

## You shall make two Keruvim of gold. (25:18)

The *Baal HaTurim* writes: *Keravia*, like children (corresponding to the *pasuk*), *Ki naar Yisrael v'o'haveihu*, "When Yisrael was a lad, I loved him" (*Hoshea* 11:1). The *Alter, zl, m'Kelm* explains the connection between this *pasuk* and the *Keruvim*, who had the countenance of children, as alluding to the youthful manner, the approach one must maintain with regard to Torah study. We are to approach Torah study and *mitzvah* performance with *raananus*, youthful vitality. Excitement, passion, freshness: these are appellations that apply to youth. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, explains the above *pasukim* (from *Hoshea*) that Hashem especially loves *Klal Yisrael* when they feel young. This means that they are always in a position to learn more, to be inquisitive, passionate, with a deep desire for more learning, deeper learning, more challenging learning. One who has "aged" – who thinks he knows it all – has heard everything; nothing can excite him, nothing can change him; he has little hope for growth. After all, he thinks that he has climbed the ladder of achievement. What more is there? Such a person represents the antithesis of *naar Yisrael*. Hashem loves youthfulness, because the young want to learn more.

*Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, observes that this is why we refer to a Torah scholar as a *talmid chacham*. *Talmid* means student. A Torah scholar is a person who, despite his achievement in Torah erudition, feels that he still has what to learn. Until he breathes his last breath, he seeks every opportunity for spiritual growth and development. Status quo is an anathema to him.

Indeed, the *Alter* would interpret this idea into the classic mantra of Torah *chinuch*, education, *Chanoch lanaar al pi darko, gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenu*; "Train the youth according to his way, (thus) even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it" (*Mishlei* 22:6). The standard interpretation is: What we imbue into the mind of a young child will remain with him as he goes through life. The *Alter* understood this *pasuk* as: If you properly ingrain in a young person the *yesodos ha'chinuch*, principles of education, the love, excitement and passion for learning, he will never cease educating himself. Unless he strives to continue the educational (not simply intellectual) process, whereby he always endeavors for more learning, seeking to be the perennial student, he will not achieve *sheleimus*, completion/perfection.

*Horav Shmuel Auerbach, zl*, related in the name of *Horav Chaim Todros Hirschler, zl* (one of Yerushalayim's saintly Jews), who remembered when *Horav Hirsch Broide, zl*, son-in-law of the *Alter m'Kelm*, moved to Yerushalayim (during his twilight years). He would sit in the *Bais HaMussar* (established by *Horav Naftali Amsterdam, zl*, for the study of character refinement) and reiterate (accompanied by a *niggun*, tune, which was common when studying *mussar* writings), *U'z'chor es Borecha b'yemei bacharus echa*; "So remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (*Koheles* 12:1). Obviously, he was singing to himself as a way of inspiring greater commitment to Hashem. This is all very fine if one is speaking to – or, about – a young person. At that point, *Rav Hirsch Broide* was an elderly and highly respected individual. What was he implying? While this practice must have raised eyes, only one person had the audacity to ask: "Is it not some time since those days of youth have passed?" *Rav Hirsch* did not miss a beat, immediately issuing his rejoinder,

“Today is days of youth with regard to tomorrow; tomorrow are the days that have yet to be lived. This is especially true when one is actually young and his powers of imagination, passion, excitement and joy are in full vigor, so that he is able to apply them together with his other physical attributes toward serving Hashem.”

The desire to grow, to live, to enjoy, is dependent greatly on one's ability to focus on the positive. *Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl*, imbued his students with the importance of accentuating the positive – both in life in general and in their own achievements in particular. Rabbi Yisrael Besser (“Warmed by Their Fire”) writes about the student who bemoaned his sorry spiritual state. *Rav Freifeld* replied in a not-so-subtle tone, “You are innocent! Do not ever say that! You hear! You are innocent! You have so much positive to focus on. You have before you a brilliant future. Do not get caught up in your past. You sinned; it is over. Now move on and look at all the good that you will yet achieve.”

*Rav Freifeld* related the story of the elderly Russian woman (who now lived in America). She was over 100 years old, and she lived in a nursing home. *Rav Freifeld* would visit her often to speak with her. Once he noticed that she was not eating her lunch. She explained that she had taken upon herself to fast every Monday and Thursday (a custom observed only by very devout men). For an elderly woman (over 100 years old) to do this was unheard of. When he asked why she did this, her explanation floored him. She tearfully began her story. “I have a nurse, Barbara, who has been with me for years. She is faithful, devoted and also a friend. Last week, she must have been overly tired, because when she gave me a shot, she pricked me, and in my pain, I yelled at her. I apologized a number of times, but still, how could I have allowed such a slip of the tongue? So, as penance, I decided to fast on Mondays and Thursdays.”

When *Rav Freifeld* concluded the story, he said, “Here is an old woman who is still trying to do it right, while there are young people, in their twenties, who are cynical and mistrustful concerning their ability to alter their lives. Now, tell me: Who is young, and who is old?”

*Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, was wont to say that a person must live in a constant state of renewal, repeatedly perpetuating himself. This should be one's guiding vision on his journey through life. We must constantly demand of ourselves to grow, to develop, to soar. Otherwise, we become complacent and externally atrophic. We cannot accept status quo in life. One either rises, or he falls.