

You shall make a Menorah of pure gold, hammered out shall the Menorah be made. (25:31)

All of the *Menorah's* varied shapes and forms had to be hammered out of one large ingot of gold. Nothing could be made separately and later attached. *Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma)* teach that this feat (the making of the *Menorah*) proved to be difficult for Moshe *Rabbeinu* to conceptualize. He simply could not visualize how the *Menorah* should appear. Hashem showed Moshe a *Menorah* made of fire. Still, our leader and *Rebbe* could not properly create the *Menorah*. Hashem instructed Moshe to fling the ingot into fire, and a completed *Menorah* emerged. This miracle is alluded to by the words, "shall be made," rather than "shall you make," since Moshe did not actually make the *Menorah*. Obviously, much commentary has been written concerning the creation of the *Menorah*. For our purposes, however, we wonder why Moshe found it so difficult to make the *Menorah*. In contrast, Betzalel immediately proceeded to make the *Menorah*. Why?

The *Gerrer Rebbe, zl (Chidushei HaRim)*, related that this question (why Moshe had such difficulty with making the *Menorah*) had troubled him for forty years. How could it be that Moshe was stymied, and Betzalel, his student, approached the job as if it was just another job? It happened that the *Rebbe's* son-in-law required a surgical procedure in Warsaw. The *Rebbe* went to visit him during his recuperation. While he was there, the *Rebbe* inquired concerning the surgeon's health and welfare. (Apparently, this was a difficult procedure that required a master surgeon. The *Rebbe* felt that it was appropriate to visit him).

The surgeon was honored to meet with the saintly *Rebbe* whose reputation as a world leader had reached even his ears. The surgeon told the *Rebbe* that, although he had performed this same surgery numerous times, this time he was very nervous and had gone through every aspect of the procedure, reviewing it many times. He explained this with an analogy. The king had a beautiful diamond. No one could place a number on the diamond's value, due to its extraordinary appearance. There was, however, one tiny flaw – one minute spot which was almost undetectable – but, nonetheless, present. It had to be removed, otherwise the diamond's value would severely depreciate. Due to the diamond's great value and the fact that its owner was the king, no expert was willing to touch the stone. One mistake and the stone would be shattered. The king's advisors came up with an insightful plan. They gave the diamond to a simple cutter who had no idea concerning its value or to whom it belonged. He did a wonderful job of removing the blemish – all because he was clueless about its value or the identity of its owner.

The surgeon continued, "Napoleon's wife was experiencing severe pain during childbirth, to the point that unless something would be done immediately, the doctors despaired for her life. Every midwife that they called suddenly demurred. No one was willing to risk their reputation by undertaking treating such a celebrity. The margin for error was zero. The ramifications resulting from a mistake on their part were serious. Napoleon's aides sought a rural midwife who had no idea who Napoleon was and certainly was unaware of the identity of his wife. This midwife treated

the wife of the king, and mother and child came through the ordeal in good health. All this was because she was not anxious about the identity of her patient.

The surgeon continued, "This is the reason that I was anxious before the surgery. I have successfully performed this procedure many times – but that was on regular patients – not the pedigreed son-in-law of the *Gerrer Rebbe*. My anxiety level rises when I must work on a celebrity."

The *Rebbe* explained Moshe's predicament as opposed to that of Betzalel. Moshe was acutely aware of the profound esoteric meaning and hidden secrets surrounding the *Menorah*. Thus, due to his elevated spiritual plateau, he was anxious concerning the creation of the *Menorah* – realizing the spiritual void that would be created by the slightest error on his part. Betzalel was not on Moshe's *madreigah*, plateau. Therefore, he did not find it as difficult to make the *Menorah*.

Bearing the above in mind, I remind myself of an important lesson that *Horav Nochum Zev Dessler, zl*, shared with me almost four decades ago. I believe he related it in the name of the *Lomza Mashgiach, Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman, zl* (the *Ohr Yahal*). The *Mashgiach* observed that every professional works with various materials endemic to his profession. A plumber works with metal and steel pipe; a carpenter works with varied types of wood; a glazier works with glass. In the course of their work, shavings, splinters, sawdust and pieces of metal fall to the ground under the feet of the professional. Thus, he stands and treads on them. The carpenter has particles of wood under his shoes, and it is these shavings upon which he steps all day. This idea, likewise, applies to every profession. One who enters the field of *Torah chinuch*, who assumes upon himself the lofty mission of educating the next generation of Torah Jews, works with *Yiddishe neshamos*, Jewish souls. As can happen sometimes (hopefully rarely – but it does happen), a *neshamah* falls to the side. Hopefully, it is a temporary condition, but, during the interim, the *rebbe* must be acutely aware that he is treading upon a *Yiddishe neshamah*. Frightening – but true. Therefore, one must approach the mission of *Torah chinuch* with enormous trepidation. The satisfaction is awesome, only as long as one does not forget the meaning and ramification of failure.

We have no dearth of stories extolling the incredible devotion that *rebbeim* throughout the ages have manifested towards their *talmidim*. Moshe *Rabbeinu* is given this title because he was – and continues to be – *Rabban shel Kol Yisrael*, the quintessential *Rebbe* of all the Jewish People. While *rebbeim* often go out of their way to impart knowledge and skills to their students, how many empathize with the various issues that their students must face? Furthermore, how many of these *rebbeim* are *gedolei hador*, leaders of their generation, individuals who keep a close eye on the pulse of the generation, whose every collective Jewish challenge is their personal challenge? The *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, was such a leader and such a *rebbe*, not only to the senior students of his *yeshivah*, but also to the young boys, the children of the Batei Avos Orphanage which he established following the European Holocaust.

One day, *Rav Yehoshua Zelig Diskind*, the *Rav* of Pardes Chana, received an urgent call from the *Rav*, asserting that he needed to borrow a significant sum of money for the *Yeshivah*. This was

during the formative days of the *Yeshivah*, when money was scarce and expenses were many. The money was to be placed in his office, since he would be unavailable all day. He needed to go to Yerushalayim for a meeting with some of the *gedolei Yisrael*, the *Brisker Rav* among them.

Rav Diskind secured the funds and quickly went to the *Rav's* office. Knowing that the *Rav* was away, he knocked and immediately opened the door. How surprised he was to see the *Ponovezher Rav* in his office talking to a young student who was crying bitterly. The *Rav* was attempting to console the boy. *Rav Diskind* apologized profusely for disturbing the *Rav*, claiming that he was under the impression that he had gone to Yerushalayim to attend a meeting.

The *Rav* explained, "Whenever I leave for Yerushalayim, I make a point to stop at the orphanage located on the outskirts of the city (Bnei Brak). This time, when I entered, I noticed a young boy crying bitterly in the corner. When I inquired about him, I was informed that this boy, who had lost both parents in Auschwitz, had just been informed that his best friend had also been murdered there. It was simply too much for the child to absorb."

The *Ponovezher Rav's* eyes were as red and swollen as that of the boy. He, too, had been crying along with him. He said, "I approached this young boy and asked what was wrong. He attempted to tell me, but was too overwhelmed by his tears. He just could not stop crying. The boy's words came out slowly, his speech slurred, as he sobbed his way through the story. I have tried to console him, but I am having difficulty in succeeding to do so. My meeting? The *gedolim* will have to wait. This child needs me now! I cannot leave." With these parting words, the *Rav* held the boy tightly as they continued to cry together.