

The bas ha'yaanah, the tachmos... and the netz according to its kind. (11:16)

The economic situation in Europe between the two world wars was severe. The Jews, who during good times lived from hand to mouth, found this period to be especially disastrous. People worked from dawn until late at night to earn enough to barely support their family. These were the lucky ones who had jobs. The others suffered the pangs of hunger and deprivation. The **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, was visiting the Polish manufacturing city of Lodz. A large Jewish population made their home there. Understandably, when a person of such distinction visited, lines of people came to greet him, seek his counsel, elicit his blessing. A father and his young *bar-mitzvah* son came to the *Rav* from Radin. The boy was a *metzuyan*, excellent student, who possessed a wonderful personality and was G-d-fearing. He presented the entire "package." The issue was that the boy could not stand idly by while his father worked himself to an early grave. He wanted permission to leave the *yeshivah* and go to work – like so many others. His father was emphatic: His son was to remain in the *yeshivah*. The world out there was spiritually bankrupt. A young boy could fall prey to the enticements of the many "isms" that were flaunting their benefits to the unknown. The father was adamant; the son felt that, with his strong background, he would withstand whatever the *yetzer hora* threw at him.

The *Chafetz Chaim* was visibly moved by father and son, each passionately thinking of the other. Indeed, the son added, "With such a father, who is so devoted, how could I go wrong? My education at home has been meticulous, watched over by my dear father. I am strong. I can make it."

The holy *Chafetz Chaim* replied, "My son, let me share with you a *pasuk* from the Torah. The Torah lists the various species of fowl which are forbidden to be eaten. Among them is *ha'yaanah*, which, according to some, is the ostrich. The Torah mentions a number of birds which are deemed unkosher. Why is it that only concerning the *yaanah* that the Torah specifies that only the *bas*, daughter, of the adult *yaanah* is prohibited? The commentators explain that the *yaanah* has a strong constitution. Its stomach is strong as steel; its skin hard as the sole of a shoe. It eats stone and glass shards. Therefore, the Torah does not deem it necessary to prohibit it. It is basically inedible because of its physical composition. The infant, however, having not yet developed, still has soft skin and is edible.

"Yirmiyahu *HaNavi* laments, *Bas Ami l'achzar, kayaanim bamidbar*, 'The daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the desert' (*Eichah* 4:3). How does the ostrich manifest cruelty to its young?" asked the *Chafetz Chaim*. "The ostrich chicks come to their mother begging for food, and she gives them what she thinks are delicacies, stones and broken pieces of glass. True, for the mother whose food pipe is like steel, these might be considered delicacies, but the chick will die as a result of a compassionate mother. Its food pipe will be torn, its stomach destroyed. The mother will be guilty of killing its child, when all she wanted to do was feed her a delicacy.

“You probably understand, my son, what I am teaching you. Your father is an adult who has become accustomed to the secular environment that permeates and infects the streets. He is strong, having spent years battling successfully to transcend its deleterious influence. He can handle the ‘broken glass and stones.’ You are young and delicate. You cannot and will not survive such an onslaught on your spirituality.”

What was true then increases in intensity in contemporary times. Parents think their young, delicate children can handle the street. They even bring it into their homes via the various virtual and not so virtual media available today. Perhaps the parents have a stronger constitution; their children, certainly, do not. Why should we be guilty of the cruelty of the ostrich?