

And you shall discern from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, G-d-fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money. (18:21)

Ramban explains that the phrase, *sonei batza*, “people who despise money,” refers to improperly obtained money. Moshe *Rabbeinu* is searching for those individuals who are of sterling character, G-d-fearing men who are not swayed by offers of material abundance. Money means nothing to them. Such people can be judges. We wonder why someone who is a person of accomplishment, G-d-fearing and honest, would still have to prove that he despises money gained inappropriately. If he is an *ish emes*, honest person, false money would be abhorrent to him. Why is it necessary to underscore that the judge must have proven himself to be a *sonei batza*?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, explains by employing a simple analogy from everyday life. One can have a number of combustibles in a room, such as newspaper, gasoline, and sulphur and still be safe from fire. What is missing from the equation? A spark -- one little spark -- transforms all of these potential flammable items into a conflagration. The potential fire requires a spark to ignite the combustibles. Otherwise, it is nothing more than potential.

This is the idea behind the above qualities. Each one is a potential quality which reaches its full definition when the spark is ignited. All – except for *sonei batza*; despising evil, being intolerant of a wrong, is not simply a potential quality. The very definition of despising evil is that one is intolerant and, in turn, takes action about it. Many G-d-fearing, honest people in the world are sadly indifferent to injustice. Injustice does not flare up their feelings of indignity. They are not happy, but, if necessary, they can live with it – as long as it does not infringe upon them.

Our quintessential leader was a *sonei batza*. He stepped out of the royal palace to confront an Egyptian hitting a Jew. He immediately acted. Moshe *Rabbeinu* could not tolerate such an injustice. He saw his brethren slaving in the mortar. He plunged in and carried the load with them. The Midyanite shepherds were abusing Yisro’s daughters. Moshe acted immediately to save them. One can fear Hashem, be the paragon of integrity, yet fail to take action when an injustice occurs. It is so easy to turn away, to not get involved. Such a person should not be promoted to a leadership position. He is missing the quality of *sonei batza*. He does not take umbrage when evil reigns. His moral indignation is kept private, as he negotiates diplomatically with those who harm our people. The *sonei batza* does not leave well-enough alone, because it is unjust; it is not “well-enough.”