

For the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make just words crooked. (16:19)

We think that *shochad*, bribery, is about taking money to sway judgment. As *Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita*, points out, it is not always about accepting money. Any favor that, when granted, makes the beneficiary /judge feel indebted is considered a bribe. Indeed, as we see from the following story (“In the Footsteps of the Maggid,” by Rabbi Paysach Krohn), one can never be too careful with regard to the far-reaching effects of taking a bribe/accepting a favor. *Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl*, together with his brother-in-law, *Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl*, founded Telshe Yeshiva in America. The *Rosh Yeshivah* had lost his wife and four of his children to the Nazi murderers, when they decimated the city of Telshe, Lithuania. He remarried, and he and his wife were blessed with a son and a daughter.

Understandably, he doted on these two children who served in some small manner as comfort and solace after the tragedy that he had sustained. Unfortunately, as much as they wanted to, they were unable, due to their material insufficiency, to provide the two children with even the basic, simple toys with which all children grow up. When their son's third birthday arrived, two of the *yeshivah's bachurim*, students, each one hailing from a well-to-do family, purchased a small tricycle as a birthday gift. We can only begin to imagine the joy that permeated within their home.

A short while later, the *Rosh Yeshivah* was set to give the *Yoreh Deah bechinah*, to test the oldest students and grant them *semichah*, ordination. When they walked into the *bechinah* the *Rosh Yeshivah* smiled, “Just the other day, I penned a thank you note to you for the gift you gave our son. It was greatly appreciated. However, due to the feelings of gratitude that I have for you, I do not think that I can be objective in testing you for *semichah*. Therefore, I must recuse myself and ask you to take a *bechinah* elsewhere.”

Such was the greatness of the *Rosh Yeshivah*. He sensed that his overwhelming love for his son and his appreciation to the students who had brought a little extra joy to his son's life, would impair his objectivity. This is the extent to which the prohibition against taking a bribe can go

.