

If an individual person from among the people of the land shall sin unintentionally. (4:27)

Sin is a deviation from the appropriate behavior expected of a Jew. When one sins, he is off the mark, missing the target of the area upon which he is supposed to focus.

This is one circumstance in which being a poor marksman is a serious liability. There is sin which is intentional, and there is the instance where one unintentionally deviates from the focus of the target. Somehow, he forgot, did not think, or was the product of an assimilated background – he did not mean to stray, but regrettably he did. He receives no punishment. He brings an offering to atone for his lax behavior, and life goes on. It was a mistake, and a mistake can be rectified – one can always return. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, relates the following story:

One of the eighteenth century's greatest Torah giants, the *Shaagas Aryeh*, *Horav Aryeh Leib Gunzburg, zl*, had a devoted *shamesh*, aide/secretary, who stood by his *rebbe's* side for many years. When the man reached the end of his life's journey, he implored the *Shaagas Aryeh* to take his young son under his wings. Apparently, the *shamesh* had a young child, born to him late in life, who was a veritable genius. The boy, Rafael, was a special child and under the right tutelage could have a bright future. The old *shamesh* knew that his *rebbe* would see to it that this would become a reality.

Rav Aryeh Leib was true to his word, basically adopting the boy and personally studying Torah with him. One night, when *Rav Aryeh Leib* went into the boy's room to bid him goodnight, he was shocked to see that the boy was not there. The *Rav* called for a search in which the entire Jewish community was involved. They found no clue to the boy's whereabouts. They had searched everywhere. It was as if he had disappeared into thin air.

That night the *Shaagas Aryeh* had a dream, informing him that Rafael had been kidnapped by a priest who wanted to raise this brilliant Jewish boy as a Catholic. Regrettably, such tragedies were not entirely uncommon in those days. In the dream, *Rav Aryeh Leib* was shown that the boy was in a nearby monastery, already taking lessons preparing him to convert to Christianity. The *Shaagas Aryeh* woke up with a start. He would have to save the boy.

There was a Jewish tailor in town who had been around for some time. He had a thriving business, catering to the wealthy gentiles of his community. As a result of his daily encounter with his gentile customers, he crossed the line of religion, to the point that the Christians considered him one of them. He had access to their monastery and priests, having established their trust and esteem. The *Shaagas Aryeh* was determined to save Rafael. He approached the tailor and asked him to be his agent to rescue Rafael from the monastery. The tailor agreed – on one condition: The *Shaagas Aryeh* must assure him that he would be buried alongside the Torah giant. *Rav Aryeh Leib* agreed.

Fearing that Rafael might not trust the tailor, *Rav Aryeh Leib* gave him a code which only Rafael would understand. "Tell him the words, *Ta'uss l'olam cho'zeres*, 'A mistake always returns.' (This is a reference to the *halachah* that one who errs in the recitation of the first three blessings of *Shemoneh Esrai* returns to the beginning. It has also become the catchphrase for anything that is executed under erroneous circumstances – that the subject, such as in the sale of a product, the *ta'uss*, is returned.)

The tailor succeeded in extracting Rafael from the monastery. In order to ensure that the priests would be unable to recapture him, Rafael was sent to another city where he studied with a special tutor who attended to his spiritual/intellectual development. Before long, Rafael became one of the young, distinguished *rabbanim* in the area. By then, the *Shaagas Aryeh* had passed on to his eternal rest. The tailor had also aged and was confronting his own imminent moment of truth. He lay on his death bed and called for the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society. He notified them of his "deal" with the *Shaagas Aryeh*. He demanded that they follow through on the *Shaagas Aryeh's* promise that the tailor could be buried next to him. Understandably, the *Chevra* were in a quandary. They were unaware of the tailor's courageous act of rescue years earlier. It had been kept hush hush, for fear of ramifications from the Catholic priests. While the *Chevra* "debated," Hashem did His own work. The funeral took place Friday afternoon. It was a rainy, gloomy day, with a heavy cloud of mist surrounding the cemetery. It was so difficult to see where they were going that, by "mistake," the *Chevra* "just happened" to bury the tailor next to the *Shaagas Aryeh*!

That Sunday, the error became known when the weather cleared up and the townspeople noticed the freshly-dug grave next to the *Shaagas Aryeh*. There was great tumult throughout the city. People began to take sides. The *Chevra Kaddisha* were prepared to disinter the body and bury him along the outside fringe of the cemetery. In the end, they decided to consult with one of the distinguished *rabbanim* in the area. The *Rav* was *Rav Rafael*! Yes, that same young boy who could attribute his return to Jewish life to the self-sacrifice of this tailor, now the subject of the *halachic* query: Should they remove the body and bury it elsewhere?

Rav Rafael decided that *Ta'uss l'olam chozeres*, "A mistake always can/should (be) returned." He felt that the tailor's close relationship with the monastery's priests was in itself a *ta'uss*, mistake. The tailor had thought that in order to earn a living he would have to be like them – talk like them, and live like them. This was his life's error. Had he acknowledged Hashem, he never would have gravitated to the *goyim*. Thus, he is no different than one who has transgressed *b'shogeg*, inadvertently. Therefore, he may continue to have his burial plot next to the *Shaagas Aryeh*. Little did *Rav Rafael* know the significance of his *halachic* treatise, *ta'uss l'olam chozeres*, and its meaning to his own religious life. It was the code that spelled the difference for him between spiritual life and death.