

been used over and over: "The *Admorim (Chassidic Rebbes/and Rabbanim)* are guilty for the deaths (during the Holocaust) of many of Europe's Jews." This was a reference to the fact that many Jews who asked their spiritual leaders if they should leave Europe were told that it was better to remain together and either live or die as observant Jews. Their fear of the unknown, of the rampant assimilation that has destroyed (and continues to destroy) the Jewish lives and pedigree of a large portion of our People, was the overriding reality which guided their decisions. Nonetheless, they were once again coming at us with the blame game.

The *Klausenberger Rebbe* feared no man. He asked Eshkol, who, prior to becoming Prime Minister was Finance Minister, "Tell me, if a man gives over his business or finances to an agent to manage for him, how does he ensure that everything is being run properly? From time to time he makes an audit, goes over the books, checks the profits and losses.

"Let us check the audit of our nation. For thousands of years, the nation's affairs were conducted under the able guidance of our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders. The last century – one hundred years – brought about a change in which you eschewed the counsel of the *gedolim* and replaced it with your own theory and logic. One hundred years is sufficient time after which an audit is appropriate. Let us tally what took place these last one hundred years under your watch.

"Six million Jews were brutally murdered by the Nazis. Stalin murdered three million Jews in Russia. Assimilation in America, Great Britain and France claimed six million Jews. I am not counting the rest of the western countries. Every day, three million Jews in the Holy Land are in spiritual endangerment. All of this occurred during your tenure as leaders. So, tell me, who should really carry the onus of guilt for the last century?"

Levi Eshkol shook his head in apparent defeat. The subject was closed.

In another vignette, the *Klausenberger* was part of a work detail in a rock quarry. The Nazis felt that backbreaking labor under the most inhumane conditions would break even this staunch, resolute believer. They were wrong. The detail was forced to carry large boulders up and down a hill. During one of the work periods, the workers became soaked when a torrential downpour came down on them, also soaking the ground and rendering it like soft clay. The Nazi commander had no mercy as he made them carry the boulders, even as they slipped on the soaked earth. It was at that moment that another Jewish inmate, from a secular background, turned to the *Rebbe* and asked, "Can you still say *Asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*, 'Who chose us from amongst the other nations'? Are you still happy to be part of the Chosen People, the treasured nation?"

"More so now than before, I can recite those words with even greater devotion. Now when I say these holy words, I will think of the Nazi fiends and be filled with increased joy that I am not like them," declared the *Rebbe*.

The other inmate looked at the *Rebbe* incredulously. The *Rebbe* continued, "I understand that had Hashem not chosen us to be His People, we could revert to becoming as base and as reprehensible as these Nazis. It is far better for me to be an inmate suffering abuse, torture and agony than to be one of them. I would rather be among the victims than one of the murderers!"

There is no grey area. One is either part of the *Am ha'Nivchar*, or he has the sad potential of plummeting to the nadir of depravity, to the lowest of low.

Va'ani Tefillah

רופא חולי עמו ישראל – Rofei cholei amo Yisrael. Who heals the sick of His nation, Yisrael.

It would seem that non-Jews also become ill and are healed. Does Hashem heal only Jews, while the others are left to the elements, the doctors, to good fortune? *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, applies the notion that, concerning non-Jews, their fate is destiny-related. Whether inscribed in the *mazalos*, astrological stars, or some other dimension of reality, there is some fate which is almost impossible for the gentile to overcome.

The destiny of the Jew is above *teva*, nature, and above *mazal*, zodiac signs. As Hashem cannot be defined, so, too, the destiny of the Jew cannot be defined, because it is directly overseen by Hashem. Thus, when a gentile becomes ill, his cure is under the realm of nature and *mazal*; if it is his *mazal* to become well, he will live. Otherwise, he succumbs to nature. The Jew, however, is above *mazal* and *teva*. No diagnosis is final. Only Hashem's word is final. Furthermore, there is *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine supervision, which supersedes *teva* and *mazal*. Therefore, even with regard to the healing process, the Jew will suffer only what is designated for him by Hashem. It is never the illness or the doctor; it is Hashem. He is our Divine Healer.

In memory of a dear friend on the occasion of his yahrzeit

החבר הרב צבי בן החבר ר' משה ז"ל
נפ' ד' תשרי תשע"ג
Mr. Bjorn Bamberger

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Parashas Nitzavim-Vayeilech

תשע"ז

פרשת נצבים-וילך

אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ד' אלקיכם
You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d. (29:9)

We are standing motionless before Hashem. This does not seem right, because it is the time of the year when anxiety and tremors should accompany the chill creeping up our collective spines. *Rosh Hashanah*, accompanied by its ominous reminder that the future we hope for might, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven-forbid, be nothing more than hope, is quickly bearing down upon us. Is this a time simply to be "standing"?

Regrettably, there are instances when the debit column of our spiritual spreadsheet is overwhelming. The credit column is embarrassing, paling in comparison with its counterpart. "We should be crying out," declares *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*. "Why are we silent? Where is the emotion?" The venerable *Mashgiach* employs a *mashal*, parable, to illuminate this anomaly.

"A young sheep that is grabbed by a wolf and dragged away by its legs invariably cries out (or whatever sound a frightened sheep makes). It screams and does everything possible to plead for help. If we see a sheep being dragged away, and the sheep does not utter a sound, it is an indication that the wolf has grabbed it by the throat, obviating its ability to breathe, let alone scream. When an *eiver she'ha'neshamah teluyah bo*, organ upon which the animal's life is dependent, is torn, we understand why it does not scream: it is too late.

"The same idea applies with regard to our contemporary times. When our *emunah*, faith, and *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem were strong, and the winds of change did not sway us; when our *avodas Hashem*, service of the Almighty, was on a meaningful and inspirational level, then, when a person would fall prey to the *yetzer hora*, his hands and his feet – nothing upon which his spiritual life was dependent – were affected. Thus, when the days of *Rosh Hashanah* neared, they began to shake, to weep, to scream, to plead with Hashem that He overlook their errors and grant them life. Sadly, in our generation (this was written thirty years ago), our service to Hashem has slacked off so much that it is almost as if the wolf (of the outside world) has grabbed us by the throat and is holding us in a choke hold. We have lost our ability to articulate our needs, because we have lost our understanding of the seriousness of our condition. I think it is more like the fellow who thinks his cough is a cold, when, in fact, it is a grave disease which is robbing him of his life with every passing day. We must wake up before the available treatment, which we are delaying, loses its effectiveness.

In *Niflaosecha Asicha*, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Shlomo Bloch, zl*, distinguished *talmid*, student, of the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, who relates the following story. A group of Russian soldiers grabbed ahold of a *yeshivah* student who was walking from the *bais hamedrash* to the house where he ate his nightly dinner. The Russian soldiers were comprised of the lowest of the low, people who were uncouth, base, and illiterate. They despised anyone who was different than they were. After beating him to within an inch of his life, they decided to use him for rifle practice. They began shooting, but, no matter how often they shot, they could not hit their mark – the *yeshivah* student. First, they blamed their failure on the rifle's deficiency, but, after taking it apart and finding nothing wrong, they decided that a Higher Authority wanted the *yeshivah* student to continue living.

The entire incident took about a half hour, but, to the *yeshivah* student, it was an eternity. During that half hour of intense fright, the trauma caused the students hair color to change from black to white! (This is not an uncommon phenomenon.)

The *Chafetz Chaim* commented, "This is how a Jew should feel on the Day of Judgment, when every living creature passes before Hashem. If his hair does not turn white, it is because he does not have the proper emotion concerning the *Yom HaDin*, Day of Judgment."

השבת אל לבבך... ושבת עך ד' אלקיך
And you will ponder in your heart... and you shall return unto Hashem your G-d. (30:1,2)

When things do not seem to go your way, you see more curse than blessing -- and begin to become anxious. You finally start believing that Heaven might just be conveying a message to you – and you begin to think. *Sforno* explains the thought process and what should be coursing through your mind: "When you carefully examine and consider the conflicting aspects (of your concepts and actions) and call them all to mind, so as to distinguish truth from falsehood, then you will recognize (realize) how far you have distanced yourself from Hashem in your opinions and behavior which are contrary to His Torah."

As a result of *Klal Yisrael's* experiences in *galus*, exile, they will, at some point, come to the stark realization that their defection from the Torah has caused their being cursed and oppressed. This will, in turn, result in some serious self-examination. The Torah calls this introspection, the "pondering of the heart," and *Sforno* interprets it to be one's consideration of the inner conflict that wages within him between good and evil/truth and falsehood. Man always attempts to resolve the conflict, although he is not always

successful. When man realizes the folly of his ways, he will eventually repent and return to Hashem.

When one focuses on his inner conflict, the ambiguities of his life, he perceives a fresh perspective, which ideally becomes a catalyst for *teshuvah*/repentance. I would think that one should focus on the clear-cut sins, the overt errors of one's life – not the conflicts and ambiguities. *Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl*, observes that the special prayer *Al Cheit*, which we recite on *Yom Kippur*, has the following confession: *al chet shechatanu lecha b'yodim u'blo yodim*; "I confess for the sins of which we are aware (*yodim*) and those of which we are unaware (*lo yodim*)."¹ One would normally think that, for the most part, our sins fall under the category of *yodim*, with the minority being *lo yodim*, ones that we do not know. Thus, it would make sense that the individual who is determined to repent successfully would focus on those sins that are well-known, that are obvious. Afterwards, he can introspect and continue his search for those covert sins, which may have slipped his mind. *Sforno* implies an idea entirely different from this hypothesis. He intimates that one must first and foremost focus on his inner conflict and ambiguous, sinful behavior, in order to understand: his vested interests; his proclivities; and his internal struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Indeed, implicative from his exposition is the notion that the majority of one's sins are indeed *lo yodim*. Only after one has come to grips with his internal struggles, his feelings concerning right and wrong, and his reactions based upon his personal proclivities, can he begin to understand the reason that he is distant from Hashem.

To put it in simple terms (I think): It is not necessarily what one does, but rather: why he does it; what provokes him; what his personal failings are, all of which determine his gravitation toward sin. This is a powerful observation, because one is hard-pressed to address sin and the best approach to *teshuvah* until he is acutely aware of the factors which contribute to his sin.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes a second lesson to be derived from *Sforno*. It is possible to have a window to peer through at the inner workings of our psyche. Our subconscious (according to *Sforno*) is not a closed door which is impossible for us to penetrate *personally*. Even when a person is within the grips of sin, under the influence of passion and uncontrolled desire, he can still introspect and search within himself to understand and reflect upon his tendencies that affect his subconscious. *Sforno's* position, however, does not seem to coincide with *Shlomo Hamelech's* comment in *Mishlei* 21:2, *Kol derech ish yashar b'einav v'shochein libos Hashem*; "A man's every way is upright in his eyes, but Hashem resides within his heart."² *Rabbeinu Yonah* explains that a person's *middos*, character traits, and his nature are straight in his own eyes. He sees nothing questionable or wrong with himself, because he is unable to see beyond his personal vested interests. How then can a person repair/correct himself, his *middos*, to make them consistent with Hashem's demands of us? Hashem helps him. Hashem grants him the help that he needs. He must, however, make use of this assistance. In any event, we see that man cannot do it alone. His *middos* are stronger than he is. How then are we to understand *Sforno*?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that two forms of vested interest are imbedded in our subconscious. Some are buried so deep that we are unable to unearth them without

Hashem, but Hashem is present, and He does help. For others, we are able to do it alone, to introspect and see what it is that is causing us to make the wrong turn – all of the time.

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המוות ואת הרע... ובחרת בחיים

See – that I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil... and you shall choose life. (30:15,19)

Some of us think that once one is born into a *frum*, observant family and educated in a fine Torah-oriented and conducive environment, it is smooth sailing from there. Well – it is not. The choices exist on a daily --almost constant – basis, and one's commitment must be made anew – everyday. So says *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, in his commentary to the above *pasuk*: "*Hayom* – today – each and every day of our lives, the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, attempts to lure us with his guile. Just because he was not successful 'yesterday,' it does not prevent him from trying again 'today.' The concept of *hayom* is certainly applicable for one who 'yesterday' did not triumph over the *yetzer hora*. He must double his efforts today to succeed in quelling his desire for sin."

We think that once we have taken the path of *frumkeit*, traveled the right road and done well, we are literally on cruise control. Observance does not work that way. We must make the correct choice every day. The flipside is obvious. If yesterday was not a "good" day, it does not mean that today has to follow in yesterday's footsteps. Every new day presents new and greater opportunity for growth – if one is willing to make positive choices.

This is a powerful lesson, but why does it have to be this way? Why should we be relegated to struggle daily to maintain our *frumkeit* level? Why should our commitment be constantly tested, always in jeopardy of failing? Why should parents live in constant fear that something can go wrong with their "perfect" child? Simply, we could say that this serves as a medium for gaining reward. The greater the pain – the greater the gain. With the increased difficulty comes the greater *schar*, reward. I think, however, that it goes deeper than that. Specifically because religious observance is a daily struggle, man also has a daily opportunity for return. We live in a time when the challenges to *frumkeit*, both to ourselves and to our children, are constant. Sadly – tragically – we are not guaranteed that the exemplary Torah education which we have provided our children – ourselves – will suffice. We can hope. We can pray, and we should; when we see the slightest change, we should immediately intervene, but if we do not succeed, we must remember: we always have a tomorrow. Everything has two sides. There is struggle, and there is opportunity. We aspire to succeed in the struggle, so that we never require the alternative - the opportunity.

Parashas Vayeilech

ויקרא משה ליהושע ויאמר אליו לעיני כל ישראל חזק ואמץ כי אתה הנובא את העם הזה אל הארץ

Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Yisrael, "Be strong and courageous, for you

shall come with this People to the Land." (31:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu summoned *Yehoshua* in front of all *Klal Yisrael* in order to build *Yehoshua's* esteem. Let everyone see and note that *Yehoshua* has been designated as *Moshe Rabbeinu's* heir and successor. *Moshe* was the quintessential leader, but taking the people into *Eretz Yisrael* was not an option that was available to him. *Ya'an lo he'emantem Bee l'hakdisheini*; "Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me" (*Bamidbar* 20:12): Certainly, *Moshe* believed in Hashem, but, as the *Kli Yakar* explains, *shelo geramtem l'haamin li*, "Because you did not cause others to believe in Me." *Moshe* should have realized (explains *Kli Yakar*) that *Klal Yisrael* was a multifaceted, complex people which included many *geirim*, converts, who required constant inspiration. He should have employed every opportunity for increasing their *emunah*, faith. Otherwise, Hashem would not have taken away *Moshe's* leadership. This was a new crowd, however, born-again Jews and Jews by choice, who demanded constant care and sensitivity, with heavy doses of inspiration. Miracles to bolster their faith were necessities. Different souls are drawn to different aspects of Torah and Judaism. A leader must realize that a new generation is not a "one size fits all" generation.

This idea applies as well in contemporary times, when a leader must address the variegated spiritual and emotional needs of a multifaceted crowd of listeners. The leader must be well-grounded, not only in Torah, *halachah*, *hashkafah*, Jewish philosophy, but he must also be well-versed in the full panoply of Torah expression – and know how best to convey his knowledge to his listeners. Otherwise, he will have misguided, confused listeners – or worse (might be better than confused), no listeners.

It all begins (and ends) with *emunah*. One whose faith in Hashem is deficient does not have much of a chance for spiritual survival. The challenges out there are many, and the people seeking to undermine his beliefs are constant. They are equipped with the knowledge that their own misguided beliefs and deviant lifestyle are in vogue only as long as they are able to ensnare others, who are as spiritually crippled as they are. The *Lelover Rebbe, Shlita*, relates an incident which occurred one hundred and fifty years ago in Yerushalayim, whose lesson resonates even today.

A simple (unlearned) Jew brought his chicken to the *shochet*, ritual slaughterer, which was soon slaughtered. The man brought the chicken home. As he was cleaning the chicken, he noticed that the chicken was covered with lice. Unsure if this condition would render the chicken unkosher, he returned to the *shochet* and showed him the chicken. The *shochet* replied, "So what? Where does it state in the Torah that a chicken may not have lice?" Most would be calmed with this response. Not our "hero"; he wanted another opinion. He sought out a *rav* who concurred with the *shochet*: the chicken was kosher. Nonetheless, this Jew was not placated. He wanted to be certain that the chicken was kosher. The *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, *Horav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, zl*, lived in Yerushalayim. He would be the next stop.

Unlike the previous *halachic* arbiters, the *Maharil Diskin* (as he was reverently called) instructed the man to locate the chicken's head and open it up. The man returned to the *shochet*, located the head, opened it up and found it

to be infested with lice. This meant the chicken's brain was rotting inside – rendering the chicken unkosher. *Rav Yehoshua Leib* explained, "All chickens have lice, which they are able to shake off. This chicken obviously was unable to shake off the lice. This led me to believe that the lice were an internal problem. As I suspected, the lice were infested in the brain. The problem was in the chicken's head."

The *Lelover* derives an important lesson from this incident. All people go through life confronted, at times, with various issues and challenges. It is never smooth sailing for anyone. As long as the "head" (the mind) is healthy and aware that everything comes from Hashem, he will be able to shake off all notions of difficulties. If, however, a person's head is not healthy; if he has deficiencies in his basic *emunah* in Hashem; if he does not grasp the notion that everything which occurs is orchestrated by Hashem for a reason – then he will find himself in difficult predicaments.

When a person believes that events happen naturally, that Hashem does not play a role in one's life, then the spiritual lice have invaded his mind. When the mind is, however, securely anchored in its commitment to Hashem, when one knows that whatever occurs in his life is Hashem's edict, the challenges to his *emunah* might arise, but he will be able to shake them off.

I close with a selection from the *Ohr HaChaim's* commentary to *Shemos* 22:6, which is especially apropos at this time of year with the *Yimei HaDin*, Days of Judgment, approaching quickly. He writes: *Ein lecha shah v'rega she'ein Hashem Yisborach oseh peulah im ha'adam bein b'bechinas gufo bein b'bechinas tzarachav*; "There is nary a moment that Hashem is not doing something for a person, whether in regard to his physical existence or his mundane needs." There is never a moment that we are detached from His care and from His surveillance.

ועזבני והפר את בריתי אשר כרתה אתו

And it will forsake Me and annul My covenant that I have sealed with it (31:16).

From their nascency as the "spiritual" heirs to the European and Russian *Haskalah*, Enlightenment movement, the secular Zionists who undermined the Orthodox *Yishuv haYashan*, Old *Yishuv* (settlement in Yerushalayim), continue to lay the blame for every one of our People's troubles at the doorstep of the Orthodox, Torah-observant Jew. Founded upon misguided principles, and nurtured in hypocrisy and avarice, this movement is Jewish only in name. Insidiously, it has attempted to subvert every achievement of the Orthodox – accomplishments that were gained with blood, sweat and tears. They too sacrificed, but for personal ideals, not Torah values. Nonetheless, the blame game has been their declaration of absolution. Whatever has gone wrong throughout history has always been the fault of the Torah-observant camp. If the secular Zionists were to have their way, the Jewish People would be riding high, feared and respected by the whole world.

I write this as a sequel to the following vignette – not as a rebuttal to their claim, because their claims are so ludicrous and unfounded that they do not warrant any response. The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, was once visited in Natanya by then Prime Minister *Levi Eshkol*. During the conversation, *Eshkol* bared his feelings, employing one of the most inane critiques against the Orthodox, one that has