

I shall take you to Me for a people, and I will be a G-d to you. (6:7)

The election of *Klal Yisrael* as the nation upon whom Hashem confers His Name is a concept about which every *ben Torah*, every observant Jew and Jewess, is acutely aware. Sadly, the term “observant” in this case is more than a mere adjective. It defines those who believe in *Klal Yisrael* as the *am ha’nivchar*, “chosen people.” We choose to be chosen, and only we are willing to aspire to be worthy of the mission of “choseness.” Of the millions who carry the name Jewish to define race, only those who are knowledgeable and committed to this mission understand its meaning and responsibilities and take pride in carrying its banner. Those who have had their Jewish heritage surreptitiously purloined from them can only blame their misguided forebears and prevaricating leadership.

Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita, quotes *Rav Meir Grozman*, a *rav* in Tel Aviv, who was present when a tour group of Israeli air force pilots visited with **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, during their tour of Bnei Brak. They entered his apartment and were immediately overwhelmed by a large salon which was lined from (the) floor to ceiling with bookcases, each filled to capacity with *sefarim*, volumes of Torah commentary. In the middle of the room was a table covered with a tablecloth, upon which were piled a number of *sefarim* all opened up to a specific page. At the table sat an elderly man, bent over the books, apparently engrossed in study.

The members of the group entered the room and took seats surrounding the *Rosh Yeshivah*. *Rav Shach* looked up and asked, *Mi ba’rosh*, “Who is the leader of this group?” One of the men came forward and said, “I am.”

“Since you are the leader, I would like to extend my hand to you and welcome you on behalf of your group to my home. Please sit down.”

One of the aides of the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked *Rav Shach* to sit down, but he dismissed him with a wave of his hand, saying, “In honor of these distinguished visitors, I will stand while they remain seated. They came to visit me, which indicates they seek to do me honor. I also feel that I should pay my greatest respect to them.”

Rav Shach then turned to the men and said, “You are very distinguished men. Your mission of protecting the Jewish People in *Eretz Yisrael* demands the utmost gratitude on our part. I understand very well your contribution to the safety and security of every man, woman and child living in the Holy Land. You should all be blessed by the Almighty for your devotion to His People.

“When you are up there, flying high above the terrain which includes all of Hashem’s creations, land, sea, mountains, inhabited areas, forests, and deserts, you have the opportunity to view the world through a unique perspective. As such, you are availed a global perspective of the Almighty.

Seeing it all before you allows you to see what the average person cannot. Furthermore, when you are “up there,” you may feel “closer” to the Creator. Do you take a moment to cogitate on what you see? Do you ever ask yourselves: Who created all of this? You are so fortunate to have this privilege. I am truly envious of your opportunity to achieve even greater *emunah*, faith, in the Almighty.

“If, Heaven forbid, your faith is not increased exponentially, it must be because the spiritual education which was availed to you was dismally deficient. Let me elaborate on how deficient the educational system is.” Rav Shach went on to point to a large, heavy tome on his desk, “This large *sefer* is a volume of the *Talmud Zevachim*.” He pointed to the various commentators, *Rashi*, *Tosfos*, *Rosh*, *Rif*, *Maharasha*, and then went on to mention a host of other names. He then pointed to his bookcases filled with *sefarim*, explaining the general nature of the areas upon which these authors focus. After giving them an outline of the vastness of Torah, he asked, “Do you now agree with me that your Jewish education has been stunted?”

“I have neither asked you to repent, nor have I asked you to put on *Tefillin* or observe *Shabbos*. I just want to know one thing: What right do you have to deprive your children of their heritage? Let them learn, understand, and, then, if they choose to reject the Torah, they at least will have been allowed to make an educated choice! Have they had the opportunity to see what a *Shabbos* looks like? – A *Yom Kippur*? Moreover, let them compare the freedom of an observant Jew with the freedom of one who does what he wants with his life. I would like to know which life has greater satisfaction, inspiration, future.

“We, in the *yeshivah*, as well as all of the Torah-observant Jews throughout the world, have chosen to follow in the path of our Patriarchs, the way of life that, throughout the millennia, has been transmitted from father to son. We have been hounded and persecuted, yet, we have remained staunchly committed to our heritage and have preserved this legacy, so that it may be transmitted to future generations.

“Hashem should protect you as you guard over His Land. May you be successful in all of your endeavors on behalf of our People. May we together greet *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.”

Rav Shach refused to sit down until the very last pilot had left the room.

The pilots left and congregated outside the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s apartment: “This cannot be the very same Rav Shach who last week railed against members of the *kibbutz* who do not observe the laws of *kashrus*. Imagine! He even questioned their Jewish pedigree.”

After all was said and done, they all agreed that meeting the *Rosh Yeshivah* and listening to him speak was a seminal experience – one that would remain with them for the rest of their lives. In summing up the experience, the commander remarked, “We need someone of his elevated stature at the helm of the Jewish People. It is because of his inspiration and demands that we are what we

are. Imagine how low we might descend without someone like him to look up to.”