

According to the teaching that they will teach you... shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)

One must obey the decision of the court even if he is convinced that the court has erred in its ruling. Even if the ruling seems to be saying that right is left and left is right – you must obey. It goes without saying that, if one is certain that the court has ruled correctly, he must obey its decision. The law is timeless. We must listen to *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah as interpreted and expounded by our Torah leaders. The **Sefer HaChinuch** comments: “In every generation, we must listen to the rulings of the wise men who have studied under and received their understanding of the law from the sages of the previous generation. They toiled to understand the meaning and logic of every *halacha* and spent days and nights laboring in the field of Torah to understand its truth. One should not rely on his own understanding of the truth. He must ask, listen and obey. This is the meaning of the Torah’s admonition not to deviate from what they will tell you.”

Regrettably, we have witnessed individuals who have taken the mantle of Torah leadership into their own hands, deciding what is right and what is wrong, when one should be stringent and when one may be lenient. They feel that they are also scholars and that they understand the situation better than the Torah leaders. Thus, they have no problem ruling according to what they see fit – even if they are going against the ruling of the *mora d’asra*, *rav* of a community, who has already rendered his decision. They will seek out a scholar elsewhere who neither has a clue concerning the issues involved, nor has a right to render a ruling regarding a community which has a *mora d’asra* who has already ruled in the matter. In their desire to pander to the forcers of secularism and modernity, they are willing to usurp the Torah and wrest it from its leadership. They are themselves often well-meaning, but misguided, and willing to act unconscionably in their encroachment of Torah leadership.

There is nothing worse than a “little” knowledge. One who is an *am ha’aretz* knows nothing and will, for the most part, stay out of the fray, because he knows quite well that he is out of his league. It is the one who has studied in high school, perhaps even continued on to *yeshivah gedolah*, who has perhaps accumulated some *yedios*, knowledge. He knows the “lingo,” the correct phrases; he may even have studied some of the texts on an elementary level. He is now caught up in a misplaced sense of outreach and social justice, and he is willing to throw it all away for a little bit of fame or ego enhancement. Thus, he will have no problem standing up to a *rav*, *rosh yeshivah* – even *gedolei ha’dor*, the generation’s Torah leadership, in pursuit of his goals.

Make no mistake: These are Orthodox Jews who, for the most part, are observant and do listen to the words of the *gedolei Yisrael* – when it serves their purpose. They just feel that anything beyond the realm of *issur v’heter*, kosher and not kosher – is the pot permissible to use or not? – is outside the purview of the Torah scholars. Indeed, they feel that a Torah scholar’s lifelong dedication to – and toil in the sea of – Torah gains him no more insight than anyone else.

In a famous letter concerning such people who pick and choose Judaism and its leadership as they see fit, the **Chazon Ish** wrote: “The notion that the Torah can be divided into different parts – one addressing the laws concerning *issur v’heter*, and the other concerning guidance in other areas of life – with the rulings of the Torah sages applicable and binding only to laws of *issur v’heter*, what is kosher and what is not, is, in fact, the ancient position taken by the German Reform movement, which led to the near total assimilation of German Jewry. To delineate between the powers vested in the *Chachmei Yisrael* is tantamount to one who is *megaleh panim ba’Torah* (literally, one who reveals face in /at the Torah, or debunking the Torah) by issuing interpretation which subverts the traditional and accepted perspective.

After all is said and done, does this mean that a student may not question his *rebbe*? What is the accepted criteria concerning intellectual dialogue? In his *Michtav M’Eliyahu*, **Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl**, asks why Miriam *HaNeviyah*’s critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu* was labeled as *lashon hora*, slanderous speech. Does this mean that if a student has a question concerning his *rebbe*’s position regarding a certain issue, it is considered *lashon hora* to voice an opinion?

Rav Dessler explains that it is dependent upon what the questioner thinks in his heart. If he acknowledges that his *rebbe* is acutely attuned to the truth as seen by the Torah, then he may ask his question as a medium through which he can get closer to the truth. If, however, the student thinks, “I am no slouch. I know how to learn, and I feel that my *rebbe* is not cognizant of all the issues; he does not see the wider picture. I feel that if I do not take issue with my *rebbe*, his opinion could backfire,” then he had better keep his peace. We can go on and on with various scenarios. I think the reader understands what we are saying. If one has *emunas chachamim*, if he sincerely believes in what the *gedolim* say, and he feels this is *Torah mi’Sinai*, then he may seek a deeper understanding of their position. If, however, he thinks that he knows better – he manifests the early symptoms of a disease called *kefirah*, heresy.

An inspirational episode concerning the significance of *emunas chachamim* and its power took place with **Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**. A woman who was still childless after many years of marriage came to Rav Moshe and pleaded with him for a *brachah*. Apparently, her husband had approached the *Rosh Yeshivah* a number of times, to no avail. This time, however, the wife came. She refused to settle for a blessing, actually demanding, that Rav Moshe issue a decree that Heaven grant her a child. The woman felt, *Tzaddik gozer, v’HaKodesh Baruch Hu makayeim*, “A righteous man decrees and Hashem fulfills his decree.” In other words, this woman felt that Rav Moshe’s *gezeirah*, decree, was “money in the bank.” She would have a child.

Rav Moshe looked at the woman incredulously, as he asked, “Me? I should issue a decree? What power do I have to achieve efficacy?”

The woman was intractable. She would not budge. “The *Rosh Yeshivah* has it within his power to intercede in my behalf. I want a child! Please!”

Clearly, she was having difficulty understanding the meaning of the word “no.”

Finally, *Rav Moshe* relented and acquiesced to her request. He said, “I cannot decree that you have a child. On the other hand, in the merit of your *emunas chachamim*, in which you believe that one who studies Torah possesses incredible powers, Hashem should bless you.”

One year later, the woman gave birth to a healthy child.