

At the entrance of the Ohel Moed shall you dwell day and night for a seven day period, and you shall protect Hashem's charge so that you will not die. (8:35)

The **Chasam Sofer**, as cited by *U'masuk Ha'or*, interprets this *pasuk* homiletically to teach us a lesson concerning man's true focus in life. If a person lives his life in such a manner that he "dwells" in front of the *Ohel Moed* it means that he never forgets the most important principle of existence in this world: life does not go on forever. One day, each and every one of us will return "home," from whence we came. If this awareness accompanies our every life's endeavor, then we will merit to "protect Hashem's charge, so that you (we) will not die" without *teshuvah*, atonement. One who lives his life in such a manner that he realizes that he stands at the entrance to the Sanctuary, and that everything he does must be carefully "weighed and measured" to be certain that he is carrying out the will of G-d, then he need not worry. He will leave this world in the proper frame of mind, for he does not have to worry about the "future." It has been secured by his "present."

Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, relates the story of a *Kollel* fellow, who after years of devoted Torah study, left the four cubits of *halachah* to endeavor in the world of commerce. He maintained a regular daily schedule of learning with his *chavrusa*, study partner, *Rav Berachyah Shenker*. Sadly, one day, after complaining of various aches and pains and following a battery of tests, he was told that he was suffering from a terminal illness. His days were unfortunately numbered. It was possible to prolong his lifespan by up to three months, but it would mean undergoing painful radiation and therapy which would only fill his last days on this world with pain and misery.

The fellow decided that it was not worth it. He began to psych himself up to the reality of death. He sat there for the first few days, hopeless and dejected, miserable with his lot in life. His wife was beside herself. She pleaded with him to change his mind and make an all-out attempt to extend his life – even for a few months. For her sake and for the sake of their children, she begged him to relent and take the treatment.

The man refused to listen. Pleading and weeping did not move him. He was not taking the treatment. As far as he was concerned, his life was over. His wife called his *chavrusa* and asked for his help. *Rav Berachyah* decided to take the man to **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, who, aside from being the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of his generation, was also a very practical person whose common sense approach to life's questions had guided many a questioner. The fellow agreed to go to *Rav Shach*; if the conversation were to turn to the issue of extending his life, however, he would immediately leave. His mind was made up. He would petition the *Rosh Yeshivah* for his blessing – and nothing else.

The two – *Rav Berachyah* and the ailing man – went in together to meet *Rav Shach*. The man was thoroughly prepared to make an about face if the conversation were to turn to extending his life. He

was, however, totally unprepared for *Rav Shach's* questions. "Are you at ease concerning your death?" the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. "Do you have what to take with you? You know that in Heaven there is an accounting of our achievements on this world. Are you so sure that you have sufficient achievement to gain entry in the World-To-Come?"

Suddenly the man burst into tears. "What am I going to do?" he cried. "No, I do not know if I have sufficient merit."

"So what are you doing about it?" the *Rosh Yeshivah* countered.

"Nothing," the fellow replied. "The doctors say there is no hope. I will soon die of my disease."

"Can they not do anything to prolong your life – even for a short time?" *Rav Shach* asked.

"Yes," the fellow responded, "but it involves much pain and will work only for three months."

"Three months! That's a lifetime," *Rav Shach* said. "What is the question? If you can extend your lifespan even for only a few months, go, go immediately and start the treatments!"

The sick man who had given up on life, who had refused to have any treatments for prolonging his life – ran to the doctor and asked to be accepted into any experimental program that could add time to his life. Regardless of the consequences, he realized how correct the *Rosh Yeshivah* was: one must come to terms with "where he is going." The only way and place to prepare for our destination is here and now – during the journey called life. A life well lived in accordance with the Torah will beget a reward worth living for in the World-to-Come.

It all reverts to what the *Tanna* says in *Pirkei Avos* (3:1), "Consider three things, and you will not come into the grip of sin: know from whence you came; where you are going; and before Whom you will give justification and reckoning." These three questions incur a fourth question, which essentially is the underlying question that we must answer: Why did you come here? Why did Hashem create us? For what purpose were we placed on this world? Regardless how we phrase it, the question is compelling and frightening. The question should make us cease whatever we are doing (unless we are in the midst of carrying out a *mitzvah*) and ask: Is this why Hashem placed me here? This question can really ruin someone's day!

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, the legendary leader of pre-World War II Europe and *Rosh Yeshivah* of Baranovitch, traveled to America on behalf of his *yeshivah*. Fundraising in those days was not a fun job. This was especially true in light of fact that the idea of full-time Torah study for adult young men had not yet permeated the American mindset. It was a grueling trip which many a European *Rosh Yeshivah* was compelled to take. It was time-consuming and often quite degrading. The flipside was that the American community was able to see, meet and be inspired by a bona fide *gadol baTorah*.

One of *Rav Elchanan's* ex-students was very wealthy, having made it in the burgeoning clothing business as the producer of buttons of all types, sizes and materials. His factory produced the buttons that were used by many of the clothing manufacturers. He was a fine man, but, sadly, having left Europe at a young age and arriving in America at a time when religious observance was an anomaly, he had become one of the many tragedies of the American Jewish community: he was no longer observant. He would be happy to meet his revered *Rebbe* once again, even though he no longer looked or acted like the *yeshivah* student he once had been.

Rav Elchanan arrived at the facility and entered the man's office. Following the proper welcome gestures, the student asked, "*Rebbe*, how can I help? What brings the *Rebbe* to my factory?" "I have a button that came off my coat, and I was hoping that you could fix it," was the *Rosh Yeshivah's* reply.

The student could not believe what he had just heard. Nonetheless, he called over a worker and asked him to match and sew a button on to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* frock. *Rav Elchanan* thanked the man profusely and prepared to leave. "*Rebbe*," the man asked, "why did the *Rebbe* come all the way to America to see me?" *Rav Elchanan* responded in his sweet voice, "I told you; I needed to have a button sewn onto my frock."

Something was not right. The great Torah leader of European Jewry, the individual upon whose words the entire Torah world hinged, certainly did not travel across the ocean just to have a button sewn onto his frock. The man was troubled and that night could not sleep, so bothered was he by his *Rebbe's* unexplained presence. He called the home where *Rav Elchanan* was staying and asked to speak with the *Rosh Yeshivah*. "*Rebbe*, please tell me the reason for the *Rebbe's* trip to America."

Rav Elchanan instructed his student to come to the home where he was staying, and he would explain. The student immediately took a taxi to the home where the *Rosh Yeshivah* was residing. After greeting him, *Rav Elchanan* said, "You asked me why I traveled across the ocean to visit you. When I replied that it was to sew a button on my frock, you refused to believe me. Imagine, making such a long trip, enduring such hardship, just to have a button sewn on my frock. The answer was nonsensical, almost ludicrous. Yet, let me ask you a question: Why did you, a distinguished, successful, Jewish businessman and civic leader come to this world? Hashem created you in His Heavenly abode and sent you down to this world. For what reason? To make buttons? Is my response any less ludicrous than yours?"

The man took the hint and realized the message his beloved *Rebbe* was conveying to him. How many of us realize and acknowledge the lesson of his story? We, too, each have his or her own personal purpose for being placed on this world. Do we ever give it some thought, or are we too busy, too involved, too uncaring to realize that we are not fulfilling our G-d-given purpose? Time flies when one is having "fun"; our time is flying by quickly.