

"And now if I have indeed found favor in Your eyes, make Your way known to Me." (33:13)

Moshe implored Hashem to explain to him the meaning of finding favor in Hashem's eyes. Moshe sought to understand the manner in which Hashem rewards those who adhere to His precepts. According to the *Talmud Berachos 7a*, Moshe was referring to the age-old question of, "Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?" This question has fascinated many a human being and, truthfully, its answer is beyond human comprehension. Indeed, no answer would suffice for those who choose to question. The believer, however, accepts the challenge of dealing with this issue by addressing it through the vehicle of *emunah*, faith in the Almighty.

The **Chafetz Chaim** attempts to explain the issue of reward and punishment with a fascinating analogy. Once a king had a very dear friend, one who he entrusted with all of his state and personal secrets. So great was his feeling of love and trust that there was nothing he would not confide in his friend. One day, to the king's great consternation, a trusted advisor notified him that his "friend" was actually a traitor. He had allegedly shared the king's secrets with some of the most ruthless enemies of the state. At first, the king did not believe these allegations. He sought every avenue to disprove the terrible indictment against his friend. Alas, it was to no avail. The traitor was proven guilty, and the sentence had to be meted out. As broken-hearted as he was, the king still undertook to carry out a severe punishment for the treachery that had been committed against him in particular and the country in general.

He decided that a tall tower should be erected which could be seen from afar. He had his workers construct a small room on top of this tower with walls made entirely of glass. The entire edifice stood in the middle of the public square of the capital city, and the traitor was placed inside the room. He was not to be given any food or drink. He was to remain in that room until his death. The king felt that the traitor's public execution would serve as a lesson to everyone.

On the first day, the whole city emerged to see the prisoner being led into his death cell. They waited to see the prisoner's reaction. The prisoner, fully comprehending his fate, had a hearty last meal and was in reasonably good spirits on that first day. On the second day, however, when the hunger pains began to settle in, the prisoner's attitude appeared to be more humble. On the third day, the crowd -- which had already begun to dissipate -- noticed that the prisoner was starting to demonstrate signs of weakness. His face had fallen, his appearance looked very haggard and drawn, and he could hardly move. On days four and five, he just lay there moaning from pain and starvation. On the sixth day, to the surprise of all of the onlookers, the prisoner seemed to lose his mind. He tore his shirt off and sunk his teeth into his arm, taking a bite out of his flesh! The people turned their heads away in horror at this shocking sight.

At that moment a visitor, who had heard about the famous punishment, came to town.. When he came to the public square and beheld the sight of the "starved" prisoner eating, he turned to the

crowd and innocently asked, "What kind of punishment is the traitor receiving? It seems to me that this man is having a sumptuous meal!" The people responded, "Fool, do you see what he is eating? He is eating his own flesh!"

The lesson is clear. True, we see wicked people who should be getting their punishment but are, instead, living very well. They seem to be having a banquet when they should be starving. What we do not see is that they are eating themselves. We may add that, just as the prisoner would soon be feeling intense pain from his self-inflicted wound in addition to his hunger pain, so, too, will those who are enjoying their "own flesh" feel the pain of their wounds. The lifestyle they have chosen for themselves may seem sensational with its temporary excitement. They do not realize that they are eating themselves up alive and, when the fun is over, they will have to endure the pain of their self-inflicted wounds. Hopefully, many individuals will be astute enough to recognize the inevitable before it is too late.