

Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding and well-known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads. (1:13)

Rashi notes that the word *v'asimeim*; and I shall appoint, is spelled missing a *yud*; thus, it reads *v'ashmam*, their guilt. This teaches that the moral and ethical failings of the people are the fault of their judges, who should have reproved them when they sinned. If the "class" is unruly due to a lack of discipline, the first address for blame is the teacher. First and foremost, a leader must realize that he is not a private person. He is held responsible not only for his sins, but also for the sins of the people that he leads. While not all errors are preventable, the leader must step in when necessary, shoulder the blame, clean up the mess and make certain that it does not happen again. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai teaches that leadership demands a leader who, when he errs, has the humility and integrity to say, "I made a mistake." *Ashrei ha'dor she'ha'nasi shelo meivi korban al she'gegaso*; "Fortunate is the generation whose leader (is willing to) brings a *korban*, sin-offering, for his unintentional sin" (*Horiyos* 10). A generation whose leadership is the paragon of integrity, thus taking responsibility for its own errors, is truly fortunate.

Such integrity occurs when the leader is constantly introspecting and asking himself, "Am I doing the right thing, or am I acting just to protect myself? Do I have his/her best interests in mind, or mine?" The following story underscores another form of introspection. Obviously, such introspection applies only to a leader whose standard of responsibility is very high. *Horav Dov Ber, zl*, of Lubavitch was the second *Rebbe* to lead *Chabad chassidus*. During one of his journeys, he stopped at an inn near the city of Samargon. Since it was summer and the weather was agreeable, the *Rebbe* decided to spend a few extra days there. Torah leaders hardly ever have anonymity and rest. When word went out that the *Rebbe* was at the inn, Jews from all over the Samargon area converged on the little inn, hoping to be received by the *Rebbe* and obtain his blessing.

The *Rebbe* met with many Jews until he suddenly stopped and announced that he needed to be alone; no more *yechidus*, being alone with the *Rebbe*. His door was shut, and no one was allowed in. His *gabbai*, secretary, thought that the *Rebbe* was resting, being that he had seen so many Jews. He just needed a break. After half an hour passed, however, and the *Rebbe's* door did not open, the *gabbai* became concerned. He knocked, went in and emerged a few moments later all red-eyed. He apparently had been weeping. The *chassidim* who had been traveling with the *Rebbe* were disconcerted. Something must be wrong. The *gabbai* said a few words to the *chassidim*, and they, too, became upset. Some began to cry. Slowly the crowd of people who were waiting became frightened. What could be happening to make the *gabbai* and his close *chassidim* weep?

A couple of hours passed, and several of the older *chassidim* (older meaning closer, since they had known the *Rebbe* for many years) entered the corridor leading to the *Rebbe's* room and listened at

the door. They heard the *Rebbe* pouring out his heart to Hashem. He was weeping bitterly as he recited *Tehillim*. No one had an inkling about what could have impacted the *Rebbe* so. Indeed, some of the *chassidim* were so frightened that a few of them fainted. The crowd, observing this display of emotion on the part of the *Rebbe's* closest, began to weep bitterly. They knew that something was not right.

The *Rebbe* concluded his *Tehillim* recital, and he began to prepare for *Minchah*. He was so tired that he decided to lay down and rest in bed for an hour to recover his strength. He then *davened* *Minchah*, followed by *Avinu Malkeinu*, the prayer customarily said during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the Ten Days of Repentance and fast days. Following *Minchah*, the *Rebbe* met with his *chassidim* and delivered a lengthy discourse on the purifying, expiating effect of sincere weeping. It was a powerful lecture, one that the *chassidim* would remember for years to come.

The *Rebbe* was confined to bed the next day to rest from the previous day's experience. Still, no one knew what had disturbed the *Rebbe*. Horav Pinchas, zl, of Shklov was a *chasid* of the *Baal HaTanya*, Rav Dov Ber's father. As such, he was eminently qualified to approach the *Rebbe* to seek an explanation for what had taken place. He asked the *Rebbe* for an explanation. (A *Rebbe* doesn't owe anyone an explanation. However, Rav Pinchas asked the *Rebbe* as a student asks a mentor, seeking to understand a certain behavior, so that he, too, could learn from his *Rebbe's* actions.)

The *Rebbe* became very sad as he spoke to Rav Pinchas: "When a *chasid* enters into *yechidus*, a private audience with the *Rebbe* (for the purpose of seeking advice or a blessing), he opens up to me, revealing the inner maladies of his soul. Each *chasid* opens up on his level, seeking my assistance in curing his spiritual ills. In order to successfully help him, I must first find the same shortcoming, be it in the most subtle form, within my own self, and attempt to correct it. It is not possible to guide someone else in cleansing and perfecting his character until I, myself, have already experienced this same problem (albeit on a level far removed from that of the petitioner) and undergone a similar process of self-refinement.

"The other day, someone came to me with a serious problem. It was so bad that I was horrified to what depths of sin he had fallen. I attempted to find within myself some remote action that could in some way, however subtle, be related to what he had become. Nonetheless, this man had come to me, so I knew that somewhere, somehow, something in my activities could relate to his miscreant behavior. It was then that I realized that it must be something so deeply embedded in me that it was beyond my reach. This is what shook me to the core of my being and inspired me to repent and return to Hashem from the depths of my heart." This is introspection at its zenith.