

You shall come to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and to the Judge who will be in those days. (17:9)

Rashi explains that we are required to listen specifically to the *shofet*/spiritual leader of our day. *Horav Simcha Bunim m'Peshischa, zl*, cited the *Baal Shem Tov, zl*, who, prior to his death, remarked that Hashem has selected ten different types of spiritual leadership: *Neviim*, prophets; *Shoftim/Zekeinim*, judges/Elders; *Melachim*, kings; *Kohanim*; *Tannaim*; *Amoraim*; *Nesiim*; *Gaonim*; *Rabbanim*; and the last have been the *tzaddikim*, righteous Jews of every generation. The *Baal Shem* asserted that he initiated the last *hanhagah*, form of leadership, that would precede the advent of *Moshiach*.

The *Satan* once asked the Heavenly Tribunal, "How do these *tzaddikim* distinguish themselves over other Jews, who are all enjoined to become *tzaddikim*?" The Heavenly tribunal responded that there would always be groups of *chasidim*, virtuous Jews, that would follow the instructions of a *tzaddik* who would serve as their leader, guiding them in serving Hashem. Realizing that such leadership could be an obstacle to his efforts to entice *Klal Yisrael* to sin, the *Satan* was determined to foil the influence that these *tzaddikim* might exert on their *chasidim*. The *Satan* asked permission to do what he does best: prevent the inspiration from positively affecting the *chasidim*. He would accomplish his goal by undermining the *tzaddik's* power through slander and dispute. He would see to it that each group would remain that way - an individual group, with no respect for the other *chasidim* or *tzaddikim*. Each group would revere its own *rebbe* and *tzaddik*, but the members would disparage others who did not follow their *rebbe*. Regrettably, the *Satan* has succeeded in his nefarious objective. We might consider this when we wonder why *Moshiach* has not yet arrived.

Horav Menachem Mendel m'Kotzk, zl, was a *talmid*, disciple, of the "*Peshishcha*." A teacher once came to the *Rebbe* and asked his advice regarding a *shidduch*, match, for his son, a gifted young man. The young lady's father was a wealthy man who had promised to support the young couple indefinitely. Moreover, he was willing to give him, the father, a hefty sum of money, so that he would no longer be compelled to teach for a living. There was, however, one problem: the girl's father was not a G-d-fearing Jew.

Rav Menachem Mendel remained silent as his *rebbe* instructed the man to go through with the match. "Things will work out," said the *Peshishcha*. When the man left, *Rav Menachem Mendel* ran after him and said, "I think you should not go through with the *shidduch*. It will not work out." The man was now perturbed. Should he listen to the *rebbe* or to his distinguished student? Unfortunately, when in doubt, one follows the concerns of his wallet. The desire for financial security loomed over him. It overwhelmed him like it has overwhelmed so many others. The teacher agreed to the *shidduch*.

The young man married the rich person's daughter. Each party received his monthly check, and it

appeared as if they would all live happily ever after. A few years later, the *Peshishcha* passed on to his eternal resting-place. Suddenly, the situation began to change. The young man, having been "fattened" by his father-in-law's benevolent nature, stopped studying *Torah* and began delving into secular books. After a short period of time, he stopped his observant life-style. The father's business, which had been doing well, suddenly went into bankruptcy. The heart-broken father decided to travel to Kotzk to speak to the *Rebbe*.

Rav Menachem Mendel told him, "I told you so; you should not have allowed that *shidduch* to take place." The man retorted, "But the *Peshishcha* told me to; he agreed with me." The *Kotzker* responded, "Every *tzaddik* is given the ability to see the future that will occur during his lifetime. He does not see beyond his own mortality. The *Peshishcha* saw that the young man would thrive. He could not see, however, what would transpire after he passed on, which in this case meant the spiritual demise of this young man." We have only the *shofet* of our day.