indeed, received a unique reward. He was the progenitor of all our nation's Matriarchs! His daughter, Yiskah, was actually Sarah *Imeinu*. His daughter, Milkah, married Nachor, who together were the grandparents of Rivkah *Imeinu*. Rivkah had an older brother, named Lavan, who had four daughters, two of whom were Rachel *Imeinu* and Leah *Imeinu*, and the other two were Bilhah and Zilpah, the mothers of some of the *Shevatim*. Haran had a son, named Lot, who, in a manner which left much to be desired, was the progenitor of Rus, who married Boaz and became the progenitress of *Malchus Bais David*, the Davidic dynasty; and

Naamah, who married Shlomo *Hamelech*, and was the mother of his son and successor, Rechavam.

The lesson to be derived from here is that Hashem rewards those who sanctify His Name. The reward is such that one sees the value of his dedication through even greater sanctification of Hashem's Name. Haran gave his life. In return, he received a reward of generations of countless committed Jews whose *raison d'etre* is the sanctification of Hashem's Name.

Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, relates that he was *menachem avel*, visited the mourner's home, of a family whose father had passed away leaving over sons who were distinguished Torah scholars and leaders in various communities. The deceased had been a simple Jew, deeply committed to Torah observance. Indeed, his commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* was paramount in his life. Clearly, this was indicative by the education which his sons received and the choices that they made for their vocations. Nonetheless, *Rav* Levenstein felt that for a man to have had such Torah *nachas*, satisfaction, from his offspring, he must have had exceedingly great merit. He asked his sons about their father's life. Perhaps he could garner some clue to the source of this *nachas*.

"Our father was from Haifa. In his early years, he had stock in the company which was the forerunner of Egged Bus Company. The economic situation in the country was extremely challenging. People did not have enough to eat. He was fortunate to have an income from his stock. This went on until someone raised the question concerning the appropriateness of having stock in a Jewish cooperative company that was actively being *mechallel Shabbos*, desecrating *Shabbos*. He presented the question to *Rav* Klein who was *Rav* in Haifa. The *Rav* instructed him to go to Bnei Brak and ask the *Chazon Ish*.

"Father spent a good part of the day traveling to Bnei Brak, and he was finally allowed into the room of the *Chazon Ish*. The sage was in bed due to his poor health. Our father asked the question; the *Chazon Ish* replied: 'Assur, prohibited;' and that was it. Our father immediately returned home, sold his stock and began job hunting.

"Six months elapsed with no luck. We no longer had any money in the bank. His father-in-law helped whenever he could. This, too, did not last. He had various odd jobs that came along, but never for very long. Finally, our father found steady work as a soap salesman. He walked around all day with a sack filled with soap slung over his shoulder, as he went door to door, climbing long flights of stairs, to sell his soap. It was difficult work— and humiliating – to boot, but it kept food on the table.

"One day, Father was walking down the street carrying the heavy sack on his shoulder, when he met **Horav Menachem Tzvi Berlin, Shlita**, *Rosh Yeshivah Rabbeinu Chaim Ozer*, who commented to him, "You are not carrying a sack of soap on your shoulder. You are carrying *Shabbos* on your shoulder!" This gave our father tremendous *chizuk*, encouragement (as it should inspire the readers as well).

“Father purchased an old Egged bus, which he converted into a delivery truck for hauling paper. His next venture was a small store where he sold frozen vegetables. This business lasted until the *Shemittah*, Sabbatical year (when one abstains from working his field, allowing the produce of the land to be considered ownerless), which raised numerous halachic questions concerning the origin of the produce he was purchasing. He sold that business, and he went to work for a *yeshivah* as its handyman.

“Father worked hard his entire life. Well into his eighties he would work from early morning until evening. He was extremely proud of the many endeavors he had given up in order to remain a committed Jew. Once, he met a friend from his old days as an Egged bus driver. The friend was surprised that our father was still putting in a whole day’s work. ‘Imagine, if you would not have left your position, you could be like the rest of us, with a comfortable pension, a government apartment, a car. Instead, you are working day and night – when you should be relaxing.’

“Father heard this, he immediately made an about-face and returned to the *yeshivah* where he worked. He went over to the first student that he saw, and, in an excited voice, said to him, ‘What does he (pointing to his friend outside) have? A car? A pension? An apartment? Does any of that compare to what I have? I established an entire generation! I made a firm commitment to the future of our People! That is what I have!’”

This was all the result of his overarching commitment to sanctifying Hashem’s Name, relinquishing wealth and opportunity for Torah and *mitzvos*. Hashem reimbursed him in kind. He indicated that there was more to life than a few dollars, a car, and an apartment. He wanted to be immortalized by generations of Torah observant progeny. Hashem granted him his wish.