



From Strength to Strength
Parshas Beha'aloscha

Rabbi Moshe Dabrashvilli was recognized as the leader of the Jewish elders in Georgia (part of the former USSR). He had studied Torah in Lithuania and returned to lead his community. In the 1970s, together with thousands of Jews from the former USSR, he made Aliyah to Israel.

When he would speak of his past his eyes would fill with tears. "Those were the days," he would often say, recounting his youth in the city of Radin, the home of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, author of the Chafetz Chaim.

Rabbi Moshe was very young when he entered the Chafetz Chaim's yeshiva in the city. He accepted the yeshiva's rules of conduct with love.

One of these guidelines was that all students should go to sleep early, so that they could awake feeling fresh the next day.

One evening, as Moshe was studying, the Chafetz Chaim came into the study hall and turned off the light, letting the students know it was time to turn in. All of the students went to bed, except Reb Moshe, who hid in a corner and waited until the Chafetz Chaim left so that he could resume his studies.

At three o'clock in the morning he concluded his studies and left to go to bed, which was situated in the home of the Chafetz Chaim's sister. The streets of Radin were dark and seemed empty.

After a few steps he noticed someone else in the street. Initially he thought the person posed a threat, but then noticed it was the Chafetz Chaim himself, pacing back and forth.

He continued on to his room, and while falling asleep he thought to himself: we students are told to go to bed, but the Chafetz Chaim himself stays up until a late hour.

Our weekly parsha commences with the verse: "The Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon and say to him: "When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the menorah."¹

Rashi brings the Midrash that says: "Why is the portion dealing with the menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the chieftains (in last week's parsha)? For when Aharon saw the dedication offerings of the chieftains, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication, neither he nor his tribe. So G-d said to him, 'By your life, yours is

greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps.'"

This account is a bit odd, as Aharon was an active participant in the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, so what was the source of his angst?

Our Sage teach us in the Talmud: "Rav Zera, or as some say, Rav Chinnena bar Papa, further said: Observe how the character of the Holy One, blessed be He, differs from that of flesh and blood. A mortal can put something into an empty vessel but not into a full one. But the Holy One, blessed be He, is not so; He puts more into a full vessel but not into an empty one."²

The holy books explain that in the physical world, one needs an empty vessel to put something into it, but in the spiritual realm, a full vessel can accept more, while an empty vessel can contain nothing. He who is empty of Torah and Mitzvos cannot relate to the Torah properly, but he who is filled with Torah will absorb more and more.

Aharon, after concluding the inauguration of the Mishkan, was filled with passion and sought more Mitzvot to fulfill, more spiritually, more service of G-d. He who seeks spirituality will never be satiated.

G-d responds to Aharon: "yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps" – you desired more commandments? I will give you more and more.

This is what the Talmud means when it says: "Rav Chiyya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: The disciples of the wise have no rest either in this world or in the world to come, as it says, they go from strength to strength,"³ and as the Mishnah teaches us: "the reward for a Mitzvah fulfilled – is another Mitzvah."

Reb Moshe awoke early in the morning and prepared himself for prayers. His hostess provided him with his daily meal.

While doing so, she told the young man: "For the past three days, my brother has not been at his best...he does not sleep at night, paces in the streets, he is seeking to recite *Kiddush Levana*,⁴ but because of the clouds and snow he cannot see the moon and is therefore upset."

Then Reb Moshe knew that the Chafetz Chaim had a reason for his late-night excursions, he was simply walking with passion, from strength to strength, from Mitzvah to Mitzvah.

² Tractate Berachot 40a.

³ Tractate Berachot 64a.

⁴ A Jewish ritual, performed outside at night, in which a series of prayers are recited to bless the new moon.

¹ Bamidbar 8:1-2.