

"What man (is there) who is fearful and fainthearted let him go and return to his house." (20:8)

After the *Torah* lists those who were free to return home from battle, it mentions the one who is faint-hearted. One who lacks the courage to represent his people in battle should return home lest he instill this fear into others. In *Sotah 44a* the *Talmud* adds that this fear is more than an apprehension concerning battle and brush with death. This fear applies to one who is *ushca ,urhcg*, "fearful of the sins in his hand" One who is afraid of the transgressions he has committed will affect the success of his brethren. He must depart from the field of battle.

Horav M. Swift, z.l., explains that these are no ordinary sins. After all, no man is perfect. We refer here to one who is fearful of the sins committed "by his own hands." There are times when circumstances drive man to lose control and sin. The way one has been raised, his family background and social environment, leave an indelible imprint upon his personality. Such a sinner is not to be condemned. He must be shown the correct path, through study, encouragement, and sympathy. The unforgivable sin that is contagious is the one of *ushc*, one who has the ability to help others but has not. One who has the power in "his hands" to help, but does not, commits an unpardonable sin. One who has the means, *ushc*, but refuses to lend assistance, truly has reason to be afraid.

We may suggest another interpretation of the term *ushc*. We often find excuses to rationalize our wrongdoings. For every *aveirah*, sin, we find a *teretz*, excuse. A time comes, however, when all of our excuses simply no longer work. We can no longer blame our parents, teachers, and rabbis for our failure to adhere to Hashem's *Torah and mitzvos*. These are *ushca ,urhcg*, sins that were in our hands. We have been afforded the opportunity to do the right thing. No one has distracted us from following Hashem's mandate. No one has compelled us to transgress. It has all been within "our hands" to do well, but we have failed. This is unforgiveable! When one sees that he has no one to blame but himself, he is gripped by an overpowering fear. This apprehension can be overcome through *teshuvah*, repentance, and reaffirming one's obligation to Hashem and His people.