

Each man by his banner, according to the insignias of their fathers' household. (2:2)

Each tribe received a designated spot around the *Mishkan*. At first, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was concerned that a dispute might arise between the tribes. Quite possibly, each individual tribe had its own idea concerning its placement. Hashem told Moshe that he need not worry. The tribes knew their place, understanding that the configuration determined by their Patriarch, Yaakov *Avinu*, would apply now as well. The tribes accepted their grandfather's decision; what he had decided hundreds of years earlier was still applicable today.

How are we to understand this? The tribe that might question Moshe's decision could just as well question Yaakov's designation. What guarantee was there that, since Yaakov had earlier arranged the tribes in a specific manner, it would be acceptable today as well? Could they not argue that times had changed; this was not a funeral; it was not merely twelve brothers, but twelve tribes comprised of thousands of people. Perhaps the configuration should now be altered. How did Hashem assuage Moshe's concern?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains this by applying his deep understanding of human nature. The average intelligent person has a fair and impartial sense of judgment. This sense of objectivity is applicable as long as he has no *negios*, vested interests, to cloud his impartiality. If the individuals who stand before him are strangers, and if the question presented to him has no bearing on him personally, his ability to remain aloof and render clear, concise judgment should not be impugned. Once the question pertains to friends, however, the playing field changes drastically. This is also true if he has a personal stake in the issue.

Nonetheless, if an earlier episode had produced an accepted cogent response, it can now be studied objectively and acknowledged as being correct, despite the fact that now, in an unrelated case, the emotional factors are rising high and threatening to derail the truth process. The incident concerning Yaakov had taken place many years earlier. It was accepted as correct – despite the present involvement of *Klal Yisrael* in an unrelated, but similar, question. Thus, even though under other circumstances the tribes might have taken umbrage with Moshe's decision concerning their placement, they could not argue with Yaakov's decision, since that decision had been accepted and agreed upon from an objective viewpoint. It was, therefore, a "done deal."

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the power of a previously resolved intellectual decision. Such a decision has the ability to withstand the compelling and often convincing pressures of persuasiveness which are the result of emotional bias. Thus, we are able to navigate the course of truth through the ambiguities of life's challenges.

This leads us to the powerful question which has destroyed more than one weak believer: How can we tell if we are right? How do we ascertain if certain reasoning has its source in our *yetzer tov*,

good-inclination, or *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination? As we confront temptation and find ourselves confused and disoriented, to “whom” do we listen?

Indeed, the best way to avoid this issue is to determine the correct behavior before the situation arises. Regrettably, we do not always have the luxury of “looking back” or “planning ahead.” The *Rosh Yeshivah* suggests that when we have the opportunity to review our past, or think about and plan the future prior to a given situation, at that point, when we are not under the pressure of bias, we should realize what we should be doing, what is the *emes*, truth; thus, we avoid becoming a victim to uncertainty when temptation strikes.

As an example of this process, the *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that, when we study the laws of *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, if we arrive at the realization that our friend's faults do not justify speaking *lashon hora* about him, we should accept this as axiomatic and as the unwavering truth to which we will firmly adhere. As a result, when the topic of our friend's “family” comes up in a conversation, we will subdue our feelings, ignore the rationalizations, regretting them as lame excuses to slander another Jew. By an advance charting of our life's course, which clearly requires self-discipline, we determine right from wrong objectively – before the challenge arises. We are then able to ensure that the ideals and values of Torah thinking will guide us as we “stay the course” through the often stormy and confusing seas of life.