

It shall be considered as bloodshed for that man, he has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from the midst of his people. (17:4)

After Noach saved the animals during the Flood, Hashem permitted man to partake of animals for food. If a man slaughters a consecrated animal outside of the *Bais Hamikdash*, the process is referred to as *shchutei chutz*, slaughtering “outside”. This act of slaughtering reverts to pre-Noach days and is deemed tantamount to committing bloodshed. There is no death penalty, because the individual did not take a human life; on a cosmic level, however, he did spill blood – which is an offense punishable by Heaven. **Horav Ezra Barzal, zl**, quotes *Rashi* who compares this spilling of blood to human killing. Why? Veritably, the slaughterer has caused undue pain to the animal, but can this be likened to murder in any way?

Rav Ezra derives from here that every creation has a specific purpose, a designated mission in life which it is designed to achieve. An animal that has been consecrated has been elevated to a status whereby now, by virtue of its ritual slaughter, will provide pleasure for Hashem. When its owner is spiritually elevated via the *korban*, sacrifice, that he offers in honor of Hashem, the Almighty derives great *nachas*, pleasure. Depriving Hashem of this *nachas ruach*, pleasure, by cutting the animal off, preventing it from attaining its role and purpose in life, is an act that is tantamount to murder.

Now, if this is the attitude *vis-à-vis* an animal, how much more so are we held responsible for depriving a human being from achieving his potential, from accomplishing his mission and purpose in life? A friend is studying in *yeshivah*; a girl is doing well in her studies at the Bais Yaakov, and someone – either inadvertently, because he/she needs company, or acutely, with malice aforethought -- prevents this friend from attaining his/her goal in life. This is murder, perhaps not punishable by a court of law, but Heaven will not countenance such negative action. The individual who is responsible for the spiritual detriment of this person -- the one whose actions have catalyzed his stunted spiritual growth-- is considered to be a murderer.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl, *Mashgiach* in Yeshivas Torah Ohr, had previously served in Yeshivas RJJ for four decades. He was known for his individualized spiritual treatment of every student, each of whom he viewed as a *bachur chashuv*, distinguished student. Even when a student was suspected of committing a spiritual offense of the degree of *Shabbos* desecration, the *Mashgiach* continued to treat him as before. He explained that each individual views himself positively. He concedes that he has certain failings, but that these failings are merely superficial, extraneous blemishes which do not impact on his true essence. In other words, no one is willing to concede guilt; he always has an excuse. Thus, the *Mashgiach* felt that each student should be treated accordingly, acknowledging the premise that he was “unaware” of his personal shortcomings. Every student had a *neshamah* that could be reached with patience and love.

The *Mashgiach* understood what motivates the American student. Baseball is America's favorite pastime, and he was well aware that the *yeshivah* students were into the game and its players. He did not denigrate the sport, because he was cognizant of their attachment to it. He had no aversion to their playing ball, but not to have baseball take over their lives. Play for sport, play for fun, but do not play as if your life depends on it. The *yeshivah* students were part of a league with students of other schools. While the *Mashgiach* frowned on this, and he reiterated in ethical discourses that one does not grow great in Torah by wallowing in baseball, he nonetheless supported them. When they lost the last game of the season, thus plummeting down to last place, he consoled them. On the one hand, they knew his feelings concerning baseball; on the other hand, they appreciated his concern and encouragement.

One of the distinguished American *Roshei Yeshiva* remembers that, as a teenager, he was a prolific basketball player. Indeed, he was so good that his reputation within and without the *yeshivah* spread as his fame as a player grew. Many students looked up to him with respect and even awe due to his physical prowess on the basketball court. Understandably, *Rav Zaidel* did not approve, and he even subtly hinted at his disdain, but he never denigrated the student or the game. In fact, the day after a big game (which was held at night following night *sefer*), *Rav Zaidel* would question his student concerning the game: how did he play, what kind of shots did he make; how many three-pointers, etc.? He understood how much it meant to the student. His personal feelings aside, his students' emotions were more important. In due time, he would get his message across. He did.

Many of us have dreams, visions, and aspirations for the future. While everyone has a mission and purpose in life, he often does not discover that purpose until he gravitates towards it and achieves distinction in it. He then realizes that this is what he was destined to do. What if: he had a dream; he had hope; he made plans; and someone – due to his immaturity, obtuseness, pure envy – belittled him, maligned his plans, shattered his hopes? Such a person -- knowingly or unknowingly -- is guilty of an unpardonable sin. This is the Torah's message. Perhaps the following vignette, which I might have once previously written, illustrates this idea.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, was a unique *gadol*, Torah leader. He was an individual who encompassed the very apex of Torah scholarship. An accomplished *Rosh Yeshiva*, he was founder of *Chachmei Lublin*, which was one of the premier *yeshivos* in pre-World War II Europe. A *Rav* of a distinguished Torah community, a strong political advocate who championed Torah causes in Polish Parliament, he carried much influence in both the secular and Torah worlds. He radiated pride in Torah and served as a model exemplar for *yeshivah* students to emulate. Nonetheless, it was none of these achievements that established his preeminence within the Torah world; rather, it was his innovative plan to have the entire Torah – camp study one *blatt* of *Gemarah* daily. His *Daf HaYomi* garnered for him the position of Torah mentor for generations to come. As long as *Daf Yomi* is studied, his celebrated name lives on.

It almost did not happen. Yes, we might have lost this great treasure; the dream of a lifetime was

almost shattered by the innocent taunting of children. Now for the story, which is related by Rabbi Yisrael Besser in *Warmed by the Fire*.

Rav Meir Shapiro was once traveling by train. As the train pulled into a town for a brief rest stop, the *Lubliner Rav* alighted. Word spread that the distinguished sage was in town, and, within no time, throngs of people came to the station to greet and pay homage to this great man. Among the people was an upcoming young *rav*, son-in-law of the *Shotzer Rav*, who waited to shake hands with the *Lubliner Rav*.

He introduced himself as the *Shotzer Rav's* son-in-law, a name which carried much weight with *Rav Meir Shapiro*, himself having grown up in Shotz. *Rav Meir* asked the young *rav* if his *rebbetzin* was also in attendance. When he replied in the affirmative, *Rav Meir* asked if he could meet her. The young *rebbetzin* came over, and, after greeting her, *Rav Meir* asked, "Do you remember that, as a young child, I would learn with your father in your home?" The woman replied that, indeed, she remembered. "Do you recall how I would play with your siblings and with yourself?" Once again, the woman replied that she remembered.

Then suddenly, *Rav Meir's* voice changed. It became deeper and slightly louder. "Do you remember how I would share my dream of one day having a *limud*, program of study, to which all the world would be able to adhere – together, as one? I was going to connect the entire Torah world through Torah study. Do you also remember how all of the children made fun of me?"

The *rebbetzin* did not reply.

"Do you know how close I came to losing confidence in my plan – dropping it altogether – because of all the taunting? This is why I asked to meet you. I just wanted to share a lesson with you: Never laugh at the dreams of a child!"