

The Kohen who is exalted above his brethren. (21:10)

The *Kohen Gadol* is described as the individual who is the most exalted above his brethren. *Chazal* define this greatness as exalted in piety, wisdom, handsomeness, wealth (which, if he does not have, is supplied to him), and strength. Obviously, the two most critical requirements are piety and wisdom; the other criteria are mentioned so that the average person, who does not look beyond the external, is still impressed. While appearance certainly does play a role, as does physical strength, why should wealth be important? Indeed, material wealth seems to be the antithesis of *ruchniyos*, spirituality.

The *Rebbe of Rizhin, zl*, was a *tzaddik* without peer; yet, he surrounded himself with fabulous wealth, such that it was to the envy of everyone. All of his personal belongings, even his every-day cutlery, were fashioned from the most expensive materials. The buttons of his *bekeshe*, silk frock, were of solid gold, studded with diamonds, and his pillowcase was woven from pure gold thread. Prior to his *petirah*, passing from this world, the *Rebbe* said, “Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* attested about himself that he never benefitted from this world – not even the amount of a small finger. I testify about myself that I did not enjoy from this world – anything – not even the amount of a bit of thread. The reason for my grand and royal conduct was all *l’shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven.”

To understand this statement, we refer to an exposition of the *Rebbe* concerning a statement in the *Talmud Berachos 17b*. *Chazal* say, “Every day a Heavenly Voice declares, ‘The entire world is sustained because of (in the merit of) Chanina, My son; yet, Chanina, My son, suffices (to live) on a *kav* of *charubin*, carob, from *erev Shabbos* to *erev Shabbos* (week to week, this is all he requires to live).’” The *Rebbe* asks, “What is this *Chazal* teaching us?” He explains, “The Heavenly Voice bemoans the fact that, while the world is sustained on the standard which seems sufficient for Chanina, he is to live in deprivation, feeling the constant pangs of hunger. Why is this?” asks the *Rebbe*, “Because Chanina needs no more than a drop of carob to sustain himself. When the *tzaddik* is able to live on a little, everyone else is sustained on that standard. A *tzaddik* who demands more, both in food and in material accretions to support his material lifestyle, it will trickle down to his flock. They, too, will be sustained on such a level.”

The holy *tzaddik*, *Horav Uri, zl, m’Strelisk*, who was known as the *Saraf*, fiery one, established a *chassidic* court of students who represented the apex of spiritual devotion. They neither benefited, nor sought to benefit, from this world in any way. For them, it was all about *ruchniyos*, spirituality. It is related that once one of the senior *Admorim*, a holy, saintly *Rebbe*, visited the *Saraf*, and he asked him, “Why is it that your *chassidim* live such a life of physical/material deprivation? Why do you not bless them with *parnassah b’harchavah*, good, sustainable livelihood? Why should they live in such abject poverty?”

Immediately, the *Saraf* called over a group of *chassidim* and said to them, “Here sits next to me one of the true *tzaddikim*, righteous persons, of our generation. You may request from him anything

that you want. Whoever is in need may ask for the *Rebbe's* blessing." One *chasid* appeared and asked, "I would like to recite *Baruch She'Amar* (Morning Prayer) with the same feeling and devotion as the *Rebbe*." This was the type of *chasid* the *Saraf* produced; one that had no need for material wealth whatsoever. When the *Saraf* passed away, a number of his *chassidim* traveled to Rizhin to seek guidance from the *Rebbe*. It is important to underscore that these men were of a spiritual calibre without peer. Their exalted spiritual achievements were the consequence of a life of total devotion to spirituality.

The *chasidim* presented their *kvitalch*, written requests, to the *Rizhiner*, who scanned them and noticed that each one requested only spiritual ascendance. There was not a single request for material sustenance. The *Rizhiner* returned their petitions and said, "It is written in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 60:5) that he who recites the first *pasuk* of *Krias Shema* without proper devotion and intention does not fulfill the obligation to recite *Krias Shema*, since this is the primary opportunity for *Kabbolas Ole Malchus Shomayim*, accepting upon oneself the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. Additionally, in *Shulchan Aruch* (57:4), it is written that he who does not have proper *kavanah*, intention, when he recites the *pasuk Poseiach es Yadecha*, 'Open up Your hand, (in *Ashrei*)' also does not fulfill his obligation. He must repeat his request. This teaches us that it is not enough to ask only for spirituality. One must also see to it that his material needs are addressed!"