STAM TORAH

PARSHAS VAYETZEI 5778

“ULTIMATE CURRENCY”[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Rav Matisyahu Salomon shlita notes that every year, as we read the parshios in Bereishis, we enjoy discussing the profundity and extent of Avrohom Avinu’s chesed. There always seem to be new explanations and perspectives which expound upon how selfless and extreme the chesed of Avrohom was.*

*Rav Matisyahu explains that we need to have the same discussions and analyzation about the exemplary integrity and work ethic of Yaakov Avinu, while he was working for Lavan. The Torah demands the highest levels of ethics and responsibility regarding the workplace. It’s a value we don’t sufficiently emphasize. A Torah Jew is obligated to be wary of his financial responsibilities, and he must be honest to a fault.*

In America, standard currency is the dollar, in Britain it is the pound, and in Japan the yen. Gold, diamonds, and pearls have universal value, as does real estate. These are commodities that ‘make the world go around’. In the words of Shlomo Hamelech, “Money answers everything.”

In the celestial World of Truth, undoubtedly Torah and mitzvos are the ultimate currency. But might there be another commodity that ‘opens doors’ in that world? Is there something which causes the angels to bow deferentially before it, as it were, in a similar vein to how people ‘bow’ deferentially before wealth in this world?

After Leah Imeinu gave birth to four sons, and Rochel saw that she was not being blessed with a child, she took an extreme measure. She offered her maid Bilhah, as a wife to Yaakov. Rashi explains that Rochel learned the concept from Sarah Imeinu, who gave her maid Hagar to Avrohom to marry.

What merit was there in giving a maid as a wife?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt’l explained that spiritual growth requires *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. In the physical world, success is often achieved through unyielding ambition and uncompassionate drive to reach the top. The world of finance is one of extreme competition, where there is no room for compassion or consideration for the feelings of others. A sign above a major highway reads: “If you don’t purchase this space to advertise your company, your competitor will first.”

The spiritual world is the polar opposite. One climbs the ladder of greatness by putting his own needs and desires aside, to help and build others. The more one places others before himself and sublimates his own ego, the greater he becomes.

For a woman to allow her husband to marry another woman is an extreme act of mesiras nefesh. For a woman to offer her maid to be her husband’s second wife is the ultimate act of mesiras nefesh.

The ultimate currency in heaven is mesiras nefesh! Torah and mitzvos performed with self-sacrifice and complete dedication is the ultimate currency in the World of Truth.

Dayan Aharon Dovid Dunner of London, England, is a well-known Rav and lecturer throughout the Torah world. As a Dayan, he is accustomed to receiving unusual halachic questions. But every now and then he receives questions that surprise even him.

A man related to Rav Dunner that his grandfather was a holocaust survivor. Somehow, he had smuggled his tallis with him wherever he was sent, including into Buchenwald. Amazingly, he never missed a day of wearing that tallis. After liberation, he continued wearing that tallis every day of his life. In his tzava’ah (will) he asked to be buried in the tallis. But when the grandfather died, they forgot!

It was almost his first yahrtzeit, and the family was regretful that they had not fulfilled his instruction. At that time, his grandmother was dying, and the inevitable was imminent. The question was could they bury the tallis with the grandmother, who was to be buried alongside her late husband? Would that count as fulfilling his will?

Dayan Dunner decided to send the question to be asked of Rav Chaim Kanievsky. The answer he received stunned him. Rav Chaim replied that the tallis should not be buried with the grandmother. Rather, they should open the kever of the grandfather, and place the tallis in there, as he had requested.

Dayan Dunner called a few local chevra kadishas but all of them were squeamish and uncomfortable about doing it. The man himself did not want to give his grandfather a second burial. Couldn’t they just bury it with the grandmother?

Dayan Dunner asked the question to be presented to Rav Chaim again. His response remained the same. But he added, that if they didn’t want to open the kever, they should dig a hole as close to the kever as possible, and place the tallis there.

The family was still uncomfortable, but they agreed to do it. However, they still wanted to know why it was so important to bury it as close as possible to their grandfather.

When Rav Chaim was asked about it a third time, he replied “In the upper courts, the most valuable commodity is mesiras nefesh. The man’s tallis is his greatest testimony about his incredible mesiras nefesh. His family must therefore, make every effort to place at as close as possible to him, so he has it by his side in the Next World.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

When negotiating with the B’nei Ches, Avrohom Avinu stated, “If it is your desire to allow me to bury my dead from before me, listen to me, and allow me to meet with Ephron ben Tzochar.” The word Avrohom uses for desire is “*nafshechem*”, which literally means ‘your soul’. What we desire is part of our essence. To place those desires aside for the sake of others, is mesiras nefesh. The ultimate mesiras nefesh is for one to give up his life to sanctify the name of G-d. But, it is often more challenging to live with mesiras nefesh in the mundane day-to-day of our lives.

When we are busy doing something we need to finish and put it aside to daven mincha, when our child asks us to help with her homework and we are tired and muster up patience to help, when a neighbor or friend asks for a favor and we are not in the mood of helping and we agree to help anyway, when we drag ourselves to a shiur or to learn with a chavrusa at the end of a long day, when we listen to a griping friend who needs chizuk though we have ten other things to do - these are all examples of mesiras nefesh.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Our yetzer hara likes to minimize such feats by convincing us that real mesiras nefesh entails doing something profound. But that is untrue. Every time we push ourselves beyond our comfort zone, it is an act of mesiras nefesh.

The holiday of Chanukah, which is rapidly approaching, is a celebration of mesiras nefesh! The Maccabees went to war to ensure our ability to serve Hashem and guard the Torah in the most holy and pristine manner. They reasoned that a life devoid of Torah is not worth living, so they set out for battle with little hope for victory.

Their incredible mesiras nefesh, first on the battlefield, and later to perform the mitzvah of lighting the menorah with pure oil, served as the catalyst for the miracles that transpired.

They went well beyond the natural norm, and Hashem granted them miracles, well beyond the natural norm. It’s a holiday that celebrates, not only supernatural occurrences, but our ability to be supernatural, which is the secret of our national eternity.

“And she said, behold my maid, Bilhah… I will build from her.”

“If it is your desire”

*Rabbi Dani Staum, LMSW*

*Rabbi, Kehillat New Hempstead*

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1. Based on the lecture given at Kehillat New Hempstead, Shabbos Kodesh parshas Vayetzei 5777 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This story appeared in Ami-Living, November 30, 2016, by Rabbi Yoel Gold. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is important to note that if one agrees to do things only because he is unable to say no, out of feelings of guilt or not wanting anyone to be upset at him, that is a deficiency. There are times when it may be correct and proper for us to say no, sometimes for our own well-being. The point being made here is about one who, when overcoming his immediate desire for comfort, will feel gratified and happy afterwards with his decision, not resentful and indignant. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)