

"I would like to die the death of the righteous." (23:10)

The *Talmud* in *Avodah Zorah* (25b) states that *yeshorim* (righteous) refers to the Patriarchs. Why is the reference here in describing the Patriarchs as *yeshorim* in contrast to other applications for describing the righteous, such as, "*chasidim* or "*tzaddikim*"? The *Netziv Zt"l* explains the difference between these two descriptive words. In *Parashas Haazinu* (32:4) the *posuk* states that Hashem is "*The Rock, perfect in His working...righteous and straight is He*". The *Netziv* explains the word "*yashar*" (straight) as referring to the declaration of our belief, which helps explain the severe punishment meted out during the destruction of the Second Temple. That generation was persistent in its crookedness. They acted as *tzaddikim* (righteous individuals), they studied *Torah*, and performed acts of kindness, but nevertheless they were not straight and upright in their dealings. As a result of their insecure misgivings regarding everyone's level of religious persuasion, they caused an enormous rift and undeserved hatred among various factions of people. The purported suspicions and innuenda raised by these people ultimately led to bloodshed. The *posuk* says that Hashem is "*yashar*" - straight, and will not tolerate *tzaddikim* such as these. This appellation is reserved only for those who are straight, not deceitful in their relationships with others, tolerant, and impartial, striving to understand others. This was the greatness of the Patriarchs; besides being righteous and devoted in their personal relationship with Hashem, they were also straight in their dealings with all men. Avrohom sought to save the corrupt city of Sodom, Yitzchok searched for ways to appease his enemies, and Yaakov remained respectful to the deceitful Lavan, throughout his tenure with him. As the Divine Inspiration rested on Bilam, he realized and desired the death of the "*yeshorim*" What he failed to realize was that one must first live a life which is "*yashar*".