

Only be strong not to eat blood – for the blood, it is life – and you should not eat the life with the meat. (12:23)

Rashi comments: “You may not eat meat that was torn from a living animal.” The Torah prohibits us from eating *eiver min ha’chai*, a limb cut from a living animal. The *Sefer HaChinuch* offers the *shoresh*, root, of the *mitzvah*, that we not train ourselves in the trait of cruelty, which is a most disgusting trait. Indeed, we can perform no greater cruelty than to cut a limb off a living animal and eat it. The *Chinuch* continues with a *mussar*, ethical character, directive. “I have already written numerous times concerning the great benefit that we derive in our acquisition of good *middos*, character traits. When we distance ourselves from the bad, the good will remain with us, because good inherently gravitates towards and clings to good.”

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, observes that, historically (and nationally), good character traits, without which we would not have been worthy of receiving the Torah, have been our hallmark. In *Tehillim* 114:2, David *Hamelech* writes (concerning *Krias Yam Suf*), *Haysah Yehudah l’Kadsho*, “Yehudah became His Sanctuary,” which is a reference to Nachshon ben Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah, who was the first person to take the plunge into the Red Sea (which split), followed by the rest of the nation. Why does David *Hamelech* use the word *haysah*, (it) became? It is written in the feminine form. Concerning Nachshon, it should have said *hayah*, in the masculine. The *Nesivos* explains, that in order for the sea to split, *middos tovos* were a critical and vital requisite. Thus, it was necessary to apply the merit of Nachshon’s grandmother, Tamar, wife of Yehudah, who exemplified positive character traits at their apex. She was prepared to die in order that she not embarrass Yehudah.

The *Chinuch* closes with the words: “The good inherently gravitates towards and clings to the good.” Hashem wants only good. Thus, He enjoins us to choose and cling to good, because we should be like Him. While every Jew possesses the capacity and deep-rooted desire to do good, it is unquestionably an almost innate quality in those whose life is infused with – and wholly devoted to – Torah study and dissemination. As they develop into *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants, and scholars of note, their character traits are honed and refined through the Torah. A Torah leader is not simply a more knowledgeable scholar; he stands out in every aspect of his ethical/moral character. Obviously, one whose life’s work revolves around training and supervising the ethical character refinement of *yeshivah* students – the *Mashgiach* – will be one who possesses such an impeccable character. One such *Mashgiach*, *Horav Meir Chodosh, zl*, of *Yeshivas Chevron*, was a giant among giants, whose self-control and character refinement were legend, as evinced by the following vignette.

The students of *Yeshivas Chevron* were acutely aware that, when the *Mashgiach* had made a decision to ask a student to leave the *yeshivah*, he had no room for negotiation. He was out. The *Mashgiach* did not take such a decision lightly. It was the result of extreme, careful and painful deliberation. He looked at every possible reason to maintain the student’s status quo. When he

could not longer find a redeeming reason to keep him, and once he had determined that his presence was harmful to other students – it was over.

The *Mashgiach* had decided that a certain student, who had once demonstrated extraordinary potential, was using his remarkable qualities for anything but learning. His spiritual/ethical character had deteriorated and plummeted to such a nadir that his presence in the *yeshivah* was a detriment to all. Sadly, the time had come to ask him to find another venue for his baneful activities. Word had spread that the fateful day was coming very soon.

The student's friends told him, "You know that once the *Mashgiach* makes the decision, he does not reconsider. It is a done deal." The student replied, "Trust me, you will see that the *Mashgiach* will not ask me to leave." A few days passed, and the *Mashgiach* summoned the student to his office. "Do you know why I sent for you?" the *Mashgiach* asked. "Sure," the student replied. "The *Mashgiach* wants to remove me from the *yeshivah*. I know exactly why the *Mashgiach* is doing this. He is asking me to leave because he has nothing else to do. Today it is me; tomorrow, it will be someone else." When the *Mashgiach* heard such words of unmitigated *chutzpah* spouting from the student's mouth – he did not send him from the *yeshivah*.

Why? This was a student who had demonstrated a callous and audacious attitude toward authority. His lack of *derech erez*, respect, notwithstanding, he deserved banishment from the *yeshivah* for a host of other infractions. Yet, the *Mashgiach* said, "No"; the student would remain in Chevron.

What spurred the *Mashgiach's* sudden change of heart? (Apparently, the student had known that his rejoinder would make a difference.) The *Mashgiach* was a great, saintly man, who introspected over his action to make completely certain that no vestige of personal interest motivated his decision. While he originally had reason to send him out, now, because the student had spoken with *chutzpah*, the *Mashgiach* felt his decision might be tainted with personal feelings. In the end, the student was so impressed with the extraordinary *middos* of the *Mashgiach* that he made an about-face, changed his life and became a diligent, G-d-fearing student, who developed into an illustrious *talmid chacham*.