

“Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I shall hear it.” (1:17)

Many people want to lead, but most are incapable – nonetheless that does not seem to stop them. A *rav* should not be remote, inflexible and uncaring. He should have a profound influence on the daily lives of his flock. Yet, this does not stop many from seeking positions of leadership. A *rav* should certainly be a scholar, but not every scholar should be a *rav*. A *rav* should be people-oriented, a communicator, friendly, compassionate and sensitive to the needs of all his members. Yet, lacking these criteria does not stop certain people from assuming positions of leadership.

Horav Eliezer M. Shach, z.l., adds another perspective to the short list of criteria for successful rabbinic leadership: The *rav* has to be able to say, “I do not know.” *Rav* Shach relates that when *Horav Shmuel Salant, z.l.*, *rav* of *Yerushalayim*, passed away, they were in a quandary as to whom to ask to fill this august position. The *rabbinic* leadership of *Yerushalayim* sent a request to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, z.l.*, *Brisker Rav*, to elicit his guidance in regard to a certain Torah scholar. Because he was a G-d-fearing individual who possessed a brilliant mind and an encyclopedic knowledge of the Torah, they felt they had found the right person to fill the vacancy left by *Rav Shmuel Salant*.

Rav Chaim responded with the following, “While it is certainly true that the *rav* in question is a great *gaon*, *Talmudic* scholar, I, however, wonder if someone were to refute his lecture, would he have the fortitude to concede error. Since I am unsure in regard to his ability to say, ‘I erred’, I cannot recommend him for the position.”

Indeed, when *Rav* Shach lauded the attributes of a certain *rav* in Bnei Brak, he would say that his greatest virtue was the fact that regarding an area in which he lacked proficiency, he would say, “I do not know.” Regrettably, even this criterion does not stop many people from assuming a position of leadership.