

According to the teaching that they will teach you and according to the judgment that they will say to you, shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)

The decision rendered by the courts must be obeyed, even if one is convinced that it is wrong. Even if the judge/Torah scholar seems to be conveying that right is left and left is right, you must listen, accept and execute the law as told. We must maintain unswerving obedience to the directive issued by our *gedolim*, Torah leaders of the generation. Not everyone warrants the title *gadol*, Torah giant. Some may qualify as scholars, but, unless one reflects the total demeanor of *mussar*, ethics, *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, in addition to being erudite, one does not qualify as a *gadol*. *Halachah* is a self-contained discipline which adheres to a different standard. Thus, knowledge in its own right – without the religious/spiritual accouterments which accompany it – is an insufficient barometer for determining *gadlus*.

Rashi adds to the *lo sassur*, “‘You shall not deviate’: Even if they tell you that right is left and that left is right.” At first blush, this is a difficult concept to absorb. If the judge/*rav/rosh yeshivah* is (in my mind) clearly in error; if he says that right is left and/or vice versa – he is wrong. Nonetheless, the Torah enjoins us to listen, accept and perform – even when we know he is wrong. How can the Torah expect an intelligent human to accept a statement, an edict, that he knows is categorically false?

Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, explains this in the most enlightening manner. Obviously, wrong is wrong – as right is correct. Yet, the Torah tells us to accept what is wrong – because, although it might be wrong in our mind, it is really right. We are wrong. The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that *Rashi* chose the opposites of right and left as opposed to day and night, black and white. Why specifically are right and left used? Following the lead of the *pasuk*, right and left are used for practical purposes. When one person stands opposite another, Reuven’s right hand is opposite Shimon’s left hand – and vice versa. So, in reality, whether it is right or left is a question of angle, or perspective, from which position is one looking at the hand. My right hand is your left, so when I say “right,” you say “left”; yet, we are both correct!

The Torah is conveying a profound truth. At times, we might be quite certain about something, but this is only from our own perspective. The *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, views the issue from a different vantage point, hence, representing a different perspective. The scholar’s vision has been honed by the wisdom of the Torah which he has acquired. Thus, he sees the larger picture with a clarity of vision which is inaccessible to someone who has less accumulated wisdom.

It is not always easy to accept that someone knows more than we do, but that is exactly the definition of *emunas chachamim*. Once we lose the ability to believe in our Torah leaders, I wonder

what is next. *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 42) relate the story of *Rav Masna* who came to the city of *Papunya* and taught the *halachah* that *matzah* must be made with *mayim shelanu*. The next day everyone came to his house to request water from him. He then explained to the people that *mayim shelanu* does not mean “our water,” but rather, water that rests outside its source, so that it has had a chance to cool off. Why did *Chazal* bother to relate this incident? Obviously, there are better and more edifying lessons to be taught than demonstrating how simple-minded people can be.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, quotes *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, who explains that *Chazal* are actually teaching us a lesson in *emunas chachamim*. Everyone, at one time or another, either has personally baked *matzah* or has observed its production, personally or on video. With this in mind, imagine some great *rav*, a noted Torah scholar, visits our community and informs us that what we have been doing for generations is all wrong. Furthermore, the *halachah* which he teaches is one that incurs for him considerable profit. For example, he tells us that we must use a certain flour obtainable only from him at a premium price. The probable reaction to his *halachah* would be: “My father and grandfather have all baked the old way. What was good for them is good for me! There is no way I am going to accept a new – more expensive – way to bake *matzah*, just to line the rabbi’s pockets.”

Clearly, the citizens of *Papunya* knew how to bake *matzah*. They had been doing so for years. They could easily have told *Rav Masna* to take his teachings elsewhere. They listened and lined up the next day for his water, because they misinterpreted what he had meant. They were willing to accept or trust that *Rav Masna* knew what he was saying – that he knew more than they – even if it flew in the face of their common-sensical reasoning. That is *emunas chachamim*!