

The valuation shall be fifty silver shekels. (27:3)

Chazal (Megillah 23b) distinguish between *arachin*, valuations, which are a set amount established by the Torah, and *damim*, money/assessments, which are based upon a person's worth (on the slave market). *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, posits that the Torah is teaching us that two variant circumstances, conditions, determine how to view a person. First is a person's established level – as expected of him, based on standards. This is similar to an established expectancy that at (for example) age 20, an individual should be proficient in various disciplines. At age thirty, he should have progressed beyond this to a different level. This continues on as he ages, experiences life and continues his education. A second perspective is based upon a person's potential. Some people have the ability to grow higher and farther, to shine as superstars. If they are held to the established standards, they will not realize their potential. *Erech* is a set value, and *damim* is based upon a person's potential.

A good word, a smile, an acknowledgment of one's effort and hard work can go a long way in enabling a student to achieve his/her potential. On the flip side, a negative statement, an uncaring, unfeeling teacher can destroy a student's self-esteem, undermine his self-confidence and ultimately destroy his potential. Everyone needs a subtle push in the right direction to live up to his capabilities. Some require a harder push to establish an awareness of their identity. I think many people would be observant if they knew what non-observance can lead to. Take the following anecdotal story.

Moshe was a simple fellow. A woodchopper by trade, he barely eked out a few ruble with which to support himself. It is one thing to live in abject poverty; it is another when your neighbor down the block is becoming increasingly wealthy with each passing day. Moshe lived in a village next to a successful magician by the name of Ivan. This magician was steadily raking in the cash. Moshe just stood there, watching his neighbor become richer and richer.

Moshe had difficulty observing Ivan's increasing wealth. He, too, wanted out from his wretched life. Why could he not become wealthy? He walked up to Ivan's door, knocked – and was ushered into a palatial home. "Ivan," Moshe began, "I, too, want to become a magician like you. I am sick of living a life of poverty. Will you teach me the black arts of magic? (Moshe was not asking for the superficial sleight of hand tricks. He wanted the real thing.)

Ivan took a look at the *nebach* that stood before him and sighed, "My friend," Ivan began, "I will be happy to teach you magic and take you on as my assistant, but first you must undergo hypnosis, during which you will be asked to forget certain things. If you accept this, then we can go on."

Moshe was happy with any positive response from Ivan. "No problem, I readily accept your rules. I am prepared for anything that you ask of me," Moshe replied. He was now about to learn that it was easier said than done.

Ivan took out his tools of the trade and put Moshe into a deep trance, "You will first forget your name." Moshe had no problem with this. For money, he could not care less what his new name would be. "Fine, I accept to forget my name." Now Ivan made a more difficult request, "You will forget your family." Once again, Moshe (no longer Moshe) accepted the change. Money trumps family, he felt, "Yes, I accept to forget my family."

Now came the clincher, "You will forget that there is one G-d." When Moshe heard this last request, he jumped from his seat and exclaimed, "I could never do that! How could I deny the existence of the one and only G-d?"

Ivan was incredulous. "Why not?" he asked. [Ivan lived in a world in which people denied the existence of the Almighty on an almost daily basis. Anything that furthered their goals was acceptable.] When Moshe heard this question, he yelled, "Because I am a Jew!" "How can I forget that I am a Jew, when there is only one G-d?"

We forget who we are, from whom we have descended, and to Whom we owe everything. One of the biggest challenges facing people today is their identities. Who am I? Where am I going? Before one determines where he is going, he must acknowledge who he has been and where his journey began. We are *Yidden* who are the beneficiaries of a glorious, albeit tumultuous, history. Hashem has guided us throughout our history and will continue to do so, until that glorious day that he sends *Moshiach Tziddkeinu* to redeem us from our exile.