

conceal his evil intention, but he is no less injurious. Both of these *mazikin* are dangerous, and, without Hashem's protection, we are unable to protect ourselves from their malevolence.

We have enemies who brook no compromise concerning their evil intentions. They neither have shame, nor do they have true intentions. They hate; they vilify. At least, they come at us with a frontal attack. We can prepare ourselves by moving out of harm's way. What about those who appear as sweet as the early morning rays of sun, breaking through the dark night? Are they for real, or is it all a disguise? They posture themselves as our friends, but, in truth, they would turn against us the moment that they could derive benefit from such a move.

Perhaps we might take this analogy a step further. By their very natures as harbingers of change, dusk and dawn present themselves as periods of ambiguity. At dusk, the sky is beginning to darken, as the rays of sunshine begin to wane. Nonetheless, the sky still has rays of light left; it is not yet black and bleak. Dawn presents a similar scenario, as the first rays of the morning sunshine begin to pierce the darkness of night. The dark night gives way to daylight, with its hope for a new beginning.

A negative attitude can bring about a most self-destructive downfall. Success requires positivity and self-esteem. One who is negative tends to be downbeat, disagreeable and skeptical. He always expects the worst, and he is surprised when it does not occur. The flipside is positivity, which could be equally damaging when misplaced in opposition to a realistic vision of a person's attitudes and potential for success. In other words, expecting too much can be equally as destructive as expecting nothing at all.

Let me demonstrate how the *mazik* of misplaced (light) positivity or its contrasting ambiguity (represented by dusk) plays itself out by subtly putting down one's passion for success, under the guise of "I do not want him to get hurt."

A fellow aspires for success in a given field of endeavor. He has potential, but is not eminently capable of achieving his dream. Life is not a bed of roses, and one must be prepared to surmount various obstacles in his rise to success. A positive attitude is not only helpful, it is an absolute requisite if one is successfully to address the various crises which can – and often do – arise. On the other hand, optimistic bias might cause one to view things in a less than objective manner, often ignoring the warning signs to which our own negative emotions are pointing. Thus, we cause ourselves to lose our grip on reality. Psychologists refer to this as "illusion of control," when, as the result of the natural outcome of optimistic bias, one begins to delude himself into thinking he has greater control over the outcomes of events than is the reality. Psyching ourselves with positive thinking can cause us to become overly

optimistic, to the point that we overestimate our ability to succeed. Hence, the *mazik* of "dawn," the ambiguity that comes with misplaced positivity, is acting in full force.

The ambiguity of dusk is more subtle, as it seeks to pour cold water on the fiery passion and drive of he who is driven to succeed. This *mazik* can present itself as a "friend" who does not want us to "fail." The mere mention of failure to a person who is driven to succeed can destroy his drive. It creates doubt: "Can I really make it?" "Do I have a chance?" "What if I fail?" This covert *mazik* with its "well-meaning" intentions has destroyed many people, causing them to give up before they ever start. One can fight the *mazik* that presents its true colors. It is the more nuanced, "well-intentioned" *mazik* that is so difficult to overcome, because it is difficult to detect.

Va'ani Tefillah

ראה בעינינו – Re'eh b'anyeinu. Behold our affliction.

"Whose fault is it?" is a common cliché, which we tend to overuse, because, in our minds, it absolves us of guilt. We blame everyone but the real culprit – ourselves. Heaven responds to our actions; thus, we engender what is, for the most part, a Heavenly reaction. Therefore, when we say the word *anyeinu*, our affliction, it (also) means the infliction which we have caused upon ourselves. When we ask Hashem to "Behold our affliction," we are admitting that our problems and troubles are self-generated. Nonetheless, it does not make it any easier or more palatable. We hurt; we know that the hurt is the result of our spiritual deficiencies, yet we turn to Hashem to see what we have brought upon ourselves and ask that: A) He remove the affliction and B) He helps relieve us of our shortcomings, which are the cause of our present predicament.

Sponsored in loving memory of our dear father and zaidy on his yahrzeit

Rabbi Shlomo Silberberg

הרב שלמה בן נתן ז"ל

נפ' י"ד סיון תשנ"ט

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Mrs. Miriam Solomon and Family

Parashas Naso

תשע"ז

פרשת נשא

**ויעשו כן בני ישראל וישלחו אותם אל מחוץ למחנה כאשר דבר ד' אל משה
Bnei Yisrael did so; they expelled them to the outskirts of the camps, as Hashem had spoken to Moshe. (5:4)**

The *Sifsei Kohen* views this *pasuk* as an enormous accolade regarding the character of *Klal Yisrael*. The nation sent out from their camps only those individuals who were so enjoined by Hashem. The *zav* was sent out only from two camps: *Shechinah* and *Leviah*. *Machane Yisrael* welcomed both him and the *metzora*, despite the nature of their diseases. They did only what Hashem had asked of them – and no more. They could easily have said, "Why should we allow the *zav* and *metzora* – individuals whose illnesses are repulsive in nature and who are ritually contaminated – to remain in our camp? Why should we expose our families to them?" They did not, because they cared; they empathized; they were *Yidden*.

Let us see how this attitude plays out in the afterlife, when our *neshamah*, soul, ascends to its rightful place, but must first present itself before the Heavenly Tribunal before it may enter (the cosmic imagery is rendered in *Nitzotzos*).

Nachum was a simple, decent Jew, a carpenter by trade. He earned a simple living, paid his bills and had very little to do with anyone. In fact, for all intents and purposes, Nachum viewed himself as a *lo klumnick*, a nothing, who had no effect on anyone. He sat in the back of the *shul* in a nondescript area. He garnered no attention to himself, because, after all, he was a *lo klumnick*. (Sadly, we all know somebody who views himself this way.)

Nachum's earthly journey came to an end, and he was summoned to the World of Truth, where the true essence of an individual is illuminated. As his soul was drawing closer to the gates of *Gan Eden*, he saw throngs of Angels standing at attention to accompany him to his ultimate place. He questioned this, "Why would such a crowd of Angels gather for a *lo klumnick* like me?"

The Tribunal began to play a "film" of his life. In the images before him, he observed himself entering the *makolet*, grocery store, early in the morning and bidding "Boker tov, good morning!" with a smile to the proprietor. The film demonstrated the positive effect of that smile. The storekeeper worked hard all day, with little appreciation for his toil. People rarely found time to compliment him, but Heaven help him if something was not perfect. As a natural reaction, the storekeeper was rarely in a good mood. All day, he was compelled to listen to the harangues of those who

felt they must release their pent-up anxieties and tension on someone – and who was a better candidate than the storekeeper?

But Nachum's smile at the beginning of the day warmed the storekeeper's heart and allowed him to be tolerant of every malcontent that "graced" his threshold. As a result, the people discovered that the storekeeper did not react negatively to their diatribes. He smiled back. A smile can be infectious, and so it was. Nachum smiled – the storekeeper smiled – the customers smiled! This continued on all day – everyday, all because Nachum, the *lo klumnick*, started a positive chain reaction of smiles! The Tribunal turned to Nachum and asked, "Do you still think that you are a *lo klumnick*?"

The change was brought on by a smile. He smiled, despite circumstances that were not always favorable. He did not permit the situation to determine his smile. His smile defined the situation.

איש אשר יתן לכהן לו יהיה

What a man gives to the Kohen shall be his. (5:10)

Simply, this means that the man who gives of his material assets to the *Kohen* is not really giving it away; actually, it is an investment that will continue to give back. *Lo yihiyeh*, "it will remain his," forever, in his stead. We have heard the maxim, *Tzedakah tatzil mi'maves*, "charity protects/saves from death." It is not as if charity is an added therapy. It is actually a preventative agent that wards off the Angel of Death. It is an added antibody which fights and eradicates the disease which might take one's life. Why? *Lo yihiyeh*, "it is his;" it remains with him, like a coat of protective armor. The *tzedakah* one gives never leaves him. One need not be sick in order to benefit from the panacea of *tzedakah*. *Lo yihiyeh*; it will always be there, just in case it is ever needed.

This does not undermine the *tzedakah* that one gives if, or when, he is in need of merit. That, too, will have a beneficial effect. It is just that therapy administered prior to an illness has a greater chance of effecting a propitious result than therapy administered when the patient is quite ill.

Furthermore, *tzedakah* is not necessarily measured by how much one gives, but rather, by how much the beneficiary benefits. *Tzedakah* requires no stories, nor do accolades even touch the overriding significance of *tzedakah* and how it changes lives. Nonetheless, if one person's attitude will be altered as a result of what I write, it will be worth it.

I am presenting two examples of *tzedakah* which I came across during my years in *chinuch*. Obviously, these are

not isolated cases. They have impacted me: the proof positive is that, after many years, they are still on my mind.

This is a contrast in parental example. I remember visiting a friend of mine, *Reb Yosef Feigenbaum, zl*, together with another *rebbe*. We were seeking support of a fledgling *mechanchim kollel* that we had initiated. It was 9:00 p.m., and his children – who were all of elementary school age – had already retired for the night. They were not sleeping, but they were in bed. As he was about to write the check, he asked his wife to call down all of the children to observe how one gives *tzedakah* – and to participate actively in the *mitzvah*. They came down in their pajamas, and sat at the table as Yosef wrote the check and handed it to us. He remarked that this was how his father gave *tzedakah* – in the presence of the children – to inculcate them with a positive attitude towards sharing with one’s brethren. Is it any wonder that it was Reb Yosef’s grandfather, *Reb Yitzchak Feigenbaum*, who opened up his modest house – first to *Telshe Yeshivah*, and later to the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland (now called Bais Chinuch Horav Dessler) In fact, the burgeoning of Torah in Cleveland rests solidly on his and his wife’s shoulders.

Now for the contrast. Two boys in middle elementary had a “disagreement” which led to physical blows, incurring a visit to my office. One boy was the son of a prominent lay member of the community, a well-to-do benefactor of *klei kodesh* and Torah institutions; the other boy was the son of one of the *klei kodesh* in the community. In the conversation that ensued with each individual boy, the son of the lay person said, “He will not amount to much. He will end up standing by my father’s door just like the other rabbis.” Obviously, this boy was expressing what he had observed at home. Apparently, he did not receive the same instruction in the significance of *tzedakah* as the children in the first part of these contrasting stories had received. I can, however, add an addendum that, somewhere along the way, he did learn the importance of sensitivity to the plight of others, since he is today an amazing *baal tzedakah*.

Two fathers, both fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. One presented it as a privilege; the other probably viewed it as an obligation. At least, this is how his son perceived his father’s actions. How can we prevent the attitude that accompanies the check from determining the enduring positive effect of the *mitzvah*?

אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יַפְלֵא לְנָדָר נָדָר נִזְיֵר לְהִזְיֵר לַד’
A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

While Judaism does not encourage extremism of any kind, it nonetheless makes provisions for those who desire or feel that they must live outside or beyond society’s conventional norms. Thus, the Torah channels this tendency, as it does with all human drives (and obsessions), into serving Hashem. The case in question is the *nazir* who has taken upon himself the added restrictions of abstaining from all wine and grape products – fruit products that otherwise have no Biblical or Rabbinic prohibitions placed on them. Furthermore, as a member of society in which almost all

public and private celebrations include wine as a ritualistic beverage, the *nazir* defies convention, rejects the norm, and now must appear in public in an unfashionable manner, sporting his long hair – since a *nazir*, in addition to being prohibited in grape products, may not cut his hair. The *nazir* is not your usual extremist. His decision is well thought-out and, in his mind, quite rational. His rejection of convention is a plea for greater purity and stronger self-control. He has decided to ascend the ladder of spirituality and has chosen the *nazir* rite as the vehicle for his spiritual journey.

Despite the *nazir’s* positive motivation, his extreme approach, while accepted, is treated with a degree of apprehension. Thus, the nazirite vow is typically limited to thirty days, and, once the vow has been successfully completed, the Torah insists the *nazir* now go to the other extreme by shaving off all the hair on his head. Last, the *nazir* must bring a *Korban chatas*, Sin-offering, to atone: for his leaving a high level of spirituality to return to the mundane world; for leaving the mundane world and having rejected Hashem’s gift of wine. The bottom line is that the Torah prefers balanced living, a harmony between limitations and freedom. As the *Bostoner Rebbe, zl*, puts it (quoting from one *Chassidic* Master), “When Satan wants to seduce a man, he encourages him to become ultra *frum*, too pious. Satan is clever. He knows that the average person cannot handle extremes. To be overly pious demands a unique individual whose level of spiritual integrity is impeccable, and whose sincerity is without question. For the rest of us, however, the path of extremism can lead to spiritual and physical disaster.

When one goes to the extreme, he rejects choice – which is a major tenet of Jewish dogma. We are shown what is correct; we are guided along the correct path, but the choice which path to take is ultimately ours. The extremist places himself in an impossible box from which choice is not an option. This is either the work of Satan – or an indication of an emotional deficiency.

The pursuit of absolute control or to live a life devoid of choice, allowing the choices and decisions to be made by someone else, is the ultimate sign of weakness. The *Rebbe* writes about the cults that appeared in the sixties. It was a tumultuous era which claimed the spiritual lives of a number of our young people. Having lived through that era, I can say emphatically that those who had a solid *Yeshivah/Bais Yaakov* education, who hailed from homes where Torah was paramount and parents were stable, on the whole were not affected by the scourge of hedonism, idol worship, addiction and pure base living subservient to the directions of their guru or whatever other dogmatic leader they served. Many of these unfortunate ended up on the doorstep of the *Bostoner Rebbe*, who embraced each one with his illuminating smile and warm and caring heart. While he succeeded with many, he sadly did not fare as well with far too many (even one is too much, but we have no idea of the strangeness the cults had – and continue to have – on the unsuspecting and the anxious). He had two “failures” which he underscores for the lessons they impart. I take the liberty of redacting the stories for the same reason. Perhaps the next fellow in need might be reached. Parents and children are going through so much today. Every

lesson can be helpful and, if it saves one *neshamah*, its value is beyond description.

Many students (secular) sought out their roots during the tumultuous sixties. Those who came with open minds to listen and learn – did well. They listened and learned – and many adopted the Torah-observant lifestyle. Those who did not, left with a deeper understanding and respect for the Torah Jew, which they applied to their lives. In some cases, it did not change the parents, but they were open-minded with regard to providing their children with a balanced Jewish education.

Those students who had fallen prey to the cults were, for the most part, messed-up almost beyond repair. Once young people accepted the abnormal lifestyle of the cultist as being normal, there was very little anyone could do. A person can be convinced to change if he realizes that something is missing in his life. If, however, he feels that he is normal and that we, those who want to help, are misguided, then we have a very difficult uphill battle to fight.

The Hare Krishna movement was a serious perversion of Hinduism. It made the rounds in the sixties and seventies and had a deleterious effect on many Jewish young people who hailed from secular backgrounds. The members of the movement shaved their heads and walked around in orange robes, chanting mantras and collecting money from passersby. They were probably living far from social norms, as was common in those days. The ride might have been exhilarating, since they did what they wanted and answered to no one but their cult leader. Generally, this was a one-way trip. Most did not survive to return to a normal life. Once they were in, they were smashed. The *Rebbe* was asked to reach out over *Shabbos* to a young relative of one of his *chassidim*. Perhaps the *Rebbe* could reach him.

The initial chat was harmless. The moment the *Rebbe* touched on the cult, the young man clammed up and refused to talk. This, regrettably, is how cultists are trained to respond – no response – period. The *Rebbe* attempted another approach. “Why not look at your own roots?” the *Rebbe* asked. “Why not discover what Judaism is all about, before you go searching in strange waters?”

It was Friday night. *Davening* went beautifully, as the fellow listened to the spirited *davening* highlighted by the melodious *Lecha Dodi*. During this entire time and all through the meal, the fellow kept mumbling to himself. The *Rebbe* asked the student who was sitting next to him what he was mumbling. Apparently, he was impressed with the *davening* and the warm surroundings at the meal. This frightened the cultist, so he began reciting his mantra over and over again, lest he fall prey to the influence of Torah-true Judaism. At that point, no one could succeed in reaching him. That *Shabbos*, however, did actually leave an impression on him. Today, he is living a reasonably normal life – not observant, but at least normal.

The second case involved a young man who was searching for religion. He found it in Buddhism, and, after studying to become a Buddhist Monk, he married another Buddhist. His family frantically called the *Rebbe* to intervene – which he did. Once again, it was too little, too late. Indeed, the fellow said that, had he discovered Judaism earlier in life before he discovered the “beauty” of Buddhism, he might

have decided to remain with Judaism. Now, however, it was impossible for him to explore Judaism since he was so satisfied, so happy. He really had no reason to switch. He was quite happy right where he was. Had we been the first responders when this young fellow was crying out, his search would have ended with Judaism. Sadly, we were too late.

What attracts unstable Jewish students to the cult? It was fellowship and acceptance that gained entrance for them. Then it was the strict discipline and demanding lifestyle that kept them there. Lost young people are not searching for more freedom. It is just the opposite. They want stronger discipline, greater order, more demanding authority; they want someone to control their emotions, to essentially control their lives. They are afraid of freedom. Their low self-esteem does not allow them to cope with the concept of freedom. They want to be controlled.

The Torah believes in choice – the right choice, but man’s choice no less. Hashem created man to be free: to make his own decisions – not to be controlled by others; to question and seek the answers that are available; not to be afraid of the truth, but to embrace it.

יְבָרֶכְךָ ד' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ... יֵאָדָר ד'... וְיִזְנֶנְךָ... יִשָּׂא ד'... וְיִשֵּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His Countenance... and be gracious to you... May Hashem lift His Countenance... and establish peace for you. (6:24,25,26)

The *Kohanim* are enjoined with blessing the Jewish People with a three-fold blessing, petitioning Hashem: to safeguard the nation (*shemirah*); to shine His Countenance on them and grant them *chein*, graciousness and favor (*v'yechuneka*); and to grant the third, and greatest blessing of peace (*shalom*). Obviously, the sequence teaches us an important principle; peace follows after one is protected, both from without and within, from internal enemies and even from himself. Favor is the result of Hashem’s blessing which we earn through the light of Torah. Without Torah, life is very dim; we do nothing but grope from one obstacle to another. Last, once we are secure and embrace the Torah, we are worthy and capable of true peace. One cannot be at peace with others unless he is first at peace with himself. Unless one adheres to a Torah lifestyle and is subservient to Hashem, he is neither safe, nor is he capable of achieving a life of harmony, satisfaction and peace.

V'yishmirecha, “and safeguard you.” *Chazal* add: *Min ha'mazikin*, from those who would injure you. *Targum Yonasan* does not accept the usual definition of *mazikin* as referring to demons and injurious spirits. He explains that there are two forms of *mazikin*: *inei tihareirei*, the sons of dusk; and *inei tzafirei*, the sons of dawn. There are two kinds of demons, those who present themselves in their true colors: either black as night, or those who camouflage themselves to appear as light as day. Have no fear, they are one and the same. The harsh *mazik* who comes at us with his true colors showing is an evil and injurious *mazik*. Is he worse, however, than he who disguises his injurious character beneath a façade of fake sweetness? He may