

## **You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)**

Some individuals find it hard to follow the direction set forth by the Torah sages of each generation. They feel that the guidance of the *gedolim*, giants of Torah, must be consistent with their personal line of thinking. Accepting the sage advice of a Torah leader is a bit too much for them to handle. The *ben Torah* who conforms to the direction of the *chachmei haTorah*, wise men of Torah, lives a life of peace and calm, serene in the knowledge that he is following the path that Hashem has established for him. He realizes that, after all is said and done, the *gedolim* have a perspective unlike that of the average person. The wisdom which they have accumulated through the Torah, in addition to their righteous adherence to the word of Hashem, grants them Divine favor and insight – which they share with us.

**Horav Chaim HaKohen, zl, m'Gerbah**, offers the following meaningful analogy. A young man, not proficient in any specific trade, sought a vocation in order to earn a living. He went to the market to investigate his choices. He spoke with the wagon drivers to inquire whether they needed an apprentice. After all, why not? He would earn an honest living, save his pennies, and one day – he would own a wagon and horse. Then he would be in the big time. He was given an offer for a job, but he decided to check out another vocation before settling on becoming a livery driver.

The young man walked over to the wharf where he met a ship's captain and asked him about employment as a sailor. The captain said that it was hard-- but satisfying--work. He could work his way up the ladder to one day becoming the captain of his own ship. During the conversation, he began to think out loud, "If I become a wagon driver, my life will be predictable. The road straight before me. I know my destination and how long it should take me to reach my goal. What more does one need? The ship's captain and sailors travel in wide, open, uncharted waters. The sea is imposing, without markings to indicate where one is. A person can get into a boat with a plan to reach a certain destination and, within a few days travel, he can become completely lost! He could conceivably be traveling in circles and never reach his destination. Why would I want such a vocation? While it is true that I would get to see the world, visit exciting places, meet people from all over, but it would be true only if I reach these places. If I travel in circles, I will meet no one and see nothing!"

The captain looked at him with knowing eyes, as if to say, "My dear young man, you are truly clueless about the ways of the world." "Come with me," the captain said, as he drew the young man into the captain's office. On the large desk were spread a number of maps. "Let me explain to you. These are maritime maps which show the various ports of call where the ship stops. We draw a line from point A to point B and follow our navigational chart. We have no obstacles, no hills or valleys, no rained-out roads, or construction which we must divert. Our path is straight in accordance with the map. The only one who must worry about reaching his destination is the wagon driver who must contend with the poor roads that he must travel."

This is to what Shlomo *Hamelech* alludes when he says in *Mishlei* 31:14, *hoysa k'anios socheir*, "One who follows the path of Torah has before him a straight journey, just like the one who travels the sea by ship. He has no obstacles, since he follows the Heavenly map which charts his trip."