

## That you say to me, “Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling.” (11:12)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* presents his *taanah*, “complaint,” to Hashem. **Horav Meir Shapiro, zl**, explains Moshe’s rationale. The developmental stages of a child require varied levels of adult support until the child matures sufficiently to the point that he is able to fend for himself. A young child of infant status requires a *meinekes*, nursemaid or babysitter, who feeds the child, since his young age does not yet allow for him to serve himself. An older child who has progressed beyond the need for adult feeding intervention requires an adult *omein*, sort of pedagogue, to train the child concerning what he must eat and what he requires in order to maintain self-sufficiency. Certainly, the two positions of the *meinekes* and *omein* cannot be interchanged. Imagine having the *omein* talk to the child, guiding him on what to eat and how to obtain it, while the *meinekes* attempts to carry and feed the child who is already educable. When the roles are reversed, we have chaos, such that neither the infant nor the older child is satisfied.

Moshe said to Hashem: *Klal Yisrael* contains a class of wealthy individuals whose function should be to look out for the welfare of the poor. These people are here to address the physical needs of the nation. There is also a class of Torah scholars whose function should be to address the spiritual needs of the nation. I, Moshe, am the nation’s *omein*, pedagogue, charged with teaching Torah to the people. Instead, I have been relegated to *meinekes* status, whereby I am charged with providing meat and seeing to it that the physical needs of the nation are addressed. My leadership role has been altered. Instead of seeing to the spiritual needs of the nation, I am also grappling with the physical requirements.

Veritably, a Torah leader’s function does not end with the spiritual development of his flock. If his people are hungry, he must feed them. A true Torah leader is all-purpose, focusing on the spiritual, but never losing sight of the physical pulse of the nation.

**Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, remembers seeking refuge in Vilna during World War II. He was not alone. He shared accommodations with displaced *yeshivah* students from Poland, which was now a war zone. At this point, Vilna was part of Lithuania, thus remaining a war-free zone. One day, *Horav Chizkiyah Mishkovsky* told him, “I am taking you to meet **Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl** (*Rav* of Vilna and undisputed leader of European Jewry). *Rav* Chaim Ozer was a *gadol* at a time in which Europe was filled with *gedolim*. He was the greatest of the great, an individual whose brilliance and encyclopedic knowledge were surpassed only by his extraordinary love for every Jew and care and concern for his every need. To be invited to speak with this giant among giants was an unparalleled honor, but simultaneously frightening. A *yeshivah* student could well expect to be tested on his Torah proficiency. One had to be sufficiently erudite and clear in his understanding and analysis of the subject matter.

*Rav* Galinsky passed most of the night reviewing the *Gemorah*. Added to his anxiety was the fact

that he would be standing face to face and speaking with the *gadol hador*. On the other hand was the incredible excitement over experiencing this unprecedented opportunity. He entered the room and gazed upon *Rav Chaim Ozer*. No sooner had he stretched out his hand to say *Shalom Aleichem*, that the *Rav* asked him his first question: "When did you last receive a letter from your parents?" Imagine, his first question was not concerning the *Gemorah*; rather, it was about his welfare!

*Rav Galinsky* replied, "It has been months since I last heard from home. My parents are in the war zone."

Second question: "Do you have a place to sleep?" *Rav Chaim Ozer* did not question him concerning a bed to sleep on, since no one had beds. It could be a bench, a chair, or the floor. Without a roof over one's head, however, he would be prey to the elements and freeze.

*Rav Galinsky* answered that he did have sleeping arrangements. The third question astounded him, as it underscored the true greatness of *Rav Chaim Ozer*. "Can you please show me your shoes?" the *Rav* asked.

Terribly ashamed, because his shoes were torn and filled with holes, he reluctantly removed them from his feet and showed them to him. Seeing his shoes, *Rav Chaim Ozer* took out some money from his wallet, handed it to him, and said, "Here, go and buy yourself a pair of shoes."

*Rav Chaim Ozer's* concern was not merely for the *yeshivah* student's learning. If a young man had no food in his stomach, nowhere to sleep and threadbare shoes, he could not learn properly. After the young man's physical needs were addressed, he could learn.

**Horav Chaim Brisker, zl**, was the *Rosh Yeshivah* par excellence, whose *derech halimud* was equally legendary. One day, the *askanim*, public figures who were the communities' movers and shakers, came to *Rav Chaim's* home and asked the *Rebbetzin* why it was cold in the house. Apparently, they had dropped off a load of wood the other day. It should have lasted for a few weeks. She replied that as soon as it had been delivered, the *Rav* informed the poor that they were welcome to take what they needed in order to heat their homes. In a short time, all was gone.

The men were frustrated. They could not keep up with the *Rav's chesed*. Finally, they returned with more wood. This time, they locked the storage shed and gave the *Rebbetzin* the key: "This is our wood, to be used by the *Rav* and his family. You have no permission to give it away!"

The next day, the *askanim* visited the *Rav's* home to discover to their consternation that the house was still bitter cold. "We told you not to give away the wood," they said. "We did not give it away. In fact, we did not even go to the woodshed," the *Rebbetzin* replied. "Why, then, is the house so cold?" they asked. She responded, "The *Rav* said, 'If there is insufficient wood for the poor, then I, too, will not have wood. I will not be warm when my community is cold!'"

This is the mark of a Torah leader. He suffers along with his flock. If the poor are cold – so is he. If they are hungry – so is he. Indeed, a leader who never had to worry about his next paycheck will have great difficulty understanding the economic challenges faced by the members of his community. A leader must be both an *omein* and a *meinekes*, caring for the spiritual – as well as the physical – needs of those who look to him for leadership.