

"And Moshe chose able men from all of Yisrael." (18:25)

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch z.l., cites the *Sforno* who sees a profound implication from this *pasuk*. After searching for men who possessed all the qualities mentioned by Yisro, he chose "able men" who were well versed in law, diligent in determining the veracity of a situation, and capable of bringing it to a proper conclusion. This definition of "*anshei chayil*" distinguishes itself from that of the other commentators. *Sforno* focuses on the individual's ability to think and use his common sense, coupled with an unremittant desire to make use of these faculties to solve problems.

Yisro had suggested four qualifications to serve as the criteria for finding the most suitable judges -- able men, who fear G-d, men of truth, who hate bribes. Regrettably, Moshe did not find any men who embodied all of these qualifications. He consequently chose those individuals who possessed the most important feature of all, those who were *anshei chayil*, able men, men of ability and substance. These individuals were imbued with common sense, driven by a desire to resolve problems with veracity and expedience. A judge or any *Torah* leader must be well versed in *Torah* law, prudent and capable of making a decision. Scholarship must be combined with astuteness. Sagacity, prudence, depth and perception are the qualities that embellish the *Torah* scholar's erudition, for they access the application of the law.

Horav Bloch notes that a *Torah* scholar who possesses a developed mind, who is intellectually sophisticated, is more apt than one who is G-d fearing, but lacks depth and common sense. One who applies his intelligence to the appreciation of the ways of Hashem is far better than he who goes through the motions without any direction or understanding. *Chazal* teach us that an *am ha'aretz*, an unintelligent or unlearned Jew, can not be a *chasid*, pious Jew. Piety without intelligence, religion without scholarship, is dangerous. The competition for "excellence" in piety can cause one to foolishly misconstrue that which is of secondary importance to be primary. One must focus on the essential.

One should approach religious life with a profoundly intellectual analysis of every aspect. Performing *mitzvos* in a mechanical or ceremonious manner without understanding their substance -- using mimicry and mindless parodying -- should be disdained. Indeed, this attitude should apply to life in general. The cause and effect of every action or habit must be examined. Blind behavior and matters of habit should be avoided at all cost. Nothing should be done or accepted simply because of social/environmental pressure. The underlying basis of life should be intellect and perception, always seeking to perfect oneself in order to better serve Hashem.