

## **"You are children of Hashem your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves, nor make a bald patch between your eyes for the dead." (14:1)**

The juxtaposition of topics in this portion of the *parsha* begs elucidation. The previous *perek* dealt with the false prophet who instigated people to worship idols. This is followed by the laws concerning an *ir ha'nidachas*, a place in which an entire population of a city defected from Hashem and committed themselves to idol worship. The *Torah* goes on to emphasize our unique relationship with Hashem as analogous to the relationship between children and their parents. This unparalleled relationship precludes our unusual out-pouring of grief at the death of a parent. What connection is there between these various laws? What message can be derived from it?

*Horav S.R. Hirsch z.l.* sees a definite connection among the topics of idol worship by instigation, our "familial" relationship with Hashem, and excessive grief for the deceased. He explains that the first chapter concerns the false prophet. It deals with the issues that prominent spiritual personalities - or people who are dear to us - might raise in order to influence our *emunah*, faith in Hashem. One's social or spiritual prominence - or even his friendship with us - is of no consequence when it contradicts Hashem's mandate. When one becomes a vehicle to incite others to defect from Hashem, he is no longer our friend or mentor; he is an apostate to be spurned and scorned.

We are admonished in *Sefer Vayikra* - and once again in this *parsha* - against excessive mourning and senseless expression of grief. The prohibition against making incisions on one's body and making baldness on one's head are aimed at maintaining one's self-esteem. When one makes symbolic gestures representing inordinate and exaggerated grief, he indicates a lack of faith in his own self-worth. His self- image should reflect his unique role in relationship with Hashem. No personality, regardless of prominence or closeness, may control our psyche to the extent that his demise causes us to "come apart at the seams."

In the previous chapters, we are admonished against this unrestricted devotion to person/persons who impose upon us their distorted perception of Judaism. Such people use their position in the community and our respect for them as vehicles to abuse us. This danger became magnified as *Klal Yisrael* prepared to enter *Eretz Yisrael* to settle in small settlements throughout the land. They would be living in isolation, far removed from the center and mainstream of the national community. In this milieu, the spiritual demagogue, using his imposing personality and camaraderie to prevail upon the unassuming to defect from Hashem, had the opportunity to achieve greater success.

The *Torah*, therefore, repeats with increased emphasis the prohibition against undue and unnatural display of grief. The *Torah* once again demands us to maintain our self-respect, even against our nearest and dearest friends and relations. This is our mandate because we are "Hashem's

children," an appellation which elevates us above the rest of mankind. The bond which attaches us to Hashem is stronger and closer - and overrides all others.