

Is it to Hashem that you do this, o vile and unwise people? (32:6)

How could *Klal Yisrael* have been so vile and unwise as to sin against Hashem? *Rashi* explains that they were vile in their lack of gratitude and unwise in not taking into consideration the dire consequences of their misbehavior and rebellion against Hashem. One would think that being considered vile is much worse than being called unwise. Why then does vile precede unwise? The *Chafetz Chaim*, *zi*, explains this with a *mashal*, parable, to a man who worked one month a year, during which he earned enough to sustain himself for the other eleven months. This arrangement worked out well until he suddenly became ill during that month. He was quite ill, and he had to take every penny that he had hidden away for a rainy day. Well, it was now raining. He used up all of his savings, but, *Baruch Hashem*, he emerged from the treatment a healthy, cured person. The problem was that he was now broke.

His friends saw that he was depressed. His usual smile and friendly demeanor were gone. He was essentially miserable. His friends asked him about his unbecoming attitude. He explained that he was not upset about the medical expenses which had depleted his savings. What concerned him was the fact that he had no money to support himself during the coming year, since he had spent his “working” month in bed. “When I sit out that month, I do not eat the following year,” he complained.

This, explains the *Chafetz Chaim*, is the distinction between vile and unwise with regard to *mitzvah* observance. Prior to its descent to this world and following its return to the *Olam Ha’Neshamos*, Heavenly Abode of Souls, regardless of the duration in time (even if it is thousands of years), the *neshamah*, soul, of a Jew, can do nothing to accumulate reward. It has no opportunity for *mitzvah* performance in *Olam Habba*; hence, there is no chance of reward. It is only in this world that *mitzvah* performance, good deeds, are available. What one fails to do here lives with him forever.

A *naval*, vile person, is one who has transgressed, who has rebelled against Hashem. *Lo chacham*, an unwise person, is a reference to one who wastes his time and allows the opportunity for spiritual advancement via *mitzvah* performance to slip through his hands. Once it is lost, it is lost for eternity. The *naval* has sinned, but, if he repents, his slate is cleansed and his “vileness” expunged. The unwise person who does not perform *mitzvos*, who does not learn when he can, whose *davening* is, at best, deficient, loses out forever. Therefore, the Torah first wrote vile, because that appellation is salvageable. The unwise person is sadly relegated to “live” with his impudence.