

This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)

The *Talmud* (*Horayos* 12b) relates that *Rava* asked *Rav Nachman* if a *Kohen Gadol* who was afflicted with *tzaraas*, spiritual leprosy, may marry a widow. (Under normal circumstances, the *Kohen Gadol* may not marry a widow. However, since as a *metzora* he is disqualified from serving, perhaps the prohibition against marrying a widow would not presently pertain to him.) The answer was not available to him. On another occasion, *Rav Papa* raised the same question to *Rav Nachman*. This time, *Rav Huna*, son of *Rav Nachman*, interjected with the answer that, just as a *Kohen Gadol* who becomes *tamei*, ritually impure, may still not marry a widow, likewise, one who has a *mum*, blemish, even though he may not perform the service, is still prohibited from marrying a widow: Leprosy is also a blemish; hence, the *Kohen Gadol* who is afflicted with leprosy may not marry a widow. When *Rav Papa* heard this answer rendered by *Rav Huna*, he arose, kissed him on the head and gave his daughter to him as a wife, so impressed was he with his *halachic* expertise.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, quotes this passage in the *Talmud* and wonders why *Rav Huna*, who was *Rav Nachman*'s son, remained silent when *Rava* asked the same question of *Rav Nachman*. Yet, when *Rav Papa* asked the question, he responded and greatly impressed *Rav Papa* with his response. *Rav Zaitchik* explains that upon noticing that his father, *Rav Nachman*, did not have the answer, *Rav Huna* remained silent, due to *kibbud av*, honor for his father. Later on, however, after some time had passed, his father's lack of an answer and the infringement on the honor due his father did not impact his decision as much. On the contrary, what father does not have *nachas*, satisfaction, upon seeing his son's brilliance and erudition? A father is not jealous of his son's achievements. Nonetheless, *Rav Huna* originally exhibited extraordinary self-control, restraining himself from rendering the *halachah*, out of respect for his father. *Rav Huna*'s strength of character did not go unnoticed by *Rav Papa*, who immediately offered him his daughter in marriage. This is the type of *baal middos*, person with refined character traits, he sought in a son-in-law. To him, it was not all about pedigree, financial status, or even erudition; it was about *middos*. The *middah* of *vitur*, concession, tolerance, deference, self-control out of respect and feelings for another person, took center stage in *Rav Papa*'s assessment of a *ben Torah*.

Human beings have feelings – that is what makes them human. How we manage those emotions informs one's humanity. I used the word “manage” as opposed to “suppress,” because ignoring one's feelings do not make the feelings disappear. They fester until an opportunity arises – either good or not so good – when the dam bursts and he/she is compelled to reckon with his/her emotions. Emotions need not control one's life. We control our emotions with willpower. *Horav Nachman Bulman, zl*, teaches, *Ein davar omeid bifnei ha'ratzon*, “Nothing stands in the way of one's will.” The key is to have the proper *ratzon*, will. The secular world has a laundry list of theories and solutions for developing the appropriate will to overcome the inappropriate emotions. While our purpose is not to negate science and medicine, the focus of this *d'var Torah* concerning *hisapkus*, the self-control exhibited by *Rav Huna*, is on gaining self-control through *mussar*, ethical discourse. We acquire the right desires by learning about them, having a mentor who guides us, and choosing an environment of like-minded individuals whose goals and values are Torah-

oriented. Many people talk the talk, but, when it comes to walking the walk, they only do lip service to having the correct *ratzon*. They say they want, but do they really want, or are they just making noise? It was this attitude in action, which Rav Papa observed manifest by Rav Huna, that inspired him to take him as a son-in-law.

One can literally write a book about the *middah* of *vitur/vatranus*. Stories abound about this *middah* and how some of our *gedolim* – and also simple Jews – whose *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem was consummate, lived their lives with *vatranus* as their lodestar. We view *vitur* as a *middah tovah*, good, refined character trait, that guides us to look away and exert self-control in situations in which, for the most part, we have every right to be demanding. As I was perusing various *vitur* stories, however, I came across one that illustrated the practical aspect of *vitur* for me. It availed me a new perspective on how we should view life's occurrences/circumstances in the context of *vitur*.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, arrived in Yerushalayim circa 1873. Shortly after his arrival, he went to visit the *Kosel*. He was accompanied by another Jew. Rav Yosef Chaim's reputation preceded him, and he was already known as one of the leaders of the *Old Yishuv*. An Arab storekeeper noticed the distinguished Rav and decided to do what he did best. He threw a rotten orange at the Rav. At the time, the Rav was far from fluent in Arabic, so he replied in Yiddish, "*Ah sheinah dank*; Thank you!" The Arab recognized the Jew who was accompanying marriage. This is the type of *baal middos*, person with refined character traits, he sought in a son-in-law. To him, it was not all about pedigree, financial status, or even erudition; it was about *middos*. The *middah* of *vitur*, concession, tolerance, deference, self-control out of respect and feelings for another person, took center stage in Rav Papa's assessment of a *ben Torah*.

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Things happen in life – not always to our liking. People act in a manner which, in our mind, we consider inconsiderate – or even hurtful; when we act kindly, we find out that we were being taken advantage of; and the list goes on. From the above vignette, we derive that it could always have been worse; what occurred was actually a *chesed*, kindness. We cannot fathom Hashem's scale of merit. We might consider ourselves deserving when we are not, or we are deserving, but there is a smidgen of impropriety which Hashem "kindly" expunges; only we do not realize this. Thus, *vitur* is not just a refined character trait; it is a vital, integral way of life.