

Yaakov journeyed to Succos and built himself a house, and, for his livestock, he made shelters. He, therefore, called the name of the place Succos. (33:17)

According to the simple *p'shat*, explanation, of the *pasuk*, Yaakov *Avinu* built a house for himself and *succos*, temporary housing/pens, for his cattle. *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* explains the words, *Va'yiven lo bayis*, "And he built for himself a house"; *u'banah lei bei midrasha*, "he built for himself a *bais medrash*." In other words, Yaakov built for himself a place to study Torah – this was his house, his domicile. For his sheep and cattle, he built *succos*. This seems unbelievable. Why should Yaakov give a name to a place based upon the temporary housing that he made for his cattle? Why did he not give a name that would somehow incorporate the *bais hamedrash* that he had built. After all, this was his primary home. Yaakov's *yeshivah* was his home! In *Emunah Shleimah*, *Horav Tzvi Nakar, Shlita*, suggests that Yaakov gave the name Succos in order to emphasize that he was satisfied with temporary housing. For his personal use, the *bais hamedrash* where he would spend most of his waking hours, he built a permanent abode. Succos is a message: Anything material/physical is temporary. The only entity which has endurance is that of the spiritual dimension, because it connects to *nitzchiyus*, eternity. A person must be aware what is *ikar*, primary, and what is *taful*, secondary.

When the boundaries of Russia, Poland and Ukraine were redone in order for people to survive the economic upheaval, it was necessary to move products from country to country in the most "creative" manner. The taxes that had to be paid for most merchandise were prohibitive. One day, a Jewish fellow pulled up to the new border with a barrel laden with sand. "What do you have there?" the inspector asked. "Nothing, just sand" was the Jew's reply. "I do not believe you." The inspector pulled out a sieve and sifted through the sand. He was certain that diamonds were hidden within. When he could not find anything, he let the fellow pass. Two hours later, the man was back with another wheelbarrow filled with sand. This time the inspector was certain that the Jew was attempting to pull a fast one on him. He searched and searched and came up with nothing.

This continued all day and the following day. After two weeks had passed, and the Jew had transported 250 barrels full of sand, the inspector asked, "Listen, I will grant you a pass and not charge you taxes, but you must tell me your trick. What are you hiding?" The Jew replied, "I am transporting barrels for sale. The sand just takes your mind off my true objective."

We, too, fall prey to this ruse. The *yetzer hora* attempts to convince us to follow the money, focus on the material, devote our lives to physical pursuits. All of this is done in order to turn our hearts and minds away from what is primary: *ruchniyus*, spirituality. We are too busy searching through the sand for the diamonds. Meanwhile, the barrels are passing by under our noses.

Horav Nesanel Reisman, zl, father of *Horav Yisrael Yitzchak Reisman, zl*, *Dayan* in the *Eidah*

HaChareidis, lived in one of the tiny villages on the outskirts of Warsaw. He had an overwhelming desire to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*. In those days, travel across the high seas was fraught with danger and difficulty. In addition, the poverty and deprivation which the intrepid settlers who came to Yerushalayim confronted were daunting. Nonetheless, the opportunity to live in our G-d-given Land made the trip all the more acceptable. At first, a group of compatriots wanted to join him, but they had too many hurdles to surmount. They did ask that *Rav Nesanel* write to them describing his living quarters and life in the Holy Land, so that they could make an educated decision concerning following him.

Rav Nesanel arrived, and shortly thereafter he wrote his friends, singing the country's praises. He wrote, "My home has windows that are three meters high; the house is roomy and stunning. The inhabitants of Yerushalayim want nothing and live in total calm and joy." The letter impressed the community that remained in Poland, but, before they committed themselves to such a change in their lives, they wanted one of their own to see for himself and report back to them the country's extraordinary features. The agent left for *Eretz Yisrael* and immediately upon arrival went in search of *Rav Nesanel*. It was a small community in which everyone knew one another. He was directed to a small corner of Meah Shearim. He walked down the steep steps to the basement of a house that had seen better days. He searched for a while until he was able to locate the "hole in the wall" that served as home to *Rav Nesanel* and his family. He entered to see a number of young children playing on a sheet spread out on the floor. The poverty that reigned in the home was evident. The joy that he saw on the faces of the children, however, was something to behold. He asked the children to direct him to *Rav Nesanel*. They pointed to a *shul* across the street. He entered the *shul* to hear *Rav Nesanel* learning in his singsong voice. After greeting one another, *Rav Nesanel* asked, "Have you made the move?" "No, actually I am here to check out the community to see if everything that you wrote about your house is true. Sadly, I have to say that it could not be further from the truth."

Rav Nesanel looked at the man incredulously. "Look at the windows; are they not three meters high? Look how roomy and airy the *shul* is. I did not bend the truth." "But I saw where you live, and it is nothing like what you intimated," the man countered. "That is where I sleep at night. The *shul* is my house. It is the home in which I spend most of my day. This is truly my house."

It is all a matter of perspective. Some erect mansions with more rooms than they will ever fill. Unfortunately, this is their home which bespeaks their value system. True, they "visit" the *shul* upon occasion, but it is nothing more than a casual visit. Their home is their mansion, or whatever home or villa they inhabit during their vacation. We, by our actions, determine the value of a given entity. A farmer is not interested in diamonds. He needs fertilizer to make his crops grow. Are we any different?

A man who suffered from abject poverty came to the holy *Apter Rav, zl*, bemoaning his sorry state of affairs. His daughter was engaged, and he had no money with which to marry her off. The *Rebbe* listened intently, then asked, "How much money do you need?" "One thousand ruble" was

the immediate response. “How much do you have?” “One ruble is all that I can spare.”

The man was presenting the *Rav* with a tall order. The *Apter*, however, was used to tall orders. “The first business appointment that comes your way – take it, regardless of its judiciousness.” The man left and stopped by an inn for the night. There he met a group of wealthy diamond merchants who were having dinner with their drinks. One of them, who had imbibed more than he should have, decided to play a little game at the expense of the poor fellow.

“Would you like to purchase a diamond?” Remembering the *Rebbe’s* advice that he accept the first business opportunity, he agreed to purchase a diamond. “How much money do you have?” the merchant asked. “One ruble.” When he heard this, the man laughed. “Do you have any idea what this diamond is worth? One ruble could perhaps buy a small sliver of this diamond.” The poor man stood his ground, “I understand, but all I have is one ruble.”

The man then thought of an idea, “I will sell you my *chelek*, portion, of *Olam Habba*, the World to Come for one ruble.” What could the poor fellow do? The *Rebbe* had given explicit instructions to settle for the first business opportunity, even if it meant buying this man’s *Olam Habba* for a ruble. “I agree.” The poor man immediately put together a contract, had two witnesses affix their signatures, and the deal was made. He now owned the merchant’s *Olam Habba*, and the merchant had his sole possession: one ruble.

A short while later, the merchant’s wife returned from her own shopping trip and heard what had transpired. “You foolish man!” she screamed at her husband. “How could you have sold your *Olam Habba*? I will not stay married to you. I am going to the *Rav* and ask for a divorce!” The merchant saw that his wife was implacable. She would not remain with him unless he reclaimed his *Olam Habba*. The man returned to the poor man and offered him ten rubles for the *Olam Habba*. “Absolutely not. I will not sell for less than one thousand ruble.” The merchant was stuck between a rock and a hard place. His wife was demanding a divorce unless he retrieved his *Olam Habba*, and the poor man had imposed the exorbitant sum of one thousand ruble for its return. With no other recourse, the merchant extracted a thousand ruble from his wallet and purchased back his *Olam Habba*. The poor man could now marry off his daughter, and the merchant had his *Olam Habba* and his wife.

The woman now said she wanted to speak with the *Apter Rav* concerning whether, in fact, her husband’s *Olam Habba* was worth one thousand ruble. The *Rebbe* listened to her question and replied, “Truthfully, when your husband agreed to sell his *Olam Habba* for one ruble, its value dropped down to even less than a ruble. What Jew would sell his *Olam Habba*? Can he even begin to imagine its value? By his actions and attitude, however, one determines and sets the value of his *Olam Habba*. Afterwards, when he paid out one thousand ruble to recover it, he showed that it was very valuable in his eyes. Furthermore, since, as a result of his payment, the poor man could now marry off his daughter, his *Olam Habba* increased in value.”

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, supplemented this. The value of any noble action is measured by how much the person who executes it values it. Every *mitzvah* is valued in accordance with a person's understanding of its infinite worth. Sadly, some just do not understand the *mitzvos* and good deeds that they perform, hence devaluating their spiritual worth.