

responding to his son, a son who, despite his deficient behavior, still maintains a special place in his father's heart. On the other hand, he cannot ignore his son's religious infraction, his reneging the Torah values that were taught to him at home, which are such a vital part of his father's life. To come down too hard will destroy his son and the father's relationship with him; to ignore his nefarious attitude and behavior undermines the very principles which support everything his father has taught him. Thus, the father painfully expresses his rebuke, "Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." These words are not expressed with disdain; derision does not creep in as he speaks these words. They are conveyed amidst pain, filled with fear, yet generating hope that perhaps, one day, his son will return. After all, he is his son. This is something of which he never loses sight.

We must remember that every Jew, regardless of how alienated from religion he has become, possesses an intrinsic and inextricable bond with Hashem and with His Torah. *Mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice for Hashem, is an inherent component of the Jewish DNA. Furthermore, every single OTD, off the *derech*, estranged, or disinterested Jewish child, if he were to wake up one day to the realization that he was the only Jew in the world -- the one upon whom *Klal Yisrael* depended -- he would most certainly rise to the occasion. This is who we are. Nothing can, or will, change our essential nature.

Having said this, we wonder why this feeling of, "It is all up to me," prevails only when it is all up to him. Why does the essential Jew manifest his true nature only under circumstances of duress, when faced with extinction? Why is the Jewish spark so dormant? The reason is that he thinks he is unimportant. He is one of many. No one really cares if he remains religious or not. Judaism will survive without him -- so why bother?

The success in *chinuch*, educating a child, is often contingent upon our ability to convey to the child the notion that he counts; he matters; he makes a difference. Perhaps this is why the *Baal Haggadah* divides the family of sons into four categories. Each one is different; each one is an only child. Each child requires his father to respond to him on his level of understanding and acceptance. Some children require an explanation that is accompanied with a smile; others might require it to be repeated. Others might "hear" the answer, but, only after a few years of trial and error in life, do they begin to see the truth and accept it. We all must ask ourselves: "What can I do to inspire my child, to help him understand, to reveal his connection with Hashem? How do I nurture his spiritual growth?" Life is fraught with challenge. Not all can navigate through the ambiguity by themselves. Some need help; others need support. That is what parents are for. The *ben rasha* did not become like that overnight. At one time, he was probably one of the other sons. Something happened along the way. While we cannot always prevent what happens -- we must be there to help and guide our child toward the solution. Otherwise, we might only have

three sons at the table.

Va'ani Tefillah

**Teka b'Shofar Gadol – תקע בשופר גדול לחרותו
I'cheiruseinu. Sound the great Shofar for our freedom.**

Teka b'Shofar is the tenth blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrai*. The specific designation of the number ten with regard to the ingathering of the exiles is not lost. *Kibbutz galuyos*, ingathering of the exiles, and returning to the Holy Land have been our national dream since the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple, which was provoked in part by the infighting among the people -- *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred. The return must be one embraced and personified by unity. Divisive quarreling among Jews is the sad result of arrogance and envy. One who is humble does not envy, since he does not feel that he is more worthy than his brother. Humility is the cornerstone and anchor of unity. The *yud*, tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is the smallest letter and consists of a single component. Thus, the tiny *yud* symbolizes humility, the essential component of natural unity.

Furthermore, ten symbolizes *kedushah*, holiness -- as in return to our Holy Land. Ten is synonymous with *kedushah*, because it is considered a whole unit. It is the "one" which consists of components. Ten males make up a quorum in whose presence *Kedushah* and *Kaddish* may be recited. The dimensions of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies, was 10 cubits by 10 cubits. Therein were housed the *Aron HaKodesh* and the *Luchos*. We recite the tenth blessing which signifies holiness, and supplicate Hashem to return us to the Holy Land.

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By her children

Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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Parashas Bo

תשע"ה

פרשת בא

**ויהי חשך אפלה בכל ארץ מצרים שלוש ימים
And there was a thick darkness throughout the land of
Egypt for a three-day period. (10:22)**

Egypt was plunged into three days of overwhelming darkness, a blackness so heavy that the Egyptians were unable to move. If the purpose of the darkness was to impede the Egyptians' ability to see, Hashem could have struck them with blindness. It happened in Sodom, when the townspeople were about to attack the Angels who had come to save Lot. Hashem could simply have blinded the Egyptians without creating such a heavy darkness. The *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, explains that it is well-known that when a person loses the power of one of his senses, the other senses become more acute. This is due to the fact that the neurons that flow to the now impeded sense will flow instead to the other senses. Thus, if one's sight becomes impaired, his other senses will be more perceptive. On the other hand, if someone sits in a darkened room with his eyes open, his eyesight working at full strength, he continues to see, to employ the power of all of his senses -- he is just unable to penetrate the darkness that envelops him. In such an instance, explains the *Chasam Sofer*, the individual who is unable to see due to the darkness does not benefit from his other senses to the same extent as one who suffers from blindness. Hashem was not about to benefit the Egyptians -- even by default.

We might suggest that Hashem did not want simply to impair their sight; He wanted to impede their movement. A blind man has the ability to move; thus, he can sit with a friend, talk, commiserate, thereby maintaining a sense of kinship. When a person is enveloped by a heavy darkness in which his ability to move is impeded, however, he is all alone. He might be sitting a few feet from someone, but is unable to benefit from the nearness. Hashem wanted each Egyptian to feel the loneliness, the inability to reach out to his fellow for comfort, encouragement and hope. The plague of darkness was about helplessness, so that the Egyptians would have some idea of the suffering and pain that they had impacted upon their Jewish slaves.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, quotes *Horav Shaul Brody, zl*, primary student of the venerable *Maharam Schick, zl*, who related a frightening story about his *Rebbe*. In his later years, the *Maharam Schick's* eyesight waned, and he became blind. The sage lamented his blindness because he was not able to learn from *sefarim*, Torah volumes. Nonetheless, he did take solace in the fact that, in his youth, he constantly reviewed his studies to the point that they became committed to memory. He extolled the great benefit of constant *chazarah*, review, since, if one would

ever reach such a dire predicament in which he could not see or *sefarim* from which to learn were inaccessible, he would still be able to learn Torah.

Rav Zilberstein has an addendum to the story which indicates the incredible diligence and *hasmadah* that the *Maharam Schick* applied to his learning. Once, during the latter stages of his life, his *shamash*, aide, found his *Rebbe* crying. He asked, "*Rebbe*, what is it? Can I do anything to help?" The *Maharam Schick* replied, "Had I known that I would end up like this (unable to read), I would have learned much more." "But *Rebbe*," the *shamash* asked, "if the *Rebbe* would have known this, would he have studied 25 hours a day?" (In other words, the *Rebbe* was such an extraordinary *masmid* that he never wasted even a moment.)

The *Maharam Schick* was pleased with his *shamash's* response. It was evident that his *shamash's* response had put him at ease. The *Maharam Schick* continued, "From the time that I had some *seichal*, a modicum of intelligence, I never wasted a moment. Nonetheless, if I would have known what would happen with me later in life, I would have minimized the breadth of my learning and spent much more time reviewing what I had previously learned."

ושמרתם את המצות... ושמרתם את היום הזה לדרתיכם תקת
נולם

**You shall safeguard the matzos... you shall
observe this day for your generations as an
eternal decree. (12:17)**

Procrastination is a major hindrance when it comes to getting something done. Certainly, no one will hire a worker to complete a job knowing that this worker has a reputation as a procrastinator. On the other hand, one would find himself hard-pressed to call a procrastinator evil. Unreliable perhaps, but evil? Certainly not. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, teaches us that, with regard to *mitzvah* performance, procrastination, delay of any sort, is characteristic of the pull of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, over us, and, thus, sufficient reason to refer to it as an evil trait.

The Torah admonishes *U'shemartam es ha'matzos*, "You shall safeguard the *matzos*." One must take great caution to see to it that the dough that he is preparing for *matzah* does not become leaven. Laxity in guarding the dough can cause it to ferment, leaving him with bread -- not *matzah*. This is still not evil. Laxity will not get the job done, but it is not evil. *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* who teach, "Do not read the word as *matzos*, but rather as *mitzvos*. (Different word -- same spelling and letter structure.) Just as one must be diligent while baking *matzos* lest the dough become *chametz*, leaven, we must also be diligent in *mitzvos*, lest they spoil." We must grab the

opportunity to fulfill every *mitzvah* which presents itself.

Zerizus means alacrity, immediacy in performing a *mitzvah*. *Zerizus* is not limited to baking *matzos*; it is a critical component in all *mitzvah* performance. Otherwise, the *mitzvah* is subject to *chimutz*, the leavening effect, spoiling it. Alacrity shows that a person: cares; values the *mitzvah*; respects for Whom it is being performed; demonstrates how much it all means to him. Some individuals are perennially late for everything. Is this a character deficiency or an indication of their true feelings towards the subject to which they were to attend? This might be true, but it is inexcusable with regard to *mitzvos*. Hashem is waiting.

Rav Wolbe suggests a deeper aspect to the *chimutz* failing. He cites the *Mesillas Yesharim* who teaches that one who does not perform a *mitzvah* at its earliest possible opportunity empowers the *yetzer hora* to prevent him from carrying it out properly. When we procrastinate, we are inviting the *yetzer hora's* participation in our *mitzvah* performance. Furthermore, the interim time between the opportunity and actual performance is in and of itself the creation of the *ra*, evil, which exists in the cosmic world. Therefore, the *mitzvah* can actually be the result of a negative force.

To further explain this concept, *Rav Wolbe* quotes *Chazal* who teach that, prior to Adam *HaRishon's* sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, no delay existed between conception and birth – the child was born immediately upon conception, with no gestation period necessary. Likewise, *Chazal* teach that in *yemos*, the days, of *Moshiach*, ready-made fabrics and fully-baked cakes will grow on trees. There will be no interim period for food or clothing preparation. This idea is an extension of the above concept, which posits that delay is in and of itself the consequence of sin. Thus, when sin is absent, so is delay. It all happens – immediately!

When an opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* or to carry out an act of *chesed*, kindness, to help another Jew presents itself, we must realize that what is presented and when it is presented is Hashem's doing. Imagine, Hashem asking anyone of us to do something for Him, we would fall over ourselves to execute His wish with utmost haste. Why do we delay in other instances, when we should live our lives with the knowledge that "situations," "opportunities," "needs," that present themselves to us are Heaven-sent for us to carry out – not to push off on someone else.

We rationalize, look for excuses, so that we can continue maintaining the status quo. Obviously, if Hashem has presented us with an opportunity, He is indicating to us that He wants us to resist the status quo and do something. Practicing *zerizus* is our way of subordinating ourselves to the will of Hashem. The *Talmud Sotah* 40a relates that Rabbi Abahu had an interpreter who explained his lectures in lay language to the general public. The interpreter's wife once boasted to Rabbi Abahu's wife, "My husband is every bit as learned and original as your husband, and he humbles himself to function as an interpreter out of his great sense of humility." Rabbi Abahu's wife related this woman's *chutzpah*, audacity, to her husband. Rabbi Abahu countered, "What difference does it make who is more brilliant? The end result is that between the two of us, the Divine teachings are conveyed to the general populace. That is all that matters."

In the early days before the city of Bnei Brak became the bustling Torah center that it is, the area was

mostly fields for grazing, where shepherds would bring their flocks to graze. *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*, would often walk through these fields accompanied by students who drank up every word of Torah that emanated from him. Along his "route" sat an elderly shepherd, enjoying the calm, the air, the peacefulness of the moment. The *Rosh Yeshivah* would greet the shepherd warmly each time he passed by him.

One day, he took his walk and was surprised to discover that no shepherd was present. Upon inquiring of the other shepherds, he was informed that the elderly shepherd had passed away during the night. *Rav Shach* was upset and immediately asked about the funeral arrangements. No one was really sure of the arrangements or whether he even had a family. *Rav Shach* felt that this was a *meis mitzvah*, a person who dies and has no one to attend to his burial – and he immediately set himself to making arrangements and informing people to attend the funeral of a *meis mitzvah*. Who would not heed the call of the *Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*? Within a few short hours, people from all over joined the *Rosh Yeshivah* in paying the *kavod acharon*, last respects, to this elderly Jew. *Rav Shach* understood that Hashem had presented him with an opportunity. He could easily have dispatched a number of students to address all of the details, but Hashem had "spoken" to him – not to others. This is what is meant by *zerizus*.

שבעת ימים שאור לא ימצא בבתיכם

For seven days, leaven may not be found in your houses. (12:19)

Preparing for *Pesach* is a daunting task – one made increasingly more difficult with the stipulation that not even the smallest crumb of leaven may be in one's possession. It goes without saying that this measure is prohibited for human consumption. At first glance, this law is strange. Indeed, the laws concerning *chametz* are unique in comparison with other *maachalos asuros*, prohibited foods. The *halachah* of *mashehu*, whereby even the slightest measure of *chametz* is prohibited, and, if it mingles with other food, the entire unit is prohibited, is different from other prohibited foods in which *bitul*, nullification, applies. Even *chazir*, pork, is *bateil b'shishim*, nullified in sixty times its volume, but *chametz* is never nullified. One must eradicate every single trace of *chametz*. Why? Why is such great significance placed on destroying the tiniest bit of *chametz*?

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, explains that *stam maachalos asuros*, the average forbidden food, is *bateil b'shishim*, since in the proportion of sixty times itself, its taste is no longer detectable. Nonetheless, even if a forbidden food can no longer be detected – it is still there. While this does not bother us concerning pork, or whatever (since it is all about the taste), it does bother us concerning *chametz*. *Chametz* symbolizes the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination. (Yeast makes the dough rise, just as the *yetzer hora* arrogates a person, with arrogance being the root of most sinful behavior). When it comes to the *yetzer hora* there is no room for compromise. Thus, as we cannot make any compromises with the *yetzer hora*, we can neither allow a trace of *chametz* in our possession, nor may we ingest it, regardless of how many times it has been nullified.

One tiny germ left unchecked can destroy an entire city. The *yetzer hora* can – and has – destroyed individuals who have achieved acclaim and distinction. One trace of self-delusion leads to self-seduction, and goes on from there to complete capitulation and downfall. Once the *yetzer hora* grabs a hold of a person he is in a free-fall to infamy, unaware that it is occurring.

The *yetzer hora* does not begin by attempting to convince a person to commit an *aveirah*, sin. It starts with a *mitzvah* – perform the *mitzvah*, but take something out of it for yourself: a little attention, a little *kavod*, honor, a little pleasure; anything that defrays from the actual *mitzvah* its values, its purpose. Once the *yetzer hora* succeeds in diminishing the *mitzvah*, it moves on to *aveiros*. The individual is now trapped. It is much more difficult to extricate oneself once the *aveiros* have begun.

Veritably, the term evil inclination is pejorative. Despite the translation of its name, the *yetzer hora* is not an impulse to do evil, to do harm. The *yetzer* inclination is an inner drive, which, if used properly, is necessary – even vital – for human life. *Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 9)* teach, "If not for the *yetzer hora*, no one would build a house, marry, beget children, nor engage in commerce." The struggle begins when we attempt to apply these impulses which, for the most part, arise from our lower base selves to accommodate our higher selves, to address our spiritual mission. The *yetzer hora* will do everything within its power to impugn and subvert our efforts, so that we do not succeed. In other words, the impulse is not evil; rather, it is difficult to control its use for our higher, loftier mission in life.

The *Alter, zl, m'Novoradok* posits that the *yetzer hora* finds or creates an opening, usually based on *frumkeit*, righteousness. He then exploits that and, slowly, before we know it, we have committed a sin. This is what happened with Kayin, who became jealous when his brother, Hevel, offered a sacrifice. When Kayin saw that Hashem accepted Hevel's sacrifice, he, too, wanted his sacrifice to be accepted. It began with religious envy (I want to be as great a scholar as my neighbor), but, after all is said and done, it was pure jealousy. The *yetzer hora* kicked in, transferring the religious envy into murderous envy and, finally murder.

One should never underestimate this adversary. This is why even a *mashehu*, the smallest amount of *chametz*, is unacceptable on *Pesach*.

We think that the illustrious Torah giants have it easy. After all, they seem to have conquered their impulse. The *talmidim*, students, of the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, once said to him, "*Rebbe*, if only we could have your *yetzer hora*." The *Gaon* quickly replied, "That is the last thing that you want. The *yetzer hora* grows as the person progresses spiritually. Commensurate with his spiritual ascendancy will be the power of his *yetzer hora*."

Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl, entered the *bais hamedrash* and noticed his students conversing with one another. As he came over, they immediately concluded the conversation. He asked them what they had been talking about. They said, "We are afraid that the *yetzer hora* is bearing down on us. We are discussing ways to escape his pursuit." The *Rebbe* responded, "You have no need to worry. You are not on such an elevated spiritual level that the *yetzer hora* chases after you. You are still pursuing him!"

The *yetzer hora* takes his function very seriously.

Horav Nosson Breslover, zl, once commented, "The evil inclination cares less about the sin which man commits than about the *atzvus*, depression, that results from it." The *yetzer hora* can now further ensnare the person and cause him to perform more and greater sins. We, thus, become our own biggest enemy. When one's heart is in pain, he cannot properly serve Hashem. This is what the *yetzer hora* wants. As long as we are doing a poor job of serving Hashem, encouraging us to sin is not necessary. Only one thing is worse than committing a sin: compounding one's infraction by not repenting. This is where the depression does the most damage, by convincing the sinner that he cannot correct the spiritual detriment that he created. The sinner figures, since I cannot change what I have done, I might as well continue along the road to infamy. This is the *yetzer hora* speaking to us.

He attempts to seal the deal by convincing us that, once he has sinned, he cannot extricate himself. He is on a trajectory towards ignominy. Why fight it if winning is not a viable option? Under such circumstances, one might as well join the opposition. If one pauses long enough to gather his senses and think what is happening, he realizes his foolishness. All of this is orchestrated by the *yetzer hora*, who does nothing but allow us to make poor choices, and then encourages us to adhere to our decision because, after all, it is all over for us anyway. The *yetzer hora* is not evil. We are evil. We make the wrong choices. The *yetzer hora* simply sees to it that we stick with those decisions.

**והיה כי יאמרו אניכם בניכם מה העבודה הזאת לכם
And it shall be that when your children say to you,
"What is this service to you?" (12:26)**

The Torah addresses four "sons" – each one different from the other. One is wise; one is (called) wicked; one is simple; the last one is uninitiated, unable to ask. They all have one common denominator: they are sons. One deals differently with a son. One does not attempt to "best" a son; one seeks to teach a son, to enlighten, to help him understand, to inspire him. Thus, regardless of who the son is, how he acts, or how he presents his questions – remember, he is still your son. We do not seek to prevail, to triumph, over a son.

There are four categories/types of "sons." *Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita*, explains that there are four – and no more. Everyone falls into one of these categories. We must listen to the question that is presented to us, because the question defines the questioner. The reply that we give should coincide with the answer given in the *Haggadah*. The right answer will be accepted. The wrong answer will not.

Veritably, not everyone asks a question. The *she'eino yodea lishol* has nothing to ask. The *ben rasha*, wicked son, does not really ask; he makes a statement, because he has all of the answers. Furthermore, are we really attempting to "blunt the teeth" of the *ben rasha*? The added comment, "Had he (*rasha*) been there (in Egypt), he would have not been liberated," will certainly not facilitate a loving relationship. Is this the way in which we are supposed to speak to our children?

Rav Ezrachi explains that the father (which applies to us all) must walk a fine line. On the one hand, he is