

A prophet from your midst, from your brothers, like me, shall Hashem, your G-d, establish for you – to him shall you listen. (18:15)

The *Navi* is obviously very special, since Hashem has chosen him for this function. How are we to know if he is truly Hashem's choice? Apparently, the credentials of this *tzaddik*, righteous person, are impeccable, characterized by positive attributes and virtues to which everyone agrees. Nonetheless, everyone has his personal opinion and his own litmus test. What passes muster for one person does not necessarily pass muster for another. Is there a clear-cut criteria which define a righteous leader? *Rashi* comments that he must be *mumchah hu lach*, proven to you, to be a *tzaddik gamur*, such as *Eliyahu HaNavi*, whose spiritual distinction is undisputed. Indeed, he was within his rights, and he acted appropriately when he overrode a *Rav* of the Torah. He brought a *korban*, sacrifice, on Har Carmel, away from the *Bais Hamikdash*. In this instance, *Eliyahu* suspended the law, because it was necessary. Only someone of his caliber, however, could act in this matter.

Horav Leizer Brody, Shlita, relates the story of two *yeshivah* students who debated among themselves, considering the virtues and spiritual/intellectual distinction of their respective *rebbeim*. Each one, of course, posited that his respective *Rosh Yeshivah* was greater than the other's. Word of this debate reached the ears of the *Mashgiach* of the *yeshivah*, who summoned both *bachurim* to his office. He began the conversation by asking one of the students to recite the *tefillah* of *Atah Chonantanu*, "You have graced us with intelligence" (a prayer recited in the *Motzoei Shabbos Shemoneh Esrai* that distinguishes between various contrasts) by heart. He proceeded to recite the *tefillah* without error. The *Mashgiach* then turned to the other *bachur* and asked him to recite *Va'todeinu*, a similar prayer recited on the occasion that *Yom Tov* falls on *Motzoei Shabbos*. The two *tefillos* are parallel in nature, but the latter prayer draws distinction between *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, while *Atah Chonantanu* presents a contrast between *Shabbos* and *chol*, weekday. This time the student had difficulty remembering every word in perfect sequence. (Practically, *Atah Chonantanu* is recited weekly, while *Vatodeinu* is recited a few times a year and not every year.)

The *Mashgiach* said to the student, "Do not be embarrassed that you are unable to recite *Vatodeinu* by heart, but everyone recites *Atah Chonantanu* without a problem. Everyone has the ability to distinguish between *kodesh* and *chol*, sacred and mundane. Not everyone has the capacity, however, to distinguish between *kodesh* (*Shabbos*) and *kodesh* (*Yom Tov*). Your *Rebbe* understands the tendencies of your soul; he is acutely aware of your disposition and propensity. Likewise, your friend's *Rebbe* is aware of his students' individual proclivities and impulses. From a spiritual perspective, your respective *Rebbeim* understand the source of your *neshamos* and how Hashem watches over each one of you. One cannot determine which *Rebbe* is greater; rather, each student is best served by his individual *Rebbe*."

This is quite possibly what *Rashi* means when he says, *Mumchah hu lach*; "he is proven to you."

Each *talmid* has his individual *Rebbe* that “works for him.” His *Rebbe* understands what “makes him tick,” how to reach him and how to encourage him to *shteig*, grow in Torah, *yiraas Shomayim* and *middos tovos*. Not every student is a perfect “fit” for someone else’s *Rebbe*. Each one must seek the *Rebbe* who is *mumchah*, proven, for him.

The average person is unable to determine the distinction of a *tzaddik*. He can, however, ascertain the *Rebbe* who was the greatest influence on him, who inspires him most, and to whom his soul gravitates. That *Rebbe* is his *tzaddik*. Furthermore, the *Rebbe* who understands his *talmid's* deficiencies, needs, and growth potential, as well as how he can engender this growth, is the *Rebbe* who is best aligned with his soul.