

## You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout...Whoever will touch the mountain will surely die. (19:12)

*Nogea* means to touch inappropriately or to reach up/out. It is the act of going beyond one's domain into that of another. One may extend himself indecorously or even correctly, but, in any event, he goes beyond himself into another otherwise inaccessible area. He reaches/touches elsewhere. The Jewish People were warned not to touch the mountain. It was off-limits to them. It was theoretically beyond their reach, out of the sphere of their purview. The *Chafetz Chaim*, *zi*, cited this *pasuk* in a letter admonishing the head of a medical conference against tampering with the Torah-study of *yeshivah* students. Apparently, a medical conference had been convened, with the primary issue on the agenda the poor health of *yeshivah* students. Rather than find ways to augment their situation by providing better, more nutritious food and living quarters, their goal was malicious: to diminish the amount of time devoted to Torah by assigning more time for recreation and physical exercise, anything that would remove them from the *bais hamedrash*. They sought to decrease the number of students per class, which would close the doors of the *yeshivah* to the many students who were cut from the student roster.

The *Chafetz Chaim* began his letter to the physician who led the conference, "Since I heard that a medical conference under his leadership is convening in Vilna, I am sending my blessing that the Healer of all flesh send you His Divine assistance and blessing from Above. I heard of your concern for the *yeshivah* students, and I would like to inform you that, *baruch Hashem*, the *yeshivos* are doing quite well, providing their students three nutritious meals daily. The young men take walks during the course of the day, thus availing themselves of the requisite exercise. They are all healthy, which I am certain you will be happy to hear."

Following the *Chafetz Chaim's* signature, he added a postscript. "I would like to remind your honor of a *pasuk* in the Torah, *Kol ha'nogea ba'har mos yumas*; 'Whoever will touch the mountain will surely die.' If just touching this will incur the penalty of death (and the mountain is merely the platform upon which the Torah was given), certainly one who touches (appends) the Torah itself will surely become subject to this punishment."

The *Chafetz Chaim* gave *mussar*, admonished, in a subtle – almost respectful – manner. While he did not seek to offend the individual to whom he was speaking, he did not want to downplay the severity of the incursion. The Torah was off-limits. Anything that represented *negiah*, inappropriate touching, overreaching the boundaries of Jewish law, was playing with a fierce response from the Almighty.

Secular movements that have developed within Judaism have proposed that *mitzvos* be appended to conform to the spirit of the times. In nineteenth-century Germany, when the gates of the ghetto came crashing down and Jews were granted the right to participate fully in society, the desire to

assimilate was (for some) overwhelming. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, who was the preeminent *Rav* and valiant fighter to preserve our *Mesorah*, Tradition, countered that only through traditional Jewish education and commitment to Torah observance will we survive as a nation. Otherwise, we will have nothing. Indeed, those who assimilate, renege Judaism, have never really been accepted by the gentile society. To them, we will always be Jews.

The Torah instructs us to set boundaries around the mountain, so that no one will touch it. *Horav S.R. Hirsch* explains the purpose of *Hagbalah*, establishing a perimeter, as the Torah's way of teaching us that the Torah came (from Hashem) to the People. It neither developed from within the people, nor was it intuited by Moshe *Rabbeinu*. It, with the Oral Law, is Divine in origin, and Hashem is its Author. Thus, the Torah's whole character is eternal, immutable and inviolable. Indeed, the same *Hagbalah* was continued when *Klal Yisrael* encamped in the wilderness. *Machane Kehunah* and *Leviyah*, the encampment of the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* surrounded *Machaneh Shechinah*, where the *Mishkan*, Sanctuary, was, so that the people were kept at a distance from the Sanctuary. Thus, the superhuman origin and validity of the Torah as being independent of time and place were established for all time. The *Kohanim* and *Leviim* were to protect the Torah from the incursion of the earlier and ever-present deviant movements. Those movements have taken upon themselves the "responsibility" to transform the Torah and Orthodoxy to a "kinder," more "attuned to the times," form of Judaism – a religion that will tear down the perimeter established around the Torah, so that it will conform to the values and morals of the surrounding culture, Heaven forbid.