

If There Is No “*Da’at*,” How Can We Have Leadership?

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Translation (unauthorized) by Joseph Faith

1. Introduction

What is Torah-leadership? Does it really consist of a special characteristic known as 'Da'at Torah'? I have been asked to discuss these questions, but before I commence my treatment of the issues, I would like to add a note of caution.

Discussions such as these, by their very nature, are likely to contain critique of certain forms of leadership. I would like to emphasise that I am not attacking or opposed to any individual on a personal level. My words relate to a general approach that has become prevalent in the Religious and Charedi communities recently.

I would therefore request that my words not be applied on a 'practical' level in a simplistic fashion, which would create the impression that they were directed against a particular individual. And let me add that there would be a further problem with any such simplistic application.

As we have learnt in the Gemara (Shabbat 97a) regarding the *tzara'at* of Miriam:

"In a similar fashion it is stated, 'And Hashem's anger rose up against them, and he left' (Bamidbar 14) - this teaches that Aharon was also afflicted with *tzara'at* - so said Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Yehudah Ben Beteira said to him 'Even if you are right, you will be called to account for saying this!

If what you say is true - the Torah concealed it up, yet you reveal it!

If what you say is false, then you are libelling that great *tzadik*."

Indeed, I do not have the gall to claim that my words are words of 'Torah', but in the same fashion (as the aforementioned Gemara) 'the matter is concealed (i.e. I am not mentioning the names of those who I am criticizing) - yet you reveal them! Either way, he who reveals this is destined to be called to account'. And anyone who seeks to explain who my words are directed against is doing so solely of his own accord.

2. The Starting Point

My starting point is based on the words of our sages regarding the order of the Shmoneh Esrei. As is well known, after words of 'praise' at the beginning of the Shmoneh Esrei, we move on to 'requests', the first of which is 'You, who gracefully bequeath knowledge (*'da'at'*) to man'. This prompts an obvious question, namely, 'why do we start with a request for knowledge? Are there not greater and more important requests for us to make?'

One could have assumed that 'knowledge' is indeed the most important thing. This fits in nicely with the Rambam's view that *da'at* characterises and emphasises the 'image of Hashem' in man, and separates him from other life-forms.

However, in the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Brachot* 5:2) another explanation is given, according to which *'da'at'* is a 'key':

"...in accordance with the opinion of Rebbi. As Rebbi said 'I am shocked that they removed the request for *'da'at'* from the Shabbat prayers. Without *'da'at'* what use is prayer? Without *'da'at'*, how can one make 'havdala' (in which one 'distinguishes' between shabbat and weekdays)?"

In order to distinguish between one thing and another, between blue and green, between a donkey and a wild ass, between one man and another, a person requires *'da'at'*. As long as he has not requested, and been granted, *'da'at'*, a person is not capable of making distinctions.

In a similar fashion, 'If there is no *'da'at'*, how can there be leadership? In the same way that it is impossible to have prayer or havdala without *'da'at'*, so too can there be no leadership without *'da'at'*. We are discussing a crucial ingredient, a sine qua non, a primary factor without which leadership cannot exist.

And just to remove any doubt, we are not merely discussing Torah leadership. The same applies for political leadership, whether for Jew or Gentile. Without *'da'at'* how can one have leadership?

This intrinsic requirement for *'da'at'* is even more important when we are dealing with the widespread concept of 'Da'at Torah'.

3. 'Da'at Torah' As A Source Of Authority

The concept of 'Da'at Torah' was first propounded amongst Lithuanian Jews, and from there it expanded to other religious camps. Much has been written about it over the last few years, and it has been described in a satisfactory manner, and therefore I do not want to discuss it at length. This is not the appropriate forum to discuss this concept's

various incarnations from a historical and social perspective, although it is important to define its true meaning and implications. Many interrelated, fundamental questions arise from it.

From a normative perspective, the first question is to what extent a Jewish person is obligated to adopt the 'Da'at Torah' doctrine.

At its core, this is a question of fact. In light of the axiom which underpins this concept, namely that 'Hashem discloses his secrets to those who fear him, and makes His covenant known to them', is a person who is exceedingly learned in Torah actually an expert in every field, including 'profane' fields (if there really are matters that are not included in the 'holy' realm)?

This conception is innovative, inasmuch as we are not discussing the obligation of obeying *gedolei Torah* merely because of the commandment of 'Lo tasur (You shall not depart from what they tell you..)', or because of the commandment of '*Ve'asita ke'khol asher yorucha*' (And you shall act in accordance with all that they teach you)', but rather due to two additional suppositions:

1. That a person who has learnt a lot of Torah can be relied upon, and it is appropriate for him to give advice in all fields of life, both holy and profane equally.
2. There is either a halachic or ethical obligation to obey the 'Da'at Torah' of a particular *talmid chacham* (i.e. one who has learnt enough Torah that he is an expert in all other areas).

It may well be that these suppositions have some basis in the words of Chazal, however, certainly not to the extent that some like to present it today. This can be seen from the way that the concept of one's obligation to obey a *talmid chacham* has been expanded from its original context, wherein it refers to a *dayan* in a *beit din*, who acts as a link in the inter-generational chain of halachic jurisprudence. In *Parshat Shoftim*, it emphasises that this obligation refers to an actual *dayan* who sits on a *beit din*, and one is obligated to adhere to his rulings.

When dealing with the obligation to adhere to a ruling in this context, the obligation itself is not particularly surprising, in the same way that in all other areas of life one must obey the person who is in charge of a given system, and directs its policies. A sports-player obeys the team coach; a soldier must obey his commander and so forth.

According to the 'Da'at Torah' outlook, every Jewish person, who is a part of the Torah system, is obligated to absolutely obey those who stand at its helm - the *gedolim*.

The main innovation here is that a person is not allowed to avoid adhering to the '*dayan*' or *gadol*'s ruling, even when he is outside of *beit din*.

Even in his daily routine of going to bed and waking up again, when a person is going on his way, he is obligated to totally obey his 'halachic officer', even if he is not in a court case (in which he is subject to the dayan's decision). The obligation of adhering (to the rulings of 'Da'at Torah') extends to every Jew, in every time and in every place.

This obligation, in its broader formulation, is not explicitly expressed in the Torah, but it is the clear implication of the Rambam's words at the beginning of Hilchot Mamrim:

"The great beit din in Jerusalem is the central conduit for the Oral Torah, and its members are the chief legal decisors. From them shall law be promulgated to the entire Jewish people.

And regarding them has the Torah stated '...according to the ruling which they have decided for you' - this is a positive commandment.

And anyone who believes in our teacher Moshe and in his Torah, is obligated to rely on them for all religious matters."

4. The Commandment of 'Lo Tasur (You Shall Not Depart...)'

A superficial glance suggests that the concept of 'Da'at Torah' is based on an explicit verse in Devarim (17:11):

"According to the teaching that they instruct you, and according to the ruling which they shall tell you, you shall act, you shall not depart from that which they tell you right or left."

Despite this, there is almost no detailed discussion in the entire Talmud of the commandment of 'you shall not depart'. It would appear that it is restricted to a few limited cases, which are themselves dissimilar from each other in their character.

Let us start with the first source, which discusses a rather timely issue. The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat (23) rules that one can make the blessing of 'He who has sanctified us with His commandments' on lighting the Chanukah lights, because the sages instituted this, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded us that 'you shall not depart'. This first appearance of 'you shall not depart' relates, therefore, to the blessing on the Chanukah lights, a blessing that was instituted by the sages.

In another case, in Masechet Yoma, the discussion of the commandment of 'you shall not depart' relates to the rabbinic obligation of the 'witnesses oath' due to the commandment of 'you shall not depart', an obligation which is not a 'rabbinic decree' as such, but is rather an implication of another decree that the rabbis instituted.

Nevertheless, a careful examination of those two cases in which the commandment of 'you shall not depart' is mentioned demonstrates that there is indeed a strong basis for accepting a broad definition of 'you shall not depart', although this implication is not beyond doubt. Examination of these cases demonstrates that the obligation of 'you shall not depart' does not merely relate to standard halachic decision-making, but also to wider-ranging rabbinic decrees.

There is no explicit scriptural derivation in the Talmud of the commandment of 'you shall not depart' as it relates to standard halachic decision-making. It seems plausible that this absence is explained by the fact that this is self-evident, and therefore Chazal saw no reason to discuss it. It could be suggested that, as far as Chazal were concerned, the obligation of 'you shall not depart' relates only to the rabbinic authority to enact halachic ordinances, and does not grant them authority in other fields.

However, as mentioned earlier, the Rambam, (Mamrim 1:1) expands the obligation of adherence (to rabbinic authority) to all 'religious matters':

"The great beit din in Jerusalem is the central conduit for the Oral Torah, and its members are the chief legal decisors. From them shall law be promulgated to the entire Jewish people.

And regarding them has the Torah stated '...according to the ruling which they have decided for you' - this is a positive commandment.

And anyone who believes in our teacher Moshe and in his Torah, is obligated to rely on them for all **religious matters**."

Nevertheless, it clear that even according to this broader formulation, we have no explicit source for the authority of 'Da'at Torah' in all realms of life.

In light of this, one must wonder about the circumstances in which the commandment of 'you shall not depart' does apply, upon whom it devolves, when, and any other such details, and to clarify if it can be widened to other fields and for other goals.

5. 'Between Blood and Blood, Between Judgement and Judgement' - That and No More

At the beginning of the Torah portion in which the commandment of 'you shall not depart' is mentioned, the Torah states as follows:

"When a legal matter shall be too difficult for you, between blood and blood, between judgement and judgement and between leprosy and leprosy, matters under dispute in your gates, you shall rise up and ascend to the place that Hashem, your Lord, has chosen."

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (87:A) discusses this verse:

"'Between blood and blood' - between the blood of nidda, childbirth and gonorrhoea. 'Between judgement and judgement' - between capital cases, monetary cases and corporal punishment. 'Between leprosy and leprosy' - between leprosy upon the body, leprosy of the house and leprosy of clothes. 'Matters' - These are matters of dedications, valuations and sanctifications. 'Dispute' - this refers to the Sotah-water ceremony, beheading a calf, and the purification of a leper. 'In your gates' - This refers to crops which are left or forgotten being given to the poor, and to the corner of a field which is left for the poor."

The Gemara clarifies the laws which are contained in the verse, but does not refer whatsoever to social, policy-related or political issues. It would appear that it did not occur to the Gemara for even one second that the commandment of 'you shall rise up and ascend' relates to a political issue that is currently on the communal agenda or to matters of legislation in parliament.

This means that the beit din does indeed have wider authority, however this is only in issues that are explicitly halachic or otherwise directly Torah-related: Nidda blood, the beheading of a calf, the purification of a leper. That - and nothing else!

Thus I would say that the attempt to widen 'Da'at Torah' to matters of a purely profane nature is a profound 'jump' in the process of widening the definition of 'you shall not depart'.

6. 'Da'at Torah' Nowadays - Three Approaches

As many have already demonstrated, the current conception of the 'Da'at Torah' doctrine, which extends its reach to all realms of life, is a product of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The substantial expansion of 'you shall act in accordance with all that they teach you', itself leaves us with some fundamental questions. Who are those individuals who have merited 'Da'at Torah'? Can we really expect it from every rabbi? In every subject?

Or perhaps one should restrict it to the confines of the beit din, or even - in the most minimalist formulation - to the Great Beit din in Jerusalem, and that only when it is actually in full session.

Another question relates to a topic regarding which the Rivash was asked about - the issue of whether it is necessary to receive 'approval' in order to decide halachic questions. One could seemingly ask why somebody should bother to study in order to receive 'rabbinic ordination'. A plausible response to this question is that this is a necessary qualification, with similar requirements in every other field. In the same way that a doctor or lawyer needs to

pass certain tests in order to practice their chosen profession, so too in the field of rabbinics and halachic decision-making.

The Rivash (Siman 61) discusses the definition of a talmid chacham who merits having others excommunicated to defend his honour, and he integrates other factors into the discussion. When he deals with the dispute that occurred over this issue in his era, he turns to a tangential matter, which relates to the Gemara in Sanhedrin (5:B):

"Should he issue halachic decisions? - Yes, he may issue such decisions. If he is sufficiently learned, why does he require permission to do so? Because of a case that once occurred.

As we learnt in a Beraita: Once Rebbi was on his way somewhere, and he saw people kneading their dough in impurity. He asked them: Why are you kneading your dough in impurity? They answered him: One student came here and told us that '*mei betzaim*' (dough water) could not contract impurity. In truth the student had informed them that egg water '*mei beitzim*' could not contract impurity."

Thus, it is not only a matter of extensive Torah knowledge which is necessary, but one also needs to consider other issues, such as a person's clarity of expression, the lack of which may bring his listeners to error.

An intermediate approach has been suggested by R. Aharon Feldman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael in Baltimore and one of the leaders of Charedi Jewry in America. According to him, there is indeed no halachic obligation to adhere to the words of rabbis and the 'Gedolei Yisrael' in non-spiritual matters. On the surface, it is even slightly strange that we make use of scholars who are great in Torah and halacha to find solutions to questions that have no relevance to halacha.

However, R. Aharon added, that although there is no obligation, it may well be foolish not to listen to them. If you believe that certain rabbanim have been granted special capabilities, and have been crowned with the quality of 'the secret of Hashem is granted to those who fear Him, and he makes known to them His covenant', would it not be utterly foolish not to take advice from them?

Instead of turning to a rabbi, who is an expert in the intricacies of Torah, a person from whom 'no secret is withheld', you turn to the weak reed of a doctor or lawyer whose entire expertise consists of a few courses he took in university? Is this logical?

According to his approach, in the same way that in medical matters one does not go to any old doctor, but picks the greatest expert, so too in 'wordly matters', one should turn to the greatest possible expert.

According to his approach, there is a clear distinction between the two 'plains'. On the normative level, there is no obligation to take advice from a rabbi in 'wordly matters', but in terms of one's behaviour on a practical level, it is desirable and fitting to do so.

In summary, we can see three main approaches:

1. 'Da'at Torah' is obligatory in every field of life, whether sacred or profane.
2. 'Da'at Torah' is not relevant at all in material matters.
3. 'Da'at Torah' does not obligate us on a normative level, but it is extremely worthwhile to rely on it, and someone who declines to do so is a fool.

How do we decide between these three conceptions? Perhaps here too we should turn to 'Da'at Torah', we should take counsel from one of the 'gedolim' and ask him what the final decision is?

I shall say this with great distress; it appears to me, that in the contemporary reality the answer one will receive depends on the 'address' - the 'gadol' who one turns to.

It is not impossible that the social situation of the one who is asked and the degree to which one recognizes him as a 'gadol' are the factors which will decide the degree to which the answer is correct.

7. Any talmid chacham who lacks 'da'at' is worse than a putrid animal carcass!

One of the most difficult questions in this field, relates to and encompasses the topic of our discussion: If there is no '*da'at*', how can we have 'Da'at Torah'?

To illustrate this, I will relate a story. Many years ago, I travelled to Bnei Brak to console my rabbi and teacher, Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt'l, in his mourning, when his wife had passed away.

When I went to see him, I found him sitting alone. We had a private conversation, and this was conducted in a very open and honest fashion, from one heart to another. Rav Hutner told me that one of the talmidei chachamim who came to console him, tried to convince him and to 'explain' to him how his wife's passing was 'positive', inasmuch as she was now in the world of truth, a world which is entirely positive and other such nonsense.

And indeed, it is not uncommon to hear such things when one goes to console a mourner, especially when the deceased passed away while being involved in a mitzva or has fallen in battle, in sanctification of Hashem's name.

It is superfluous to state that saying such things is totally unsuitable. I remember that when Rav Hutner told me this, he raised his voice and he applied the following severe words of the Midrash to that talmid chacham (Vayikra Rabba 1):

"Any talmid chacham who lacks '*da'at*' is worse than a putrid animal carcass!"

Rav Hutner added in his thunderous voice: "Did you hear this? 'Any **talmid chacham** who lacks '*da'at*'. Consider this - we are not discussing an ignoramus who lacks '*da'at*', but rather specifically a talmid chacham. A talmid chacham, who has 'filled his belly' with Talmud and the responsa literature, who is an expert in the 'Ketzot HaChoshen' and 'Netivot HaMishpat'. But if he lacks '*da'at*', which can direct and guide him so that he will act with understanding towards others, and interact with them in a civil fashion, **he is worse than a putrid animal carcass.**

Had I not heard these incisive comments with my own ears from my rabbi and teacher, I would be fearful of voicing such sentiments of my own accord.

So, without getting too involved in the question of the correct balance between '*da'at*', 'wisdom' and 'understanding', in this context it will suffice for us to note that one can certainly conclude from this midrashic teaching that '*da'at*' is not bestowed from on high, as a free gift which is passed automatically into man's hands, even if he is a supreme talmid chacham. '*Da'at*' does not necessarily accompany knowledge and analytical skill, and is not necessarily bound up with them like fire is with hemp fibres.

We have learnt from Rav Hutner's incisive comments that there is a certain level of '*da'at*' that is vital for a talmid chacham to possess, and without which his wisdom is severely impaired. And so, even if we adopt the approach which requires obeying gedolim, it would be logical to assume that this obligation applies only to a talmid chacham who possesses '*da'at*', and not to a talmid chacham who is full of Torah knowledge 'like a pomegranate', but lacks '*da'at*'; a talmid chacham, who, according to the midrash, 'is worse than a putrid animal carcass'.

Would we approach this 'carcass', who according to our sages is better than that talmid chacham, to ask it for advice on medical matters? Can a talmid chacham who lacks '*da'at*' be relied upon? Can we accept the words of a Torah genius lacking human and emotional sensitivity, who possesses no psychological insight?

8. Who is the sage who possesses '*da'at*'?

The obvious question is: What are the qualities of this '*da'at*' that we speak of, and what is its place in our Toraitic, existential, spiritual and moral world?

It would appear that the '*da'at*' of which Rav Hutner spoke is a combination of 'common sense', lay-logic (that some talmidei chachamim tend to disparage) together with a deep

understanding of the situation at hand. A talmid chacham who possesses '*da'at*' attempts to understand the person, his background and his position. To accomplish this, one needs deep psychological insight, together with an understanding and recognition of the developing and existing reality that the questioner inhabits.

Thus one could say that the world of a true talmid chacham, when he is advising or directing a questioner in a certain path, stands on three things:

- a) Understanding the world and soul of the person who stands in front of him.
- b) Understanding the reality and the situation at hand.
- c) A true and honest accounting of his own conscience, which obligates him to establish whether he is indeed capable of issuing guidance on a specific issue, and whether he possesses sufficient expertise regarding it.

For all of these, one needs sensitivity and the ability to truly understand another person. To what extent have you acquired the tools, the training and the education that will enable you to analyse such matters as they really are?

This is my central difficulty regarding 'Da'at Torah'. In theory, I have no issue with the need for making use of 'Da'at Torah'. On the contrary. The question is whose 'Da'at Torah' and to what end?

When one entered into R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's room, for example, even for a quarter of an hour, you could not leave without feeling some form of enlightenment. Indeed, were it the case that all gedolim were 'R. Shlomo Zalman's' I would have no opposition to 'Da'at Torah'.

R. Shlomo Zalman was very proficient at answering questions on matters he was an expert in, but at the same time he knew how to say 'I don't know' on matters in which he was not.

And what greater example do we have than Rashi, the teacher of the Jewish people, who writes in several places in his commentary to the Torah and the Talmud, 'I don't know' (and the great genius R. Akiva Eiger noted and gathered together all of them).

I am doubtful in the extreme as to whether one should consider the 'Da'at Torah' of a talmid chacham, great as he may be, who lacks the integrity and honesty to say 'I don't know' or is incapable of saying 'I'm not an expert in the field'.

Indeed, talmidei chachamim such as R. Shlomo Zalman are not commonly found. To our great distress, many of those who propound 'Da'at Torah' nowadays are lacking '*da'at*' in numerous fields.

The Sifri and the Talmud in Sanhedrin (17:A) establish that one should elect dayanim to the Sanhedrin who are fluent in seventy languages. The Netziv explains that mastery of

numerous 'languages' grants a dayan exposure to various cultures and forms of wisdom. The dayan described by the Netziv is a person who is open, well educated, and possesses broad horizons. This stands in complete contrast to a dayan who encloses himself in the 'four cubits' of halacha, to the extent that he is not even fluent in Hebrew, and when he reaches a comment of Rashi that deals with grammatical issues, he is accustomed to skip it, and I need not say more.

Did this dayan never learn or hear about the resolute comments of the Gra in the 'Sifra D'Tzniuta' on the great importance of delving into linguistics and in praise of the study of grammar?

There are so many rabbis and halachic scholars nowadays who do not merely lack knowledge of 'seventy languages', or even two languages, but in actual fact they do not possess mastery of their one and only language! They find grammar difficult and their speech is garbled.

Thus there is no theoretical issue here with adhering to 'Da'at Torah' but rather a concern that perhaps that '*da'at*' is not real '*da'at*'. '*Da'at*' is not merely deep theoretical knowledge of Torah and proficiency at issuing halachic rulings, but rather empathy and sensitivity. And if these are not present, why should we rely on the 'Da'at Torah' of a person lacking these vital characteristics?

It is unnecessary to state that this applies not merely to halachic scholars but to all leaders. The requirement of morality and human sensitivity does not merely apply to the field of Torah. In the same way that a person would not allow himself to be examined by a doctor who was highly professional, but intolerant, arrogant and crude, so too he should refrain from seeking a halachic decision from a talmid chacham lacking sensitivity.

9. 'An Appropriate Dayan' - One With Empathy & Humanity

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (7B) teaches as follows:

"Reish Lakish stated: One who fields an inappropriate dayan - it is as if he planted an idolatrous 'Asheira' tree in Israel, as it says (Devarim 16), 'Dayanim and enforcers shall you appoint', and this verse is juxtaposed with (ibid), 'You shall not plant any Asheira tree'.

Rav Ashi stated: And if he did so in a place where there are learned scholars (that would have been appropriate for the position) - it is as if he has planted it next to the temple altar, as it says, 'next to the altar of Hashem, your Lord'."

The term 'appropriate dayan' has several possible explanations, and one could argue that it has the same meaning as an 'inappropriate student', as mentioned by the sages.

Nevertheless, it is clear that this term does not merely relate to knowledge specifically, rather it expresses the dayan's sensitivity, morality and humanity.

This sensitivity should be part of the dayan's emotional make-up, at every stage.

An 'appropriate dayan' is alert and sensitive to the defendant's plight, and adopts a responsible attitude towards him.

An 'appropriate dayan' is one who knows how to fully understand a given situation, and as we stated earlier, he first examines whether he has the appropriate rational, and not mystical, tools - that will enable him to properly adjudicate the matter before him.

A dayan who is lacking human sympathy, and a degree of care towards his fellow man, does not merely lack 'Da'at Torah', but lacks '*da'at*' whatsoever, and he is worse than a putrid animal carcass.

The necessity for sensitivity towards another's soul should be emphasised. It is often the case that a careful reading of psychological texts, or reading and studying the works of great authors who plumb the depths of man's soul help one to acquire the ability to relate appropriately to another person, and to penetrate the depths of his soul.

Of course, this ability can be acquired via other means, but greatness in Torah alone is no guarantee for interpersonal skills, and for the ability to be attentive and sensitive to another's soul. Can we rely unquestionably on a Torah scholar who is great in Torah but lacking in '*da'at*'? Can we adhere to the pronouncements of one who lacks a humane bent - that is the sensitivity towards and understanding of man's soul?

Indeed, not everyone who knows how to unravel complicated talmudic discussions of the laws of eruvin is a great expert in human psychology.

And it is superfluous to mention those great scholars who act as if they can decide every question on the basis of mystical powers.

To our great sorrow, the situation today is very different from how it was when gedolim were known not only for their greatness in Torah, but also for their communal and social leadership.

10. What is the difference between earlier generations and later ones?

In earlier eras, sensitivity towards others was generated naturally. The Rambam in Egypt and the Noda BiYehuda in Prague were known to all for their immense greatness in Torah. They 'dwelled amongst their people'. This was in a society and in an era in which the majority of their communities were Torah-observant. Their 'working environment' was full of the fear of heaven, even if this was the 'fear' of ignoramuses. Despite their ignorance, the community

members accepted the yoke of leadership of the Rambam and the Noda BiYehuda with joy and love, to the extent that some would add an additional phrase to the kaddish prayer, 'in your lives, and in your days, and in the days of our teacher and rabbi, Moshe the son of Maimon'. In that era, the community members understood that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had granted their rabbis 'wisdom' and common sense in addition to Torah knowledge.

Indeed, the trust was mutual. Two-way. Besides for their greatness in Torah, these gedolim acted as communal leaders. They themselves fulfilled the commandment of 'and I dwell amongst my people'.

They were accepted by their communities for reasons having nothing to do with their Torah knowledge, and they were tied to them with bounds of love. It was their connection to the community which provided them with their authority; their 'Da'at Torah' grew out of greatness in Torah combined with a human and cultural connection.

Ironically, in the era of earlier gedolei yisrael, when their '*da'at*' really was 'Da'at Torah', and their loyal flocks adhered to their views, 'Da'at Torah' itself had not yet become an obligatory doctrine.

Moreover, in the past, as a scholar would grow in stature, he would deepen his connection with the community he presided over. This is not the case nowadays, however.

In that earlier era, there were only a few gedolim, but everyone turned to them. This was in a large part due to the deep attachment that existed between the community and its leaders. The connection between them was natural. It was not infrequent to take a four year old child to that scholar so that the child would enjoy his radiant countenance, and this would be deeply inscribed upon his soul. The great talmidei chachamim in that generation were connected both to Torah and to the society in which they lived. Even if they were not experts in psychological texts, or in literature and history, the great Torah leaders of that generation were integrated and deeply rooted in the land in which they had grown, and were not detached whatsoever. In that context, 'Da'at Torah' derives its strength from the direct personal and human connection that the sagacious leader has with his community.

This has not been the case, however, in later generations. It is specifically in the later generations, when the concept of 'Da'at Torah' has become more deeply entrenched, when many gedolim have chosen a different path, which is many ways the exact opposite of that which preceded it. This is not mere coincidence, and is rather a reflection of a fundamentally different approach, both in its social and education aspects.

Many of the gedolim in our day advocate a distorted educational and social approach, under the framework of which talmidei chachamim build up tall walls around themselves, doors which are bolted shut, in order that heaven forbid nothing which is occurring in the outside world should penetrate, and drip into the walls of the study hall.

This is the reality in which tremendous *talmidei chachamim* who are totally detached from reality are raised. After decades of total detachment, he is drawn out from hiding, and becomes a 'gadol', a leader and guide.

Astonishingly, the field of his leadership is not limited to Torah alone, rather he is requested and required to make decisions on the very issues that he fled from in the past; that he hid from for so many years. It appears that even devotees of mysticism cannot heal this great blemish.

Indeed, there are some who ascribe the ability of those 'gedolim' to relate to all of the many issues that are brought before them to their wondrous and mystical abilities, but I am highly doubtful if it is fitting and desirable to ascribe such far reaching authority to mysticism.

To illustrate, I shall mention a painful issue which characterizes one sector of the Israeli public, which has reached near-catastrophic proportions, both with regard to the ethical and human issues involved. Yesterday, two money collectors visited my home. One, who is the son of divorced parents, is supporting himself and his thirteen siblings; the other is a father of ten children who had reached a level of poverty whereby the family could no longer subsist.

The question is self evident: What were the parents who brought these children into the world thinking? Did they really believe that that their children would be able to rely on me for their entire lives?

This phenomenon is the result of a combination of factors. Large families are encouraged, which in and on itself is an important value, as long as the children's future is planned for. What will they eat? How will they sustain themselves? Where will the money come from?

This situation brings many to a shameful level of poverty-driven hunger. The parents' generation have already experienced severe financial difficulties; what will be with their children? Why do they not make it possible for their children to gain an education that will enable them to earn an honourable living?

This issue is connected, of course, to the larger question of leadership. How can a leader encourage his entire community to have large families, when the children are literally suffering from hunger?

It is the leaders - not those who are led - who have brought about the situation in which children will not receive an education that will make it possible for them to earn an honourable living. It has reached the extent that if nothing changes, their grandchildren will still be knocking on our grandchildren's doors for help.

Did the sages believe this to be appropriate? Did they live in this fashion? Does this lifestyle not represent that of a 'talmid chacham who has no *da'at*'?

The Gemara in Brachot (28:A) relates the circumstances under which Rabban Gamliel was forced to resign from his position. One of the main criticisms of Rabban Gamliel is summed up in this very harsh line,

"Woe unto the generation that has you as its leader, because you do not recognize the pain of talmidei chachamim, how they sustain themselves and what they will eat."

Let us remind ourselves, we are discussing a leader of the Jewish people, not some minor dayan in a beit din in some town or other. Indeed, even a leader of the Jewish people needs to be blessed not merely with greatness in Torah, but with awareness, with empathy, with responsibility and consideration for the pain that talmidei chachamim experience.

It is not infrequent for me to feel jealous of the love of Torah prevalent amongst certain sectors of the Torah community. However, it is hard for me to believe that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has left his people to experience misery, and a person must choose between this path which has Torah but no '*da'at*' and the other path which has '*da'at*' but lacks Torah.

Here too, the judgement of a true talmid chacham, who has both Torah and '*da'at*' is vital, in order to map out the correct path; one which integrates an honourable life with the love of Torah and fear of heaven.

A life of sustenance, a life of honour, is not merely a matter of '*dat*' (religion), of Torah, but also of '*da'at*'. And a talmid chacham without '*da'at*' is worth less than a putrid animal carcass'.

11. 'That you should cause Hashem's name to be loved...'

And from here we move to another issue, regarding which it can be said that anyone who 'dwells amongst his people' feels greatly pained over.

As is well known, one of the Torah's mitzvot is 'Loving Hashem'. "You shall love Hashem, your Lord, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might'.

At the end of Hilchot Teshuva, the Rambam describes at length the qualities of this 'love', which exceeds even that between people. This is what he writes:

"And what is the correct love that one should have (for Hashem)? One should love Hashem with an extremely strong, even excessive, love, until his soul is bound up with the love of Hashem and he contemplates it constantly, as if he was love-sick - like one who is love-sick about a woman and cannot stop thinking about her, whether he is sitting or standing up, eating or drinking.

Even greater than this should be the love of Hashem in the hearts of those who love Him, they contemplate it constantly, as we have been commanded 'with all your heart and with all your soul', and as Shlomo Hamelech said in a figurative sense, 'and I am sick with love'. And all of Shir Hashirim is a parable for this."

However, besides for this sort of love, the mitzva of loving Hashem extends to sanctifying his great and awesome name. In certain critical circumstances, 'loving Hashem' is fulfilled by sacrificing one's self.

A central aspect of the mitzva of loving God is mentioned in the Sifri (Va'etchanan 32):

"Another interpretation: 'You shall love Hashem your Lord' - make him loved by humanity, like Avraham your father, in the manner of which it is said (Bereishit 12:5) 'And the soul which the made in Charan'.

The job of a rabbi is to bring others to the love of Hashem. A rabbi is someone who the wider community reads about in the newspaper, and feels positive about. "What a wonderful person. A person who learnt Torah; see how beautiful his behaviour is, how exquisite his manner is. He is concerned for the weak and the oppressed. He takes to heart the situation of the convert, the orphan and the widow. A rabbi such as this, how can we not love him?" And thus Hashem's name becomes loved because of him.

However, to my great pain and sorrow, sometimes the opposite is the case. The actions and statements of talmidei chachamim are publicised, and not only do they not add to the love of Hashem, but rather, heaven forbid, they lead to the hatred of Torah, and to utter desecration and degradation of Hashem.

As if that did not suffice, some of these talmidei chachamim do not merely cause hatred towards Hashem, but also interpersonal hatred too.

Awareness that one must prevent others from eating non-kosher foods or transgressing other sins is already widespread. Many are extremely careful not to transgress the prohibition of placing a stumbling-block before the blind (*lifnei iver*). However there are many talmidei chachamim who do not even consider the prohibition of causing someone to hate another Jew. And I wonder about them, inasmuch as they have learnt the entire Torah, are they not aware of the command 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart'? Is causing hatred and conflict between Jews light in your eyes? Woe unto us that we have reached this level.

A well-known rabbi once had a one-off opportunity to conquer the entire country with the love of Hashem. But with his address, not only did he not increase the love of Hashem, but rather he spoke of those who sleep with niddot and eat rabbits and insects, and so did he increase, to our great distress, alas, hatred of Hashem and hatred between Jews.

There are those who believe that this problem can be solved by digging in further. According to this way of thinking, we act in our way, and we take not the slightest interest in the implications of our actions on the outside world. We don't know, and we don't want to know what occurs in this accursed world.

However, in reality this 'digging in' is fleeing from truth and from the clear requirement that our sages set up for us as a part of the mitzva of loving Hashem.

This awful reality is not a heavenly decree. It is dependant on the '*da'at*' of the society in which we live and on the '*da'at*' of Hashem's representatives on earth. I can guarantee that nobody ever left a meeting with Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, or read anything he wrote, having increased his hatred for Torah or its standard bearers, heaven forbid; rather the opposite is the case. I don't believe that there is anyone who related in that way to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky; what a delightful reception one received from him; what understanding and sensitivity to the smallest details.

12. Conclusion

To conclude, and to avoid any doubt, let us stress that the fact that we recoil from 'Da'at Torah' in its contemporary context, does not pose the slightest conflict with the important principle of '*emunat chachamim*'. Indeed, '*emunat chachamim*' is required; the sole remaining question is how we know both 'what' and 'who' to believe in.

I do not concede that our relationship with gedolei Torah should be identical to that with great scholars of physics or chemistry. Torah is not a mere technocratic subject. The Torah is a Torah of life, it is 'our life and the length of our days', and in it 'we shall meditate day and night'. But specifically due to this conception, we must expend the greatest of efforts to remove any conflicts between excelling in Torah and in '*da'at*', between greatness in Torah and human sensitivity.

A leader is someone who can bring a society from one point to another. In order to be successful he must remember that he cannot ask of his society more than they are capable of. In a time of emergency, a leader can ask exceptional things of his 'flock', as Churchill did in 1940. However, as routine set in after the war, Churchill once again became a regular politician. Setting the bar in the heavens, a goal which is too difficult to reach, which is not achievable, which cannot be carried out in practice, often reflects the fact that a leader has become overly distant from the society he leads.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (8:B) records a debate about acquiring an animal by either riding or leading it. From that debate one sees that a 'leader' occupies the more prominent position, and especially when he 'leads forward'.

Indeed, as we stated earlier on, one should not disparage a leader's Torah knowledge. However, Torah knowledge does not suffice; there is also a vital need for '*da'at*'.

As 'dwellers' of the beit hamidrash, and as people for whom a Godly reality is close to our hearts, with spiritual and Torah-based experiences ingrained in ourselves, we understand well the requirement to make the Torah and Hashem's kingship loved by others. We must begin with the society within which we live - specifically in those sectors that are close to Torah and mitzvot. Those who involve themselves in Torah study are supposed to demonstrate through their actions and to clarify that its values do not cause hate, but rather bring love and completion to both the individual and the nation.

May it come to pass that all of us, both on an individual level and collectively, become worthy of this mantle; may it come to pass that we understand the responsibility that lays at our door, and that we should not merely think about our spiritual power but also, and perhaps chiefly, about our responsibility.

The Torah world is a world that knows how to discuss spiritual power, but this is a power which is anchored in responsibility, in sensitivity and in humanity, with all that this implies and in all areas of life.