

The end of all flesh has come before Me. (6:13)

Simply, this means that the immorality of this generation had exceeded all boundaries. A people that behave so immorally, who are filled with such corruption, have forfeited their right to existence. Their end must come. Hashem told Noach to build an Ark and take his time doing it, so that maybe the people would repent, thereby averting the decree issued against them. The **Kli Yakar** interprets this statement with a homiletic twist. "The end of all flesh has come before Me": When is there an end to all flesh? This refers to the *yom ha'missah*, day of death, when the immortal soul severs its relationship with its temporary residence, the body, and the person (as we know him) dies. Hashem said to Noach, "The *yom ha'missah* has come before Me with a complaint. It laments the fact that people no longer either remember or care about the meaning of death. They have lost all sight of the fact that life is temporal. No one lives forever. I countered, 'How do you know that people have forgotten about You?' The *yom ha'missah* replied, 'For the land is filled with corruption. Is it possible that someone who is acutely aware that he is going to die (and answer for his way of life) would be so corrupt? Apparently, they have lost sight of reality.'"

Remembering that he is mortal is the last frontier for salvation for the individual. Realizing that one is not here forever is considered by *Chazal* the last and most potent argument for preventing him from abdicating and falling prey to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination. *Chazal* teach that when an individual senses the *yetzer hora* taking the leading edge over him, he should study Torah. If this is not successful in overpowering the cunning of the evil-inclination, he should recite *Shema Yisrael*.

If this, too, does not resolve his dilemma, he should remind himself of his own mortality. The realization that he will die and have to answer for his behavior should be sufficient deterrent from sin. If it is not – then he is at the same point of no return reached by the *dor hamabul*, generation of the Flood.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, was wont to give greater meaning to the concept of *yazkir lo yom ha'missah*, "Let him bring to mind the day of death," with the following incident: The *Maggid* was visiting America on one of his many trips. At the time, he was the guest of a wealthy family that supported many Torah causes. He was taking a "tour" of the house when he came to a room which surprisingly, did not have a *mezuzah* on its doorpost. (Perhaps the owner thought that since the room served a secular purpose, it did not require a *mezuzah*). Lying on the table situated in the middle of the room was a large coffee table size book, which was more like an album, dedicated to the life of President John F. Kennedy, one of America's most beloved leaders, who was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. He was a young man with a wonderful future, whose life had been cut short by an assassin's bullet.

In the first picture, one saw a smiling President Kennedy getting into his open presidential limousine. He seemed like he did not have a care in the world. The whole world seemed to be smiling with him. The second picture showed the crowds of well-wishers and spectators lining the

route that his car was taking. The third picture showed the President and the First Lady in the car, surrounded by his secret service. The fourth picture showed the President falling over, the victim of a shot to the head. The next few pictures depicted the scene of the tragedy: the ambulance rushing to the hospital; the doctors meeting the ambulance; the doctors rushing to surgery; the sad-faced surgeon leaving the operating room; and then, the last picture: his grave.

As Rav Sholom stared at the pictures, *Chazal's* statement, *yazkir lo yom ha'missah*, came to mind. A person must realize and internalize the thought that at any moment his life could change, and even worse – it could, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, end. It is all in the pictures. A few snapshots depict the ultimate prestige, the epitome of happiness, and just a few pictures later, one sees the bitter end. From the limousine to the grave in a few snapshots; a few hours that changed the life of a young president on top of the world, and, incidentally, also changed the course of the world.

Rav Sholom now adds his observation. If a person would sense that he could very well die the very next day, that tonight would be his last *Maariv*, evening prayer; would he *daven* in the same manner that he has during the past years? Do we ever think that tonight could be our last *Maariv*, our last *Krias Shema*?

How many spouses have bemoaned not saying “goodbye” with more feeling when their husbands/wives left for the day – not to return? How many of us “planned” on settling disputes, only to discover that it is too late, the *Malach HaMaves*, Angel of Death, settled it for us? We read this and say, “Tomorrow, I will change,” but what if there is no tomorrow?

All of the foolishness that man wrought throughout life can be directly attributed to a lack of awareness conveying the *yom ha'missah*. This does not suggest that one be morbid and walk around depressed all day, thinking that he might die at any moment – but he should have a balanced approach.