

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Esther Rivkah *bas Avrohom a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Calling off the Dogs

PARSHAS TETZAVEH 5776

The saintly and venerated R' Chatzkel Levenstein served for a time as *Mashgiach Ruchani* (spiritual overseer) for the Mirrer Yeshivah in Brooklyn, NY. However, while he delivered discourses to the students, he did so in his own home, which was some distance from the *yeshivah*. Actually, there were two ways to get there – the short way and the long way. The issue was that the more direct route was fraught with a certain element of danger. A number of the gentiles dwelling in that stretch of residences kept vicious dogs in their yards, who were known for their tendency to attack passersby. And so, in order to attend the *Mashgiach's* discourses, the students had to traverse a much longer, roundabout path to avoid an unpleasant and potentially harmful experience.

R' Chatzkel was very concerned about the prospect of *bitul Torah* (neglecting Torah study). As such, he would deliver his ethical discourses during "*bein hasedarim*" – the time between the official *yeshivah* study periods – so as not to interfere in any way with the regular *yeshivah* schedule.

Neutralizing the Threat

One time it happened, however, that a conflict arose between these two objectives, for the discourse ran slightly overtime. Now, there was not enough time for the *bachurim* (young students) to take the longer, "safe" route and still make it back in time for the beginning of the next period in *yeshivah*. R' Chatzkel thus urged them to take the short way back, so as not to miss out on any learning time. Respectfully, the *bachurim* voiced their hesitancy. "We're simply too afraid of what the dogs might do to us if we walk past the gentiles' yards," they explained.

But R' Chatzkel was not to be deterred. He felt he had the perfect solution to the *bachurim's* plight. "Do not be afraid," he told them. "You go the short way, and I will stand outside the whole time and observe your progress. That way, the dogs won't disturb you."

Sure enough – relates R' Shalom Schwadron – the matter played out exactly as R' Chatzkel instructed. As the *bachurim* proceeded past the gentiles' yards, they were surprised to find the resident dogs behaving as if struck dumb. And they looked back to see their beloved *rebbe* standing and watching them all the while (*She'al Avicha V'yagedcha, vol. I, p. 131*).

While an interesting account, this episode bears some examination. What, exactly, was R' Chatzkel's secret? How was he able to "ward off" and neutralize the threat from the beasts?

R' Shalom explains that the event was simply a function of the awe-inspiring presence of a true *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar). Someone who reaches the appropriate level reflects, in some sense, the Divine radiance.

Indeed, a like notion is echoed by the Mishnah in Avos (4:12), which states:

יהי... מורא רבך כמורא שמים.

“The awe of your *rebbe* should be of (the caliber of) the awe of Heaven.”

The Torah conveys a similar sentiment when it states that Yisrael – when they are worthy – need not be fearful of their enemies: וְרָאוּ כָּל-עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם ד' נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וְרָאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ – “And all the nations of the earth shall see that you are called by the Name of Hashem; and they will be in awe of you” (*Devarim 28:11*).

Neutralizing Brazenness

This very concept manifests itself in a most fascinating way in this week’s *parshah*. Parshas Tetzaveh features the special *bigdei kehunah* (priestly vestments), one of which is the *tzitz*, the golden plate that adorned the forehead of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). This sacred item bore an unmistakable message, as the words “*Kodesh LaHashem* – Holy to G-d” were engraved upon it (*Shemos 28:36*).

Chazal relate (*Arachin 16a*) that the *tzitz* was instrumental in effecting atonement for the exercise of a particular negative trait – the attribute of *azus* (brazenness). The commentators go to considerable lengths to explain the connection. Why is this specific vestment so suited to address the issue of *azus*, a negative trait of immense gravity (as the Mishnah states elsewhere in Avos [5:20]: “*Az panim l’Gehinnom* – One who is brazen-faced is slated for Gehinnom”)?

The classic work *Akeidas Yitzchak* asserts that the inherent quality of the *tzitz* was to project awe, to the extent that it would instill the very opposite effect of brazenness. He writes: “Who would be able to see the Kohen (Gadol) in all his glory, bearing on his forehead the golden *tzitz* – on which was engraved Hashem’s Ineffable Name – and *not* feel compelled, from a sense of awe and shame, to avert his gaze from this G-dly sight?”

The *Akeidas Yitzchak* then proceeds to draw a parallel from here, which relates directly to the matter of our discussion above. He asserts that the sentiment expressed regarding the *tzitz* and its effects on the onlookers is not limited to the Kohen Gadol himself, but applies to any individual who has refined his character and achieved elevated spiritual status: “There is no doubt,” he states, “that the Name of Hashem is similarly projected upon any wholesome and sagely being; as such, it behooves us to consider them with awe.”

This appears to have been the factor responsible in the case of R’ Chatzkel. In truth, one should expect the beasts to fall into submission in the face of any human being. After all, the Torah states as much regarding the *tzelem Elokim*, the G-dly image possessed by every man:

וַיִּמְרָצְכֶם וְחִתְּכֶם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ – “And your fear and awe shall be cast on all animals of the land” (*Bereishis 9:2*). Unfortunately, however, many people – through their behavior and subservience to their base nature – end up desecrating their *tzelem Elokim*. As such, they are no longer revered by the beasts of the field (*cf. She’al Avicha V’yagedcha, vol. I, p. 128*). But it is a much different situation for those saintly individuals who retain their inherent sanctity and refine their natures. Regarding such elevated people, the (above-quoted) verse applies: וְרָאוּ כָּל-עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם ד' נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וְרָאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ – “And all the nations of the earth shall see that you are called by the Name of Hashem; and they will be in awe of you” (*Devarim 28:11*).