

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

Whichever title 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*, modest, deferring to those greater than he; *ayin tova*, benevolent eye; *nefesh shfalah*, humble spirited; *ruach nemuchah*, lowly/humble spirit – patient; *lev tov*, good heart; *yetzer tov*, good natured, always seeks to do good; and *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 underplay himself. The *shafui* is one who simultaneously seeks to glorify others. He “bends,” deferring to those who are greater than he.

The *ayin tova* is one who enjoys sharing with and giving to others, while the *nefesh shfalah*, humble spirited, indicates that he feels undeserving of what he possesses, understanding that it is all a gift. The *ruach nemuchah*, lowly/humble spirit, coupled with the *lev tov*, good heart, 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 hara*; one who possesses a good inclination always seeks to do good. Together with the trait of the *chelek tov*, we have 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 have 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 ha'daas*, 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 for promulgating Jewish Law throughout the nation, was comprised primarily of *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. He suggests that 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 *middas 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.