

And it will be, if from the eyes of the assembly it was done by error. (15:24)

Enei ha'eidah, eyes of the assembly, refer to the *Sanhedrin* who, as the leaders of the nation, provide guidance, vision and illumination – which are all functions of one's eyes. As the final arbiters of Jewish law, they infuse our nation with the clarity that comes with Torah erudition and the wisdom, the result of their *daas Torah*, wisdom honed and inspired by the Torah. In his *hesped*, eulogy, for the *Maharam Shick*, *Horav Nota Wolf*, *Rav* of Pressburg, Hungary, and the leading elder of the Torah community, offered the following parable, which gives us a powerful insight into the meaning of *einei ha'eidah*.

A king became ill, the sickness affecting his vision. In no time, he lost sight in both of his eyes. The preeminent eye specialists from all over his land were immediately summoned to his bedside. After a meticulous examination which left no avenue of treatment ignored, they ultimately arrived at a consensus of opinion: the king required an eye transplant. If they could provide him with a healthy set of eyes, they could remove his useless ones, and the king's vision would return. There was one problem: no one was willing to donate his eyes to the king.

Money was no issue. The king would pay almost anything for his vision to return. The king's servants searched every nook and cranny of his land, to no avail. No one was willing to part with his eyes. As a last option, the king's servants went to the jail which was home to some very nasty people, many of whom had little or nothing to look forward to. One prisoner was serving a life sentence with no hope for parole. They made him an offer that was truly incredible: "If you contribute your eyes to the king, he will commute your sentence and allow you to go free!" They were offering this man the most elusive gift that he could ever dream of receiving.

"What benefit do I derive from the freedom which you grant me, if I will be blind? What do I gain from leaving prison if I will, for the rest of my life, live in darkness?" he asked.

The prisoner understood the reality of life and how a life of darkness is not much of a life.

"Our sages teach us," *Rav Wolf* declared, "'*misas tzaddikim*, the death of the righteous, atones for the generation.' The passing of a *tzaddik* leaves a tremendous void. The pain felt by the congregation of Jews when a Torah giant passes is an atonement for them. With the passing of the *Maharam Shick*, we merited a huge atonement for our generation, but he was the *einei ha'eidah*, our eyes, our vision, our hope and inspiration. True, we have been forgiven, but how can we continue on without vision, amidst the darkness which suffuses us all?"

A powerful statement which we often forget to take to heart. Without our leadership, we are like blind men groping in the dark. Trading our "eyes" for atonement is not a very reasonable trade.