

Moshe took the blood and threw it upon the people. (24:8)

The *Mechilta* teaches that on the last day of the *Shloshes Y'mei Hagbalah*, three-day waiting period prior to receiving the Torah, *Klal Yisrael* entered into a covenant with the Almighty. This covenant comprised their commitment to be tied, fastened and bound (*keshurim, anuvim, tefusim*) to the Torah. Only afterwards, did Moshe *Rabbeinu* say, "Come and accept upon yourselves all of the *mitzvos*." This was followed by the Giving of the Torah. **Horav Shmuel Yaakov Burnstein, Shlita**, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kiryas Melech, derives from here that, before one can actually receive the Torah, before he can enter into a covenant of commitment and thereby receive all that the Torah has to offer, one must be totally committed – "tied, fastened and bound" to the Torah. Unless one realizes the extraordinary value of the Torah and the need to be unconditionally bound to it, he will not adhere to the Torah.

Torah demands extreme dedication, steadfast commitment, constant loyalty, without which one indicates that he is not bound completely to the Torah. When one maintains such a relationship with the Torah, he demonstrates his true appreciation of its value in its own right and its significance to him.

L'Sitcha Elyon relates that when **Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl**, entered into his twilight years, his eyesight became dimmed, and he was compelled to undergo eye surgery. Following his surgery, he was unable to see. As a result, his students would learn with him by reading to him from the *sefarim*. Additionally, he requested of his grandson, *Horav Avraham Pinsky, Shlita*, to come to him in the evenings to learn. *Rav Avraham* related that he would read to his grandfather from *Mishnayos, Seder Kedoshim*, with the commentary of the *Rav (Rav Ovadia Bartenura)*, and *Rav Elya* would correct him whenever he missed a word in the *Rav*!

His grandson asked, "*Sabba*, do you know all the *Mishnayos* in *Zevachim* and *Menachos* by heart?" *Rav Elya* was silent. He did not answer him. A short while later that grandson reached the age of thirteen, when he would be ushered into adulthood by accepting upon himself the yoke of *mitzvah* observance. The night before his *bar mitzvah*, *Rav Elya* spoke with him. It was a conversation replete with emotion and inspiration. A young boy about to enter adulthood was no small milestone. *Rav Elya* wanted his grandson to appreciate the responsibility that he was about to undertake. In the course of the conversation, *Rav Elya* informed his grandson that he did not begin working on his personal spiritual development at age fifty. He began when he was twelve years old. If one wants to achieve greatness, he must begin as soon as possible. It is a long, steep climb, and, the earlier one begins climbing, the greater possibility of success.

Rav Elya concluded with the following admonition: "You should be aware that one must prepare himself so that whenever, wherever, he is to be found, regardless of the circumstances or his personal ability, he must continue his learning. Nothing may stand in the way of Torah study." This is why he had studied a number of *Mesechtas*, Tractates, of *Mishnayos*, with the commentary of the *Rav*, so that in case he was unable to access a *sefer*, or he was in a situation where the

structured learning to which he was accustomed was unattainable, he would always have access to the *Mishnayos* stored in his mind.

One of the primary distinguishing characteristics of a Torah leader is his inextricable bond with the Torah. I would not know where to begin, which *gadol* to select, which story to relate, but one vignette does, for some reason, stand out in my mind, concerning **Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, which I take the liberty to recount.

First, a little background. *Rav Chaim* was a *Novarodoker talmid*, a student of the famed *yeshivah* founded by *Horav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, zl*, the *Alter m'Novarodok*. The *yeshivah's mussar* outlook stressed the total negation of ego and the physical, mundane world. It focused on shattering one's personal desires, eradicating any vestige of evil desires or habits. Its students lived an austere lifestyle wholly devoted to Torah study, which was to them their very life. Obviously, a life of such intense deprivation took its toll on those students who were not hardy – both physically and spiritually. It required extraordinary stamina and commitment. Those who “made it” represented an elite *yeshivah* student who was in total control of himself.

Rav Chaim had acquired a sterling reputation, earned through years of complete devotion to Torah learning amid extreme deprivation. He was once invited to the home of *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, legendary *Mashgiach* of Mir. He walked in and gazed in amazement at the scene before him. *Rav Yeruchem* sat at a table surrounded by *bachurim*, students, standing, listening in awe and fear to every word that he said. *Rav Yeruchem* looked up and noticed *Rav Chaim*. He asked, “If the students of Novoradok are in a constant state of search, why do they not come to Mir?” *Rav Chaim* did not respond. *Rav Yeruchem* then asked, “Why is it that some fall? Why are the Novoradok *bachurim* broken? Why – if they leave the *yeshivah* - are they broken?” (Apparently, *Rav Yeruchem* felt that the intensity demanded of Novoradok students was too much.)

Rav Chaim shocked everyone by responding to the venerable *Mashgiach's* queries. “They fall, because you cannot fall from the floor – only from high places. They are broken, because they cannot meet the incredible demands. They are bitter because they were tested and they failed.”

These responses characterized *Rav Chaim* and Novoradok. It was a difficult grind, but those who reached the summit represented a uniquely committed Torah personality, armed with *bitachon* and *emunah*, trust and faith in the Almighty, that was without peer.

A Siberian labor camp was “home” to *Rav Chaim* during World War II. The bitter cold and hunger did not bother him as much as the inability to properly learn Torah. The study of Torah was his lifeline, without which he found it difficult to survive. What kept him going was the hope that somehow, someday, he would find a medium for studying Torah.

One of the “jobs” which everyone dreaded was water carrier. Because the nearest source of water was three kilometers from camp, the water carrier was compelled to carry the heavy buckets of ice

water the entire way. *Rav Chaim* volunteered for the job. Why? He heard that not far from the spring there lived a Jew. He was hopeful that the Jew might have a *sefer* which he could borrow. Anything which could allow him to learn would be a life-saver. He was literally suffocating without his precious Torah.

Rav Chaim left with the empty pail to go fetch water for the group. After walking for hours through the forest, he located the spring of water. He put down his buckets and went in search of the village. After a while, he found the village. Now, all he needed was the city's "smart list", so he could find the one Jew who lived there. He did the next best thing. He looked for a house with a *mezuzah* affixed to the doorpost.

Rav Chaim found the elusive home, and knocked on the door. A woman answered, and noticing that before her stood a co-religionist, she compassionately offered to share some of their meager rations with him. "I do not need food!" *Rav Chaim* cried. "Please, do you have a *sefer* from which I could learn? It has been so long. I am starving for Torah. Please help me!"

The woman called her husband who said that he had one *sefer* from which he could not part. It was all he had.

"What is it?" *Rav Chaim* excitedly pleaded with him. "I have a *Gemorah*," the man replied. "Let me at least see it," *Rav Chaim* begged. The man brought out a *Gemorah*, in which *Nedarim* and *Nazir* were bound together. With eyes filled with tears, *Rav Chaim* hugged and kissed the *Gemorah*. When he saw it was two *Mesechtas* bound together, he looked at the man, and his eyes did the rest. They tore the *Gemorah* in half, and *Rav Chaim* left with a *Meseches Nedarim*. The pain, the schlepping, the difficult walk, were all worth it. He now had his life back.