

Gather the entire assembly to the entrance of the Ohel Moed. (8:3)

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that the ability of the entire *eidah*, Jewish congregation, to assemble in front of the *Ohel Moed* was miraculous. *Hichzik ha'muat es ha'merubah*, this was a case of the few supporting the many. Indeed, the *Midrash* quotes a dialogue between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Hashem concerning this anomaly. Moshe asked, "*Ribono shel olam*, how can I place 600,000 men and 600,000 youths in front of the *Ohel Moed*?" Hashem replied, "Concerning this you are wondering? The Heavens were (originally) the size of the pupil of an eye; yet I 'stretched' it out to cover the entire world." In *Maayanei Chaim*, *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, quotes **Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl**, in distinguishing between the *ben Torah* and the *baal habayis*, the perspective of the *yeshivah* student versus that of the religious layman. The *baal habayis* is concerned for tomorrow: what will be; how we will handle the upcoming challenges. The *ben Torah*, however, is concerned with the past: how he was able to survive the vicissitudes, the challenges, the poverty, the difficulty. For him, this is a source of amazement which encourages an even deeper, more powerful sense of faith and trust in Hashem.

Rav Zaitchik observes that, if we look back in time, we truly may wonder how we achieved all of this! How did we manage to learn in two small classrooms, unheated, with broken chairs and tables, and lighting that was, at best, inferior? We did learn Torah, however, and we produced *gedolim*, Torah giants! We wonder whether it is really true that we were able to function without the electronic conveniences which have become a staple of contemporary society. The *yeshivos* of Europe functioned with minimal food, and inadequate sleeping arrangements; yet, the learning continued unabated on a level that we have yet to emulate! Indeed, we wonder if the tables were to be turned around, and we would be subject to learn Torah under such primitive and degrading conditions: would we be as devoted? The bottom line is that we must acknowledge that our very existence, our success, our every achievement, is the result of Hashem's miracle. This is what distinguishes the *ben Torah*. The *ben Torah* realizes that it is not "he" that accomplishes. It is Hashem; he is merely the fortunate spectator.

Horav Avraham, zl, brother of the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, was a distinguished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, in his own right. He was the author of the *Maalos HaTorah*, a profound treatise on Torah study. He would often travel to Vilna to be near his revered brother, to study and be inspired. Travel was difficult and involved much hardship. This did not deter him, since it meant so much to him to be with his brother.

Rav Avraham was once asked why he did not simply move to Vilna. It was not as if he was obliged to live in his village. *Rav Avraham* replied that, veritably, it would be the correct and proper thing to do, but he could not do it to his righteous wife, for whom living in their village meant so much. Obviously, this was not the expected answer. When *Rav Avraham* saw the look of incredulity on the man's face he felt that he must explain.

“One year, prior to *Succos*, it seemed that there would not be any *esrogim mehudarim*, beautiful *esrogim*, available. My *rebbeztin* knew a certain *esrogim* dealer who, in all likelihood, might be able to help us. She was right. Without asking about the price, she immediately agreed to purchase the *esrog* for me. She knew how much the right and proper *esrog* meant to me. When the seller informed her that the *esrog* would set her back fifty ruble, she did a double take. Fifty ruble at that time was an enormous sum of money – something which we did not have. Yet, a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*, and it meant so much to her. She proceeded to mortgage our house and, in return, she purchased the *esrog*.

“*Succos* went by, and the joy in our house was palpable. The *z'chus*, merit, of giving up so much for a *mitzvah* truly added to the joy of the *mitzvah*. Sadly, after *Succos*, we did not have enough money to pay the loan. We lost our house – in return for the *mitzvah* of *esrog*. We moved to a small, modest home, in which we have been living since then.

“Twice daily, as my *Rebbeztin* walks to *shul* to *daven*, she stops by our old house and stares with deep satisfaction as she utters words of praise and gratitude to the Almighty for having availed her the opportunity to give up her house for a *mitzvah*!

“Do you now understand why we cannot leave my village? How could I deprive my *Rebbeztin* of paying gratitude to Hashem twice a day? It means so much to her – and it should!”

This is what it means to remember the past with gratitude.