

# Parsha Pearls

Yisro 5768

## **Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it (20:8).**

Our Sages teach that this refers to the mitzvah to recite kiddush on Friday night. They enacted that this kiddush be recited over a cup of wine. They also enacted that another kiddush be said on Shabbos morning, before eating the meal.

Once the Chasam Sofer was traveling and he spent several days at the house of a pious but unlearned Jew. Rumors reached the Chasam Sofer's ear that his host was speaking badly about him and calling him a "sinner". He asked his assistant to fetch the man, and asked him in the presence of several of the townspeople why he had said this. The man replied that he had seen the Chasam Sofer eating the noontime Shabbos meal without making kiddush. What Jew eats without kiddush? (The Chasam Sofer arose early on Shabbos morning, prayed, recited kiddush and ate some cake. Then he studied Torah until it came time to eat the main meal. The host had not seen the Chasam Sofer make kiddush earlier.) Some of the townspeople laughed at the unlearned host's mistake, and others were so angry that they would have beaten the man, had the Chasam Sofer not intervened and saved him. Later the Chasam Sofer sat and thought: Why did G-d cause this to happen to me in my old age, that someone should call me a sinner? But then he realized with pleasure that the Torah would continue to be known to the Jewish people, thanks to simple Jews like this man. A time was

coming when the rabbis will be wicked and heretical. We need laymen who will challenge them and question their every action. The Gemora says (Beitzah 25b) that the Torah was given to the Jewish people because they are bold. Look how bold this unlearned man was! Here I was, a famous rabbi of a great city, head of a big yeshiva, and all the local rabbis came to greet me. And yet when he saw me doing something different from what his father and father's father had done, he was not afraid to call me a sinner. But if the laymen in future times follow their rabbis uncritically, believing blindly that everything they do is according to the Torah, then G-d forbid the Torah will be forgotten!" (Lev Haivri, p. 54; Chut Hameshulash p. 123)

One might ask: Doesn't this comment of the Chasam Sofer conflict with the well-known principle of emunas chachomim, faith in our Sages? The Torah says, "Do not turn aside from the thing that they tell you right or left" (Devarim 17:11), and Rashi comments, quoting the Sages, "Even if they tell you that your right hand is your left and your left hand is your right." We have mentioned the subject of emunas chachomim in the past, in the Parsha Pearls of Korach, 5766. There we quoted Rabbi Moshe Feinstein as saying that every man must keep the laws of the Torah as interpreted by the great rabbis of his generation, and not just however he himself sees fit. And in the Parsha Pearls of Yisro 5766 we

brought the story of the Brisker Rav who quoted the Kotzker Rebbe as saying that Amalek too heard about the Parting of the Sea, yet he failed to learn the correct lessons because he did not have a rabbi to interpret it for him, and therefore he came to fight with Israel. Therefore when Yisro heard about the Parting of the Sea and the war of Amalek, he realized that it is impossible to understand G-d's ways and be a good Jew without a rabbi, and so he came to the desert to learn from Moshe Rabbeinu. Based on this, the Brisker Rav said that the mistake of the Agudah activists was that they had no rabbi at the crucial time of the establishment of the Zionist state, and they decided on great issues on their own. How then could the Chasam Sofer encourage all simple Jews to challenge their rabbis and not accept what they say?

The answer is that of course one must have a rabbi and consult him on all matters, but he must not follow the rabbi blindly, without ever asking questions. Asking questions and challenging one's rabbi has always been the Jewish way, for this is how the Torah is transmitted from generation to generation. The entire Talmud is full of questions and challenges between students and rabbis.

If one sees his rabbi do something that appears to be forbidden, he should ask: Why did you do that? Is it not written in the Torah such-and-such? If the rabbi gives a scholarly and satisfying answer, then good. And if the rabbi admits that he was mistaken, then he will cease to do the forbidden act. But if the rabbi is a

wicked man, the kind foreseen by the near-prophetic vision of the Chasam Sofer, his answer will show clearly that he is not primarily interested in following halacha, and his action was taken for political or other reasons. At that point the follower should leave this rabbi and find himself a different rabbi, a true scholar whose actions are all for the sake of Heaven.

And so we find in the Talmud that when Rav Yehuda saw his teacher Shmuel doing something wrong, he challenged him, and Shmuel in his great honesty and humility admitted that his pupil was correct: "Shmuel was sitting in judgment when a woman came in and began crying before him, but he paid no attention to her. Rav Yehuda said: Does the master not agree to the verse, 'One who closes his ear from the cry of the poor, he will also cry out and not be answered.' (Mishlei 21:13). Shmuel said: Sharp one! Your teacher will be punished with cold water, but your teacher's teacher (i.e. Mar Ukva, head of the court) will be punished with hot water." (Shabbos 55a)

The Brisker Rav blamed the Agudah for taking certain actions at the time of the establishment of the state without receiving any ruling from their rabbis. Without the true Torah opinion of a great scholar, one is likely to err. But even someone who does hear a ruling from his rabbi is obligated to respectfully challenge his rabbi with any questions that he may have, so that the matter becomes clarified.