

From among your brethren shall you set a king over yourself, you cannot place over yourself a foreign man who is not your brother. (17:15)

The *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that we may not establish one who is not *m'zera Yisrael* (having the blood DNA of the seed of *Yisrael*) over us as a king. This applies even if the person is a *ger tzedek*, righteous convert. The *shoresh ha'mitzvah*, root of the *mitzvah*, is due to the fact that *zera Yisrael* are *rachmanim*, merciful. It is critical that he show mercy to all Jews and not impose upon them a heavy yoke which they are unable to bear. He should love truth, justice and righteousness, which are qualities that descendants of Avraham *Avinu* possess. The *Chinuch* extrapolates from this *halachah* that the rule of *zera Yisrael* applies to any authoritative position – even as *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 76B) say, the overseeing of irrigation to distribute water to the fields. [It goes without saying that one who is *m'zera Yisrael*, but abuses his position, is no longer worthy of serving as a leader.] *Chazal* also teach (*Kiddushin* 82A) that we do not set up one who is a barber, a bathhouse attendant or a tanner as King or as *Kohen Gadol*. It is not because they are intrinsically disqualified from the monarchy, but rather, since their vocation is looked down upon by people, they will be disparaged. [We must remember that, as times change, so do lifestyles and cultural norms.] One who has at one time done these crafts, even for a single day, is disqualified from these positions of authority. Apparently, society viewed these positions in a negative light.

The concept of *rachmanim bnei rachmanim*, merciful one's sons of merciful ones, was a character trait that was personified, not only by the *Melech Yisrael*, Jewish King, but throughout the ages by our *gedolei Yisrael*. Our Torah leaders were well known for their empathy, sensitivity and compassion in addressing the needs of their flock. As *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, notes, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* primary quality for which the Torah lauds him is not the fact that he led us out of Egypt, served as the medium for the giving of the Torah or put up with us for the forty years that we sojourned in the wilderness. The accolades bestowed upon him are expressed by two words: *Va'yaar b'sivlosam*, "He saw their burdens" (*Shemos* 2,11). Moshe was the prince of Egypt, living in Pharaoh's palace; yet, he went out to labor with his brothers and sisters. His compassion and empathy, his willingness to carry the yoke with his fellow, earned him the Torah's praise.

One *erev Shabbos*, a widow appeared at the house of the *Divrei Chaim* (*Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, Sanzer Rav*). She told him that she earned her meager living from the profits she made from selling fruit in the city market. She complained that the quality of her fruit left something to be desired. As a result, she was rapidly losing her customers. The *Rav* donned his *bekeshe*, frock, put on his hat and left his learning to head to the market. He stood at the widow's fruit stand and took an apple in his hand and called, "*Yidden*, come take delicious, healthy apples!" This was not enough for him. He had the widow double her price, in order to make up for her loss. When word got out in the city that the holy *Sanzer* was encouraging everyone to purchase the apples from the widow's fruit stand, everyone came running. This is how one of the *gedolei ha'dor*, Torah leaders, demonstrated his sensitivity and caring for a widow.

There was a poor man in Kamenitz (Brest/Belarus) who, due to his abject poverty, wore the same clothes day in and day out. He did not have access to warm water and soap to bathe himself. As a result, his body emitted a noxious odor which permeated his one set of clothing. Wherever he went, people would disperse in order to distance themselves from him. When the *Rosh Yeshivah* heard how this hapless man was being treated, he decided to do his part to change the attitude of the people toward this man. He waited until the man entered the *bais ha'medrash*. He then ran over to him, hugged and kissed him and walked arm in arm with him up to the *mizrach*, front of the *shul*, where he sat him down next to him.

Does this mean that *Rav* Baruch Ber's sense of smell did not function? Absolutely not! The man's lack of hygiene bothered him as well, but he would not allow his personal feelings to affect another Jew adversely. When a child soils himself, it is not very appealing. Does his mother complain? No, because he is her child. Likewise, this man was *Rav* Baruch Ber's brother.