

The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel. (30:15)

It is not uncommon for someone who has struck it rich, who has received the blessing of wealth from Hashem, to think that the world belongs to him. While this is certainly not the Torah way, human nature often prevails. It goes so far that one begins to believe that, if he were not deserving of all of this good fortune, he would not be its recipient. Apparently, he is a “good guy,” who is worthy of this blessing. As a result, a *baal mamon*, one who has been blessed with wealth, becomes a *baal gaavah*, arrogant and pompous, often lording himself over others, because, after all, he has it all.

We, sadly, find the opposite attitude among those who are relegated to living a life of poverty. While there are varied levels of poverty – none of them is encouraging for a person’s psyche. One who is impoverished often feels that he is a *lo yitzlach*, unsuccessful, just cannot make it; nothing ever seems to go his way. It becomes so bad that one who is poor feels worthless, second class, and obsequious to anyone and everyone who has more than he does.

Let me add that these feelings of both superiority or inferiority are transitory. They travel down the generational chain to their offspring. Parents who view themselves as inferior invariably raise their children with similar feelings of mediocrity, resulting in either intense timidity or overcompensation manifest by exaggerated aggressiveness. Those who are infused with a sense of entitlement may outdo their parents with social behavior that is overly pretentious and arrogant.

Having said this, we lay the groundwork for the Torah’s admonition, “The wealthy shall not increase, and the destitute shall not decrease.” *Zeichar Binyamin* interprets this *pasuk* homiletically: “The wealthy shall not increase,” the fact that you have been blessed with material abundance does not grant you license to arrogate yourself, to increase your feelings of superiority. It does not, in any way, mean that you are more “increased” than others, that you have greater attributes, that you are more worthy. It means nothing of the sort – other than demanding greater responsibility, increased obligation. It does not reflect anything about your character. Likewise, “The destitute shall not decrease.” The fact that you do not have an abundance of wealth, that you are poverty-stricken, does not grant you the right: to be depressed; to believe that you are unworthy, without much value, a useless, unproductive person. Money does not define who you are. Our greatest Torah leaders were poor, and, despite their indigence, they rose to incredible prominence, inspiring generations of Jews.

One name which immediately comes to mind is that of **Horav Aryeh Leib HaKohen Heller, zl**, the author of the *Ketzos HaChoshen*, *Avnei Milluim* and *Shev Shemaita*, three *sefarim* which changed the way we study *Gemorah*. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, would relate the interesting origins of the *Ketzos*. *Rav Yechiel Michel Heller* was forced to flee Russia, finally finding a safe haven in Stanislow, Galicia. A descendant of *Horav Yom Tov Lipa Heller*, author of the *Tosfos Yom Tov*, and

a premier scholar in his own right, he was accorded the respect reserved for a man of his stature. While there, a *shidduch*, matrimonial match, was proposed for his brilliant son, Yosef, with a poor girl from a reputable family. The two sets of parents agreed to the *shidduch*, although in the back of their minds they were increasingly concerned about how the young couple would be supported. Their joy was ambivalent. Looking for sound advice, they sought the counsel of *Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, Sanzer Rav*. Their question was simple: Should they go through with the marriage, since there were absolutely no funds on either side with which to support the young couple?

The *Sanzer Rav* advised them to continue as they had been doing until that time. The *chosson's* parents would continue supporting their son, and the *kallah's* parents would do the same with their daughter. A match of two such distinguished families should not be halted due to lack of money. The arrangement continued for a number of years – even after children were born. They simply divided the children. The older son, the *Ketzos*, ate with his father, while his brother, *Rav Yehudah*, author of the *Kuntros HaSefeikos*, ate with his mother. Years later, the family was reunited when they came into some money.

The *Ketzos* took the position of *Rav* in Rozintow and later in Staria, where he taught many distinguished disciples. These rabbinical positions paid practically nothing. Indeed, the *Ketzos* knew nothing but poverty his entire life. The table upon which he learned, wrote and ate was a board placed over two barrels. During the cold winter months, he would sit all day in bed, wrapped in a blanket. This is where he wrote his magnum opus, the *Ketzos HaChoshen*. In order to keep the ink from freezing, he kept placing the ink under his pillow to keep it warm.

When *Rav Aryeh Leib* completed his *Ketzos*, he sought approbations for his *sefer*. He traveled to *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Bushka*, and, after presenting him with the manuscript, asked him to review it and give his approbation.

“What *chiddushim*, novel ideas, are included herein which will add to the commentary of *Horav Yonasan Eibeshitz* in his commentary, *Kaeisi u’Pleisi*? Nonetheless, leave it here. I will glance at it.”

The *Ketzos* returned to his lodgings for the night. The next day, shortly before *Minchah*, the *shul's shamash* banged on the *bimah* and announced, “The entire assemblage is invited to gather at the *Rav's* house to begin a processional to the *shul*, as we accompany the induction of a new *Sefer Torah* to our *shul*. “ Excitement immediately filled the room, as everyone anticipated the pomp and joy of bringing a new Torah to its place in the *shul's Aron Kodesh*. *Rav Aryeh Leib* joined the throng. He was not a member of this community, but a *simchah* of such stature was not a daily occurrence.

As *Rav Aryeh Leib* moved closer and closer to the *Rav* carrying the Torah, he became more and more excited. He finally saw *Rav Tzvi Hirsch* carrying the covered Torah in his arms. As *Rav Aryeh Leib* came closer, *Rav Tzvi Hirsch* lifted the wrap, revealing the “*Sefer Torah*,” which was none

other than the manuscript of the *Ketzos HaChoshen*!

Rav Aryeh Leib HaKohen Heller achieved the epitome of Torah scholarship without such supportive accoutrements as pedigree, wealth, or friends in high places. It was his unparalleled diligence, commitment and extreme devotion to Torah that earned him his place in the past, present and future of Torah scholarship.