

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARASHAT SHOFTIM

You shall be whole-hearted with Hashem your G-d. (18:13)

Bitachon, trust in Hashem, is a complex concept in the realm of avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. Much has been written and even more has been said regarding this subject, leaving very little for this writer to add. The purpose of the following thesis is to clarify the basic meaning of bitachon and the role it plays in our daily endeavor. There are two basic approaches to understanding the concept of trust in Hashem. Rabbeinu Yonah and the Chovas Halevavos contend that if one trusts in Hashem with his full heart, Hashem will fulfill his request. This is true even if the individual is not deserving of Hashem's positive response. If his bitachon is absolute and filled with integrity, if he really believes - Hashem will do His part. Thus, if one is calm due to his consummate trust in Hashem, it is an indication that his bitachon is real.

The other opinion is that of Rashi, who posits based upon the above pasuk, "You shall be whole-hearted with Hashem, your G-d," walk with Him with whole-heartedness. Look ahead to Him, i.e. trust in what He has planned for you. Do not delve into the future; rather, accept with wholeheartedness whatever comes upon you, and then you will be with Him. In other words, bitachon is an awareness that everything that occurs comes from Hashem. It does not mean that having bitachon will catalyze any changes in the life of the faithful. Having bitachon means that the individual believes that Hashem is the Source of all that happens in his life - regardless of his comfort level with what takes place.

Let us briefly analyze these two opinions. According to the first opinion, one's bitachon can transform reality. How are we to understand this? Does faith bring about the impossible? Should an undeserving person be the beneficiary of an unwarranted gift from Hashem simply because he trusts in Hashem? Is that our understanding of bitachon? This is true only of one who is sincere in his trust and whose faith is the essence of integrity. Yet, how does this bitachon guarantee the future if, for all intents and purposes, it is not "in the cards"? Horav Eliezer Tauber, Shlita, explains this with an analogy. An extremely energetic young child had an overwhelming desire to jump off high places. Once, it was the kitchen table; then it became the bedroom dresser until he finally decided that he would jump off his father's bookcase. As daring as he was, the bookcase was slightly higher than anything he had previously attempted. His father, of course, told him emphatically that he should not even think about doing it. Boys will be boys, however, and who can say that he never thought he was not smarter than his father? The boy also knew that if worse came to worse, his father would never let him hurt himself.

The child climbed to the top of the bookcase and announced to his father that he was going to jump. His father reiterated his earlier warning. The boy did not listen, knowing full well that his father was watching and would not allow him to fall. He jumped, and his father ran to catch him before he hit the floor and hurt himself. For forcing his hand, his father punished him. Likewise, one who trusts in Hashem knows that the Almighty loves him and will not let him down. If his trust is absolute, Hashem will respond in a positive manner. He must remember, however, that he has "forced" Hashem's hand. He might have to pay for that by losing some of the merits he had stored away for a "rainy day." Now, when that rainy day rolls around, he will not have any z'chusim, merits, to protect him.

Rashi teaches us not to ask questions, but to be accepting and trusting that whatever Hashem bestows upon us is good. Hashem has His reasons, and they are beyond our ability to grasp in our present physical state. Rav Tauber writes that his parents survived the Holocaust imbued with this type of trust in Hashem. Prior to World War II, his family had lived in Pressburg. When the Nazi war machine overran Hungary, his parents escaped to Czechoslovakia and remained there amid misery and deprivation for three years until 1944, when the Germans arrived. During this time, his mother gave birth to his three brothers. His family trusted in Hashem and continued to live as normal a life as they could under such trying conditions.

One Friday night, the family was arrested and sent to Auschwitz. His mother was not yet noticeably pregnant with his sister. Those who were aware of her condition wondered how she could think of bearing children during the war years. Her response was unequivocal, "We are Jews, and, as such, we must do what Hashem commands us to do. Hashem will do what He desires." It was this type of attitude that fortified her throughout the ordeal. Miraculously, they all survived: father, mother and five children, four of whom were born during the war years.

How did she do it? How did she take it upon herself to bring children into a world that was destroying every semblance of Judaism? What made her think that these infants would survive a war that was destroying so many others? Her reply is something we should all remember. "We are Jews who believe in Techiyas HaMeisim, the Resurrection of the Dead. My child is not my child only in this temporary world. My child is mine forever, in Olam Haze, this world, and in Olam Habah, the World to Come. He will always be mine, regardless of what happens to him. I must do my share. The rest is up to Hashem!" This is trust in Hashem, believing that whatever is to be, will be. It is determined by Hashem and, therefore, inherently good. It is not for us to agree or disagree, but rather to believe and accept.

Once we have arrived at the position that bitachon in Hashem demands that we follow Hashem with wholehearted conviction and not worry about the future, we wonder what purpose is served by the medium of hishtadlus, endeavoring. We should all sit back and believe! Why bother doing anything to promote a livelihood, seek medical intervention, or do anything that affects our future? Is hishtadlus necessary, or is it even appropriate? Is not taking action counter to the concept of bitachon? The Chovas HaLevavos writes: "Hishtadlus does not help; it is, however, necessary." This means that a person will obtain his objective without the medium of hishtadlus. However, since Hashem decreed to Adam HaRishon, B'zeias apecha tochal lechem, "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" (Bereishis 3:19) as part of the curse for eating of the Eitz HaDaas, Tree of Knowledge, one has to "go through the motions" and work. Regrettably, many of us throw our entire lives into this hishtadlus, not recognizing it for what it is - a curse!

The effectiveness of hishtadlus can be derived from the manna which we received every day. Regardless of how much one gathered, he ended up with only what he and his family needed to subsist.

Gathering extra manna was of no avail. Ultimately, it was always the same.

Whether hishtadlus is necessary as part of a life strategy or it is something we must do because we are not all on the spiritual plateau that clearly recognizes that everything comes from Above, it is something that can and should be used to elevate kavod Shomayim, the honor of Heaven. We are all agents of Hashem, sent on a mission to increase kavod Shomayim. The opportunities arise constantly. We do not always recognize them for what they are and, thus, do not always take advantage of these circumstances. Rav Tauber relates an inspirational incident that occurred concerning Rebbetzin Sorah Miriam Sorotzkin, ah, wife of the Luktzker Rav and daughter of Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl. Towards the end of her life, she became very ill. At one point, she was in critical need of surgery. Despite the severity of the illness and the emergency nature of the pending surgery, she insisted on waiting to obtain the services of a specific surgeon who was highly skilled and noted for being the "top man" in his field. It took much maneuvering and the help of a number of influential public figures, but the Rebbetzin was availed of his services.

Shortly before the surgery, the Rebbetzin asked to speak with the doctor. The surgeon acquiesced to meet with her prior to surgery. She said to him, "My dear physician, you know how hard I tried to secure your services. Nothing mattered; I had to have you, but I must ask something of you. If it is Heaven's decree that I not survive this procedure, I implore you not to feel bad. It is not your fault in any way. It is what Hashem has decided, and I accept His decision with complete equanimity. I just want to be sure that you will not have any feelings of guilt."

The physician was as pompous as he was brilliant. While the Rebbetzin's words had little effect on his over-inflated ego, he nonetheless told her, "I appreciate your concern for my emotional well-being, despite your own grave condition." The Rebbetzin, however, was not finished. She continued, "By the way, in the event that you do succeed and I survive the surgery, I want you to know that it is not as a result of your expertise. It is because this is what Hashem desires."

The opportunity to increase kavod Shomayim presented itself. She had performed her hishtadlus by seeking out the best available practitioner but, ultimately, she knew and conveyed her belief to the physician that success - or failure - is all in the hands of Hashem.

You shall be whole-hearted with Hashem, your G-d. (18:13)

Tamim has the same meaning as shalem, whole, complete, perfect. To be shalem means not to have any blemishes. There are two aspects to this shleimus, wholesomeness, one from an ethical perspective and one from a philosophical position. In other words, to be a tamim demands that the individual be ethically intact and philosophically faultless. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, develops this idea in the following manner. In order to be a shaleim, one must be tocho k'baro, his inner self must coincide with his external actions, and also be baro k'tocho, his external actions must be in sync with his inner feelings and thoughts. Let me explain. There are people who are outwardly very observant. They never miss tefillah b'tzibur, praying with a minyan, attend Torah study classes, basically perform all that is demanded of them as Jews, but their heart is not in it: they lack passion; their enthusiasm is insipid, at best; their feelings about observance do not resonate with joy. In other words, they serve Hashem, but it is a sterile, cold, complacent service. This is not tocho k'baro - their external actions do not reflect their inner emotions. They daven, but the davening is about someone else, because there is no personal connection between themselves and their prayer service.

There is also the individual who is not baro k'tochu. He declares that he has a Jewish heart, Jewish feelings, Jewish belief, but he does not feel it is necessary to express in action what he feels in his heart. I have always considered this person a non-practicing Orthodox Jew. His heart is affiliated with the Orthodox point of view. He believes in it as the way a person should live. He is just not prepared to take that step himself, being comfortable with maintaining his Orthodoxy in his heart. He is an incomplete Jew. He lacks temimus.

This is the role tamim plays concerning the individual's ethical integrity. Regarding the area of belief in Hashem, tamim plays a very demanding role. In fact, this is underscored by the pasuk: Be wholehearted with Hashem; be straight; be consistent; be absolute in your emunah, belief. Rav Schlessinger makes an important point. Chazal state, Kol yeser k'natul dami. "Whatever is extra is considered as if it is missing." This means, say Chazal in the Talmud Chullin 58b, that if an animal has an extra leg, it is viewed as missing a leg, so that it is deemed treifah, unkosher.

We find a similar halachah that, if by error, the shliach Bais Din, agent of the court, gave an individual one extra makah, lash, with a whip, it nullifies the first thirty-nine. He is liable for each time he whipped the guilty person. The Rogatchaver Gaon, zl, explains that once he gives an extra lash, it is no longer considered makkos. It is undue punishment, and the individual who whipped him is punished for wounding another Jew.

A similar concept applies in the area of emunah in Hashem. Faith in the Almighty must be pure, without any additives. When people supplement their faith with philosophies that do not necessarily coincide with Torah hashkafah, outlook, they detract and ultimately subtract from their Torah hashkafah, leaving them impaired and corrupted. The Torah admonishes us not to inquire of soothsayers, fortunetellers, diviners and other such flawed individuals. It then follows with the pasuk demanding wholeheartedness in our belief. This implies that one who believes in Hashem, but supplements his belief with such extras as inquiring of people who are sustained by the forces of spiritual impurity, undermines his emunah in Hashem. In this case, too much is too little.

A prophet from your midst, from your brethren, like me, shall Hashem, Your G-d, establish for you - to him you shall listen. (18:15)

Moshe Rabbeinu tells the people that Hashem would designate other leaders from among the people. They would transmit dvar Hashem, the word of G-d, to the members of that generation. The concept of eilav tishme'un, "to him you shall listen," is an accepted axiom among the observant. Individuals, who have achieved greatness in the areas of scholarship, piety and ethics, evolve into gedolei Yisrael, the Torah leaders of our nation. They are endowed with a special ability to see, to perceive, to listen, and to instruct and guide. Indeed, having been invested with a unique inspiration from Above, their ability is beyond the grasp of the average human being. Every generation has its gedolim who tower above the common man. At times, it is something that can neither be seen nor measured. It must be experienced.

It is related that the saintly Chasam Sofer, rav of Hungarian Jewry at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the individual who set the tone and guided these communities during some of their most turbulent times, was "comfortable" in the presence of miracles. In other words, people would experience his transcendent powers in such a manner that it was obvious that he functioned above and beyond the physical constraints of the average human being. Simply put, he was a holy man. When he

was rav in Mattesdorf, he was asked to adjudicate a halachic query concerning an agunah, abandoned wife, whose husband was missing and presumed dead. This same question was posed to a number of other Torah scholars, who all permitted her to remarry. The Chasam Sofer read through all of their responsa and replied, "According to halachah, I find nothing wrong with the position taken by so many scholars. Indeed, I concur with their analysis of the halachah. However, I personally cannot permit this woman to remarry, because in my heart I feel that this woman's husband is still alive."

Sensitive to the Chasam Sofer's premonition, the woman did not remarry. A short while later, her husband returned home. It was not in the area of halachah that there arose any dispute. It is just that the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, had a bad feeling. That "feeling" was divinely inspired.

There was another case, however, in which the circumstances were reversed. In this situation, the agunah was permitted to remarry. The Chasam Sofer, together with the other Torah scholars of the day, all agreed in this matter. There was absolutely no question. She remarried, and the couple moved to another town which was under the leadership of a different rav. This rav, who was a distinguished talmid chacham, Torah scholar, studied the case and determined he was not in agreement with the other rabbanim. He, therefore, did not permit the couple to establish residence in his community.

When the Chasam Sofer heard about this, he sent a sharp letter to the rav. He wrote the following: "What prompted you to drive out the women of my nation from their comfortable abode, and to abandon the daughters of Yisrael with a strong arm?"

The Chasam Sofer added that if the rav disputed the halachic analysis rendered by the other rabbonim who had signed off on the dispensation, he was welcome to present his queries and opinion. If he had no issues regarding the halachah, however, the Chasam Sofer "hoped" that he would rescind his decision and permit the couple to live in his community.

Studying the two similar circumstances, we wonder why the Chasam Sofer was rigid in his Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration, and did not permit the woman to remarry, but he was not inclined to respect the other rav's "inspirational" feelings. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, explains that the Chasam Sofer saw a great danger arising from a situation in which every rav would build his own little altar and dispute the halachah as rendered by the gedolei ha'dor. Ruach HaKodesh is a lofty form of guidance, but it does not override halachah as expressed by the gadol ha'dor. If the preeminent Torah leader of the generation permits an endeavor, or sees reason to render a dispensation concerning a given situation, it is wrong to disagree and act in discord. This approach undermines the entire process of halachah.

*Only he shall not have too many horses for himself, so that he will not return the people to Egypt in order to increase horses...and he shall not have too many wives, so that his heart shall not turn astray.
(17:16,17)*

While the Jewish king must have an adequate number of horses, he is forbidden to get carried away and amass an excess beyond what is really necessary. Too much will cause him to seek more and that will lead him to rely on Egypt. He is also prohibited from having too many wives, because they will turn him away from Hashem. Both of these prohibitions are used by Chazal as examples of the Torah's penetrating wisdom. Shlomo Hamelech, who was certainly one of Klal Yisrael's greatest and

wisest Jews, transgressed these prohibitions, asserting that they did not apply to him. His unparalleled wisdom would protect him. Regrettably, as history clearly indicates, he was wrong. One cannot question the Torah. Its wisdom transcends and supersedes anything that is available in this world.

Chazal go a bit further with regard to Shlomo Hamelech's violation of these prohibitions. They relate that the "yud" of the word yarbeh, increase, came before the Almighty and complained, "Hashem, did You not say that a letter from the Torah will never become annulled? Why then is Shlomo Hamelech permitted to marry more than is allotted to the Jewish king? In a sense, he is annulling this prohibition." Hashem responded that no letter of the Torah will ever be negated. This was supported when Shlomo Hamelech fell prey to the effects of this excess. The question that confronts all of the commentators is simple: Why did the "yud" complain more than any of the other letters of the word yarbeh? Aspersion was cast equally on all of the letters. Why did the "yud" speak up?

Among the many explanations given by the commentators, I have selected two that have a special meaning and present a timely message. A number of commentators explain that it was because of the "yud" that Shlomo's lineage received acceptance. The Torah states, "Lo yavo Amoni u'Moavi b'kahal Hashem." "An Amonite or Moavite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem." (Devarim 23:4) Chazal derive from the "yud" of Amoni and Moavi that only an Amoni or Moavi, not an Amonis or Moavis, is disallowed in the congregation of Hashem. This was the reason that Shlomo Hamelech's grandmother, Rus haMoaviah, was accepted into Klal Yisrael. Therefore, since Shlomo Hamelech's status as king and as a Jew was attributed to the "yud," it was the letter that complained.

This has a powerful implication for all of us. We often easily forget how we arrived, how we achieved, and who assisted us in the process. As soon as we make it up the ladder of professional success, be it either in the field of material achievement or spiritual accomplishment, we forget who has helped us along the way. Indeed, at times, these are the first people that we ignore. The "yud" reminded Shlomo about his roots. It would serve us well to contemplate our own beginnings and consider those who were there when we needed someone.

Second, there is a very meaningful explanation given by Horav Tzvi Hersh Ferber, zl. He explains that the "yud" is the letter of the alphabet by which we Jews are called. Why are we called Yidden? The yud is an interesting letter in that it is unalterable. It is a very small letter. If it is made smaller, it becomes a dot. If it is elongated, it becomes a "vav." Thus, the Jew must realize that he may not change his Jewishness. His Jewish identity cannot be modified. He may not add mitzvos, nor may he subtract from them. The traditions and customs that have long been a part of our heritage continue in their vibrancy today as they did in days past. As the yud does not change, so does the Jew not change.

In a similar exposition, Rav Ferber focuses on the prohibition against the king having a multitude of horses. The Torah begins by prohibiting sussim, horses in the plural, and concludes by saying that the king might return the people to Egypt in his quest to increase his suss, horse, in the singular. Why does the Torah alter the text? Rav Ferber explains that there are people who have emigrated to the larger cities in England and America, who, due to an inability to earn a living, have had to work on Shabbos to secure a job. While certainly this is chillul Shabbos, it begins with a desecration that is focused only on the area of earning a livelihood. After some time, however, once the individual has become accustomed to desecrating Shabbos for his work, he slowly begins to cook and write on Shabbos. This leads to flagrant chillul Shabbos in which Shabbos becomes no different than a weekday. Had the individual originally not succumbed to his yetzer hora, evil inclination, when it involved a greater challenge, such as earning a livelihood, he would not be contending with the issues of desecrating Shabbos even for a simple task. In other words, at first it is the challenge of amassing

many horses. The king who is weak, however, who acquiesces to his desire, will eventually submit to returning to Egypt even for one horse. This is the regression of assimilation. First, one finds an excuse to justify his lack of observance. Afterwards, he is so accustomed to his new way of life that he no longer needs an excuse to justify his behavior. One horse will do.

It shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life. (17:19)

The pasuk enjoins the melech Yisrael, Jewish monarch, to have the Torah scroll with him at all times. This applies not only to the physical scroll, but its contents and lessons that should be his guide throughout his life. While the pasuk addresses the melech, the message applies equally to each and every Jew. The Torah is our guide and the primary staple of our life. Clearly, one who values and appreciates the Torah will have a totally different perspective on life than his counterpart who does not have this allegiance. Likewise, in order to maintain such a relationship with the Torah, one must appreciate and value its essence and message. One who is machshiv Torah, appreciates and holds it in its proper esteem, will likewise convey that feeling to his children. This is a lesson by default that has come back to haunt many a parent.

The significance of how one views something is underscored in the following Chazal. The Talmud in Kiddushin 30b relates that the School of Rabbi Yishmael taught: "My son, if this menuval, repulsive one (evil inclination), confronts you, lead him to the bais hamedrash. If he is of stone, he will dissolve; if he is of iron, he will splinter into fragments." A number of questions are in order. First, why does Rabbi Yishmael commence his statement with beni, "my son"? Second, why is the yetzer hora, evil inclination, referred to here as the menuval, repulsive one? Third, why should he lead him to the bais ha'medrash? If the point is Torah study, then learn with him in the place where he confronts you. Last, Rabbi Yishmael does not indicate that one should study with him in the bais ha'medrash. He only instructs us to pull him in there. Why?

The yetzer hora's power lies in its ability to distort the scenery around us. It projects an imagery that is unrealistic and untrue. It paints olam hazeh, this corporeal world, as a place of enjoyment, of fun, a place where self-gratification in its many forms are a necessary way of life. It distorts what is valuable and what is really worthless, what is honorable and what is shameful, what is important and what is insignificant. The bais hamedrash is a place where there is clarity of vision, where there is no question. Torah and ruchniyus, spirituality, reign supreme. Physicality and materialism are secondary. The neshamah, soul, granted to us from Hashem takes its rightful prominence.

Therefore, we are not instructed to study with the yetzer hora, because study will be to no avail if he confronts us in the street, in a place where values are distorted. In a place where Torah carries little significance, where it runs a far second behind the frivolities and blandishments of this temporal world, study will have little effect. The yetzer hora will find some way to misinterpret and undermine that Torah study. Instead of reaping benefits from Torah study, it can be used by the wrong forces as a vehicle for inappropriate behavior. It, regrettably, becomes a medium for sanctioning the improper and unseemly.

Instead, we are to lead him to the bais ha'medrash, a place where values and objectives are clear, where right and wrong are unambiguous, where the "air" is not tainted with distortion and self-gratified imagery. Indeed, it is not even necessary to learn with him, as long as he is brought into the bais ha'medrash. The clarity of vision that is now achieved will make a world of difference. The yetzer hora

is, therefore, referred to as menuval, repulsive one, to denigrate and weaken him, so that he does not have significance in our eyes. Now, we understand why the individual whom Rabbi Yishmael is addressing is called beni, my son. This appellation grants chashivus, distinction, to his neshamah component. It is the significance of the neshamah that must be emphasized in order to maintain a clarity of vision of what is dominant and what is subordinate.

We find a similar thought expressed in the Talmud Kesubos 63. Kalba Savua was the father-in-law of Rabbi Akiva. Originally, he participated in this relationship reluctantly. Indeed, when his daughter, Rachel, married Rabbi Akiva, who was at that time illiterate, he disinherited her from his fortune. Chazal relate that when Rabbi Akiva, who had become a famous scholar, visited the city where Kalba Savua lived, his father-in-law, unaware of his relationship with the great Torah leader, came to annul his vow. He was getting on in years, and it hurt him to cut his daughter off from his possessions. A neder, however, is a vow that must be annulled by a Torah scholar. Who was a greater scholar than Rabbi Akiva?

Rabbi Akiva asked his father-in-law, "Had you known that the illiterate shepherd whom your daughter married would one day become a distinguished Torah scholar, would you have nonetheless made the vow?"

Kalba Savua replied, "If he could master even one chapter or one halachah, I would never have uttered the vow." Rabbi Akiva then informed him that he was that illiterate shepherd, and Kalba Savua immediately kissed him and gave him half his fortune.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived herein. At first, Kalba Savua overcame his normal filial fatherly love for his daughter and disinherited her, because she was marrying an am ha'aretz, illiterate, unknowledgeable man. Had he known that his future son-in-law could master even one halachah, he would have accepted him. Why? Because Torah meant so much to him that even one halachah would have made the difference. Had Rabbi Akiva known anything, Kalba Savua would have never given up his daughter. Torah was that important to him. When a man is machshiv, values, Torah so much, he is rewarded with a son-in-law of the stature of Rabbi Akiva. Hashem's recompense is commensurate with our value system. He gives us what we value, and what we deserve.

While valuing Torah is all-important, how we present this value can sometimes play a significant role in the message we seek to convey. We recite daily the brachah, blessing, V'haarev na Hashem Elokeinu es divrei Torasecha, "Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Torah in our mouth." We understand that while we must overcome a number of challenges in our effort to study Torah, we ask once this effort has been expended, the words of Torah become sweet to our mouths, that we develop a cheshkas ha'Torah, a desire, and enjoyment in this endeavor. This appreciation of Torah, the tremendous enjoyment that one derives from its study, is to be conveyed both verbally and by action.

How does one develop a sweetness in Torah? How does he "taste" this unique joy and pleasure from learning Torah? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, recounts that he once spent Shabbos as a guest of the Chafetz Chaim, zl, who rendered the following exposition concerning the "V'haarev na" associated with Torah study. The Chafetz Chaim first cited Chazal, who state that the manna's taste changed according to the thoughts of each individual who ate it. "What taste was there to the person who did not give any thought to its taste?" asked the Chafetz Chaim. Silence. All those seated at the table remained silent. The Chafetz Chaim said, "Let me tell you. When there is no thought, there is no taste! The manna was a spiritual food. A spiritual entity receives its taste in accordance with the thought one puts into it. This is why we ask Hashem daily to 'please sweeten the words of Torah in our mouth.' If one sits

in front of a sefer and simply reads the words by rote without applying his mind and thought process to this endeavor, his learning will have no taam, taste. It will be bland and uninspiring. He will not be stimulated by the learning experience, because he did not apply his mind to it." Torah study is ruchniyus, spiritual in nature, and one must, therefore, engage his mind as he utters the words, so that he tastes the sweetness of Torah.

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, tasted the sweetness of Torah and imparted it to their students. The inner joy they experienced when they studied Torah was their greatest source of pleasure. They would captivate their students with this joy and, thereby, embolden them to follow suit.

The V'haarev na of Torah study was palpable on Simchas Torah when the talmidim, students, of Yeshivas Etz Chaim would watch in awe as their venerable Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, would dance a special dance in which only small children were allowed in the circle. Here was a man who was a world Torah scholar, a sage who guided world Jewry at a time when there were many great scholars, a pious and virtuous individual whose whole life was dedicated to the pursuit of Torah and mitzvos. Yet, he took the time, despite his weakened state of health, to dance with little children who were just beginning to study Torah. Why? Because he wanted to impart a very special message: Torah is sweet. It is the greatest source of enjoyment!

This was indicated by the fervor and passion that Rav Isser Zalmen manifest during this dance. He would close his eyes in concentration and begin humming a niggun, tune. Immediately, the children picked up the tune. After all, they were acutely familiar with it, having recently learned it in cheder. The Rosh Hayeshivah would sing, "Kametz aleph - ah! Kametz bais - bah! Kametz gimmel - gah!" Each stanza was repeated by the children. The aged Rosh Hayeshivah would sing, and the children would burst forth with their refrain. This dance would go on for close to half an hour until the sage, who was already over eighty years old, submitted to his physical condition and sat down. This was a dance of innocence and purity, but above all, it was a dance of sheer, unadulterated joy. The Rosh Hayeshivah, who had devoted his entire life to Torah, was teaching these little children how sweet Torah study is. His lesson and the unique manner in which he taught it remained with them throughout their lives.

He shall flee to one of these cities and live. (19:5)

One who kills inadvertently must flee to one of the Arei Miklat, cities of refuge, to seek asylum, or else he may fall prey to the wrath of his victim's goel ha'dam, relative who is the redeemer of his blood. In the Talmud Makkos 10A, Chazal derive from this pasuk that a student who goes into banishment is joined in exile by his rebbe. This is in accordance with, v'chai, "and (he shall) live," which implies that we are to provide him with whatever he needs to live. A talmid, Torah student, needs his teacher. The question is obvious: Why would the Torah impose such a strong punishment on the rebbe? To have to leave his home and family, his entire lifestyle, all because of a student. Does a rebbe have such a compelling obligation to his student?

Horav Boruch Sorotzkin, zl, cites the conclusion of the Talmud in which Rav Zeira comments that this halachah (of a rebbe following his student) is the basis of the Rabbinic dictum, "Let no one teach a student that is unworthy." Rashi explains that the student's sins will bring the rebbe to a situation in which he will act in a manner that will cause him to be banished. The Rosh Hayeshivah suggests that Rav Zeira is actually stating a reason that the rebbe accompanies his student into exile.

Since the student has acted inappropriately, it is obvious that this was not a sudden overnight infraction, but rather part of an ongoing process. This is something a good rebbe should have noticed and acted upon. Apparently, he was deficient as a mentor, indifferent to his student's lapse in acceptable behavior. The rebbe, thus, carries upon himself part of the onus of guilt for what has occurred. He cannot absolve himself from his student's actions. While he may not have played an active role, he certainly has some culpability. This is the awesome responsibility of a Torah teacher. Teaching is more than the transmission of knowledge. It is the development and nurturing of a relationship founded in the Torah that the rebbe imparts.

For the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make just words crooked. (16:20)

Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, notes that the Torah uses two terms to describe the effect of bribery: it blinds and it perverts. One who takes a bribe does not see the truth, neither in its essence nor in the manner in which it translates itself into halachah. In a similar vein, the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna distinguishes between the admonition against accepting a bribe in Parashas Mishpatim and the one cited here. The Torah teaches us in Shemos 23:8, "For the bribe will blind those who see and corrupt words that are just." Here, the one who is blinded is referred to as a wise man, as opposed to Parashas Mishpatim, in which he is called a pike'ach, one who sees. What is the difference? The Gaon explains that the term pike'ach refers to one who sees the circumstance with a clarity of vision. A chacham, wise man, however, is one who understands the halachah which applies to this situation. Shochad, a bribe, distorts both: the metzius, actual perspective, of the situation; and the individual's understanding of the corresponding halachah.

The damage sustained by a person who is bribed is devastating. A person is no less, meshuchad, bribed, by his yetzer hora, evil-inclination. An individual is already a victim of bribery by virtue of the fact that he is born with innate tendencies toward physical gratification, and a host of other natural proclivities, which emerge when he is about to "sit down" to study Torah. The yetzer hora has done a "real job" on him. The pervasive influence of the environment, coupled with his tendency to be a victim of habit, man is so bribed that making a proper philosophical decision is difficult. We see this all the time: intelligent people who fall prey to the yetzer hora's blandishments. Where are their eyes? What happened to their seichel, common sense? How do people who are, for the most part, halachically erudite seem to misconstrue and even distort, halachah to customize it to fit their own agenda? The answer is that they have taken shochad and, thus, have developed a bad case of spiritual myopia. Whatever arguments we may be able to muster will regrettably fall on deaf ears and unseeing eyes.

If there will be found among you... a man or woman who commits evil in the eyes of Hashem... and you shall destroy the evil from your midst. (17:2,7)

Why is such emphasis placed on b'kirbecha, among you, that the execution must also be carried out in such a manner that the evil is expunged mikirbecha, from your midst? The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno explains that the Torah is teaching us a profound lesson concerning collective responsibility. An individual arising from within a community to rebel against the Almighty does not occur in a vacuum. Everyone has played a role in his infamy. True, the individual is the only one to have committed this

insidious act, but he grew up within the community. Clearly, he had been influenced in some way by the collective behavior of members of the community. Yes, he acted alone, but he did not grow up alone. We all played a role in his spiritual downfall. Since we all have shared in his sin, we must all be present when he is punished.

How often do we see someone on the path to spiritual oblivion? It is difficult to watch because, deep down, we quite possibly recognize our contribution to this walking tragedy. Whether our role was active or indirect, we must all share in the onus of guilt.

In his inimitable manner, the Maggid compares this to the individual who, after watching members of his town dressing in fancy clothing, becomes so obsessed with envy that he is compelled to steal money, so that he, too, can purchase such clothing. While he is certainly the perpetrator of the act of theft, the members of the community share in the guilt. They should feel responsible for acting in such a manner that it has catalyzed such a consequence. They must participate in carrying out the punishment. The Torah knows that Klal Yisrael is by its very nature a compassionate people. When they see what they caused, they will share in the perpetrator's pain. It might be too late for him, but it could, conceivably, prevent the next tragedy from occurring.

The first of your grain, wine, and oil, and the first of the shearing of your flock, shall you give him. For him has Hashem chosen from all your tribes, to stand and minister in the name of Hashem.
(18:4,5)

The Kohanim, whose lives are devoted to serving in the Bais Hamikdash and to disseminating Torah to the masses, are not granted a portion in Eretz Yisrael. They are to devote themselves totally to their spiritual pursuits. The Torah provides for their livelihood, as they are supported by the special gifts the people are to give them. We wonder why it was necessary that the Kohanim, who devote their lives in the spiritual service of Hashem's People, are relegated to living off the gifts they receive? Is there something wrong with earning a living? Would that not be more befitting men of such stature than going to their congregants to receive their share of the gifts?

The Kesav Sofer explains that this unpleasant way of providing for their families was specifically designed. In fact, it is an essential prerequisite for the fulfillment of the Kohen's function as a member of Klal Yisrael's spiritual leadership. There is a great danger that one who reaches a plateau in leadership might become haughty. The position goes to his head, as he feels the power that accompanies the position. There are even those who might take advantage of their position, using it to control and manipulate those beneath them, those whom they are supposed to serve.

The Torah stipulates an antidote to circumvent this problem. On the one hand, they are the spiritual leadership. With regard to their material sustenance, however, they must be dependent on the people. Without the material support of the people, they cannot function. This provides a counterbalance for them, so that their position of leadership does not lead them astray.

This is emphasized by the pasuk when it says that the Kohen has been chosen "to stand and minister in the name of Hashem." They are to serve in Hashem's Name - not their own.

You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d. (18:13)

We are enjoined to follow Hashem with perfect faith, without feeling a need to know the future. This is what He asks of us: Wholesome faith, complete trust, unequivocal fidelity to the Almighty. Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl, notes that there are only two mitzvos which we are instructed to carry out im Hashem, "with Hashem": The mitzvah to have wholesome faith; and the mitzvah - presented in the Navi -to Hatznea leches im Hashem Elokecha, "Walk modestly with Hashem, your G-d." We are cautioned to act modestly, not calling attention to ourselves and to our activities. He explains that these are two areas in which it is easy to put on a facade and fool those around us. One can portray himself as a righteous believer, who is faithful to the Almighty, while, in fact, this is not true. Likewise, one can put on a display of false modesty, and no one will see beyond the superficial level.

People do it all of the time. They cloak their arrogance in a veil of modesty. They might succeed in fooling some innocent spectators. They might even succeed in fooling their close associates. They will not fool Hashem. People are trusting. They want to believe in someone. Hashem knows the truth. He knows if the emunah, faith, is wholesome or a facade. He knows if the modesty is for real or for the sake of attention. When we perform these mitzvos, they had better be im Hashem Elokecha.

The individual who stands as the quintessential paradigm of selflessness and modesty is Moshe Rabbeinu. When Hashem asked him to go down to Egypt to lead Klal Yisrael out of bondage, he said, *Mi anochi?* "Who am I?" Moshe Rabbeinu sincerely felt that he was not suitable for the position of leader. It was this utter lack of arrogance that rendered him deserving of the position. His humility was unparalleled. He did not need the mizrach vont, eastern wall. He did not need accolades and plaques. His self-effacing character was his essence. People who do not look for the position of leadership, who sincerely feel humbled by it, are the ones who are worthy of it - and who succeed in their role.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand, tells a powerful story about Horav Tzvi Pesach Frank, zl. It was the 1930's, and a vacancy had opened up for the position of chief rabbi of Yerushalayim. This is a prestigious position that was filled by a number of distinguished Torah scholars. Many people felt that Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank was the perfect person for the position. He was a recognized scholar, whose brilliant responsa were accepted throughout the world. He was also a skilled leader who had earned the respect and admiration of many. Hence, a delegation of the rabbinic and lay leadership of Yerushalayim went to Rav Tzvi Pesach's house to offer the position to him.

The delegation did not make their offer immediately. They first expounded on the issues and problems facing Yerushalayim's observant community. Rav Tzvi Pesach listened intently to their rendition with an incredulous look on his face.

Finally, he turned to the delegation and asked, "I do not understand why you are telling me this. I am acutely aware of the challenges that confront the community, and you most certainly know that I know. So, why are you here?"

The head of the delegation replied, "Rebbe, this is specifically what we are looking for: someone who has no clue as to why we are here. We are looking for someone who does not understand why we are coming to him. We want the next Rav of Yerushalayim to be someone who is so self-effacing that he does not realize that we want him to be our next rav. Rebbe, we are looking for someone like you to be the Rav of Yerushalayim."

Rav Tzvi Pesach knew that the position was vacant. A lesser person would have surely thought that they were coming to him because they were offering him the position. Not so, Rav Tzvi Pesach. His incredible humility was like that of Moshe Rabbeinu. *Mi anochi?* "Who am I?" was his catchword.

It defined his character. There are those who mouth the words, but do not mean it. Just try giving the position to someone else, and we will see what happens to the "Mi anochi?"

I must add that misplaced humility or modesty at a time when one must - and should - take a stand or believe in himself, despite what he thinks are his shortcomings, is equally wrong. At times, life presents us with a challenge. At first glance, we tell ourselves, I cannot handle it; it is too much for me. Do we ever consider that Hashem believes in us, and He is presenting us with an opportunity for growth, a chance to go to the next level? Perhaps, if we stop to think of the consequences of saying no, of passing up the opportunity, we might take a more affirmative stance.

Rabbi Frand has shared a letter from a woman who has been a successful Bais Yaakov teacher, who has inspired hundreds of young women, infusing them with a love for Yiddishkeit, Torah and mitzvos. She writes that originally she had been a medical technician, a fine and honorable profession, but she wanted to achieve a greater plateau, to reach out and inspire others, so she changed vocations. She became a teacher. Putting her heart and soul into this noble endeavor, she had a positive influence on many. Looking back at what motivated her decision, she says it was the notion that one day she would stand before the Heavenly Tribunal and be asked, "Where are all the young women that you could have inspired?" What would she say, "I was too busy as a medical technician"?

Powerful words. We all have opportunities. Some of us are insecure; some of us are victims of misplaced humility; some of us simply wake up too late. When opportunity knocks, it is a message from Hashem. Apparently, He believes in us. Should we not do the same?

When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot - a people more numerous than you - you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d, is with you. (20:1)

It is natural to be afraid, especially when one is confronted with an enemy that exhibits great strength and self-confidence. This, in addition to state of the art weaponry and large numbers, can have a humbling effect on one's sense of security. How is a person to shut his eyes and ignore the odds, ignore the vast numbers, ignore the weapons as if they do not exist? Simply, one would suggest that since Hashem says, "Do not be afraid," that we should not be afraid. The pasuk however, does not support this position. Shortly before the soldiers embark on the battlefield, they make a declaration, "Who built a new house... should return lest he die in the war." The Torah clearly states that there is something to fear - he might die! If so, why are we instructed not "to fear them"?

The Steipler Rav, zl, explains that the answer lies in the pasuk, "And you see horse and chariot - a people more numerous than you." What generates fear? It is not the danger of possible death. Anyone who goes into battle is aware of the danger. People are injured, and even die, in war. This is an accepted reality. The soldier does not fear death. What the soldier fears is the enemy, the weapons that destroy and obliterate. The nature of a person is that he fears the big guns, the bombs, the planes, the powerful soldiers.

The Jewish soldier who goes into battle is to place his trust in Hashem and hope that he will emerge alive and victorious. He should not bury his head in the ground and ignore the danger endemic to the battlefield. War is a dangerous experience. It is wrong, however, for a Jewish soldier to be afraid of the enemy and his armament. Everything is in the hand of Hashem. The mightiest rocket can miss its target, while the small pebble shot from a slingshot can take down a giant. Hashem is in control. He will determine the outcome - not the soldiers and the guns.

Indeed, this applies to everything in life. Everything is in the hand of Hashem. The illness that seems devastating and insurmountable is in Hashem's Hands. The challenge of earning a livelihood is determined by Hashem. Whom and when we will marry is Hashem's decision. We may be the players in the game called life, but it is Hashem Who determines if and when one wins.

And they shall judge people with righteous judgment. (16:18)

Chazal derive from here the importance of always seeking the positive in a person, of judging everyone in a favorable light. They cite an incident that teaches us a powerful lesson. In days of old, it was not uncommon for men to leave their families for an extended period of time in order to search for a livelihood. One such individual left his family. For three years, he worked for someone. At the conclusion of his servitude, he counted the days longingly, with great anticipation, so that he could finally return home to his wife and children. He approached his master and asked to be paid. The master's reply, "I have no money," floored him. The worker countered, "If you do not have cash, at least give me fruit." Once again the owner replied in the negative, "I have no fruit." Not willing to give up, the worker asked, "Give me some land." "I have no land," the owner replied. "How about a few animals?" the worker queried. The response was as negative as before, "I have no animals. I have nothing."

Depressed and dejected, the worker returned home. Broken-hearted and poor, he had to face his family after three years away from home. It was right before Succos, and he did not want to mar the joy of the Festival. He figured he would let things be for a few days and then see what he could do.

Immediately after Yom Tov, his master appeared at his home with the full salary that he owed. In addition, he brought a donkey laden with food and gifts for the entire family. The worker was overjoyed with this wonderful surprise.

The owner then asked the worker, "When I responded negatively to all of your requests, what did you think?"

"I never thought you were lying," the worker replied. "Each time you said, 'No,' I assumed you had a good reason. I conjectured that you had no money, because it was all invested. Your animals and your land were probably leased to various people. Your fruit was probably not tithed, and your possessions were quite possibly consecrated to the Beis Hamikdash."

"You are absolutely right. I had made a vow to give all of my possessions away, and I just received a heter, annulment, for my vow. My investments were recently returned to me with a healthy profit, which I share with you. As you judged me favorably, so should Hashem judge you favorably."

A powerful lesson is to be derived from here. We think that judging favorably is something to be done when there is no monetary loss. How about when one loses a considerable amount of money? Should he just suffer his losses in silence? Apparently, the injunction to judge people favorably applies under all circumstances - even when one's gut feeling tells him that someone is taking advantage of him. Horav Aharon, zl, M'Belz, would say, "just as when one is confronted with a difficult Rambam, he will toil and labor to find some way to understand the meaning, so, too, must we endeavor to understand the actions of our co-religionists. There is a shverer, difficult Rambam, so, too, is there a shverer 'Yid.'"

The Maharal attributes the quality of viewing people and situations through a positive light to a *lev tov*, good heart. One whose heart is intrinsically good will always seek the best for his friend. One who has an evil heart views people through a jaundiced perspective.

We find a *pasuk* in the Torah that can only be understood if we apply it to the concept of *limud z'chus*, judging favorably. In Devarim 22:27, the Torah tells us about a *naarah ha'me'orasah*, betrothed virgin girl, who was attacked and violated in the field away from anyone who could have come to her aid. The Torah writes that nothing should be done to the girl, because she certainly must have cried out for help to no avail. How do we assert that she surely cried out? There is no proof of this fact. Horav Yitzchak, *zl*, *m'Boyan*, derives from here that we judge this girl favorably, assuming that she was not a willing party to this sin.

The Tiferes Shlomo questions this. What is to be gained by giving her the benefit of the doubt? Does this ameliorate her sin? Does she become righteous simply because we judge her favorably? Hashem certainly knows the truth, and that is all that matters. Or is there an added factor which Hashem takes into consideration?

The Tiferes Shlomo explains that, indeed, the attitude Hashem takes to human sin is related to the manner in which people view the sin. When man judges favorably and looks at his fellow's actions from a positive viewpoint, Hashem does the same, even though He surely knows the truth. Nonetheless, He bases His decision on man's perspective. Hashem will not pass a negative judgment unless the human dimension has done so - already. If we are *melamed zchus* on our fellow's actions, Hashem will concur with our judgment.

You shall not pervert judgment, you shall not recognize someone's presence. (16:18)

The *pasuk* addresses the judge who must render judgment without the stature of either one of the litigants influencing his ruling. This idea applies to one who is called upon to uphold the law of the Torah. He should neither fear *manú* nor be swayed from supporting the truth, because his adversary is a man of means - both materially and physically. The Torah personality must be prepared to battle for Torah against any incursion, regardless of with whom he must contend. Yet, at the same time, he must be gentle and loving, reaching out to all segments of the Jewish community who seek his guidance and help.

The Chazon Ish, *zl*, exemplified this dual personality. In his hesped, eulogy, for the Chazon Ish, Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, *zl*, said that the Chazon Ish embodied these two seemingly incongruous qualities. On the one hand, as David Hamelech lamented, Shaul Hamelech and his son Yonasan, *Eich nafu giborim, vayovdu klei milchamah*, "How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war have been lost" (Shmuel II, 1:27). A true *gadol* is a fighter in the battle for Torah supremacy. His passing means that the weapons in the war of Torah against perfidy have been laid to rest. The *gadol*, Torah giant, is the champion in the province of protecting *kavod Shomayim*, the honor of Heaven, and preserving the veracity of Torah from those who would distort and impugn it.

On the other hand, David Hamelech was known for his gentle and caring nature. When he studied Torah or dealt with people, his personality shone forth as he reflected the epitome of refinement and affability. His compassion was unsurpassed in dealing with others. Does this mean that he was inconsistent, that his personality was an anomaly? No! He exemplified the concept of a Torah personality.

So, too, was the Chazon Ish acutely aware of the difference between the *bais hamedrash* and the battleground, between the foe who sought to pervert and undermine Torah values and the friend who needed instruction and encouragement. The Chazon Ish was, therefore, able to be the general in the battle to preserve the authentic values of Torah, to subvert those whose singular purpose it was to destroy the teachings of the Torah as transmitted in their pristine, unalterable nature throughout the generations. At the same time, he was a kind and loving father to all of those who turned to him.

You shall not pervert judgment, you shall not recognize someone's presence and you shall not accept a bribe, for the bribe blinds the eyes of the wise. (16:18)

When we establish a Jewish court system, it must be focused on justice and truth. Integrity is a value-laden word, which, regrettably, has different meanings to a variety of people. The Torah sets the standard for absolute truth and justice, concepts that are not simply great political idioms, but are intrinsic to the survival of a Torah nation. Everyone is treated equally in a Jewish court of law. There cannot be a show of favoritism towards one plaintiff over another.

A judge who accepts any form of bribe must withdraw himself from presiding over the case, because he can no longer be objective in his rendering of justice. A bribe consists of any favor, even a non-monetary service. Chazal cite a number of examples of the minutest favors in cases that to us might seem trivial and insignificant. This does not mean that Chazal were so fickle that their judgment would be impaired as a result of an insignificant benefit they derived from someone. As Horav Avraham Pam, zl, explains, our Chazal had an acute understanding of the meaning of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. They felt totally indebted to any benefactor from whom they received a favor.

We do not relate to this concept of *hakoras hatov* because we live in a world in which many people feel that they deserve everything that they receive. The great Jews of yesterday understood that there was no limit to the feelings of gratitude they must maintain to those who did even a minor favor for them.

In his inimitable manner, the Rosh Yeshivah explains how every person is the recipient of kindness and favors from those around him. One must demonstrate his gratitude to anyone who does him a service, regardless of his religious affiliation. Even if someone pays for a service, it does not absolve him from his obligation towards his benefactor. Many of the problems that comprise the crises of the American family would never surface if gratitude and appreciation for one's spouse would be recognized as a critical component in a marriage. Indeed, the many daily chores which are viewed as routine are rarely acknowledged. If people would only live by the credo of *hakoras hatov*, the world would truly be a better place to live.

Yeshivos would have a much easier time dealing with their financial burdens if students who are now alumni would recognize and acknowledge their debt of gratitude. Regrettably, this problem is not new and it is not going to recede, especially in a generation that blames all its problems on the "school."

The problem has its genesis in the way we raise our children. Rav Pam points out that even young children must be taught to say, "Thank you," when they receive something - anything. While they may not yet understand what they are saying, in time, they will be trained that a debt of gratitude exists, and they are obligated to acknowledge and repay it. As time goes on, as the young child matures into adulthood, this character trait will become an innate quality that is integral to their Jewish psyche.

You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d. (18:13)

Faith means to believe unequivocally, without first asking questions. We are instructed to be wholehearted with Hashem, to place our trust in Him - first and foremost. We go through life, enduring many trials and tribulations. In every situation, we are to view these challenges as events orchestrated by Hashem for a Divine purpose. We recite a prayer at the end of the Shabbos Shacharis, Ein KeiLokeinu, "There is none like our G-d" (the Sephardic and universal custom in Eretz Yisrael is to recite this Tefillah daily), that begs elucidation. Immediately after the first stanza, when we declare that there is none like Hashem, we say, "Mi KeiLokeinu, "Who is like our G-d?" Why ask a question after it has already been answered? I would think that the order should be reversed, with the stanza, "Who is like our G-d?" first, followed by, "There is none like our G-d."

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, applies a parable to respond to this question. A man has to enter a long, dark, winding cave. He has no lights to guide him. If he has a modicum of common sense, he will not go any further into the cave unless he is absolutely sure that he can retrace his steps to the entrance of the cave. If he thinks it through, he might prepare for himself a way out by laying down a rope as he goes farther and deeper into the cave. As long as he holds onto the rope, he will be able to locate the entrance by following the course of the rope.

The same idea applies to the concept of philosophical speculation, which is no less perilous than a dark and twisted cave. Prior to approaching the subject too deeply, one must see to it that he has established a secure way to get out of the "cave." Thus, one must first anchor himself firmly in his belief in Hashem with the declaration of, Ein KeiLokeinu, "There is no one like our G-d." Once this position has been firmly stated, there is now room for dialectic with questions such as, "who is like our G-d?" Before we delve into the question, the answer must first be rooted in our minds!

Our gedolei Yisrael embodied the principles of emunah and bitachon, faith and trust, in the Almighty. Their unshakable faith enabled them to confront the challenges and vicissitudes of life. The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl, was well-known for his faith and sanctity. He lived the words of the Rabbeinu Yonah, "The meaning of bitachon, trust, in Hashem, is that one knows in his heart that everything is through the hand of Hashem, and that it is in His power to deviate from the ways of nature." His rock-firm faith in Hashem gave him the fortitude to remain calm and relaxed when others were tense and anxious.

One who believes in Hashem is never anxious. The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah was meticulous to arrive at a wedding at the prescribed time, so as not to delay the wedding on his account. Once, he entered the wedding hall on time, only to find that the chassan, groom, had not arrived. The family of the kallah, bride, was understandably anxious and tense. The Rosh Yeshivah asked, "Why is everybody tense? Only because the wedding had to take place on time. They forget one thing: the meaning of "on time." The invitation reads, b'shaah tovah u'mutzlachas, "at a good and fortuitous time." If the chassan is delayed, it is an indication that it is not yet the good and fortuitous time. When this time arrives, he will be here." This healthy attitude was the result of a deep-rooted sense of faith.

*If a corpse will be found on the land... fallen in the field, it was not known who smote him.
(21:1)*

The Baal HaTurim notes that the laws of the eglah arufah, axed heifer, is written between two chapters that address Klal Yisrael going out to war. He explains that the Torah is subtly delivering a message to he who hates another Jew and feels that during wartime -- people are in a tumult and disorganized -- no one will notice if he kills his adversary. They will probably blame it on the enemy. The Torah teaches us that the elders must expunge this attitude from the community so that people do not feel free to spill innocent blood wantonly.

Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, gives a practical explanation. The Torah is teaching us that during war, when the value of human life has greatly depreciated and death is all around us, we should not forget any Jew. Even during times of strife, we are enjoined to care for the Jew in need and not say, "There are more important things to worry about now." If a Jew is murdered, we are exhorted to bring an atonement, because we must care - at all times, for all Jews.

This is what Yosef alluded to his father, Yaakov Avinu, when he sent agalos, wagons, which is the same word as eglah, a reference to the eglah arufah, the last halachah that they studied together before Yosef's untimely sale into slavery. He was conveying that, regardless of his exalted position, he still retained in his mind the infinite value of every Yiddishe neshamah, Jewish soul. This idea is especially significant in the aftermath of the Holocaust, when we refer to the tragic deaths of six-million Jews in one breath. Our sensitivity to life has, regrettably, been diminished.

Judges and officers shall you appoint. (16:18)

Whichever translation we choose to apply - judge, leader, rav - the spiritual leader and arbiter of Jewish law has to fulfill certain criteria. Thorough knowledge of the law is only one; it's the beginning of the many attributes he must possess. The Yerushalmi in Meseches Sanhedrin 1:4 details some of the other virtues inherent in a dayan who sits on the Bais Din situated on Har HaBayis: chacham, wise; anav, humble; shafui, defers to those greater than he; ayin tova, good eye; nefesh shefalah, simple spirit; ruach nemuchah, lowly spirit - patient; lev tov, good heart; yetzer tov, always seeks to do good; chelek tov, seeks to have a chelek, portion, in every good activity.

It is understandable that a shofet Yisrael must be a chacham, wise and erudite, but all of these additional attributes do not seem essential for arbitration of Jewish law. Horav Avraham Kilav, Shlita, suggests that there are really only four criteria, as some are duplicates of the others. Shafui and anivus are two forms of humility. The anav is humble in regard to himself. He distances himself from unnecessary honor, always seeking to play himself down. The shayaf is one who simultaneously seeks to glorify others. He "bends," deferring to those who are greater than he.

The ayin tovah is one who enjoys sharing with and giving to others, while the nefesh shefeilah indicates that he feels undeserving of what he possesses, understanding that it is all a gift. The ruach nemuchah, lowly spirit, coupled with the lev tov, defines a personality that is calm, lenient, persevering, who does not succumb to anger or scorn. The yetzer tov is the opposite of the yetzer hora; one who possesses a good inclination always seeks to do good. Together with the trait of the chelek tov, we see an individual who is caring, sharing and perpetually seeking to do good.

Chazal also add that a judge must be compassionate. If he is subject to a condition that might

predispose him to having a somewhat cruel nature, he is disqualified from serving as a dayan.

What do we derive from all these criteria? Is the judge not supposed to render Torah law - not his own personal feelings? There is, however, a concept of shikul hadaas, the ability to think something through properly, correctly, without prejudice or preconceived notion. For this type of thought process, the dayan must be the paragon of ethical thought and behavior. While I am specifically referring to the dayan, the idea applies equally to anyone who stands at the spiritual helm of Klal Yisrael.

Rav Kilav comments that the Sanhedrin HaGedolah, which was the primary source from which Jewish law was promulgated throughout the nation, was comprised primarily of Kohanim and Leviim. He suggests this is due to the extreme nature of their personalities. The Kohanim are baalei chesed, purveyors of kindness, as they are the descendants of Aharon HaKohen who exemplified the concept of o'haiv shalom v'rodef shalom, he who loves peace and pursues peace. The Leviim, on the other hand, were stern, adhering to the Mmiddas ha'Din, strict justice, to the letter of the law. These two extremes worked in consonance with one another, so that halachah would emanate from the Sanhedrin in a manner that reflected both justice and compassion, both integrity and sensitivity.

Judges and officers shall you appoint. (16:18)

Jewish leadership has to be strong - yet flexible. Compassion for, and sensitivity to all Jews are prerequisites for leadership. Strength of character and fear of no man are just as essential. The following narratives demonstrate these two inimical qualities which were the hallmarks of two Torah leaders.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was a talmid chacham without peer. Yet, he had no problem performing the most menial task if it would help another Jew - regardless of his age or station in life. Rav Yosef Chaim was once late in returning home from Shacharis. This was an anomaly, since he was a very punctual person. Concerned, his wife sent their daughter in search of Rav Yosef Chaim. She found her father drawing water from a well and pouring it into pitchers, which two little boys - ages six and seven - carried to their nearby home. The boys emptied the water into a large earthenware barrel and quickly returned to the well for more water.

"Father!" his daughter exclaimed. "Have you added water-carrier to your list of positions?"

"No," responded Rav Yosef Chaim, "but as I was returning from shul, I noticed these two little boys bending over the well in an attempt to draw water. What they were doing was dangerous, and I told them so. They replied that they had no alternative, since there was no water at home, and they could not afford to hire a water-carrier. Their mother had recently given birth, and their father - a poor talmid chacham - was laid up in bed with a severe case of the flu. What could I have done? I immediately took off my Tallis and Tefillin and began to draw water for them. I will continue doing so until I fill their water barrel."

"But, father, what will people think when they see a talmid chacham of your stature engaged in such menial activity?" his daughter rejoined.

"I care much more about what they would say in Heaven if I were to sit and eat a leisurely breakfast while Jewish children are putting their lives in danger, so that they can bring a few drops of water to their sick parents," was Rav Yosef Chaim's reply.

This was the attitude of a gadol b'Yisrael. His overriding concern was for the welfare of two young boys. This concern overshadowed whatever position he held. The lives of Jewish children were involved. What could have held greater significance? It would serve our own leadership well to digest this story and take heed of Rav Yosef Chaim's reply. How many children do we overlook because of vested interests? How many mothers' complaints fall on deaf ears because we refuse to take a stand? How many children leave the path of Torah because it is below our dignity to help? There are leaders who lead, and there are leaders who are led. It all depends where one places his emphasis.

The second story is really excerpts of a letter written by the Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, to the Jews in free countries, following World War II, pleading with them to fulfill their duty towards their destitute brethren who had survived the Nazi inferno. The letter demonstrates the Rebbe's concern, compassion and strength of character. He saw his brethren perishing before his very eyes, and no one was doing anything about it. He was not subject to petty politics or protocol. Jews were dying, and action had to be taken. This was Torah leadership at its zenith.

"To our Jewish brethren:

"As a result of our sins, we, the Jews of Europe, have suffered years of persecution, in which the evil oppressors have risen against us to wipe out, kill and destroy all the Jews. During all those years, no one rose to share our suffering or to assist us. Those few who survived, did so only through the promise of the Torah, 'I will not cast them away, nor will I abhor them,' (Vayikra 26:44) and by the covenant that the Jewish people will not be destroyed. Yet, though we have been freed from slavery, we have not yet regained our freedom.

"Single family members, remnants going from place to place in search of their lost ones - fathers, mothers, wife, children and relatives - wandering and confused in the land of their enemies. Burning tears stream down our faces, we see our enemies already content and at peace, while we linger in pain and deprivation.

"All the doors have been shut. Even the gates to our Holy Land are closed to us. We are kept in camps in poverty and shame, without clothing or shoes. Some of our people are still wearing their accursed prison uniforms.

"Our supply of kosher food is limited. Thus, many of our fellow Jews are relegated to continue eating non-kosher food. While I am aware that a number of organizations have been founded under a variety of names, they have yet to accomplish anything. Indeed, I can honestly say that to date, nothing of value has reached the camps.

"Is it not your responsibility to care for the remnants of European Jews - especially the thousands who are deathly ill? Our military commander is doing whatever possible to ease our plight, but even his hands are tied.

"Are we to ignore our spiritual obligations? Literally a hundred men grab onto a single Tallis which one person received from a relative. Men wait for hours to don a single pair of Tefillin, so as to recite the first paragraph of Shema. Holy Jews who survived the crematoria crowd together and look from afar at a page of a Siddur. Immeasurable time is wasted from Torah study, because there are no seforim. Even during these holy days we have no one to supply us with kosher Torah scrolls, Tefillin, Mezuzos, Tzitzis, Siddurim, Machzorim, Chumashim, Mishnayos and etc...

"I have been silent too long. I thought that the feelings of mercy would be aroused in my fellow Jews. However, my pain does not permit me to remain silent any longer. I cry out, again and again, to the heads of every committee and organization: Where are you?

"Jewish nation! Have you examined your deeds before your Creator? Have you fulfilled your obligations to your brethren who are withering away from agony, living in the valley of tears, fearful of what the next day will bring? After all the years of suffering, do they deserve this?"

"On behalf of all the holy martyrs who were murdered and burned alive, we scream! Please save us! Do not wait any longer! Please see to it that your assistance reaches those in need without interference or politics.

"I sign this with a broken heart with the hope that my pleas will be heard.

Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam"

I am sure that the pain was felt by many, but no one else had the fortitude and resolution to make a public demand. Not everyone wants to be Klal Yisrael's conscience. It takes true leadership.

You shall not accept someone's presence. (16:19)

Everyone must be treated fairly and equally. This idea does not apply exclusively to a court of law. A sickness prevails in a society in which we favor one person over another. In some cases, it is their pedigree; in others, it is their material wealth, or it is simply what we personally have to benefit from them. As a judge should not favor one litigant over another, so, too, should we not treat one Jew differently from another.

Horav David, zl, m'Lelov was once traveling with the Yehudi HaKadosh, zl, m'Peshischa to raise funds for charity. They came to the home of a wealthy Jew. After ushering them in, the man gave to Rav David, whom he recognized, but refused to give a thing to the Yehudi HaKadosh. In fact, he berated him, saying, "I can tell that you are a charlatan. You are not raising money for charity. You are really seeking funds for yourself. I will give you nothing!"

Hearing this gross insolence, Rav David returned his contribution, and they both left the house humiliated. It did not take long for the wealthy man to discover who Rav David's partner was. The man was miserable. He searched all over for the two tzaddikim. After awhile, he was able to locate them.

Approaching the Yehudi Hakadosh, he begged forgiveness. "I did not know who the rav was. I would never have acted so rudely. Please forgive my insolence," the man pleaded with the tzaddik.

The Yehudi's response should send a shudder up the spine of anyone who ever treated a meshulach, fundraiser, who came to our door, in a disrespectful manner.

"To forgive you for my kavod, honor, is no problem. I know you had no intentions of insulting me. What about the poor man, however, whom you thought was standing in front of you? I have no right to be mochel, forgive, his kavod. It is not in my power to forgive the hurt and humiliation sustained by another Jew.

"I have only one suggestion for you in order to attain penance for your actions. Whenever a Jew comes to your door for funds - give him gladly, and from each one should you ask mechilah, forgiveness, because of the hurtful words that left your mouth."

Perhaps the next time a poor man stands by our door and he does not measure up to our preconceived standard of qualifications, we should remember this story so that we will treat all Jews with equality.

You shall not move a boundary of your fellow. (19:14)

It is forbidden to increase one's property at the expense of one's neighbor. A simple law, which is really common sense. Yet, we find hasogas gvul to be a common malady, whether it is in business or in any other endeavor. For some reason, when one Jew is doing something and doing it well, soon he will have a competitor down the block, doing the same thing. The following story, although it does not condone the inappropriate actions of Jew versus Jew, does offer rationale for the offensive behavior.

Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl, the distinguished rav of Kovno, was in St. Petersburg to meet with the leaders of the Jewish community there. Two of the wealthiest Jews in Russia, Baron Hertz Ginzburg and Shmuel Poliakov, made a reception to honor the famous Kovnor Rav and invited members of the Russian parliament to attend. One of the most powerful cabinet members was very impressed with the Rav's brilliance and ability to converse in all areas of intellectual endeavor. One question particularly bothered the cabinet member about the Jewish people: Why is it that the Jewish people are always encroaching upon each other's business? A Jew opens a store, and a few days later someone else opens a store right down the block - or across the street. Indeed, this was a phenomenon found only among the Jews. No other nationality seemed to encounter this problem.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan gave the following response: "We see among the animal world that members of each individual specie do not attack one another. The lion does not prey on another lion, the bear does not bother another bear, and so on and so forth in regard to all animals. This phenomenon stops when it comes to fish. The fish of the sea prey on each other. Survival of the fittest and the biggest is the rule in the sea. Why is this? The answer is simple. The animal world is vast. They can roam wherever they want in search of sustenance. Since they have no problem finding food among the other species, they have no reason to prey on their own. The fish, however, are restrained to a specific area - the sea. They cannot exist out of the water. Being remanded to one area, they are compelled to fight for their existence even at the expense of each other.

"We Jews are no different. We are not permitted to live in the large cities. We are subject to living in the cramped quarters allotted to us in the small dingy ghettos. Earning a livelihood is almost impossible, since we are constrained wherever we attempt to go. While encroaching on one another is inappropriate, it is regrettably forced upon us by the Russian Government."

The purpose of the above narrative is not to condone the reprehensible behavior of a minority. It is rather to emphasize that their offensive behavior is for the most part due to circumstances. Some can just manage the situation better than others.

You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:1)

The command to listen to our sages, Torah leaders of each individual generation is a command that stands at the very foundation of our nation. As Rashi and Ramban explain, the enjoinder is to obey their decision, even if we are convinced that they are wrong, even if they seem to be telling us that right is left and left is right. We listen to them even contrary to our own perception, because they represent Hashem's edict. To listen to them is to listen to Hashem; to defy Chazal or the Torah leaders

of each generation is tantamount to defying Hashem. The reason is simple, as Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, explains. One whose vision is better because he is closer to a given place -- or on a higher plane and can consequently see further -- is believed over someone who does not have this advantage. Our Torah leaders are on a higher plane and can, therefore, develop a perspective that eludes us. The problem with some of us is that we refuse to recognize their ability to see what we cannot.

In addition, the perspective expounded by Chazal is one that is applicable to the spiritual arena, as well. We are to listen to them concerning areas of human endeavor and life. Hashem gives them the ability to see what the average human eye cannot perceive.

In a thesis on this subject, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains the individuality and distinction of the Torah scholar vis-?-vis the nation. First, we must recognize that Torah can exist among the Jewish people only to the extent that the nation is capable of evaluating and appreciating the Torah scholar - the talmid chacham whose personality symbolizes a Torah presence. Torah lives on in the Jew whose soul mirrors the image of what Torah demands of us. Our teachers must embody the Torah.

The Torah, unlimited in her depth and breadth, must have followers who will strive to draw from her life-sustaining waters. The talmid chacham seeks and discovers new horizons in Torah. There is no end for him as he delves deeper and deeper into the Torah's profundities. Indeed, for such a person the experience of Revelation occurs daily. Every moment of study is for him a continuation of the Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai.

"We dare not," says Rav Gifter, "make the error of thinking that this process may be treated in the same manner as if we were approaching a human/secular code of laws." As in every area of science or body of knowledge, one must first prepare himself to evaluate properly that science according to its unique perspective. A good doctor is one who approaches medicine with a profound inner desire and zeal to study and master it. He must appreciate his work.

Torah wisdom is no different in approach. The distinction lies, however, in attitude. If one wishes to master Torah wisdom and to become an embodiment of Torah, he must approach it according to the nature of Torah wisdom, as a revelation of Divine will. Torah must be studied in the same manner that it was given - with awe and fear - with profound inner trembling. Only then does his Torah study achieve legitimacy, and only then can he hope to begin to reap its profundity.

A talmid chacham is a student of Torah who directs his life and study according to the Torah path. He represents the continuation of the Giving of Torah to our People. He is more than a teacher; he symbolizes the phenomenon of the Torah being transmitted to the Jewish People from Hashem. He upholds the continual Revelation through which Hashem gave the Torah at Sinai. We now understand the fundamental principle of emunas chachamim, faith in Torah sages. Regardless of the judgment they render, even if it does not seem appropriate in our eyes, we dare not turn away from what they tell us. Their understanding of the Torah is wholly different than ours. They and the Torah are one. To defy a Torah leader is to repudiate the basic foundation of Torah.

Regrettably, an interesting phenomenon has occurred. With increased learning and greater Torah knowledge, people also manifest increased arrogance accompanied by a greater license to criticize. We have become distant from the concept of emunas chachamim of old, when one would never dare to utter a word against a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah leader. We have become so obsessed with gaining greater knowledge that we have lost sight of the source of this knowledge, Har Sinai. The titles -- sage, rabbi, Torah leader -- all have meaning when they affirm and represent the studying of Torah. One who is missing the fundamental ingredient of emunas chachamim misrepresents his position and carries a title that is bogus. What remains is a Torah that is devoid of Har Sinai. Once we take the Sinai out of the

Torah, we unfortunately understand where the road leads.

The judges shall inquire thoroughly. (19:18)

The judges have a halachic and moral responsibility to be absolutely certain that they render their decision based upon the integrity of the witnesses. They must question them thoroughly until they are satisfied that they speak the truth. At times, a potential catastrophe has been averted through the sheer brilliance of the judge. The Austrian government appointed Horav Yosef Shorr, zl, to the position of municipal judge. While this might have been viewed as a great honor for a Jew, it also placed the rav in a difficult position. Whenever a Jew ascends to a distinguished position, he incurs the envy and wrath of the gentiles.

It happened once that five gentiles came to the court over which Rav Shorr was presiding and accused a Jew of setting fire to a house. This was a serious allegation, since in those days all the houses were nothing more than wooden tinderboxes built close to each other. A fire in one home could conceivably devastate a large portion of the town before it could be brought under control.

These five men swore that the Jew set the fire. The prosecutor had very little to do. The witnesses were all that was needed to put the Jew away for a long time. During the entire testimony, Rav Shorr sat impassively, staring out into space. His colleagues deliberated the case back and forth and came to a unanimous decision that the Jew was guilty beyond any doubt. They wondered why the presiding judge remained quiet during the entire interchange. Perhaps he was embarrassed by the actions of one of his co-religionists. They wrote up their decision and sentenced the accused to five years of hard labor.

They each affixed their name to the official document and brought it to Rav Shorr to sign. Rav Shorr said, "It is my opinion that the accused is innocent. Instead, I am holding his five accusers in contempt of court for perjuring themselves in order to place the onus of guilt on this man. Indeed, each of the witnesses should immediately be placed under arrest and be required to serve two years in prison for his malicious lies."

The other judges looked at each other in shock. What was Rav Shorr saying? It was clear from the witnesses' testimony that the Jew was to blame. Understanding their astonishment, Rav Shorr explained, "My friends, let me ask you. Five able-bodied men see a weak Jew set fire to a house. Will they not do something about it? Do you believe for one moment that one puny Jew would get away with setting a house ablaze with five strong gentiles just watching him? Would they permit him to light a fire that could quite possibly destroy the entire town? No! These men are certainly lying." The judges acted upon his advice. After inquiring, they discovered that the witnesses were "truly" false!

In another instance, it was the rav's sensitivity that saved a person's livelihood and probably his life. Horav Menachem zl, m'Kosov was once approached by a group of laymen complaining about the moral behavior of the town's shochet, ritual slaughterer. They enumerated a number of rumors about the man and demanded that he be dismissed from his position. There was, however, one person who disputed their claims, citing their envy and hatred towards the shochet as the motivating factor behind their "rumors."

To the people's surprise and chagrin, Rav Menachem rendered his decision in favor of the shochet, dismissing the witnesses' testimony as being nothing more than hearsay. When the witnesses'

complained about the decision, Rav Menachem explained, "I have proof from the Torah to substantiate my decision. When Avraham was told by Hashem to sacrifice his son, he immediately listened. On the other hand, it was an angel that told Avraham to desist from sacrificing his son. Why did he listen to the angel? Why did he not wait for Hashem to issue an order to halt the proceedings?" The answer is that when it concerns killing a human being, one needs to hear Hashem's command. When it involves saving a person's life even an angel is sufficient. Similarly, the testimony to destroy a person's life must be free of any taint or doubt. On the other hand, to save a person, any testimony which speaks positive of the defendant is acceptable.

Our hands have not spilled this blood. (21:7)

The parsha of Eglah Arufah, axed heifer, ends with Bais Din declaring that the people had no culpability in regard to the death of the person that was discovered near their town. This means that they attested to the fact that he was accompanied and assisted as he left their community. The Torah implies the critical importance of seeing to the needs of those who visit our community, who live in our community, but are like visitors - since they are alone. All too often, something occurs to a member of our community who lives alone either by choice or by constraint, and we then ask ourselves: What could I have done to have prevented this? Veritably, most of us wake up after the fact, after someone has been hurt, humiliated, or become ill. We have justifiable excuses, or at least they "seem" justifiable. The fact that we have legitimized our indifference does not absolve us. We cannot say, "Our hands have not spilled this blood."

Why is this? Why should our excuses absolve us from responsibility? I recently read a simple story with a poignant -- but compelling -- message, which I feel addresses the integrity of our excuses. A scholarly, observant Jew, whom we will call Reuven, went out one evening to purchase medicine from the corner pharmacy. It was a nice evening, a bit cool, in an average neighborhood in Brooklyn. As he left the store, he noticed an elderly woman sitting on his neighbor's porch. Knowing fully well the members of his neighbor's family, he knew that this woman was a stranger. Moreover, she looked lost. He asked her if she needed anything. She replied that she was lost and wanted to go home.

He helped her to his car and drove to the address that she gave him. Regrettably, that address did not exist. He drove her around in an attempt to locate a familiar area. She claimed she lived near a synagogue. He drove her to the synagogue with the same results. No home, no address, no place to go.

Finally, Reuven drove the woman to the police station. They would know what to do. The sergeant listened to the all too familiar story and said, "You can go now, sir. We will take over. Sooner or later, someone will come looking for her." Reuven looked at the sergeant and said, "No. My mother is about her age. If she was lost or in trouble, I know I would want someone to be with her, not just dropped off."

So he remained with her. He asked her if she was hungry, and she said yes. He went out and bought her a meal from the nearest restaurant. Above all, he did not leave her. He kept her company for a few hours, until someone called the police station reporting a lost mother.

Why did he do this? What motivated him to stay and not do the "usual." He thought of his own mother. If this woman would have been his mother, he would have wanted someone to stay with her.

So, he stayed. "What if it was my mother?" is a question that erodes the very foundation of our excuses, because surely we would not be indifferent if it was "ours." We must begin to view those in need, those who are alone and who do not even realize that they are in need, through the prism of self-examination. What if it would be me or mine? Would I act in the same manner?

The story is not yet over. A few days later, Reuven received a call from his mother. "You must hear what just happened to me," she said excitedly. She had accidentally locked her keys in her car. It was night, and she was not in one of the finer, safer neighborhoods of Brooklyn. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, two young men appeared. They were dressed in contemporary summer garb: shorts, tank tops, with a couple of tattoos for good measure. Reuven's mother was scared, to say the least. These men could be members of one of the prominent gangs that roamed the city. She was almost ready to hand over her purse, with the hope that they would then leave her alone, when one of them asked, "Can we help you, ma'am?" She nervously explained her predicament. They left and searched various gas stations for an attendant capable of entering a car without a key. They soon returned with a mechanic, who successfully opened the car door. She was very appreciative and attempted to pay the two men for their time. One of the men looked up at her and said, "We won't accept any money, lady. Just take care of yourself. If this would be my mother, I would want someone to help her out, too."

Perhaps this is something we should think about next time: What if this was my mother - or father - or son or daughter? We can always refer to this as preventive chesed. This attitude might circumvent a problem from occurring to one of "ours." Speaking about our responsibility to the wider community on a preventative basis, I am reminded of an unnerving incident that recently occurred. A Jewish youth, regrettably very far-removed from the observant community, tragically died as a result of an overindulgent, chemically-induced lifestyle. For some reason, his single mother decided that he should have an orthodox burial. This is not uncommon; people choose to live one way and die another. It was after the taharah, purification and washing ritual, that the members of the chevra kadisha, sacred society, were outside of the funeral home, and the distraught mother came over to the leader. She looked at him and asked, "Are you the rabbi who just took care of my son?" The leader of the group very quietly responded, "Yes." Suddenly, the mother turned to him with a wild look on her face, a look that reflected years of tension, anxiety and depression and asked, "Where were you when he was alive? I do not need you any more. He is dead!" With those few words, she turned and walked away.

She was wrong in blaming the local chevra kadishah for years of neglecting her son. The closest he ever came to religion was the local secular temple on Yom Kippur. Whose fault was it? Yet, this does not change or justify our responsibility towards reaching out to all Jews. Can we say, "Yadeinu lo shafcha es ha'dam ha'zeh?"

You shall not turn from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)

The spiritual leadership of Klal Yisrael makes their decision only after careful deliberation into the halachah, law. It is rendered by individuals whose relationship with Torah is of a singular nature. Their exemplary love for the Torah goes hand in hand with their profound scholarship. Their interpretation of the Torah is law. We are commanded to listen to them, even when the decision they render seems unjustified or incorrect. They represent the final word. To undermine the words of Chazal is to attack the Torah. The following incredible story was related by Horav David Puvarsky.

The story takes place in Russia where Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, was rav. In his city there lived a malshin, informer, who went out of his way to endear himself to the authorities at the expense of his Jewish brethren. As a result of his close relationship with the government, people were afraid of him, never knowing whether they would be his next sacrifice. Undoubtedly, he caused great difficulty and anxiety for the small Jewish community. People shied away from him, as they developed an intense hatred for him.

Everybody is destined to leave this temporary world at one time or another. The informer's turn had come to return his soul to his Maker. On the last day of his life, he asked for the chevra kadisha, Jewish burial society, to come visit him, so that he could make one special request of them. When they arrived, the informer told them that he was acutely aware of the many sins that plagued his life. He fully understood the evil he had perpetrated and the terrible hurt he had caused to so many people. In his desire to expiate a malevolent life, he asked them to bury him in the ground in a fashion similar to that of a donkey - with his legs standing in a vertical position.

The men standing around the informer's bed were moved by the wicked man's plea. Thus, they gave him their word and afterward signed a document stating that they would accede to his request to be buried as a donkey.

After the informer died, word got back to the rav, Rav Moshe Feinstein, that they were about to bury a Jewish person in a manner antithetical to Torah dictate. Rav Moshe was vehement; he would not permit a Jew to be buried in such a denigrating manner.

As soon as he spoke, the people accepted his decision and buried the informer in the proper manner. The next morning, the mishtarah, secret police, showed up immediately following the burial, demanding to have the corpse exhumed so that they could see in what manner the informer was buried. The chevra kadisha refused to exhume the body. They claimed it was against Jewish law to dig up a body. The police said that it was not their responsibility if the Torah law was being undermined or not. They wanted to view the body, and no one could prevent them from doing what they wanted to do.

The chevra kadisha saw that arguing with the police was to no avail. They had made up their mind to exhume the informer. They proceeded to dig up the grave. They peered inside, saw the manner in which the informer was buried and left peacefully. It was only then that the members of the chevra kadisha realized the incredible miracle that had just occurred for them. The reason that the police sought to search the burial site was because the informer told his gentile friends that the Jews hated him, and they would surely bury him like a donkey. Even as he stood at his death's threshold, the miscreant attempted to take one last shot at his People. This person's self-hate prevailed over his sense of reason. He was willing to go to his death, to his eternal punishment, with one more sin on his record. Had he been buried in accordance with his wish, the entire Jewish community's lives would have been in danger. Such was his evil.

It was only the Daas Torah, the wisdom that is the result of being immersed in Torah that characterized Rav Moshe, that prevented a tragedy from occurring. This narrative is a tribute to the greatness in Torah that personified the individual who was the posek hador, halachic arbiter, whose decisions encompassed and addressed every area of human endeavor. We also note the evil that permeates some people. The informer knew he was dying. Rather than repent, he was determined to make one more attempt to hurt the People from whom he had become estranged. While condemning this person is easy, we might want to ask ourselves what could have happened in his life that prompted such virulent hatred towards his People?

And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life. (17:19)

The Sefer Torah shall be the primary focus of the king's life. As it guides him through life, it shall be the object of his continual meditation. The love of Torah creates a bond that cannot be broken. Its influence is ever-lasting. Indeed, many years later, the original impact of the Torah upon a person retains its freshness and inspiration as evidenced by the following story. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, tells of a Yerushalmi Jew, a profound talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who moved to Tzefas. The story takes place years ago when the opportunity and availability to own a complete twenty-volume shas was rare. This scholar possessed one volume, which contained mesechtos, tractates, Beitzah and Rosh Hashanah. This was the "shas" which he took with him to Tzefas.

Regrettably, the city of Tzefas did not possess added volumes. Thus, these two mesechtos became the focus of his love and devotion to Torah. During his stay in Tzefas, he reviewed this volume over three thousand times! While this individual was a talmid chacham of repute, he nonetheless asked his children, prior to his death, to inscribe on his tombstone only the fact that he had reviewed one mesechta over three thousand times. "Who knows," he said, "if this feat will one day inspire another Jew to love the Torah as I do."

Many years later, a distinguished family in Bnei Brak was shocked to learn that one of their sons had left the yeshivah where he had been studying, trading his seat in the bais hamedrash for a place in the street with a gang of young, rebellious hoodlums. The parents were broken-hearted. They made every attempt to bring their child back to the living - to no avail. The more they tried, the more he rejected their pleas. The influence of his newly-found friends kept him in a stranglehold that was unyielding.

One day, out of the clear blue, the young man returned to his family and to Hashem. He asked to return to the yeshivah, and, in a short while, he was counted among the masmidim, more diligent students, of the yeshivah. Today, he is a great Torah scholar, a disseminator of Torah, par excellence. In fact, that episode in his life, when he had left Torah, is long-forgotten, erased as if it had never occurred.

What catalyzed his about-face? What brought about his return to Torah Judaism? A short while after his spiritual metamorphosis he related the reason to his parents. "I once had occasion to visit a cemetery in Tzefas," he told his parents, "and I noticed by chance the tombstone of a Torah scholar, upon which was engraved the fact that he had reviewed one volume of Talmud over three thousand times! What impressed me the most was the fact that a basically simple Jew - not a rosh yeshivah or a rav - just a simple Jew, whose overwhelming love for Torah inspired him to review the Talmud so many times. This man's exemplary devotion, his incredible love for Torah, awakened within me a spark that became a passionate flame. If he could do this, why could not I? I then made up my mind to pursue my own studies with a similar enthusiasm and fervor."

What a poignant and beautiful story! There are a number of lessons to be derived herein. Quite possibly, the most significant is the impact our actions have on others, even over a period of time. Who would have thought that this young man would be walking in the cemetery and would notice a stone with a simple, but profound, message on it? But then, who are we to attempt to understand Hashem's ways?

What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? ... lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart. (20:8)

The one who is afraid of the dangers that accompany war, whose anxiety overwhelms him, is sent home, lest his faintheartedness affect those around him. The Tchoortkover Rebbe, zl, was once asked by one of his chassidim which shul he should attend. It seems that his community had two synagogues; one was a large community shul, while the other was a small shteibel frequented primarily by chassidim. The Rebbe responded that whichever shul had a member who prayed with a broken heart; that is the shul in which he should daven.

He supported his answer with the above pasuk. We derive from the pasuk that one person with a faint heart, who is devastated by his fear of battle, is sent home because of his negative effect on those around him. Certainly then if there is a shul member who is heart-broken, his effect will be all-encompassing.

And they shall measure unto the cities which around about he who was slain. (21:2)

If a corpse is found in the open country and the identity of the murderer is unknown, the elders of the town nearest the corpse perform the ritual of eglah arufah, the axed heifer. There is a dispute in the Talmud in regard to a circumstance in which the decapitated head of the corpse is found a distance from the rest of the body. From where do we measure: from the head or from the body? In addressing the second Kenessiah Gedolah in Vienna in 1929 the Sokolover Rebbe, zl, asked, "When the deceased is a spiritual casualty, when we did nothing to stem the spread of the plague of heresy, who is to be considered responsible? Should it be the 'head', the spiritual leaders of the community, who did not take the threat to the spiritual fiber of the community seriously, who did little to teach the people to fortify them against the disease of heresy? Perhaps, it should be the body, the general public who did not do enough to strengthen the spiritual foundation of their community."

Is it much different in contemporary times? A young man or young woman, at times even an entire family, fall through the cracks and are lost to their People. Whose fault is it? Is it the spiritual leadership who should have taken a greater interest, or is it the community who are too involved with themselves to worry about the individual who just does not fit in? Unfortunately, while we are arguing regarding where to place the onus of guilt, more souls are being lost.

And they shall axe the back of its neck in the valley. (21:4)

The murder of a Jew is a terrible tragedy which is compounded when the perpetrator might be another Jew. The parsha of eglah arufah, the axed heifer, addresses a situation where a corpse is found lying in the open. We have no idea who the murderer is. The Torah requires that the elders of the town nearest to the corpse perform a public ritual in which they proclaim that they are not responsible, neither by neglect nor by indifference, for the tragedy of this person's death. The primary purpose of this parsha is to convey an important message: We are responsible for our brother. Everyone must feel a share of guilt. Did we attend to his needs? Did we make sure he had accompaniment as he left town? Passive neglect and indifference are quite often as destructive as active hatred and abuse. They achieve the same degree of devastation.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, addresses an interesting Chazal in Meseches Yoma 23a which relates to the laws of eglah arufah. Chazal teach that it once occurred that two Kohanim were racing up the ramp to the Mizbayach, Altar, to perform the service. As one saw the other about to overtake him, he took out a knife and thrust it into the other Kohen's heart. When the great Sage Rabbi Tzadok heard this, he stood on the steps of the Ulam, Hall leading to the interior of the Bais Hamikdash, and said, "My brethren, of the House of Yisrael, Listen! Behold, it says in the Torah (Devarim 21:1) 'If one is found slain in the land... then your elders and judges shall come forth...' On whose behalf shall we offer the heifer whose neck is broken - on behalf of the city, or on behalf of the Temple Courts?" Upon hearing this, all of those assembled burst out weeping. Obviously, Chazal are addressing a very profound matter. Certainly, Rabbi Tzadok is not referring to the need of an eglah arufah for the victim of this wanton act of murder. As the Talmud itself notes, there is no provision for eglah arufah in Yerushalayim. Moreover, the ritual of eglah arufah is performed only when the identity of the murderer is unknown. This is surely not true in this circumstance. What is the underlying meaning of this Chazal? Rav Meir Shapiro views this story in the context of the period in history in which it occurred. It was during the Herodian period in Jewish history when the discord that reigned in Klal Yisrael was rampant and devastating. The hostility between the Perushim and the Tzedokim, the observant against those that would undermine the validity and authority of Torah, was tearing apart the spirit of brotherhood that had once existed. Demoralization, depression, spiritual and moral bankruptcy are words that aptly characterize the situation of Jewish life in general and the individual Jew in particular.

When Rabbi Tzadok saw a Kohen murder his brother in cold blood, he was acutely aware that it was not the love of the mitzvah that had motivated this wanton act of murder. He realized that it was a deep-seated hatred that had lain dormant, waiting for an opportunity, looking for an excuse to justify killing another Jew. The mask of frumkeit, religious observance, concealed a venomous animosity towards a fellow Jew. It was not frumkeit, because an observant Jew does not act in this manner. This hatred grew out of the streets of Yerushalayim, from the shallow drifters, from the alienated and assimilated, those whose hatred for Hashem's service and for those that serve Him dominate their lives. This virus was brought into the holy Bais Hamikdash where it festered into an act of murder.

Rabbi Tzadok asked, "For whom shall we bring the eglah arufah? Who is guilty of this innocent blood: Is it the city? Is it the streets of Jerusalem? Or is the Temple Court itself?! Is this fight a hatred between brothers, or is it a milchemes mitzvah, a holy war to purge evil?" Perhaps, as a postscript, we might want to ask ourselves a similar question in regard to the infighting that seems to ensue in the various camps of our People - between the observant and the non-observant and, regrettably, even among the observant. Is it a milchemes mitzvah, or simply a milchamah?

According to the teaching that they will teach you and according to the judgement that they will say to you, shall you do: (17:11)

In the neighborhood in which the Gaon M'Vilna lived, a poor tailor also resided. He was a wholesome, G-d-fearing Jew whose life revolved around doing his work and returning to his study. It happened one Erev Shabbos that this tailor was able to scrounge together the necessary kopeks to purchase a chicken for Shabbos. Imagine the joy that permeated his home: his family would be able to honor the Shabbos in a manner becoming this special day. He quickly had the chicken slaughtered and prepared for cooking. In all of her rush and excitement, his wife accidentally dipped a dairy spoon into the pot in which the chicken was cooking. They now had a sheilah, halachic question, regarding the

kashrus of the chicken.

The tailor immediately left for the home of the Av Beis Din, Head of the Rabbinical court, to ask his opinion regarding the kashrus of the chicken. The day was short, and the distance was far. It was getting late. Soon, it would be too late to finish preparing the meal. Therefore, the tailor's wife decided that she would go to her neighbor, the Gaon M'Vilna, to ask his opinion regarding the chicken. The poor woman arrived at his door Erev Shabbos with a sheilah. The Gaon immediately welcomed her. After listening to the circumstance, he rendered his judgement: the chicken was not to be eaten. In the meantime, the tailor had returned home with good news: The rav had rendered his judgement - the chicken was kosher. We can only begin to imagine the quandary he was in when his wife told him that she had asked the Gaon for his psak, decision, and it opposed the rav's psak.

There was nothing else to do but return to the home of the rav and notify him of the Gaon's decision. After listening to the tailor's story, the rav said, "Go home, and eat your meal. The Gaon and I will join you later to partake of your wife's delicacies. "

That night, after the rav had recited Kiddush and eaten part of his meal, he went to the home of the Gaon. After wishing him Gut Shabbos, he implored the Gaon, "Rebbe, my master; I am nothing before you. My learning is insignificant in contrast to yours. I am, however, the rav of this community. When I was asked a sheilah, I rendered a decision according to my understanding of the law. Regardless of the Gaon's decision, my psak must be upheld, or else the institution of rabbanus, rabbinate, will be impugned. I, therefore, respectfully ask that you join me at the tailor's home for a taste of their Shabbos meal." The Gaon responded, "If the rav asks me to come, I have no alternative but to go. Come let us go."

The tailor and his wife were overwhelmed with delight. In fact, they were so excited that the tailor's wife, in all of her enthusiasm, tripped and bumped into the table, causing the candle made of non-kosher wax to fall into the pot of chicken. Suddenly, everyone became still - including the rav. It was evident that the Gaon's decision had been correct, and by Divine intervention they were being prevented from eating the chicken. The rav immediately went over to the Gaon and begged his forgiveness for imposing his decision on him. "Please Rebbe, forgive me; obviously Heaven is telling telling us that I was wrong in my psak," said the rav to the Gaon. "No," replied the Gaon, "the law is in accordance with your decision, and we are enjoined by the Torah, 'According to the teaching that they will teach you. And according to the judgement that they will say to you, shall you do.' You are the authority in this town; you are the rav, and your decision is the accepted decision to follow. Since I rendered judgement to the effect that the chicken was not kosher, however, I could no longer eat it. It is for this reason that I was prevented from Heaven from partaking of this meal."

This story was related to demonstrate the level of a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah giant, one whose personality and character is molded through the medium of Torah. It also indicates how Torah life should be, how it was, and the level we should aspire to attain.

According to the teaching that they will teach you. And according to the judgement that they will say to you, shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)

The Torah enjoins us to listen to our chachamim, sages/Torah leaders, and to live according to Torah teachings. It is interesting to note that the Torah employs three different forms of communication between the sages and the people. They are: "yorucha" - teach; "yomru" - say; "yagidu" - tell. Each of

these terms denotes a different mode of communication. It also differentiates between the individuals who are being addressed. Horav Chaim Rabinowitz, Shlita, says that the Torah is telling us that one must listen to the Torah leaders, regardless of the manner in which they convey their message.

Let us attempt to define these terms and the lesson to be derived from the specific use of each by the Torah. "According to the teaching that they will teach you" is the leaders' license for eminence. Only the fact that it is indeed Torah that they are teaching grants them supremacy and stewardship over the people. They teach what they themselves have learned from their own rebbeim. It is a constant process called mesorah, transmission, in which the Torah is transmitted from generation to generation, unaltered from its original pristine state, as it was given to us by Hashem through Moshe Rabbeinu. To transmit Torah, one first must be worthy of receiving it. He then has the ability to hand it down to the next generation.

At first, Torah leaders interpret and teach the law to us. This is referred to as "horaah." At times, however, they must render a decision. How this decision is transmitted to the people depends greatly on the type of decision and to whom it is being communicated. Regardless of the situation, we are instructed not to deviate right or left from this decision. "Amirah," saying, is the first and primary method of communication. It is, as Chazal describe, a "lashon racah," soft manner of speech. It is a manner of communication most appropriate and pleasant - easy to understand and easy to accept. It explains Hashem's command in a way that the listener can better attune himself to assimilating the message into his life. It speaks to each person individually, according to his own cognitive level of perception. Amirah is used even when one does not speak to another person - even if he is contemplating to himself. One is instructed to "say" the rabbinic interpretation to himself, to understand and contemplate it. Indeed, even the rabbinic arbiter should say it over to himself, making sure that he fully comprehends the halachah that he is about to transmit. In order for the student to understand the lesson, in order for the rebbe to convey the lesson properly - the rebbe must be fully comfortable, understanding every nuance and aspect of the halachah. Last, amirah is a term used b'lev, in the heart, as one "says"/thinks in his heart. The halachos should be fully integrated in the heart and mind of the rebbe. They must be his essence, his life.

The next mode of communication is "yagidu," telling. Horav Shlomo Wertheimer, zl, explains that in this form of expression one relates to others what he has either seen or heard. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, defines "hagadah" as speaking up to someone. Melding these two definitions together, we may define "yagidu" as a strong form of communication in which the mesorah, tradition, that one has heard or seen is conveyed to the people in an aggressive manner. In truth, at times one must issue forth a decision that may not necessarily be written in the codes, but it is something he has seen or heard from his own mentors. In any event, "yagidu" is an approach that the people are not always inclined to easily accept. Not everyone likes to be "told." This is the Torah's message: regardless of the manner of communication, our sages have the first and last word in deciding the course we are to take as Torah Jews.

Or who will come with his fellow into the forest. (19:5)

The Torah addresses the issue of the unintentional murderer who, while chopping wood in the forest, causes his friend's death. The Mesorah cites another pasuk in Bamidbar 27:17, where Moshe Rabbeinu asks Hashem for a leader who "will go out before them and go in before them," "va'asher yavo lifneichem." It is similar to the "asher yavo es re'eihu ba'yaar." While they may be similar in

spelling, their relationship remains enigmatic. In the Kedushas Tzion, the previous Bobover Rebbe, zl, gives the following response.

When Moshe asked for a leader, he actually asked for two things. "May Hashem appoint a man/leader over the assembly"...and "let the assembly of G-d not be like sheep that have no shepherd." He cites Horav Yosele Dombrover, zl, who explains that Moshe asked that Hashem appoint a leader. He also asked that the assembly acknowledge this leader. They should not be as a sheep without a leader. They should appreciate and revere their leadership. All too often, we are blessed with wonderful leadership, but regrettably, we find it difficult to accept or defer to this leadership. The deficiency is in our character - not in that of the leader. The Bobover Rebbe relates that the rav in the town in which Horav Mordechai Tzernobler, zl, had his chassidic court was not a chasid. Indeed, he had never gone to the Rebbe. Once, on the last day of Pesach, he decided he would go see the Rebbe's Tish, table, where all the chassidim would gather together, sing and listen to the Rebbe say words of Torah. As soon as he stepped over the threshold of the house, the Rebbe said to him, "You must perform teshuvah, repent, for you have transgressed the prohibition of chametz on Pesach." The rav became very agitated and went home to search for the chametz. After awhile, he found a piece of bread at the bottom of the water barrel which was set aside for Pesach. The rav was shocked - and upset. He returned to the Rebbe and asked, "If the rebbe knew I had chametz, why did you not tell me earlier?" The Rebbe answered, "I knew nothing - until you came to me. Once you were about to establish a relationship, I was given the opportunity by Heaven to see that which was limiting you spiritually." We derive from here that as long as there is no relationship between the shepherd and his flock, as long as they do not recognize him as their leader, he cannot save them from despair.

This is the relationship between the two pesukim. If Klal Yisrael has a leader whom they appreciate and revere, then he will protect them in the "forest," saving them from the obstacles that would undermine their spiritual achievement.

Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house. (20:8)

The Torah does not seek to place a person in a situation that he cannot handle. A soldier who is afraid can harm himself and, by extension, the others who rely on him. Chazal teach us that this fainthearted person does not fear the battle per se'. He fears "because of the sins in his hand," which is a reference to such sins as diverting his attention between his Tefillin Shel Yad and Tefillin Shel Rosh. Placing Tefillin on one's hand and forehead is one mitzvah which is to be performed without any lapses in attention. One's mind must be completely focused on this mitzvah, in no way diverting his attention between the two Tefillin. One might think that this sin is not of such great significance. Chazal indicate the contrary. In fact, it is sufficient reason to return from the battlefield. Such an individual may be a liability to himself and other soldiers.

There is profound philosophical significance to this transgression. Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, in his new volume, Yalkut Lekach Tov - Chaim Shel Torah, cites Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, who spoke about the significance of this sin while addressing a Bar-Mitzvah celebration. He began by questioning the fact that a boy who turns thirteen years old is called a "Bar"-Mitzvah, while one who sins is referred to as a "baal" aveirah. Indeed, we find throughout halachic literature the word "bar," -- which is the Aramaic rendition of "ben," meaning "son" -- and the word "baal," -- which is usually

translated as "husband" or "owner" -- both used to denote "shaychus," relationship or connection, to something or someone. Is there some specific reason that "bar," son, is used in relation to mitzvah observance, while "baal" is employed in relation to sin?

There is an essential difference between these two words. A "ben"/"bar" is the son of someone - a relationship that can never be severed, regardless of how estranged one may have become. It is impossible to divorce oneself from one's parents. A "baal," husband, is connected to his wife via the kiddushin, marriage agreement, which can be severed through a get, divorce. In other words, a "baal" is a relationship that is not necessarily irrevocable. A "bar" is everlasting. One who becomes a Bar-Mitzvah establishes a permanent bond with mitzvos. He is literally like a "son" of the mitzvos. He is obligated to observe and execute Hashem's command, regardless of the circumstance. Disregarding his responsibility, citing a lack of belief or whatever other excuse enters his mind, does not revoke his obligation. It is eternal. On the other hand, one who sins is called a "baal" aveirah, denoting that the particular sin is a temporary lapse. While this "lapse" may last longer for some than for others, it is still not binding. A Jew who sins can sever his relationship with evil and return through teshuvah, repentance.

With this in mind, let us return to the sin of diverting one's attention between the Tefillin Shel Yad and Tefillin Shel Rosh. Chazal teach us that "chochmah ba'goyim taamin," wisdom is to be found among the gentiles, while Torah ba'goyim al taamin," Torah is not to be found among the gentiles. There is profound wisdom to be gleaned from Torah. There is an essential difference, however, between Torah and chochmah. Torah teaches a person how to live; it is the Jew's blueprint for life. While we find many wise gentiles whose intellectual accomplishments are profound, they do not have Torah. They do not have to live their lives in accordance with the wisdom they possess. It is an abstract wisdom which is not assimilated into their lifestyle. To learn Torah means to live Torah. One cannot study Torah Hashem and not live the life it dictates.

Aristotle was one of the wisest men who ever lived. It was known, however, that at times he would defer to his base nature and act in a manner acceptable for a creature of a lower order. When asked how he could do this, he responded, "Now I am not Aristotle!" This is chochmas ha'goyim, secular wisdom, which does not change the individual. Our Sages lived what they learned. Their total demeanor reflected the wisdom of Torah. Torah teaches; it shapes and molds a person in accordance with the amount of himself he puts into it.

The Tefillin Shel Rosh represent the thought process, the cognitive approach to life. The Tefillin Shel Yad denote action, observance, carrying out mitzvos. The prohibition against speaking or diverting any attention between these two Tefillin implies the importance of integrating the mind with the act. There cannot be any breach between what one thinks and what one does. They must be in sync with one another, unified in harmony, reflecting one's understanding and belief in the mitzvos he carries out. A Jew whose thoughts do not coincide with his actions, whose beliefs are not necessarily in harmony with his observance, is spiritually defective. He lacks the "Torah" element of his wisdom. He cannot represent Klal Yisrael in battle. When one looks at a ben Torah, the wisdom he possesses should be evident in his appearance, in the way he speaks, and in his relationship with people. As a representative of the Torah, he must mirror its image.

You shall not plant for yourselves an idolatrous tree - any tree - near the Altar of Hashem your G-d.

(16:21)

Whether the tree was specifically designated for idol worship, or any tree planted near the Bais Hamikdash, it is forbidden - as it was the custom of the pagans to landscape their temples. The inside of the Mikdash is important, not the edifice's external beauty. From the juxtaposition of the pasuk concerning the idolatrous tree on to the pesukim about appointing judges, Chazal derive the importance of appointing only those judges who are reputable, G-d-fearing, honest men. It goes without saying that he must be erudite in all areas of Jewish law. Indeed, Chazal say that one who appoints an unqualified judge is tantamount to one who plants an asheirah. While the juxtaposition does convey a message, we should, however, endeavor to see what an asheirah has in common with an unqualified, unscrupulous judge.

Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, suggests that while a "regular" idol is unmistakably an avodah zarah, because its appearance is not deceiving, the asheirah is different. Externally, the asheirah seems to be just another beautiful tree. Its sinister being, its evil essence, is concealed by its outer beauty. One might stumble; one might err and unwittingly come too close and fall under its influence. This is analogous to the unqualified judge, the inappropriate leader, the unscrupulous spiritual mentor who outwardly appears to be righteous, moral and upstanding, but behind closed doors is all a sham. Such leadership devours its followers, as they fail to see through the cloak of false righteousness.

We must ask ourselves whose fault it is that such a leadership continues to thrive. The Torah says, "You shall not plant an asheirah." To plant is to sustain, to nurture, to care for and support. In other words: We put the asheirah there; we plant and care for it. Likewise, we keep on supporting and glorifying the "asheiros" of our generation. If we would not plant them and maintain them where they are, they would not be able to exert their harmful influence over their unsuspecting community.

According to the Teaching that they will teach you. And according to the judgement that they will say to you, shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you; right or left. (17:11)

Torah leadership expound da'as Torah, the perspective as seen by the Torah. It is therefore imperative that we listen and follow their instructions. These are people whose Torah scholarship is part of their essence. They are imbued with a holiness and purity that emanates from them, a yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, that permeates their every endeavor. Their perspective is Torah perspective.

It is the purpose of this thesis neither to validate the importance of listening to da'as Torah nor to confirm its Divine origin, but rather to indicate that a person who achieves the status of rendering da'as Torah is not an average person. His insight is piercing, and his outlook is visionary.

The following story, which is cited by Yalkut Lekach Tov, sends home this profound message: The Brisker Rav, Horav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, zl, was a young man when he assumed the leadership of the community of Brisk. While he was young, he was an accomplished Torah scholar, widely respected for his erudition and Torah insight. The story takes place when the Rav was twenty-three years old. It was Rosh Hashanah. Two officers came to the shul to ask the Rav to come quickly with them to recite vidui, confessional, with a Jewish prisoner who had been condemned to death. Not wishing to disturb the Rav who was at the moment in middle of saying Shemonah Esrai, they said they would return a bit later. A few of the members of the congregation suggested asking another one of the rabbanim to meet with the prisoner. The officers responded that they had orders to bring the Rav of Brisk, not just any rabbi.

When the Brisker Rav concluded his tefillah, prayer, the people rushed over and told him what

had occurred. They understandably encouraged him to go immediately. He gave the matter some thought, finally deciding that he was not going. Fearing reprisal from the authorities, they demanded that the Rav acquiesce and go with the officers. A number of committee members were insolent enough to tell the Rav that he was endangering the lives of the entire community. The Rav would not change his position. He was not going. The officers returned during the Mussaf Shemonah Esrai. Sensing their presence, the Rav continued standing as if he was still praying. The congregation's patience had reached a bursting point, when one of the older, more distinguished looking members of the shul, came forward to the officers and claimed that he was actually the Rav. They believed him and proceeded to go with him to the jail.

After davening, services, two policemen came to the Brisker Rav's home. His family feared that they were coming to arrest him for refusing to go with the original messengers. They quickly discovered that these policemen were from a different community. They had been sent to stop the Rav from going to the jail. Apparently, the accused Jew was not guilty; it was a case of mistaken identity and he would not be executed. It was, however, too late. The "elder", who was so clever and had "replaced" the Rav, had inadvertently caused the death of an innocent Jew. Had they only listened to the young rav, had they only accepted his da'as Torah, a Jew would be alive, a tragedy would have been averted.

We must ask ourselves; How often do we choose to ignore the instructions of our gedolim, Torah leadership? How often do we think we have all the answers, asserting that they are not attuned to the "times"? How often do we realize too late that our impulsiveness and arrogance have created situations that unfortunately have had tragic consequences?

You shall come to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and to the Judge who will be in those days. (17:9)

Rashi explains that we are required to listen specifically to the shofet/spiritual leader of our day. Horav Simcha Bunim m'Peshischa, zl, cited the Baal Shem Tov, zl, who, prior to his death, remarked that Hashem has selected ten different types of spiritual leadership: Neviim, prophets; Shoftim/Zekeinim, judges/Elders; Melachim, kings; Kohanim; Tannaim; Amoraim; Nesiim; Gaonim; Rabbanim; and the last have been the tzaddikim, righteous Jews of every generation. The Baal Shem asserted that he initiated the last hanhagah, form of leadership, that would precede the advent of Moshiach.

The Satan once asked the Heavenly Tribunal, "How do these tzaddikim distinguish themselves over other Jews, who are all enjoined to become tzaddikim?" The Heavenly tribunal responded that there would always be groups of chasidim, virtuous Jews, that would follow the instructions of a tzaddik who would serve as their leader, guiding them in serving Hashem. Realizing that such leadership could be an obstacle to his efforts to entice Klal Yisrael to sin, the Satan was determined to foil the influence that these tzaddikim might exert on their chasidim. The Satan asked permission to do what he does best: prevent the inspiration from positively affecting the chasidim. He would accomplish his goal by undermining the tzaddik's power through slander and dispute. He would see to it that each group would remain that way - an individual group, with no respect for the other chasidim or tzaddikim. Each group would revere its own rebbe and tzaddik, but the members would disparage others who did not follow their rebbe.

Regrettably, the Satan has succeeded in his nefarious objective. We might consider this when

we wonder why Moshiach has not yet arrived.

Horav Menachem Mendel m'Kotzk, zl, was a talmid, disciple, of the "Peshishcha." A teacher once came to the Rebbe and asked his advice regarding a shidduch, match, for his son, a gifted young man. The young lady's father was a wealthy man who had promised to support the young couple indefinitely. Moreover, he was willing to give him, the father, a hefty sum of money, so that he would no longer be compelled to teach for a living. There was, however, one problem: the girl's father was not a G-d-fearing Jew.

Rav Menachem Mendel remained silent as his rebbe instructed the man to go through with the match. "Things will work out," said the Peshishcha. When the man left, Rav Menachem Mendel ran after him and said, "I think you should not go through with the shidduch. It will not work out." The man was now perturbed. Should he listen to the rebbe or to his distinguished student? Unfortunately, when in doubt, one follows the concerns of his wallet. The desire for financial security loomed over him. It overwhelmed him like it has overwhelmed so many others. The teacher agreed to the shidduch.

The young man married the rich person's daughter. Each party received his monthly check, and it appeared as if they would all live happily ever after. A few years later, the Peshishcha passed on to his eternal resting-place. Suddenly, the situation began to change. The young man, having been "fattened" by his father-in-law's benevolent nature, stopped studying Torah and began delving into secular books. After a short period of time, he stopped his observant life-style. The father's business, which had been doing well, suddenly went into bankruptcy. The heart-broken father decided to travel to Kotzk to speak to the Rebbe.

Rav Menachem Mendel told him, "I told you so; you should not have allowed that shidduch to take place." The man retorted, "But the Peshishcha told me to; he agreed with me." The Kotzker responded, "Every tzaddik is given the ability to see the future that will occur during his lifetime. He does not see beyond his own mortality. The Peshishcha saw that the young man would thrive. He could not see, however, what would transpire after he passed on, which in this case meant the spiritual demise of this young man." We have only the shofet of our day.

He shall write for himself two copies of this Torah... It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear Hashem. (17:18,19)

When he ascends the throne of monarchy, the newly-chosen king is to write two Sifrei Torah. He is to learn from them constantly, so that he will grow in his fear of Hashem. This will prevent his important position from making him feel too powerful. This is enigmatic. We are not talking about the average citizen; we are referring to the Melech Yisrael, king of the Jewish people, who has been hand-picked by Hashem for this appointment. Certainly, he is learned and G-d-fearing. Why does the Torah reflect such concern about his future spiritual standing?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that this is one of the potential dangers of power. One is availed the opportunity to reign over others, to be in a prestigious position, to dwell in the limelight. Without warning, a personality change can occur. He is no longer the same fine, pleasant, committed person he was in the past. Something happens: perhaps it is all the kavod, honor, and glory; or it could be status - he thinks he is now better than others. We have only to observe the changes that have taken place in people we knew, when they had been just like everybody else, in order to note the transformation. There is only one cure for the disease of kavod - Torah. Through the studying of Torah,

one is returned to reality, to contemplate the true source of power. Horav Schwab explains the redundancy in the tefillah, prayer, which we recite on Shabbos Mevarchim, when we bless the coming month. We implore Hashem for chaim: a life of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, fear of sin, and a life of osher v'kavod, wealth and honor. Afterwards, we ask for ahavas Torah, love of Torah, and yiraas Shomayim - once again. Why do we repeat our supplication for yiraas Shomayim? The answer is simple: The first request for yiraas Shomayim is followed by a request for wealth and honor. Once we have received osher v'kavod, we have to pray for yiraas Shomayim once again, because it just is not the same anymore. May every Jew merit osher v'kavod - and that extra dose of yiraas Shomayim.

He shall write for himself two copies of this Torah in a book. (17:18)

The Melech Yisrael, Jewish king, is instructed to write two Sifrei Torah: one that he keeps in his home; and a second one that he takes with him wherever he goes. We can well understand the need for a Sefer Torah that accompanies the king as he goes out, whether it is to war or just around the corner. The Torah dictates his life. It shapes his perspective. Never may he divorce his mind from the Torah. Why, however, does he have to write a Torah just so that it will remain in his palace, together with his other valuables? Every Jew should have a Torah. Is there a reason that the Sefer Torah that is his companion is not sufficient for fulfilling this mitzvah?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, offers a profound response. He explains that one can become too complacent in relationship to a Torah that is with him all the time; that joins him in battle; that is with him when he adjudicates law; that accompanies him to shul, to learn; that is by his side for every endeavor he undertakes. It might become profaned because of his "familiarity" with it. Thus, he must every once in a while step back to "catch his breath," take a few private moments with the Sefer Torah that is kept in his treasury. Let him introspect and observe whether he is acting properly, whether his intentions are sublime, whether he is still in touch with spiritual reality. Yes, the Sefer Torah in his treasury will ensure that his relationship with the Sefer Torah that accompanies him at all times remains special.

Judges and officers shall you appoint in your cities. (16:18)

The Zohar Ha'Kadosh states that the concept of "judges and officers" applies to the individual as much as it does to the nation. In order to triumph over the yetzer hora, evil inclination, one must make use of all his G-d -given faculties. Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, explains that shofet, judge, and shoter, officer, are analogies for two powers/abilities which are inherent in man. The shofet adjudicates with logic. His decision is rendered after careful deliberation and cogent appreciation of the entire circumstances. The shoter executes the judge's decision. He does not involve his cognitive abilities in carrying out the law. His job is not to think, but to act.

A person should reign over himself in the same manner. On the one hand, he should utilize the element of shofet, thinking, understanding. He should realize the difference between good and bad, using his seichel, common sense, to decide to do the correct thing. In certain circumstances, however, one must do as he is told regardless of his lack of understanding. One acts in accordance with the Torah, even if his logic does not comprehend the reason for the law. "Shoftim v'shotrim," hand in hand, these two forces work to overcome the blandishments of the yetzer hora.

Horav Weinberger comments that this idea is implied by the Tefillin Shel Rosh and Tefillin Shel Yad, the two Tefillin which we wear on our head and our arm. The Tefillin Shel Rosh signifies serving Hashem with the mind, with a cogent understanding of the mitzvos. Tefillin shel yad, represents the concept of action, doing what must be done. One must accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven, even if it is not understandable to the mortal mind. These two forces must work cooperatively in man's battle with the yetzer hora. Hence, one may not speak between the brachos for the Tefillin Shel Rosh and the Tefillin Shel Yad.

The Torah tells us to be "tamim im Hashem Elokecha," "wholehearted with Hashem your G-d." (Devarim 18:13) By applying the concerted efforts of our logic and subordinating ourselves to Hashem when the mitzvah's reasoning is beyond us, we become "tamim." The Chozeh m'Lublin once asked his famous student Rav Naftali m'Ropshitz, why the Torah says that one should be tamim, wholehearted. Why should he not be a chacham, wise man, in serving Hashem? The Ropshitzer replied that one must be a chacham in order to know when he should be a tamim! One who does not know when to be a tamim is nothing more than a tam, simpleton.

Judges and officers shall you appoint ... you shall not plant for yourselves an idolatrous tree...and you shall not erect for yourselves a pillar; which Hashem your G-d hates. (16:18,21,22)

The Torah enjoins us not to plant an asheirah, which was a tree that was worshipped as an idol. Likewise, it is also forbidden to erect a pillar or single stone for the purpose of idol-worship. Although at one time this was a manner of worship to Hashem, it was adopted by the idol-worshippers. Hashem despises anything associated with idols. Consequently, it was forbidden for a Jew to worship by any means other than the Mizbayach, altar of many stones. The Torah's juxtaposition of these laws to the pasuk regarding judges leads Chazal in the Talmud Avodah Zarah 52A, to infer that one who appoints an unqualified judge is analagous to one who plants an idolatrous tree.

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, suggests a novel approach to this parallel. A dayan hagen, qualified judge, is one who is in total control of himself and the law. He belongs to no man. He is his own person. He sublimates himself only to Hashem. He stands as the paragon of virtue, a standard for others to emulate. Indeed, the litigants that stand before him are comfortable and secure that he will submit a true halachic rendering of the case before him.

One who bows down to the ground, who worships the soil under his feet, does not transform the ground into an idol. One who plants a tree with the intent to worship it is held liable from the time of planting. The tree becomes a cheftza d'issura, an object that is forbidden. What is the reason for this discrepancy in halachah? Earth is viewed as karka olam, ownerless dirt. Ownership of land is an experience on the part of the owner, but does not effect any change in the land. Hence, land can be viewed as being an entity in which there is no human involvement. When one plants an asheirah, he infuses a part of himself into this tree. The tree is beholden to the human; the earth is not. Man can only prohibit that in which he has some involvement. Earth exists and will continue to exist without man's interaction with it.

The Torah implies that a judge shall not be like an asheirah. He shall not come on to any man. He should be in total control, not totally controlled. A judge who is unqualified, who is inappropriate because of moral weakness -- or subservient to others -- is similar to the asheirah that is planted by man.

Conversely, he should not be like a matzeivah, a pillar, aloof, insulated from the community. A judge who is not sensitive to the needs of his community can not maintain an amicable relationship with the people. He who does not understand the psyche of the people cannot adjudicate properly. Thus, he will certainly not be able to present the final halachah with a formulation that will be readily accepted. It is necessary that both litigants leave the Bais Din, court, happy, accepting the law with respect and dignity.

The judge must also understand that people change; their personalities and attitudes differ with each ensuing generation. Indeed, each community has its own unique character. In presenting his verdict, the judge must realize whom he is addressing. This in no way suggests that the halachah changes. The judge, however, should use seichel, common sense, in issuing his judgement. We find that Chazal issued decrees based upon the changing needs of a generation/community. Hillel made his famous Prozbul, allowing for lenders to collect money during the Shemittah year. The laws of Shemittah were there to help the borrower. Chazal felt they could "extend" the law in such a manner to address the changing personality and needs of that generation.

Hashem did not despise the bamah, pillar, which at one time was the chosen object for worship and offering sacrifices, until after the pagans had adopted it as part of their service. Halachah is firm, but flexible. Its principles may never be undermined. The same concept applies to the judge who renders halachic decisions.

*Judges and officers shall you appoint ...and they may judge the people with righteous judgement.
(16:18)*

The Midrash Tanchuma translates "shoftim" as judges and "shotrim" as executive officers who guide the community in the spirit of the law. Together, they unite the Jewish nation around Hashem and His law. In this way, Hashem's imprimatur is established on the land, giving it the character of a Torah state. Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, feels that this was the underlying meaning of king Yehoshafat's admonishment to the judges when he warned, "Behold what you are doing; you do not sit in judgement of men, but of G-d, for He is with you at every pronouncement of the law." (Divrei Hayamim II 19:6)

The Midrash explains that "sitting in judgement of G-d," means that Hashem declares to Klal Yisrael, "If you uphold the law I stand highly exalted," As it says in Yeshayah 5:16, "Highly exalted is Hashem Tzvaos, G-d of Hosts, through the Law." The responsibility of Jewish judges and leaders is to exalt Hashem through the law. This is an overwhelming responsibility that defines the essence of leadership.

Horav Breuer advances his explanation of the role of the judges. He questions the choice of the word "tzvaos" in connection with this thought. He cites Horav S.R.Hirsch, zl, who explains the profound meaning of his word. A crowd of men does not in itself form an army. Responsible and thoughtful leaders assign each person to his rightful position. Thus, a multitude of men is transformed into a disciplined army in which each man vies to carry out the orders of his leader. When we apply this idea to Hashem, everything that He has called into existence -- regardless of its size or significance -- forms a great tzavah, army. Each component is delegated to its specific position, so that it may contribute its unique qualities towards enhancing the purpose of creation. Man, too, is a component who finds his place in Hashem's army. The Almighty assigns him the scope and direction of his life's work, defining his role amidst all of creation.

Hashem gave us the Torah which is designed to eradicate violence, brutality, greed and egotism from mankind and to introduce the tools to attain peaceful coexistence. The Torah governs our individual and communal lives. The shoftim are charged to administer the law, so that harmony may reign among man. Their fidelity to Him causes others to recognize Hashem as Hashem Tzvaos. If the judges fail to uphold the law, if they permit Jewish life to become a moral shambles, then Hashem ceases to rule as Hashem Tzvaos. His army is no longer a harmonious group; they are a group of disparate individuals. The challenge of the judges and shotrim, leaders/administrators, is to see to it that Hashem's law is established and maintained in all circles of Judaism; to inspire each Jew to devote all of himself to his Divinely assigned tasks, so Hashem Tzvaos will be exalted in His reign over us.

Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house...and who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? ...And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her?...Who is the man who is fearful and faithhearted, let him go and return to his house. (20:5,6, 7,8)

The Torah presents an unusual scene. The Kohen addresses the prospective soldiers as they prepare to go to battle. Those that are unsuitable for battle should leave the field, for fear that their own anxiety or lack of enthusiasm might erode the morale of their comrades. The Torah addresses four types of situations in which the individual ought to return home. First, the individual who recently built a house and has not yet had the opportunity to live in it. His fear is that someone else will move in to his home; second, is the individual who did not yet redeem his vineyard. Once again he is anxious that someone else may take his rightful place in the field; then is the one who has betrothed a young woman, but has not yet married her. He is afraid that someone else will ultimately marry his betrothed. Last is he who is "afraid" of battle. Chazal tell us this refers to the individual who feels his spiritual level is somewhat lacking, a situation that will undermine his courage in time of danger.

We see that the Jewish army was composed of a unique group of soldiers. Indeed, in an attempt to heap scorn and derision on the Torah, a group of maskilim defined the "Jewish army" in farcical terms. They showed how a large group of soldiers lined up to be drafted into the army. The Kohen came out and made his proclamation. One by one, the men dropped out. Hundreds of strong prospective soldiers left for varied reasons of anxiety or fear. Finally, a small group of men remained, eagerly awaiting their call to be selected. Then the Kohen made his last announcement, asking those who feared battle, whose sins hung heavy on their hearts to also leave the select group. They also left, leaving two people - the Shaagas Arye and the Vilna Gaon - standing there bracing themselves on their walking sticks, holding their Talmuds in their hand. "These two old men are what is left of the great Jewish Army!" scoffed the maskilim.

When this incident was related to Rav Chaim Brisker, zl, he said, "True, very true, but they failed to add that it was precisely these two men who waged war with the enemy and triumphed! They did not overwhelm their enemy through conventional tactics. Their weapons were a Sefer Tehillim and blat/folio of the Talmud. They knew what it takes to win. We Jews have a unique strategy for success. While the maskilim intended to deride the Torah, their critique turned into a Kiddush Hashem. Their scorn evolved into an opportunity for people to see that our strength lies in our prayers and good deeds. Interestingly, these men seemed more concerned with their material possessions than their own lives.

After all, should not the fear of death be the overriding source of anxiety? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, comments that ostensibly anyone who went out to battle was at peace with his Maker and

with himself. He was an individual who enthusiastically performed mitzvos and energetically served Hashem.

What would "bother" such a person to the point that he could not fight the enemy? What concern could he harbor that was so overwhelming that he had to go home? It was the "ish acher", other man, who would take his place, who would move into his house, redeem his vineyard, marry his betrothed. Contrary to popular opinion, Horav Schwab contends that it was not jealousy that motivated his anxiety. Rather, it was something radically different. The soldier's concern was that someone would take over his possessions and not act appropriately with them. The house would not be open to guests; kindness would not be its hallmark. The other man would marry his betrothed and have children that would not be reared in the Torah way. He would not perform mitzvos with his property. Yes, the "ish acher" was a very real fear.

A father who is taken ill and is suddenly confronted with his mortality. What does he fear? What is his overriding concern? Is it death, the unknown, or is it something more profound.? Is it the fear that his family will not continue along the path he had charted for them? Obviously, this is a real source of apprehension. Perhaps, if we prepare the foundation correctly, if we avail our children an excellent Torah education that will imbue them with Torah values and perspective, our most basic fears will not be realized.

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