

Before an old man you shall rise, you shall honor the presence of a sage. (19:32)

The *pasuk* appears to be redundant – unless a difference exists between *zaken* and *seivah*. The *Talmud Kiddushin* 32b, explains that a *zaken* is *zeh she'kanah chochmah*, “one who has acquired wisdom.” Wisdom and age are not necessarily synonymous. Some young people have-- either due to sheer brilliance or great effort-- achieved the title of *zaken*. They are erudite scholars who are able to hold their own with the sages of “old.” Alas, some elderly Jews -- due to their advanced age-- deserve the title *seivah*; they are not by definition, *zekeinim*, since they are not erudite, as they have not acquired wisdom.

Let us take this a bit further. A *chasid*, who had reached the age of sixty years old, approached the *Satmar Rav, zl*, with great pride and said, “*Rebbe*, I deserve a *mazel tov* upon having reached the age of *ziknah*.” He was referring to the statement in *Pirkei Avos*, 5:21, which delineates man’s development through various periods in his life. Among them is counted, “*Ben shishim l’ziknah*, a man of sixty has attained old age.” Sixty is an age in which a person takes stock of his life and considers what “unfinished business” he should focus on for the remainder of his earthly days. A younger man who has the perspective that he does not know what tomorrow will bring and that every day is fraught with “unfinished business,” displays the sagacity of *ziknah*. He can already rank with Jewry’s elders. A man of sixty who has followed the *Mishnah*’s prescription for life-- beginning with Torah at five years old, *Mishnah* at ten...forty for understanding, fifty for counsel, then at sixty -- has matured in wisdom to be counted among our nation’s elders.

Hearing this, the *Rebbe* asked, “Does this *Mishnah* truly apply to you?” “*Rebbe*, why not? After all, I have reached the age of sixty.”

The *Rebbe* responded with what might appear to be an anecdotal reply, but actually reveals a penetrating truth, “In order to claim the “sixty for *zikneh*” (which means that one has acquired wisdom), one must first have successfully mastered the previous age-related progressive achievements, such as, “forty for understanding, and fifty for counsel.” If one lacks the ability to plumb the depths of an experience, if he does not understand what is really taking place and why, then his human intelligence is lacking. Without intelligence, the experience that comes with age has little value. To be able to give counsel, to render sound advice, one must have intelligence and experience. Only after he has attained the gifts that come with these age-related achievements can he begin to lay claim to the wisdom that accompanies sixty years of living.

Seichel, common sense, is a major component in *binah* (as in *arbaim l’binah*, forty for understanding) without which one cannot achieve *chochmah*. Sadly, there are those who attempt to traverse life’s journey without the full accompaniment of the required journey. They hurt themselves – which is sad, but they also hurt and often destroy others – which is reprehensible and unpardonable. Perusing through a *dvar Torah* which I wrote a number of years ago, I came across

a timeless thought, which I take the liberty of once again sharing with the readers.

We refer to the incident of Korach, who rose up against Moshe *Rabbeinu* and mutinied against Hashem. The question that rests heavily on everyone's mind is: What motivated Korach, who was considered a *pikeach*, wise, intelligent man, to act so foolishly? Did he for one moment think that he would prevail? Furthermore, when he decided to accept the test of offering the *Ketores*, Incense, he was acutely aware that there could be only one winner. Offering *Ketores* was not child's play. It had to be done correctly by the right person, or the "wrong" person would become history. Only a fool would risk so much. Korach was certainly no fool. He was among those who carried the *Aron HaKodesh*. He was one of *Klal Yisrael's* most illustrious citizens. Why? Why would a member of the nation's spiritual elite choose to defile himself, to impugn his good name – forever?

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, explains with a simple answer, expressing a profound verity which sadly holds true today – more often than we care to admit. A *tzaddik*, righteous person, is not perfect. It is possible for a *tzaddik* to err. To err is human; to ignore one's error is unforgiveable and indicates that he is witless. Korach could have made a mistake. He was envious of Moshe, and envy causes a person to do strange things – even sin reprehensibly. As long as Korach's actions could be defined as sinful, it could be "understood." It was when he acted insensate, like a fool driven by idiocy, that we ask, "How could he commit *shtus*, foolishness?" He knew that all but one of the two hundred and fifty incense renderers would die; yet, he committed himself to the test anyway. This shows that Korach had become unhinged. He was acting without *seichel*, common sense. That is inexcusable! To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Veil di greste aveirah is tzu zein a naar*, "Because the greatest sin is to be a fool."

Now, some people cannot help themselves. They are born that way. When one is born with the gift of common sense, yet refuses to apply it, then his actions are unpardonable. We are blessed with a working mind for the purpose of using it. To act foolishly, ignoring the directive of common sense, may not be condoned.

A Torah leader-- or anyone, for that matter-- who possesses *seichel hayashar*, straight, common sense, has no excuse for making nonsensical mistakes – especially if his mindlessness hurts others. Torah scholarship is important, commendable, and is to be respected. If one possesses everything but common sense, however, he - and everyone connected with him – is in serious trouble.

The Torah teaches that when Moshe was judging the entire nation by himself, his father-in-law, Yisro, suggested that he set up leaders to guide the various groups. Yisro suggested four attributes that would qualify the one who possessed them for leadership: *anshei chayil*, men of means, who have no need to flatter or show recognition; *yirei Elokim*, G-d-fearing people; *anshei emes*, men of truth, who inspire confidence and whose words are worthy of being relied upon; *sonei betza*, people who despise money, who hate to have their money in litigation, and are willing to part with

their money rather than go to court to argue over what is truthfully and rightfully theirs. Apparently, these traits were indicative of highly upstanding individuals; it was a tall list of attributes to all fit one person. The Torah tells us that, in the end, Moshe chose *anshei chayil*, men of accomplishment, men of means, as his judges. Ostensibly, when he had to choose among all four attributes, the one that was most important was *anshei chayil*. This does not mean that the judges did not possess the other qualities. It only means that they did not exemplify them. Thus, when Moshe had to make the decision, he felt that *anshei chayil* was the most crucial characteristic for a judge and a leader.

The definition of *anshei chayil* which was rendered above, men of means, follows *Rashi*. *Sforno*, however, adds to this definition, suggesting that *anshei chayil* means more than being able to transcend the need to impress and flatter, to curry favor from people. *Anshei chayil* is the quality of *maivin davar mitoch davar*, someone who is able to discern the veracity of a matter and bring it to a definitive conclusion. They were chosen over those who were G-d-fearing, but were not “able men.”

Sforno views “ability” as the most important quality which a leader/judge should possess. It is vital that he be well-versed in the law, astute and capable of rendering a decision. The *anshei chayil* were scholars who were knowledgeable and of strong character, although lacking in some of the other qualities which Yisro felt a leader should possess. Apparently, if they could not have it all, they settled for what was crucial – men of ability who could think through a problem and render a decision.

In the *Shiurei Daas*, **Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl**, develops this idea further. He posits that in order to serve Hashem properly one must be astute, developing profundity concerning the *mitzvos* and the manner in which a Jew should serve Hashem. A “thinking” Jewish scholar who is knowledgeable and understands the depth and veracity, the wisdom and sagacity of Torah – who fears Hashem out of a sense of perception and intelligence – is greater than he who is extremely meticulous and follows the letter of the law with care and fear, but without insight and depth. The *chacham*, wise man, who is capable of developing insight into the verities of Torah, who achieves Heavenly fear through a depth of understanding of before Whom he stands, has a greater potential for spiritual growth than he who fears, but lacks intellectual perfection. To put it in the simple vernacular: common sense is a critical, indispensable requisite for life, without which one is incapable of rendering a decision. A leader who is lacking in this most basic quality is not only personally in a precarious position, but he may also present a serious danger to all.