

"When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male." (12:2)

The *Midrash* begins its commentary on this parsha by presenting various perspectives on the human condition. *Chazal* interpret the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 139, *hbr, rm oseu rujt*, "*Back and front You have fashioned me*," as being a reference to human life. *Rish Lakish* says, "back" refers to the last day of creation, while "front" refers to the beginning of creation. If a person is worthy and leads a virtuous life, he is told, "You came before the entire work of creation. If, however, he is not worthy as a result of sin, they tell him, "Even a gnat preceded you; even an earthworm preceded you."

Chazal are teaching us that from the perspective of the spirit and the soul, man precedes everything. That is, of course, if the soul and the spirit govern his actions and values. Then, man can say, *okugv trcb hkhcac*, "*For Me, the world was created*." If the manner in which he acts, however, reflects a materialistic orientation, totally submitting himself to his base desires, to the corporeality of his essence, then we tell him, "The lowliest worm preceded you." The animal world is equipped for the mundane life it leads on earth. Animals are healthier and not predisposed to the worries with which humans are weighed down.

The main point expressed by *Chazal* is the significant role a strong foundation plays in one's life. If man's life is based upon *yesodos ha'Torah v'ha'emunah*, foundations of *Torah* and faith in Hashem, then despite whatever contradictions and minor errors he may commit, we can find a rationale to explain or justify his actions. If one's lifestyle is founded in observance and conviction, then, although he may stray, this represents only a temporary lapse that will right itself in time. One who does not have *Torah* as his "beginning" and "end" really has no foundation upon which to fall back.

Horav Chizkiyahu Cohen, zl, applies this idea to explain the words of *Chazal* in the *Talmud Shabbos 30b*. *Chazal* teach us that there was a movement to "hide" *Sefer Koheles* because of what seems to be contradictions in Shlomo *Ha'Melech's* work. They refrained from carrying out their intention, because "*Koheles begins and ends with the words of Torah*." *Chazal* were concerned that the unlearned and unethical would distort the meaning of parts of *Koheles*. *Chazal* felt, sacred as it was, it would be best to conceal the *sefer* before it was misinterpreted. Due to the fact that its opening and closing indicates the sublime nature of this *sefer*, *Chazal* decided that *Koheles* is a work replete with the fear of Hashem and the spirit of *Torah*.

We may question their reasoning. If the reason for hiding *Sefer Koheles* was the contradictions in the text, let us analyze the text. If the contradictions can be resolved, why is it necessary to justify the text by relying upon the fact that the beginning and end are *Torah*? On the other hand, if this reason suffices, why do we find it necessary to respond to the discrepancies in the text?

Horav Cohen infers a profound insight from *Chazal's* responses. If the beginning and end are not *Torah*, if the foundation of any work is not grounded in *Torah* perspective, then regardless of our ability to "find answers" to justify it, it remains invalid. We cannot and may not rely on any work that is not supported by *Torah*. If the beginning and end are based upon *emes*, truth, the justifications

are irrelevant. Eventually these justifications will also be refuted.

When the *yesod*, foundation, of any given work or endeavor is the spirit of *Torah* and the goal is the dissemination of *Torah*, then we can handle whatever "contradictions" may arise. Only then is there a purpose in seeking to understand the rationale behind a seeming ambiguity.

The same idea applies to man. If his *hashkafah*, orientation, is "*Torahdik*," if his mindset rests upon a pedestal of *Torah* and *emes*, then those questions which we might have regarding his behavior can be "answered." After all, people do err. At times, we must be patient and wait for an explanation. The actions of one whose *hashkafos* are not of a *Torah* perspective does not warrant an explanation, nor will one change the nature of his behavior. The dedication to *Torah* defines the essence of a person. Hence, indiscretions are viewed as lapses. One who does not maintain a *Torah* perspective is regrettably defined by his discrepancies.