

Your elders and they will tell you. (32:7)

In his hesped, eulogy, for Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapira, zl, spoke emotionally concerning the impact Rav Shach had on the thousands of talmidim who were studying Torah during his tenure as Rosh Yeshivas Ponovezh. He quoted the Brisker Rav, zl, in his hesped for the Chazon Ish, zl. The Rav said, "Up until now, we have experienced a world with the Chazon Ish alive – and now a world without the Chazon Ish." "We too," cried Rav Moshe Shmuel, "are now experiencing a different world" (without Rav Shach). He continued, relating that, when the Chafetz Chaim desired to move to Eretz Yisrael, Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, asked him to reconsider. He explained that European Jewry still needed his guidance and inspiration. Hearing this, the Chafetz Chaim countered that he was far past his prime, having reached an elevated age, which had taken its toll on him physically. He was no longer able to be involved with the issues pressing on the Jewish community. Indeed, he felt that, at this point, he no longer had the ability to mingle within the community – which is the way in which he would inspire people. He could hardly get around without help. Rav Chaim Ozer replied, "When the aged grandfather sits at the head of the table – even if he remains silent and is unable to converse with the family -- the grandchildren act differently" (by virtue of his presence). Rav Chaim Ozer intimated that the Chafetz Chaim's presence within the European Jewish community – even if, due to his advanced age, he was relegated to remaining indoors in his home -- would still impact the community. "Likewise," Rav Moshe Shmuel continued, "we did not merit that in recent years the venerable Rosh Yeshivah was at the helm of leadership with his full strength and vision as he had before. Despite this, however, we knew that 'our grandfather' was sitting at the head of the table, and this made a difference."

When the grandfather sits at his table, his presence influences and inspires behavior in ways that promote respect, unity, tradition and intergenerational connection. This enriches the family dynamic and reinforces important values and practices. I think that it is like being in a room with an Aron Kodesh. One acts differently, out of reverence for the Torah contained within. The mere fact that we have gedolei Yisrael within the confines of our communities, in Eretz Yisrael or chutz la'erezt, makes an enormous difference in the way we live and act. We sense the elevated kedushah, the majestic character traits and extraordinary erudition which they represent. This inspires us to act responsibly for Hashem, for them, and for ourselves.

In the early stages of World War II, England feared being attacked by the German army. While they could not save everyone, they planned to send as many youngsters as possible out of the country to safe haven in those countries who would open their borders to them. America agreed to send affidavits for the young children. Obviously, someone on the other side of the ocean would have to be willing to assume responsibility for the children. Rebbetzin Devorah Shternbuch had two young sons whom she wanted to send: Horav Eliyahu, zl, the future Rav of Antwerp; and Horav Moshe, Shlita, the future Gaavad of the Eidah HaChareidis – both young boys who were destined to become gedolei Yisrael. They had a close family friend in America who would see to their needs. He had heretofore supported the Rebbetzin with her nine children. The British officials provided three ships for the voyage. It was a challenge to send her sons away, but for them to remain in

England would prove to be too dangerous.

The ships were destined to leave on a Wednesday. Rebbetzin Shternbuch was prepared to sign up her two boys for the trip. As a descendant of the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, however, she refused to decide without first applying the goral ha'Gra. It would inform her if her decision would be blessed or not. [A Kabbalistic ritual attributed to the Gaon is conducted by randomly opening a Chumash and linking the pesukim on the page to the matter in question. Obviously, there is much more to it, as it is steeped in profound esoteric mystery. Not just anyone can perform it successfully -- only a select few whose sanctity and purity is extraordinary.]

The Rebbetzin went to Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, a disciple of the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, an individual who was unparalleled in his saintliness. As a talmid of Kelm, he insisted that the goral be conducted on the day designated as ha'asiri yihyeh kodesh, tenth day was holy. [This follows the law of tithing animals, in which the tenth animal to walk through the corridor of the pen received a mark designating it as maaser, holy tithe.] In Kelm, it was the practice that each tenth day (apparently, they had their own way of calculating it) was dedicated to spiritual uplift, fasting and elevated purity]. Rav Elya said that Wednesday was the tenth day, and he would only conduct the goral on that day. The Rebbetzin explained that Wednesday was the day the ships were leaving. He apologized, but was adamant that he would only carry out the goral on Wednesday. She pleaded, but he was immovable. The Mashgiach was a person before whom one stood in awe. The Rebbetzin was in a quandary. On the one hand, she wanted to do everything in her power to save her sons. On the other hand, she would only do this with the guidance of the goral ha'Gra, which, as far as she was concerned, could only be performed by Rav Elya. It was suggested other holy men might also be proficient in the goral ha'Gra. The Rebbetzin was intractable: If Rav Elya did not perform the goral, then her boys would remain in England. The ship left on that fateful Wednesday. One day into the voyage, a German boat torpedoed the ship. Tragically, no one survived. The Shternbuch family was spared. They had listened to the aged Mashgiach who refused to change his custom.