

## Aharon did so. (8:3)

*L'hagid shevacho shel Aharon shelo shinah*, to teach the praise of Aharon that he did not deviate (anything from that which Hashem had commanded). In his eulogy for *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, the individual responsible for the transplanting of authentic Torah study (via the *Yeshivah* Movement which he championed) to America, the *Satmar Rav, zl*, declared that *Rav Aharon* embodied the concept of *shelo shinah*, adamantly refusing to initiate any change in the spiritual structure of the *yeshivah* from the way it had been, dating back generations. Whatever was good for our forebears would suffice for us. Thus, the approach to Torah study, manner and discourse and the varied customs that were prevalent in the European *yeshivos* were carried over to America. Once we allow change to occur, the alterations that may result from the slightest incursion are limitless.

The story is told that an individual who appeared to have the demeanor and erudition of a Torah scholar visited *Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov*, which was then under the leadership of *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, to present a *sefer, halachic* treatise, he had written. Apparently, he had spent months studying and collecting the various opinions concerning the enunciation of the word *geshem* in the recitation of *mashiv ha'ruach u'morid ha'geshem*, which is added during the winter to the *Shemoneh Esrai* prayer. The issue was: Should the vowel beneath the *gimmel* be a *segol, geshem*, or a *kamatz, gashem*. Despite the fact that all *siddurim* employ the *kamatz, goshem*, vowel, he contended that it should be read *geshem*. He supported his position with many concrete proofs. He sought the approbation of the *Rosh Yeshivah* for his work.

The students listened to him and were almost prepared to change the *yeshivah's nusach*, version of the *davening*, until someone spoke to *Rav Moshe Shmuel*. His response was immediate and emphatic: No change of the *yeshivah's* tradition. He explained, "To the best of my knowledge, I remember my father pronouncing the word as *goshem*. If my father read it as *geshem*, it was because this is what he had heard from the mouth of my grandfather, *Horav Rephael Shapiro, zl*, who had most certainly heard it from the *Netziv, zl*, who was *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Volozhin*. The *Netziv* never acted on his own. He followed in the footsteps of his father-in-law, *Horav Itzele Volozhiner, zl*, who must have heard it from his father, the venerable *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, who was the premier disciple of the *Gaon, zl, m' Vilna*. If the *Gaon* read it with a *kometz*, who are we to dispute him?"

In order to have some idea about how a *minhag*, Jewish custom, is initiated, so that we had better appreciate its significance, I cite a vignette, which occurred concerning *Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl*. The custom is to read from the Torah during *Minchah* of *Yom Kippur*. The portion that was designated by *Chazal* is the *parsha* of *arayos*, forbidden, immoral relationships. The custom is to read the Torah using the regular year-round cantillation – not the specific one reserved for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. *Horav Yaakov Kelmas, zl, Rav* of *Moscow*, visited *Rav Isser Zalman* and spoke to him about the custom to alter the *Yom Tov* tune of reading during *Minchah*, when we read the Torah in the regular *Shabbos/weekday* tune. He explained that when the Jewish People were commanded concerning marital relationships, they wept; *Vayishma Moshe es ha'am bocheh*

*l'mishpachosav*, "Moshe heard the people weeping by their families (ibid.11:10)." Our sages derive from the word *l'mishpachosav*, by their families, that they were upset that so many (incestuous) relationships had been prohibited to them.

"Therefore," said Rav Kelmas, "the *parsha* of *arayos* was accepted by the people amidst tears and pain. As a result, it is not appropriate to read it with the Yom Tov (joyful) *nusach!*"

When Rav Isser Zalman heard this explanation, he stood up with great awe and emotion at the realization of the source of a *minhag Yisrael*.

To alter a *minhag Yisrael* is to attempt to alter *halachah*. Every *minhag* has its source in profound collective analytical thinking. Much is factored into the establishment of a *minhag Yisrael*. We saw what happened when the secularists made their first incursion into abolishing *halachah* and, eventually, the Torah. It all began with the subtle change of a single *minhag Yisrael*.