

Hashem shall place you as a head and not as a tail. (28:13)

On the surface, these two terms demonstrate an apparent redundancy. Obviously, if one is a head/leader, he is not a tail/follower. *Ramban* explains that it is possible for a nation to be a leader to some, but a follower of others. This is “sandwich” leadership, where one's leadership is of relative value. *Klal Yisrael* will ultimately be worthy of everyone's respect, which represents true leadership.

The concept of *rosh v'lo zanaf* comes into play on *Rosh Hashanah* night when, during the *simanim* (symbolic foods eaten to signify hopes and prayers for a good year), we underscore our hope to be a head and not a tail. What is the meaning of this request? Is there something special in being a head, not a tail, other than that the head leads and the tail follows? At the end of the day, they both arrive at their destination—at the same time. How is a person, whom we refer to as a *rosh*, different from he whom we view as a *zanaf*?

The *rosh*/head uses his head to think, to analyze, to innovate. The *zanaf* may be a fine, upstanding G-d-fearing, *Torah* studying Jew, but he will not get far if he refuses, ‘or is unable’ to use his *seichel*, common sense, ability to think. When a person uses his G-d-given mind, he is able to shape the future. His counterpart, the tail, only reacts, fills in the blanks. He sticks to routine and established norms, regardless of how outdated or archaic they might be. He has no sense of imagination, refuses to take risks, and is unable to inspire others to join in his vision, because he has none.

The leader breaks free of the status quo. He builds and opens doors for others, thus advancing society. Leadership, however, demands courage and taking responsibility for one's actions. The follower need not concern himself with courage and responsibility, since he really is not doing anything transformative. He lives a comfortable life, filled with complacency, acting by rote. He does not have to forge a new path—he just follows the old one. He has never realized his potential, because he would rather be a follower than take on challenges with all their hurdles. Also, his fear of failure paralyzes him. The leader must remember that, after all is said and done, he must somehow bring the follower along with him. There is a saying: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go with someone.”

This plays itself out in the spiritual endeavor as well. *Horav Shimshon Pincus, z”l*, observed that, quite possibly, one who has lived a good life as a follower made all the right moves, studied *Torah*, attended *shiurim*, but did not use his mind to elevate himself, has not maximized his potential. Thus, he has undermined his purpose in Creation. He acts as part of a crowd, following society—albeit a *Torah* society. He is not viewed as having done something; rather, he acted as part of a crowd.

Rav Pincus cites the *Chasam Sofer (Teshuvos Orach Chaim 15)* who writes about those pious Jews who refused to wear clothing made of wool for fear of *shatnez* (in case there may be linen

added somewhere). The first generation who innovated this practice did so out of a sense of true circumspection, concerned that they may violate a prohibitive *mitzvah*. The members of the generation that followed, accepting their predecessor's practice, are mere followers (*zanav*). They observed this practice because the previous generation had observed it. [This does not in any way empower one to change from the *mesorah*, accepted tradition. It is used to demonstrate how two people can do the same thing, only one is the *rosh*, while the other is the *zanav*. One can learn in a *bais ha'medrash* with hundreds of others-all immersed in *Torah*, but if he is only doing so purely because "everybody else" is learning, then he is a *zanav*. He must maintain his own goals in order to maximize his own potential. We must learn to think on our own, not just follow what everybody else is doing. Only then can our commitment serve as an inspiration for others to emulate.