

## But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)

The *Midrash* notes the difficulty individuals experience in accepting rebuke. Bilaam *ha'rasha*, the evil pagan-prophet, could not stand up to the criticism of his donkey. The *Shivtei Kah*, the sons of Yaakov Avinu, were overwhelmed with fear when Yosef merely uttered the two words: Ani Yosef, "I am Yosef." Imagine, says Abba Kohen Bardela, when we come before the Heavenly Tribunal and each and every one of us will be rebuked *lfi mah she'hu*, according to what he is, (or what he could have been). How will we stand up to this Heavenly remonstrance?

In the *Talmud Berachos* 4b, *Chazal* distinguish between the types of *kefitzos*, leaps/flights, individual *malachim*, angels, make in carrying out their missions. The Angel Michoel is charged with a mission of mercy; therefore, he goes directly to his destination in one *kefitzah*. The *Malach* Gavriel is appointed to carry out the mission of Strict Judgment; thus, he is required to pause once in between the two *kefitzos* required of him. Eliyahu *HaNavi* makes four *kefitzos*, while the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death, who is charged with the ultimate mission of taking lives, allowing for a person to perform *teshuvah*, repentance, requires eight leaps. During a plague, he is speeded up to one leap.

The *Chafetz Chaim* wonders why it is important for us to know how many leaps each *Malach* makes in carrying out his mission. He explains that Gavriel carries out his mission in two leaps, because he cannot do it one leap. Michoel, who is able to do it one leap, does so in one leap. Had Gavriel been able to perform his mission in one leap, he would have done so. This teaches us, explains the *Chafetz Chaim*, that each person must demand the maximum of himself. When it comes to *avodas Hashem*, serving the Almighty, we have no shortcuts, and we do not have the option to take the scenic route. One does everything that he is capable of doing in accordance with his ability and strength.

*Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, once asked why it happens (more often than one can imagine) that as a young boy, a child manifests wondrous ability and exceptional acumen, but, when he grows up, the brilliance and extraordinary ability seem to dissipate. He comes across as a fine, bright, intelligent young man, but definitely not one who bespeaks superlatives. He explained that when boys such as these were placed in school, they were not challenged. As long as they were better and smarter and more successful (on tests) than the other students, they were doing well. They had no motivation to excel, since their barometer was the weaker student. They were never placed in a class where their level of acumen was challenged. When a boy is not challenged, he will eventually be unable to stand up to a challenge. When good is measured against weak and bright is compared to inept, students tend to remain mediocre.

The *Alter, zl, m'Kelm* made great demands on himself all of his life. He never settled. Despite his frail health and weak heart, he suspected that indolence was the real factor in his not having sufficient drive in performing *mitzvos*. (This was obviously not the reason, since he devoted all of himself to the performance of a *mitzvah*. Unfortunately, his frailty precluded him from doing more than he did.) On the last day of his life, as he lay in bed with absolutely no physical strength left, he thought (for a moment) that he was just lying there out of laziness. He gathered every last ounce of strength left in his weakened body, rose from his bed, bent over and tied his shoes and attempted to walk. After a few moments, he realized that it was impossible for him to continue. He turned back, bent over to remove his shoes, and, while he was untying his shoes, returned his holy soul to his Creator.

*Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, relates that his *Rebbe, Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, would remark, "The *Alter* was deathly ill; yet, he suspected that his inability to do more was due to laziness, while we are actually lazy people, but claim to be sick."

We must remember that each person must maximize his potential. Achieving eighth-grade proficiency in *Talmud* is wonderful – for an eighth grader – not an adult. This applies to every aspect of our *avodas hakodesh*. It is so easy to conjure up excuses, but we must remember that "one day" those excuses will not be acceptable.