

## You shall come to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and to the judge who will be in those days... and they will tell you the word of judgment. (17:9)

We believe that the leaders of each and every generation are specifically suited for that generation. Therefore, we do not second guess our *gedolim*, Torah leadership. They are Hashem's choice. To impugn the integrity of their leadership is to question Hashem's decision. The leader of each individual generation is the last word in Torah ruling. We do not compare him to the leaders of earlier generations. He is our leader – not the leader of a previous generation.

*Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, relates an amazing story that occurred concerning the **Gaon, zl, m'Vilna**, which underscores this idea. We must remember that the *Gaon* was not only the greatest luminary of his generation, but he exceeded the scholarly and spiritual plateau of many leaders before him. Nonetheless, even the great *Gaon* deferred to the contemporary leadership of his time.

The story is told that one *Erev Shabbos*, the tailor whose house abutted the home of the *Gaon*, had a *shailah*, *halachic* question, concerning a chicken. In those days, every chicken was personally checked for any *traifos*, invalidations which would render it unkosher. Today, with quality control, very few issues arise, and, when they do, they are immediately addressed. The tailor was a G-d-fearing man, so he immediately dispatched his son to the *Gaon's* home with the question concerning the chicken. The *Gaon paskened*, ruled, that the chicken was *treif*, unkosher.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the tailor, his wife had sent someone to the *Rav* of Vilna, *Horav Shmuel ben R' Avigdor*, who ruled that the chicken was, in fact, kosher. They now had a problem: two *rabbanim* had ruled on the chicken – one kosher; one not kosher. This was a serious *halachic* dilemma.

The *Rav* represented the rabbinic leadership of the city of Vilna. Officially, he had the final word. The *Gaon* was the undisputed *gadol hador*, pre-eminent Torah leader of the generation. Would a "tug of war" ensue? When the *Rav* heard that the *Gaon* had ruled against him, he immediately proceeded to the *Gaon's* home. The *Rav* explained that, while there was no doubt that the *Gaon* was many times his superior in Torah knowledge, nonetheless, if his word were not to be respected and heeded, he would lose his standing in the community, and his *halachic* rulings would be rendered deficient. The only choice available was for both of them to go together to the tailor's house and both eat from the chicken. The *Gaon* agreed! The *Gaon*, who personally held the chicken to be unkosher, was prepared to eat from it! He understood that the viability of Torah ruling was at risk. To uphold the Torah, he would be compelled to eat a piece of chicken he held was *treif*.

By the way, when the two *rabbanim* arrived at the tailor's home, the oil lamp on the table had fallen, spilling some of the unkosher fat used as fuel on the chicken, thus rendering it

unquestionably *treif*. The *Gaon* did what he had to do; Hashem did what He wanted to do.