

FORCING YESHIVA STUDENTS TO CLOSE THE GEMORA?!

Parshas R'ay

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The KRIAH, tearing the garment, in the Knesset in Jerusalem last week, tore into the feeling hearts of myriads of Torah-loving Jews. The Kriah, the Shofar blown, Reb Meir Porush's hand cuffing himself to the microphone at the speaker's podium, the pictures of which published in dozens of newspapers and magazines, surely evoked sympathetic impact upon many. Except upon the obstinate Lapid group, who threaten to walk out of the government if the compulsory conscription law is not passed. Though meanwhile only the first of three readings was passed, it is a serious change of the status quo, and worrisome.

The story of Elisha ben Avuya, Achar, the Tanaite turned heretic and informer, is a fascinating one, comprising a full Daf in the Talmud (Chagigah 15a,b), with additional data quoted in Tosfos from the Jerusalem Talmud. Some of the anecdotes have mighty relevance to the present picture of Torah scholarship, and the advancement of proper attitudes on the part of the laity.

As was pointed out in a recent essay, this is not the first time that secularists look askance at yeshiva students not joining the army. During preparations for the Six Day War, 1967, a vociferous group argued in favor of compulsory conscription of yeshiva students. Until General Moshe Dayan (secular background) saw with his one eye (the other eye patched) the weakness of his army against the mighty enemies from all sides. "We need heavenly miracles," he proclaimed, "let these students remain in the yeshiva."

In the rapidly changing political groups joining the government in Jerusalem, the status quo principle becomes utterly unreliable. The story

of Achar is most relevant, particularly regarding his attitude to yeshiva students.

The first episode recorded from the Jerusalem Talmud, is that Achar willfully caused the death of some Torah scholars, and FURTHERMORE, he entered a Beth Hamedrosh and saw young students learning with their Rebbe, and said: "For what purpose are these sitting here? They should pursue other careers. This one can succeed as a builder, this one as a carpenter, and the third as a tailor." As a result the young students became dissuaded and discouraged and left their Torah studies to pursue those careers. Upon reflection it is evident from the use of the adverb "furthermore" that Achar's evildoing of causing students to leave the Beth Hamedrosh to pursue other careers, at an age when further study would have given them the desperately needed Torah background, was a crime more serious than that of causing the death of Torah scholars. The one adverb speaks volumes of inspiration to enhance our appreciation of Torah students who dedicate extra years to this sacred cause.

The Haftorah this week, quoting the second part of Isaiah chapter 54, and postponing the first part of that chapter for two weeks later is puzzling. One ventures to suggest the reason: Parshas R'ay is the portion read every Yom Tov, including the mitzvah of SIMCHA on Yom Tov. "You shall rejoice on your festival..." (Devorim 16:14). The Haftorah best befitting for that spirit of simcha is the passage quoted in the SECOND part of chapter 54 in Isaiah. That passage reads (54:13): "All your children will be learned in Hashem's Torah (see Metzudas) and great will be the Shalom of your children." Torah study will inspire the Yom Tov spirit of SIMCHA and SHALOM for the whole year.

