

Good Shabbos Everyone. Rosh Hashana is quickly approaching. On Rosh Hashana Hashem judges every individual, based upon their deeds and misdeeds of the previous year. It is therefore important, now more than ever, to do the right thing in life. What is the right thing in life? Thankfully, Hashem has given us the Holy Torah as a spiritual road map to guide us through life.

One of the fundamental principals in Judaism is that we have free choice. As we travel through life, we must make choices of what paths to take. Every traveler, especially a spiritual traveler, must have a navigator. The Torah tells us that our navigators in life are our Rabeim, our Torah leaders. Torah leaders are those who excel in their knowledge and understanding of the Torah as well as possessing a sterling character. Torah leaders are those who have climbed and who continue to climb the spiritual mountain through years of study and personal growth.

Because they have managed to climb to a higher point on the spiritual mountain, our Torah leaders have a unique perspective; a perspective which can help us navigate through life. Just as someone high up on a mountain can guide a person below to go in the correct direction, so too do our Torah leaders have the power to guide the Jews of the generation. Our Torah leaders are therefore a crucial part of our lives because they guide us in the right direction.

Regarding listening to Torah leaders, the Torah instructs us this week in our portion Shoftim: "According to the teaching that they will teach you and according to the judgment that they will say to you, shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left." (Devarim 17:11)

The Holy Ramban interprets this verse to teach us that if one listens to his Rav, he will have divine assistance to do the right thing in life. Thus, when we ask our Rabbis, it is as if we are getting a direct line to the will of Hashem.

The following amazing story illustrates the tremendous insight, which Hashem grants our Torah leaders.

Yosef G. remembered what it was like to be new in a yeshivah. So the experienced Yosef made a point of befriending many of the younger students, becoming like a big brother to them and helping to ease their way into the yeshivah schedule. Mendel was one of these boys. Yosef became his chavrusah - study partner, and the two spent many hours deep in study. In their conversations outside of learning, Yosef would motivate his friend to become more exact in his performance of the mitzvos and his fear of Heaven. One issue that bothered Yosef was Mendel's lenient attitude toward cholov yisrael, the requirement that the production of milk products be strictly supervised by a Jew. Yosef often reminded Mendel of the halachic importance of cholov yisrael, and of how it helps avoid and eradicate timtum halev, impurities of the heart. But Mendel remained unconvinced. While he generally appreciated all that Yosef had to offer him, he continued to ignore him on this specific issue, instead continuing his lenient attitude toward cholov yisrael.

The years passed. Yosef and Mendel both left yeshivah, were married and embarked on their separate lives. Yosef later became a teacher of Torah. Over time, the two friends lost track of each other. Some time later, Yosef traveled to a city in the Midwest to attend the wedding of one of his students. It was then that, after many years, he finally met Mendel again. It was an emotional meeting.

Yosef, in particular, found it hard to control his feelings, especially when he noticed that Mendel was being supported in his chair by several medical pillows. Clearly, something was wrong.

"What brings you to this wedding?" Yosef asked, ignoring, at first, the obvious question about Mendel's health. Mendel smiled. "I was the one who helped bring this family close to Torah. They eventually became shomer Shabbos." "That's wonderful!" Yosef exclaimed. There was a short pause. Mendel shifted slightly in his chair.

"Listen, Yosef. Do you remember how you always encouraged me to be careful about cholov yisrael?" "Of course I do. Why do you mention it?" Said Yosef.

"Let me tell you a story. It will explain how I came to be in this condition and why the mitzvah of cholov yisrael is so important to me now." Said Mendel

Mendel had become seriously ill, and was hospitalized in preparation for major surgery. His condition deteriorated very rapidly. The doctors were pessimistic about his chances, giving him only a 5% chance of survival. His surgeon, Dr. Tony Menzalla (not his real name) was very curt when he instructed Mendel to say goodbye to his wife, children and parents. Mendel was delirious with fever when his family gathered anxiously about his bedside, yet he mustered his strength for the difficult task of bidding them farewell.

They had just left the room, and the doctor was about to inject Mendel with anesthetic in preparation for surgery when the phone suddenly rang. Somehow, Mendel reached out his hand and picked up the phone. "Hello?" "The Rebbe would like to speak with you," a strange voice said. "The Rebbe? Which Rebbe?" Mendel

asked, confused. "The Rebbe of Tosh from Montreal (Rabbi Meshulem Feish Segal)."

"Who's that? I never heard of him." By now the Rebbe himself was on the phone. "Vein nisht, vein nisht, altz vet zein git, don't cry, don't cry, everything will be good." And then the Rebbe hung up. Mendel put down the phone as the doctor completed his preparations. "Who was that?" Dr. Menzalla asked curiously. "A rabbi from Montreal," Mendel answered shortly. "Who, the Tosh'er?" Mendel looked at the Roman Catholic doctor in amazement..

"That's right. Do you know him?" said Mendel. "Yes, I do. I go there once a year to get his blessing. So what did he say to you?" Said Dr. Menzalla.

"He told me not to cry, that everything will be good." Dr. Menzalla gave a dismissive wave. "So, what are you worried about? The rabbi said it will be good." And with those words Mendel fell asleep. The next thing he knew, the surgery was finished. He had woken up and he felt great! No fever. No nausea. None of the terrible side effects that are usually expected after surgery. It was unbelievable.

The doctor was pleased, but he cautioned Mendel, "You aren't out of the woods yet!" Dr. Menzalla planned on spacing out the surgery over time to minimize the danger. He wanted Mendel confined to bed-rest for an entire year. Only then would he conclude the surgery. Mendel was dismissed from the hospital with Dr. Menzalla's warning ringing in his ears. "Absolute strict bed rest! No long trips or plane flights. No standing or putting any strain on your back."

Mendel had every intention of following these orders and with Hashem's help, regaining his full health. It wasn't long after Mendel returned home that the phone rang with another call from the Rebbe. "I want you to come to me to Tosh." Mendel was in a quandary. He didn't want to turn down the Rebbe but he was terrified of disobeying the doctor's orders. He decided to call his father and ask his advice. His father encouraged him to go to the Rebbe, despite the admonition from the doctor, who had himself expressed faith in the Rebbe.

He and his wife flew to Montreal, and despite his fear he arrived feeling perfectly fine. A limousine had been arranged by the Rebbe to pick them up from the airport. On Friday night a huge crowd gathered for davening in the massive Tosh shul. Mendel too had come though he remained sitting down as his doctor had ordered. He watched with interest as the Rebbe entered a special roped-off area for prayer. Suddenly, the Rebbe turned around. He began pointing and motioning to Mendel. Mendel understood that the Rebbe wanted him to stand up and join him in the roped-off area. With the whole crowd watching, Mendel stood up and walked over to stand right next to the Rebbe. The davening resumed, with the Rebbe insisting that Mendel stand for the entire time. Mendel decided to do his best, though he hadn't stood up for this long in many months. Despite his fears, he managed to remain standing with no ill effects. After davening, the Rebbe asked someone to bring a chair with cushions. He had Mendel sit down, and then he gave Mendel a blessing.

The same scene repeated itself the next morning. The Rebbe had Mendel come stand next to him for davening, and insisted that he remain standing the entire time. Mendel knew his doctor would never believe that he had been able to remain standing for so long. The Rebbe asked Mendel and his wife to visit him after Shabbos. When they were seated in his room, the Rebbe opened a sefer - Torah book and began learning with them. First he discussed the importance of not bearing a grudge against others who harm you. And then he brought up the subject of cholov yisrael - Jewish supervised milk. The Rebbe turned to Mendel. "I want you to accept upon yourself that you will be stringent with cholov yisrael. It will be good for your neshamah - soul."

Immediately Mendel's mind flashed back to Yosef, his chavrusah - study partner, who for many months had stressed the same point. He had not taken it seriously then. But now, as he sat before the Rebbe, he finally pledged to be careful with cholov yisrael.

"Yes, it's taking time, Reb Yosef," Mendel said to his friend as he concluded the amazing story, "but now, Baruch Hashem, I am slowly on my way back to health." In the years that followed, Mendel continued to maintain a close relationship with the Rebbe. On another occasion, the Rebbe blessed him, "You should be able to handle great things that come your way." This blessing, too, came to fruition, as Mendel has opened up many yeshivos around the world, and has encouraged young adults to learn and come closer to Torah. (From Visions of Greatness p.160 Yosef Weiss).

Let us be inspired by this story to look to our Torah leaders, who have an extra special assistance from above to guide Jews through their spiritual travels in life. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**