

And He said, “Gaze, now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you able to count them!” And He said to him, “So shall your offspring be!” (15:5)

The *Divrei Chaim* explains the analogy to stars. Seen from the distance of the earth, stars appear miniscule. However, when seen in close proximity from above, their actual size is remarkable. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael* might be viewed as being diminutive and inconsequential in comparison to the nations of the world. But, upon Heavenly examination, their image changes immensely. Their true size increases as they are viewed through a Heavenly perspective.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, offers a practical explanation for our being compared to stars. Hashem instructed Avraham Avinu to gaze upon the Heavens and count the stars – something which is impossible to do. After all, they are too numerous to count. Yet, despite the futility of this endeavor, Avraham made the attempt. Why? Because feasibility, or lack thereof, concerning any endeavor is not the determining factor in its successful completion. A Jew must endeavor, regardless of the fact that success is not within his reach. It is all dependent upon one’s *ratzon*, will, determination. To paraphrase the *Lubliner Rav*, “We do not measure inclination based upon ability; rather, we measure ability based upon inclination.” When a person really wants something with all his heart and soul, he can accomplish great things which, otherwise, have been totally unrealistic.

Ko yiheyeh zaracha, “So shall your offspring be.” As you push forward, despite the impracticality of the endeavor, so, too, will your descendants continue in their service of Hashem, even under the most difficult circumstances. They will never allow lack of ability to stand in their way.

Hashem does not demand more of us than we are able to handle. Man has to open that small hole, the size of a pinhead. Hashem will do the rest, granting him Heavenly assistance. There are two primary challenges to upward growth in Torah: emotional/philosophical and physical/acumen/attitude. There are those who have been challenged by problems of faith, situations that weigh down on them emotionally, philosophically and theologically. To put it simply: they have been turned off for some reason. In such an instance, there is very little *ratzon*, will, desire to succeed. If one can survive the challenge, climb the mountain, triumph over adversity, Hashem will carry him the rest of the way.

The other challenge is acuity. Not everyone has a *Gemora kop*, a head for understanding some of the difficult dialogues and logical analysis involved in learning the *Talmud*. There are those who, although blessed with a sharp mind, are either lazy, have poor study habits, or just want to have a good time. Once they make up their mind, they, too, will grow in Torah.

The following two vignettes reflect these situations and illuminate the attitude one must maintain: One *Seder* night in one of the concentration camps during World War II, a father and his young son – the only surviving members of their once sizeable family – were sitting together “celebrating”

Pesach. Even under the dreadful conditions that marked that period in time, they were able to obtain a *Haggadah*. They read it together and when they reached the *Mah Nishtanah*, at which time the young son was to ask his father the famous Four Questions, the boy stopped. He looked at his father and said, “*Tatty*, I have six questions to ask you, the usual four and two extra questions. They are: Do you think that I will sit with you next year at the *Seder* and ask the Four Questions? Also, can you promise me that next year you will sit next to me and reply to my Four Questions?” In other words, the boy sought assurances that he will be around to ask, and that his father would be there to reply.

His father stared at his young son for a few moments and replied, “My son, I have no idea what will be in five minutes. How can I assure you what will be in a year? I do not know if either of us will be alive, or if we will be able or willing to conduct the *Seder* next year. One thing, however, I can promise you with my whole heart and soul: Next year and every year until *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* arrives, thousands of Jews will gather around the *Seder* table on *Pesach* night, and young children will ask the Four Questions, and fathers will reply. Our nation has been assured by Hashem, *ki lo sishkach mi’pi zaro*, ‘The Torah will never be forgotten from His children.’ Regardless of the situation, the troubles notwithstanding, someone, somewhere, will continue learning Torah. We never give up – regardless of the circumstances.”

The second episode was related by *Horav Baruch Shimon Schneerson, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Tchebin*. The *Tchebiner Rosh Yeshivah* was a child prodigy. Thus, he was accepted in the premier European *yeshivah* of *Chachmei Lublin* under the guidance of the *Lubliner Rebbe, Horav Meir Shapiro, zl*. He was a student there for some time. As a young man, he was selected by the *Rosh Yeshivah* to be a *bochen*, tester, for those students who were just entering the *Yeshivah*. The *bechinah*, entrance exam, included a thorough test on the prospective student’s knowledge of *Shas*, his analytical skills, acumen, and a complete appreciation of his observance, *yiraas Shomayim*, Fear of Heaven, ethical and moral conduct. The *yeshivah* sought only the best, and this meant that each student excelled in every aspect of the defining character of a *ben Torah*.

One day a young man presented himself to the *Yeshivah* administration seeking to gain entrance into the *Yeshivah*. It was evident that he was a special student, his *yiraas Shomayim* and *middos*, character traits, were outstanding. After being tested by the different *Roshei Yeshivah*, it was evident that he was not the brightest student. His knowledge and understanding of the material were far from exceptional. His analytical skills were quite lacking. Regrettably, this extraordinary young man was not *Chachmei Lublin* material. The first group of testers signed off on him with a rejection slip.

When *Rav Baruch Shimon*’s turn to test the prospective student came around, he was visibly impressed with the young man’s demeanor, his fear of Heaven and his overwhelming desire to learn Torah. Alas, the other *Roshei Yeshivah* had already rejected him. *Rav Baruch Shimon* was very upset. What could he do? Clearly, *Chachmei Lublin* was founded for the purpose of providing a high standard of Torah education, specifically for such students as this young man. How could

they reject him? He was a unique student with incredible potential. Although it was true that he also had a long, difficult road ahead of him to achieve his goal.

Rav Baruch Shimon could not sleep. He decided to walk to the *bais ha'medrash* and perhaps spend some time learning in its welcoming environment. It was two o'clock in the morning, and no one was in the *bais ha'medrash* – or so he thought. He entered the sanctuary of Torah and heard a commotion. What was the source of the noise? He began to follow the sound until he worked his way to the back of the building. In the corner of *the bais ha'medrash*, he discovered the young man who had that day been rejected, weeping uncontrollably. He was repeating over to himself how much he had wanted to attend this *yeshivah*, bemoaning his lack of ability, entreating the Almighty to please help him. He wanted so much to learn Torah in Lublin.

Rav Baruch Shimon could no longer contain himself, and he, too, burst into tears. How could they say “no” to such a *ben Torah*? He decided that although the hour was late, he was going to the home of one of the *Roshei Yeshivah* whose decision carried great weight and demand that this *bachur* be accepted in Lublin. He woke up the *Rosh Yeshivah*, and, with great emotion, made his pitch, demanding that the *Rosh Yeshivah* accompany him to the *bais ha'medrash* to see for himself a *bachur's* yearning for the opportunity to grow in Torah scholarship.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* went to the *bais ha'medrash* and saw for himself the spectacle that had so captivated *Rav Baruch Shimon*. His heart melted at the sight of this young man pouring out his heart to Hashem. The very next day, the *Roshei Yeshiva* convened and elected to accept the student. He did not let them down. Indeed, within a short time, he was counted among the *Yeshivah's* outstanding students. Nothing stands in the way of *ratzon*.