

"Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding and well known to your tribes." (1:13)

Chazal have defined the concept of a *chacham*, wise man, as "one who learns from all men" (*Pirkei Avos* 4:1). Each human being is unique; we can learn something from everyone. Each Jew is capable of being a teacher, knowingly or unknowingly; each Jew has something of value to impart. *Chazal* infer that wisdom is not a specific body of knowledge that can be acquired or transmitted. Rather, it is an attitude, an approach to life. One is said to have a wise outlook if he is willing to learn from others and assimilate the positive lessons he has acquired into his lifestyle. Thus, wisdom is not a permanent quantitative body to amass and treasure. One who ceases to act wisely is no longer considered a *chacham*!

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, expands on this idea. The corporeal essence of man does not change as a result of *chachmah*, wisdom, just as wearing clothes does not transform a person. Knowledge and wisdom affect the individual externally. When a person demonstrates a positive attitude towards attaining and increasing wisdom by indicating a desire to learn from all people and all situations, he embodies the quality of *chachmah*.

The foundation of wisdom, claims *Horav Bergman*, is the ability to divest oneself of all preconceived notions and to transcend personal prejudice in the quest for knowledge. This requires humility, a quality which is not always expected in the "wise." In their imagery, *Chazal* have compared the *Torah* to water. When one is thirsty, he is not particular who gives him the water. One will surely not accept water only from someone who is on the same level as he is. Water is a source of sustenance, and one takes it from whomever will give it to him. This same attitude should apply to *Torah* and its wisdom. One must seek it out and be inclined to learn from everyone. However, this approach is not tantamount to advocating studying *Torah* from anyone or any source! Studying *Torah* from an individual who does not represent a true *Torah* perspective is not proper and will inevitably result in a misconception of *Torah* thought.