

## **"You are standing this day all of you before Hashem your G-d, your heads, your tribes, all the men of Yisrael... from the hewer of your wood, unto the drawer of your water." (29:9,10)**

The *Torah* distinguishes among the various kinds of Jews, noting that the profession of each reflects his station in life. Indeed, the *Torah* indicates that all members of the Jewish "body" - from the "head" to the "foot" - were assembled on *Har Sinai* on that auspicious day. The *Baal Ha'Tanya* mentions that, at times, the "foot" will assume the role of the "head". Metaphorically, although the head gives guidance to the foot, it is the foot which actually leads and carries the head and the rest of the body from place to place. Consequently, in the spiritual realm, it can be the "water drawer" who serves as a role model, inspiring the "heads of the tribes."

The defining characteristic of the head is the ability to think. It is the foundation of man's intellect. The foot carries, but does so only by following the directive of the mind. The basic feature of the foot, therefore, is the sense of obedience, the ability to follow instructions, to subordinate itself to a "higher" order. How can the common Jew, characterized by his obedient *emunah peshutah*, simple faith in Hashem, serve as the paradigm for the intellectual Jew? Are we to accept the idea that the great *Torah* scholar is to view the simple Jew, the *Tehillim Yid*, as the model for this own spiritual ascendancy?

We suggest that, indeed, the high and mighty can learn from the *poshute Yid*, simple Jew. Those who - either due to the constraints of nature or circumstance - have not had the opportunity to grow intellectually or to observe *mitzvos* in the same manner as the great *Torah* leadership still harbor sentiments that carry great significance.

The grief one endures as a result of his inability to perform a *mitzvah* properly or to study a section of *Talmud* is in itself a noble "deed." Such a feeling touches the very essence of one's *neshamah*, soul. It is the cause for great reward. Thus, the yearning exhibited by the "water drawer" can serve as an inspiration for the "leadership" to emulate.

We must also address the issue of *emunah peshutah*, simple, pure faith, on the part of the ordinary Jew, who may not have the same intellectual acumen of the scholar. Throughout their tumultuous history, Jews have resolutely retained their belief in Hashem's justness, despite their confrontation with trials and tribulations that would overwhelm most people. One need only to peruse some of the literature pertaining to *Churban* Europe - the Holocaust - in order to be amazed at the tenacious adherence of observant Jews to *halachic* norms. These anecdotal lessons serve as a source of pride and inspiration for all, scholar and laymen alike, reflecting the devotion of our people to Hashem *Yisborach* under the most trying circumstances.

A story which comes to mind - because of its poignancy and timeliness - is one which the author personally heard annually before *tekias shofar* from the *Veitzenar Rav*, *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels*

*z.l.* He told of the events which took place in Auschwitz on *Erev Rosh Hashanah* in 1944. The cruel Nazi commandant had decided to sustain the lives of only those boys between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who were big enough and strong enough to carry out the back-breaking camp labor. The others would be put to death. He devised a sadistic test to determine who would live and who would die. At the end, fourteen hundred boys who unfortunately had not passed the "test," were imprisoned in a special cellblock to await their imminent execution.

The next morning, the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, fathers or relatives who had heard of the terrible fate that awaited their children, tried to persuade the kapos to release them. They took whatever valuables they still possessed and attempted to ransom their children. The kapos replied that an exact count had been taken of the boys, and for every one released, some other child would have to replace him. Although each knew that saving his son's life was at the cost of another Jewish child's life, fathers made whatever deals they could to spare their own children. All that day of *Rosh Hashanah* there was a mad trafficking in lives. The kapos, succumbing to their greed, released some boys only to grab replacements.

*Horav Meisels* was approached by a Jew from Oberland who said, "*Rebbe*, my only son is locked in that doomed cellblock. I have enough valuables to ransom him. I come to you, *Rebbe*, to ask a *she'eilah*, *halachic* question. May I ransom my child, knowing that another child will probably be taken in his stead? May I save my son's life at the expense of another?"

*Horav Meisels* responded that with no *seforim* and no other Rabbis with whom to consult - and without the necessary clarity of mind because of the distressing circumstances - it was difficult to render a correct *halachic* decision. Unable to permit the father to ransom his child, but yet unwilling to deny him the opportunity, he implored the father to please desist from asking this *she'eilah*.

The distraught father refused to accept a "non-answer" and said, "*Rebbe*, if you can not give me a definite *heter*, permission, to ransom my only son, then so be it. I accept Hashem's decree with love." *Horav Meisels* attempted to dissuade the Jew by explaining that he simply could not give a definite answer, but this by no means precluded the acceptability of such an act. The father would not budge in his commitment. He said, "I will not ransom my child at the expense of another Jewish soul. I accept Hashem's decree with love and joy!"

All that day, the father persisted in his decision, murmuring joyfully to himself that he had achieved the merit of giving his only son's life in obedience to the Almighty. He prayed that his selfless act of devotion be viewed in the same positive light as the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the binding of Yitzchak.

This moving story clearly demonstrates the devotion of the Jew to Hashem and His *mitzvos*. May the selfless acts of heroism by our ancestors throughout the ages serve for us as an inspiration and source of merit for the New Year.