

"And there came the fugitive and told Avram, the Ivri." (14:13)

The *Radak* explains that Avram was called "*Ivri*," since he was the descendant of Ever. Presenting an alternative approach, the *Midrash* contends that he was called *Ivri* in recognition of his position vis-a-vis the rest of the world. The word "rcg" means "the other side." This suggests that Avraham was on one side of the moral/spiritual divide, while the rest of the world was on the other side. Although Avraham had many disciples, he remained essentially alone. His beliefs and moral rectitude precluded his integration into the pagan society which reigned at the time.

The concept of "being alone" in the world characterizes the *ben Torah*. *Horav Yechiel Michel Feinstein, Shlita*, cites the *Talmud* in *Taanis* 10a which confirms this concept. The *Talmud* refers to *Talmidei Chachomim*, *Torah* scholars, who are assiduous in their *Torah* study and *mitzvah* observance as *ohshjh*, individuals. Why do *Chazal* not refer to them simply as *Rabbanim* or *Torah* scholars? Why do they imply this idiosyncratic name? It is obvious, notes *Horav* Feinstein, that the word *ohshjh*, individuals, distinguishes the *Torah* scholar.

The essence of a *Talmid Chachom* is his ability to be his own man, not deferring to outside pressure. It characterizes one who is able to remain resolute in the face of challenge and unwavering against the alien winds of change. Even if the entire world stands against him, he maintains his observance, never varying from his commitment and belief. This was Avraham's distinction in being called *Ivri*.

The righteous man must be able to endure isolation. For some, sacrificing popularity is the price they pay for embracing truth. Public acclaim is great if one is not subject to bending his principles. Being a Jew frequently demands that we accept the challenge of "being on the other side." Our success -- or failure -- in maintaining religious observance is often commensurate with our ability to master this challenge.