

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah states this week, "you shall not deviate from the word that they (Rabbinical authorities) will tell you, right or left." (Devorim 17:11). We see from this verse that the Torah has specifically granted authority to our Torah Sages and Rabbinical authorities to decide matters of Halacha - Jewish Law. Elsewhere Hashem tells us that the Torah is "not in the heavens." (Devorim 30:12); one of the interpretations of this verse is that although the Torah was given from Heaven, it is the Rabbinical authorities who have the power to decide the application of Jewish Law.

There are numerous references in the Medrash and Talmud to the concept that whatever the Beis Din flesh and blood of this world decides, that is how the Beis Din of On High of Hashem will decide a certain issue. The following interesting discussion and story illustrate the power of our Rabbis to determine the Halacha and to influence our lives in ways we have never imagined!

By Torah law, an animal that is mortally wounded either through birth defect, disease or injury is deemed a treif and may not be eaten. Common parlance today is to apply the term "treif" to anything not kosher and "glatt" to anything kosher. However, technically speaking "treif" refers only to an animal with a defect which would cause it to die within a year. While "glatt" refers actually to the highest level of kosher beef, whereby the lungs of the cow are entirely free of defect; glatt means "smooth" in Yiddish.

There is a discussion in Halacha (Jewish law) as to whether a particular lung defect renders a animal treif. The Beis Yosef (R' Yosef Karo, author of Shulchan Aruch) rules that such a lung defect does not render the animal treif, while Rama (R' Moshe Isserles) disagrees and rules that an animal with such a lung defect would in fact be un-kosher. Ashkenazic Jews generally follow the opinion of Rama when he and Beis Yosef disagree.

However, with regard to this disagreement, one Ashkenazic Rabbi once ruled according to Beis Yosef. He was Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, legendary author of Sha'agas Aryeh and one of the eighteenth century's greatest Torah geniuses. His psak (ruling) in this matter caused quite a stir among Ashkenazic Jews. Nevertheless, the Jews of Volozhin, where the Sha'agas Aryeh served as Rav, faithfully followed his opinion. Years later, when the Sha'agas Aryeh's famed disciple, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, became Rav of Volozhin, he continued to follow his rebbe's ruling.

In Volozhin, there lived a man who suffered from a lung disorder identical to that which was the subject of the disagreement between the Beis Yosef and the Rama. The man decided that his condition would benefit from the rarified air of Switzerland and he began making plans to move his family there.

One night, the man's father, who had died some years before, appeared to him in a dream. "My son, I have come to warn you not to leave Volozhin. The illness from which you suffer is rendered life threatening by the Rama — and his ruling is followed by almost the entire European Jewry, including the Jewish community of Switzerland. It is only in Volozhin that the Rama's opinion is not followed, for it is there that the great Sha'agas Aryeh served as Rav, and it is he who ruled that this illness is not terminal (according to the Beis Yosef). The Sha'agas Aryeh's opinion carries great weight in Heaven. Just as the animals in Volozhin with this defect are deemed kosher and not mortally ill, so too, are you deemed capable of living many more years. However, if you move elsewhere, where the Sha'agas Aryeh's ruling is not accepted, you will die within the year."

The man canceled his plans to move. He was never cured of his lung disorder, but he lived into his eighties! (From SHABBOS STORIES p. 220 Rabbi Shimon Finkelman.

Let us all take to heart the lessons from this week's parsha and commit ourselves to searching out the most qualified Halachic authorities. Our lives could depend on it! **Good Shabbos Everyone.**