

## **May Hashem appoint... a man over the assembly who shall go out before them and come in before them... and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd. (27:16,17)**

The text of the *pasuk* appears superfluous. Once Moshe *Rabbeinu* presented his request for a leader who would go out and come in before the nation, it is obvious that he was seeking someone who exemplified caring leadership. If so, why was it necessary to add “the assembly should not be like sheep who have no shepherd”? If they have a leader who cares and worries about them, it goes without saying that they will not be left like sheep without a shepherd. That is the purpose of a leader.

*Horav Avraham Yoffen, zl*, explains by relating an incident that occurred during the Russo-Japanese war, circa 1904-1905. When countries go to war, their citizens usually suffer economic hardship. This is especially true for the citizens who are struggling just to keep their heads above water. The Jewish communities in Russia suffered greatly. Hunger and deprivation were added challenges to the usual issues that confronted the Jewish community in Russia 120 years ago. This economic adversity was especially rough on the *yeshivah* world, whose students on a “good” day survived on very little nourishment. It reached the point that the *yeshivos* were compelled to send *shluchim*, collectors, to fundraise in areas of Western Europe unaffected by the war. The problem was that it would appear that these fundraisers might be developing a pact with countries not friendly to Mother Russia. When the government sought a scapegoat, they usually looked at the Jewish community. Thus, a number of *Roshei Yeshivah* decided that fundraisers would not pass scrutiny. As a result, the *yeshivos* suffered even more. It became so difficult that the *yeshivos* had no money left to purchase kerosene which provided light during the long winter nights. Learning, however, must continue. Thus, the *yeshivah* students studied in the dark by memory. This is how Torah study was maintained in Russia 120 years ago.

A conference of *Roshei Yeshivah* was convened. They decided that, since they could not take the chance of sending *shluchim* outside of the country, they would send fundraisers throughout the Jewish community to collect whatever scraps were available. Torah study must continue at all costs. The next hurdle was to determine whom to send to collect. Any able-bodied person was working for the war effort. The students had to learn Torah. No one was left but the *Roshei Yeshivah* themselves, who would personally have to go from door to door seeking whatever alms and food was available to sustain their students. The decision was made, and the names of the *Roshei Yeshivah* were entered on a list and divided up according to geographic area. Everything was moving forward to enable the *yeshivos* to continue with their unhindered devotion to Torah study.

Suddenly, *Horav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, zl*, the *Alter m’Novarodok*, stood up and asked to speak,

“Veritably, the *matzav*, situation, in the *yeshivos* is bleak. The students are starving. They are down to existing on crumbs of bread to sustain them throughout the day. I suspect, however, that, if the honored *Roshei Yeshivah* will leave their institutions to tread from door to door in search of sustenance, they will return with bread, but, by the time they return, their students will be gone! I, for one, am returning to my *yeshivah* to be with my students.”

The conference broke up. Everyone was in a state of tumult, regarding what to do. One thing was certain: the issue and its resolution were no longer cut and dry. Each *Rosh Yeshivah* would have to mull over the pros and cons and decide on his own. The *Alter* had painted a grim picture in which the resolution to the problem was worse than the problem. A short while later, the *Alter* of Novarodok received a letter from *Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl*, of Slutzk, saying that the *Alter's* sharp words saved the *yeshivah* world from demise. Without *Roshei Yeshivah* who stand at the helm of their institutions – they would have bread, but no students.

We derive from this vignette that a Torah leader does not leave his ship. His students are his sheep, and he is their shepherd. A shepherd does not abandon his sheep. If a *Rosh Yeshivah* must leave for a very short interval, he must carefully weigh the benefits against the disadvantages that might result.

This is to what Moshe was alluding when he detailed the criteria for a leader. He must go out and come in before them; he must concern himself with the welfare of the people. If their welfare is dependent upon his leaving his post, abandoning his community, however, he must take into consideration that the negative consequences resulting from his departure might far outreach whatever advantages will incur. A leader's place is with his flock.