

# THE SUMMARY OF ALL FEAR

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

One of the most discussed verses in this week's portion deals with the fear of Heaven.

Moshe presents the Children of Israel with a simple request fear G-d. Though it may sound simple we all know that it is not. The problem is that Moshe presents the petition as if it were a simple feat. He says, And now Israel, what does G-d want of you? Only that you fear G-d your Lord (Deuteronomy 10:12). He makes it sound as though the fear of G-d is only a minor matter.

The Talmud in Tractate Berachos asks what we all might ask: Is the fear of G-d such a small thing? The Gemara relates how Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yocha'i: The Holy One, blessed be He, has in His treasury nothing except a stockpile of the fear of heaven, as it says, "The fear of G-d is His treasure" (Isaiah 33: 6). Obviously if fear of G-d is so cherished by the Almighty, it must be very difficult to attain.

The Gemara answers: True! For it was Moshe who said this verse and for Moses fear of G-d was a small thing. Rabbi Chanina compared it to a person who is asked for a big article, and he has it. Since he has it, then it seems like a small article to him.

I always was bothered by the Gemara. Just because it was easy for Moshe, who says it is easy for us? So why does Moshe imply to the people that fear of G-d is simple. That is easy for him to say. But don't you have to know your audience and talk to them on their level? Rav Yitzchok Zilber, founder of Toldos Yeshurun, an organization that re-educates estranged Russian Jews about the heritage that was snatched from them, is known as the Father of contemporary Russian Jewry. A native of Kazan, Russia, Rav Zilber was born just before the Russian Revolution in 1917, but was discreetly taught Torah by his revered father and not only completed Shas several times during his years in Russia, but also taught Torah to many others. During World War II, he was imprisoned in Stalin's gulag where, yet he managed to remain Shomer Shabbos despite the inhumane conditions. He later had to flee from the KGB, which wanted to arrest him for his Torah activities in Russia. In 1972, he emigrated to Israel. As he walked off the airplane on his arrival in Israel and embraced the custom agent.

Chavivi! My dear one! shouted Rabbi Zilber as he gave the man a bear-hug embrace. It is so wonderful to be here and talk to a Jew like a Jew! The man offered a polite smile and a pleasant Shalom.

Please tell me, pleaded Rabbi Zilber with an intensity that seemed to announce a question whose

answer would solve all the problems facing Jews for the millennia. For years I am struggling with this problem. Please tell me, how did you understand the K'tzos haChoshen on the sugya of Areiv? (The K'tzos haChoshen is a classical commentary on the Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat, Code of Jewish Law.)

Ma zeh K'tzos haChoshen. (What is a K'tzos haChoshen)? came the reply.

Rav Zilber was puzzled. He tried another query. Maybe you can explain how you understood the Mishne in (tractate) Uktzin in the last chapter.

Mishne? Uktzin? K'tzos? What are you talking about?

Rav Zilber, recalling the difficulties he had trying to teach and study Torah in Russia was mortified. In honest shock, he asked the man. How is this possible? You mean to tell me that you live here in Israel and have the ability to learn Torah. And you don't know what the K'tzos is? You never heard of Mishne Uktzin?

Rav Zilber began to cry.

They say that the customs agent was so moved by Rabbi Zilber's simple sincerity, that he began to study Torah.

Perhaps the Gemara is telling us the simple truth. It was important for an entire nation to see the man to whom fear of heaven was considered the simplest and most rudimentary aspect of life. To Moshe, fear of Heaven was natural. As a leader, he had the imperative to impress the nation, with his sincerity. To us simple Jews, it is important to see someone whose Jewish observance is as simple and graceful as if it is second nature. To us it may be a struggle, but it is imperative that the benchmark of our goals is someone to whom fear comes natural.

In this country, we say anyone can become president. In Moshe's vision, the one he imparts to his people, anyone can fear Hashem.

Good Shabbos

*Dedicated in memory of Oscar Oliner by Mr. and Mrs. Marty Oliner*

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