



THE RABBI BINYAMIN KAMENETZKY
TORAH LEGACY FOUNDATION
לזכרון של הרב בנימין קמנצקי זצ"ל

אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאתגרו של
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

*A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky*

In memory of
Mrs. Lea Eisenberg a"h
who passed away this week

Together with her husband Leon z"l, her vision and determination enhanced the lives of so many Jews by enabling the dissemination of Torah and Derech Eretz to thousands of talmidim and talmidos.

5780 - Parshas Vayishlach - Money or Life?

In Parshas Vayishlach, we learn how Yaakov Avinu, on his way to greet Eisav, crosses the Yabok River and forgets small jugs. He goes alone to retrieve them, and meets the angel of Eisav. The Angel tries to overpower him, injuring him in the process. Why then did Yaakov risk his life to retrieve such trivial items?

The Gemara (Chulin 91a) explains that "The money and possessions of tzaddikim is more precious to them than their bodies, for they do not participate in acts of theft." Simply understood, the righteous treat their possessions in high regard, for they were acquired with holiness and service of Hashem, as only honest and proper means were used to acquire them.

Perhaps we can understand this concept on a deeper level.

My father, Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky, printed the following story in his book, "Parsha Parables."

Rabbi Betzalel Zolty, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, related the following story:

The Rosh Yeshiva of Slobodka Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein was in America in 1924, raising much-needed funds for his Yeshiva. During his visit, he received an urgent telegram. The Lithuanian authorities were going to conscript the Slobodka students into the army. Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel, known as the Alter of Slabodka, the founder and Dean of the Yeshiva, made a decision to open a branch of Slobodka Yeshiva in the ancient city of Chevron in Eretz Israel. He would send 150 students to what was then known as Palestine, to establish the Yeshiva, and in this way free them from service in the apostatizing, ruthless Lithuanian army. That monumental undertaking would require a sum of \$25,000 to transport, house, and establish the Yeshiva.

Rabbi Epstein was put to the task. He discussed the program with a dear friend of the Yeshiva, Mr. Schiff, who immediately decided to contribute the massive sum in its entirety.

Years later, in the early 1930s, the tide turned for Mr. Schiff. With the crash of the stock market, and plummeting real estate prices, it took only a few months before he was forced out of his own apartment, and was relegated to the cellar of a building that was once his, existing on meager rations.

At the same time, the health of Rabbi Epstein was failing, and he no longer had the strength to travel. His son-in-law, Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, made the trip to America in his stead, to raise funds for the Slobodka Yeshiva. He did not know of Mr. Schiff's situation until the man got up to speak at a parlor meeting on behalf of the Yeshiva.

"My dear friends," he began. "I do not wish my business misfortunes on anyone. I invested literally millions of dollars in all sorts of businesses, and they all failed. I have absolutely nothing to show for them. But there is one investment I made that continues to bear fruit. I gave \$25,000 to establish a Yeshiva in Chevron, and that investment is the best one I ever made. One must know where to invest."

When Rabbi Sarna heard that Mr. Schiff was literally bankrupt, he cabled Rabbi Epstein, who quickly arranged to give him a \$5,000 loan in order to get him back on his feet and begin doing business again. Through some generous benefactors, Rabbi Sarna got a hold of the cash and went directly to the basement apartment where Mr. Schiff now resided. He explained to him that Rabbi Epstein insisted he take this money as a loan.

Mr. Schiff jumped up in horror, "What do you want from my life? The only money I have left is the \$25,000 that I gave the Yeshiva. Do you want to take that from me as well?"

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l would explain in the name of Rav Meir Shapiro, Rosh Yeshiva of "Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin" and founder of the "Daf Yomi." Materialistic people and resha'aim value themselves more than their money. After all, they use all their money in pursuit of physical pleasure. Obviously, their ultimate goal is their physicality.

Tzaddikim, however, are just the opposite. They exert as much energy as possible to utilize their physical being for the service of Hashem. However, whatever they cannot attain with their own bodies, they use their money to accomplish. An act of chessed, a mitzvah, or a few extra hours of daily Torah learning which is simply out of reach, they spend money to attain it, or fund it from afar. In a tzaddik's eyes, his money is more powerful and more beloved to him than his body. For his money can sometimes accomplish more in the service of Hashem than his body alone. Thus, Yaakov Avinu risked his life to retrieve his small jugs.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky is the Director of Advancement at Yeshiva of South Shore - ישיבה תורת חיים - בית בנימן. He is currently compiling the vast storehouse of all the Torah thoughts from his grandfather. If you have any stories to share from his grandfather, you can email him at skamenetzky@yoss.org.