

Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue. (16:20)

If we know of one imperative that hardly requires an injunction concerning its primacy, it is the pursuit of righteousness. Nonetheless, the Torah not only feels the need to mention it, but to mention it twice; *tzedek, tzedek*, “righteousness, righteousness.” Everyone is involved in *mitzvah* performance (or so they claim), but even the execution of the most significant *mitzvah* must be carried with spiritual and moral integrity. A *mitzvah* should not be carried out at the expense of others. To appropriate funds for the needy – funds that have been “earned” in a less than reputable manner – is not a *mitzvah*, but actually angers Hashem. I say “less than reputable,” because it is a term that applies to “gray” areas in which the inappropriateness of an activity/action might not be dark black or bright white, but a little grayish. It is tempting to cross the line, because, after all, we are doing this to help someone. It is like speeding to get to the hospital – even though if, *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, we cause an accident, we have no excuse. Gray areas. “*Tzedek, tzedek*,” explains the saintly *Horav Bunim, zl, m’Peshischa*, “You” must pursue righteousness with righteousness. No excuses – the end does not justify the means.”

Furthermore, *tzedek, tzedek* – continuously, persistently. Just because one has begun the endeavor with *tzedek* as his lodestar does not permit him to change gears along the journey and implement “other” methods for completing the endeavor. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, is crafty. If at first it is unsuccessful in tarnishing the “means,” it waits until, at some point, it notices a weakness in the individual’s mettle. It seeks an area where it can exacerbate this weakness and “convince” the person to alter his means – of course, for the greater good. Hashem demands consistent *tzedek* from us.

A community was confronted with choosing between two candidates for the position of *rav*. While one was far more erudite, charismatic and people-oriented, the other candidate was a *b’nan shel Kedoshim*, heir to an extra-ordinary lineage of forebears who were all illustrious Torah giants. Due to their obvious obtuseness, the community leaders gravitated towards *yichus*, pedigree, over quality.

They sought the advice of a Torah luminary, who was appalled by their line of thinking: “It would be an insult to this candidate’s ancestors if he were to be chosen solely in their merit – rather than on his own. The Torah requires the position of *rav* to be occupied by one who is eminently qualified – not one whose ancestors preceding him were qualified. *Yichus* is wonderful, an added benefit, once everything else is in place.”