

"To distinguish between the contaminated and the pure." (11:47)

In the last *pasuk* of the *parsha*, the *Torah* elaborates the underlying motif of Judaism and the mandate for every Jew to follow. We are charged to study and learn how to distinguish between that which is ritually defiled and that which is pure. In theory this is clearly our goal, but practical application is possible only through study. One may desire to be observant. If he is not proficient, however, in the code precise observance remains elusive.

Rashi interprets the concept of *havdalah*, the ability to discern between pure and defiled (kosher and non-kosher), as applying to more than just the distinction between a kosher cow and a non-kosher donkey. Such a distinction is obvious. This *mitzvah* teaches us that it is a requirement to be so proficient in the laws of *kashrus* that one is able to distinguish between those things that appear similar. This includes discerning between the fraction of an inch that makes a *shechitah* kosher or non-kosher.

A proper *shechitah* consists of cutting the majority of the necessary organ or organs. If one were to cut merely one-half, the *shechitah* would be deemed improper. This fraction of an inch makes the difference between an animal that is ritually slaughtered and one that is killed and consequently non-kosher.

Horav Sholmo Y. Zevin, zl, points out that this fraction of an inch, this hairbreadth, stands between sanctity and defilement, between purity and contamination. This concept applies to many areas of Jewish life. He cites the *Talmud Eruvin 13a* in which *R' Meir* related that when he came to *R' Yishmael*, the latter asked him about his occupation. When *R' Meir* responded that he was a scribe, *R' Yishmael* said, "Be meticulous in your work, for your occupation is a sacred one. Should you by chance omit or add an extra letter, you would thereby destroy all the universe." This refers to the *t* in the word *met*. If omitted, it would change *met* truth, to *met*, death. By adding a *u* to the word *met*, the verb would change from the singular form to the plural. When such terms are applied to Hashem's Name, the scribe in the latter case would be guilty of acknowledging polytheism (*urcshu*). In the former, an omission of the *t* would indicate a denial *u*"j of the Living G-d. Indeed, one letter, one drop of ink, can destroy the world.

We find a similar idea expressed in regard to the *klal*, community. In the *Talmud Kiddushin 40b*, we are taught that a man should regard himself as being half guilty and half meritorious. If he performs one *mitzvah*, his merit will weigh him down on the scale of merit; if he commits one sin, on the other hand, his transgression will weigh him down on the scale of guilt. This idea applies as well to the world community in which one sin can bring disaster to the world, while one merit can save the world.

Horav Zevin posits that this hairbreadth distinguishes the fraction of an inch regarding *shechitah*,

as well as man's situation which he is equally guilty and meritorious. It also finds expression in the concept of time. We find that one can acquire his portion in the Eternal World in a moments notice. In the *Talmud Kiddushin 49b*, *Chazal* state that if one betroths a girl on the condition that "I am righteous," the girl is viewed as betrothed even if he is absolutely wicked. The reason given for this *halachah* is that the man could have meditated repentance in his mind thereby becoming a complete *baal teshuvah*. Imagine transforming an entire lifetime in a matter of minutes of true repentance. Fortunate is he who is able to appreciate and utilize every minute allotted to him.