

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Tetzaveh

Tel: 815-301-1928

Fax: 815-301-1928

Email: shabbatshalomfax@gmail.com

ShabbatShalom.org

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

11 Adar 1, 5782

The Fax of Life

ת"ו

February 12, 2022

GOOD MORNING! The Talmud relates an amazing story regarding the commandment to honor one's parents. There are two versions of this story – I am using the version found in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Peah* 3a). There are actually three separate incidents recorded in the Talmud regarding a remarkable man – Dama ben Nesina. Here is one of them.

Rabbi Eliezer was once asked, "To what length must one go to honor one's father and mother?" He said, "You are asking me? Go and ask Dama ben Nesina." To what was Rabbi Eliezer referring?

Dama ben Nesina was the head of the city council of the city of Ashkelon. Once, during the times of the Holy Temple, a gemstone on the breastplate worn by the High Priest – the *choshen* – was lost. The rabbis inquired, "Who would have one of similar quality?" They were informed that Dama ben Nesina, a non-Jew, was in possession of such a stone.

They went to him and negotiated a price of 100 dinars for the stone. He went to the upper floor of his home to fetch it from the chest in which it was kept and found his father sleeping. Some say that the key to the chest was in his father's fingers; others say his father's foot was resting on the chest.

In any event, he descended and told them, "I cannot bring it to you." They thought that it was a negotiating tactic and that he merely wanted more money. They raised the price to 200 dinars, then to a 1,000. Still, he remained resolute and declined.

When his father woke up from his sleep, he went up and brought it to them. The rabbis wanted to give him the sum that they had last mentioned, but he refused. He said: "Would I sell my father's honor for money? I will not make any profit from honoring my father! You will only pay the sum we originally agreed."

What reward did the Almighty bestow upon him? Rebbi Yossi said: The following night, his cow gave birth to a red heifer and Israel gave him its weight in gold to acquire it. (A perfectly red heifer is EXTREMELY rare and very valuable – it is said that during the 420 years of the Second Holy Temple only seven such cows were born.) It is also interesting to note that the postscript regarding Dama being rewarded with a red heifer ensured that his extraordinary act of honoring his father would never be forgotten.

We find the very same stone in this week's Torah reading:

"And you shall make the breastplate [...] And the fourth row an emerald, and an onyx, and a jasper" (28:15-20).

The Almighty commanded Moses to make the breastplate with settings for twelve gemstones. On these stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes. The twelfth stone, which was a jasper or *yeshpeh* in Hebrew (interestingly enough, phonetically it is very similar to jasper), is represented on the breastplate by the tribe of Benjamin. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, this stone is the one that was lost and then purchased from Dama ben Nesina.

There is a fascinating Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 71:5) that discusses the significance of this gemstone. It also informs us that Benjamin's mother, Rachel, was a paragon of the virtues of silence and discretion. The Midrash goes on to explain the connection between this gemstone and those virtues.

The Midrash relates that Rachel's father, Lavan, intended to deceive Jacob, his future son-in-law, by placing his older daughter Leah under a thick veil during the wedding ceremony and substituting her for Jacob's true love – Rachel.

(Contrary to popular belief, this is not the source for the custom of a *bedeken* ceremony at a Jewish wedding. The *bedeken* is when the groom comes to see his bride-to-be immediately before the wedding ceremony and lowers the veil on her face. This custom comes from the passage in the Bible where Rebecca lowered a veil over her face shortly before marrying Isaac (*Genesis* Ch. 24). The veil symbolizes the idea of modesty and conveys the lesson that however attractive physical appearances may be, the soul and character are the main focus of a union.)

Jacob, knowing full well that his father-in-law was not to be trusted, had actually prepared for this possibility by giving Rachel a secret code that she could convey to him during the ceremony so that he would be sure he was getting the "right" sister. The Midrash says that Rachel exhibited this quality of silence and discretion when she didn't reveal to her husband-to-be that her father was indeed planning on deceiving him by replacing her with her sister. In fact, she wanted to make sure her sister would not be horribly embarrassed, so she gave her the

secret code with which Jacob had entrusted her.

The Midrash continues that this trait of discretion was inherited by many of Rachel's descendants. Her son Benjamin knew full well that his brothers had sold Joseph, yet he kept silent and didn't reveal to his father what they had done.

Rachel's descendant Shaul (who was from the tribe of Benjamin), upon being anointed the first king of Israel, did not celebrate and throw a lavish party as most kings are wont to do. Rather, he quietly returned home to his father's house and said nothing of the matter to anyone.

Another descendant of the tribe of Benjamin was Esther. After being chosen as queen and joining King Achashveirosh's household, Esther was incredibly discreet as to her origins and shared her secrets with no one. In fact, her name means concealment.

The Midrash explains that the reason Benjamin was chosen for the stone *yeshpeh* is because the name of the stone is a contraction of the words "yesh" and "peh," which, in Hebrew, means "has a mouth" – in other words, he has what to say. As we have explained, Benjamin was fully aware of the circumstances surrounding Yosef's disappearance, yet he kept his silence.

Still, Benjamin's conduct here seems very difficult to understand. He must have seen how much pain and suffering his father Jacob had endured over losing his son Joseph. How could he have kept his silence?

In fact, Benjamin was extremely fond of Joseph and, of course, he had no part in the selling of him. Yet, there is no doubt he must have felt that Joseph was gone forever. He actually grieved for his older brother, and the names of each of his 10 sons reflected his longing and sadness over his brother's sudden disappearance. So why didn't he tell his father the truth about what happened to Joseph?

There is only one possible reason as to why Benjamin didn't reveal the circumstances behind Joseph's disappearance; telling his father what his brothers had done would only bring Jacob an immeasurable amount of pain from knowing that his own children had acted in such a cruel manner toward their brother.

In addition, it would ultimately bring Jacob to the crushing realization that he himself may have been the source of the friction and enmity between Joseph and his brothers and therefore the cause of Joseph's apparent death. It is quite likely that Jacob would never forgive himself.

The Midrash uses Rachel's example of discretion to show that it was this quality of character that led to her descendants being worthy of royal lineage – Saul as the first king of Israel and Esther as a queen to Achashveirosh.


Each of them (Rachel, Benjamin, Saul, and Esther) could have improved their own personal situation by just simply stating the truth. The lesson here is that leadership begins with one who is willing to forego their personal advancement for the sake of a higher truth.

A similar lesson can be learned from the story of Dama ben Nesina (of course it was no accident that the gemstone in question was the jasper – the "yesh-peh" of the tribe of Benjamin). Dama too could have benefitted from the sages' misunderstanding of the situation. But he was committed to a higher truth and remained true to his conscience over personal gain.

TORAH PORTION: Tetzaveh, Exodus 27:20 - 30:10

The Torah continues this week with the command to make for use in the *Mishkan* – the Portable Sanctuary – oil for the Menorah and clothes for the Cohanim – the Priests. It then gives instruction for the consecration of the Cohanim and the Outer Altar. The portion concludes with instructions for constructing the Incense Altar.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem 4:46* Miami 5:53 Cape Town 7:24 Guatemala 5:47 Hong Kong 6:00 Honolulu 6:09

 Jo'Burg 6:35 LA 5:15 London 4:53 Melbourne 8:05 Mexico 6:16 Moscow 5:06 New York 5:08 Singapore 7:02 Toronto 5:24

"QUOTE OF THE WEEK": Do you keep secrets from others or do secrets keep you from others?

Dedicated with Deep Appreciation to
Oscar Feldenkreis



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

Honor a Loved One! Dedicate an edition of the Shabbat Shalom Fax ShabbatShalom.org (IRS# 65-0389241)

Friend of the Fax \$54 Benefactor \$118 Patron \$252 Fax Dedication \$360 Partner \$1,000

Shabbat Shalom Fax ● PO Box 402666 ● Miami Beach, FL 33140

To be removed: Send the name & fax number to: rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org — or ... fax/call: 815-301-1928