

Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? (20:8)

Prior to selecting those individuals who were to represent the nation in war, we find the *Kohen Gadol* asking all those who had just made family commitments-- a new wife; a new house; a new vineyard-- to leave the circle and return home. The *Kohen* left the scene, and the officers took charge. According to Rabbi Yosi HaGelili, the last declaration, which exhorted he who was afraid to leave, focuses on a person who is not as much a coward as he is afraid of dying. He is fearful of the impact that his sins will make on his successful transition home from the battlefield. A sinner is justified in being afraid. His behavior does not warrant Hashem's pardon. In order to protect even the sinner's dignity, the Torah also freed the others -- such as a person who has just built a new home--from going to war. Thus, when the sinner leaves the field, spectators might conjecture that he is leaving for one of the other reasons.

The concept that one should be fearful of his negative spiritual behavior is quite a serious one. The great giants of Torah were extremely cognizant of every infraction, deficiency, any spiritual shortcoming which could undermine their ability to garner reward in *Olam Habba*. Ironically, it was specifically those who were very distant from sin who were most concerned about their reward.

There is a well-known story told concerning **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, the founder of the *mussar*, ethical character refinement, movement. One night, *Rav* Yisrael had occasion to be out late. Walking through the quiet streets of town, he passed the house/store of the local shoemaker. He was surprised to see the man still working so late. He had a small candle burning at his table. *Rav* Yisrael knocked on the door and was immediately ushered into the home, "Is it not late for you to be working?" *Rav* Yisrael asked. "*Rebbe*," the shoemaker replied, "as long as the candle is burning, I can work. Once the candle burns out, I am in total darkness and can no longer work."

When *Rav* Yisrael heard these words emanating from the shoemaker, he became emotional. Thinking for a few moments, he realized that he could well apply the shoemaker's words to life in general. "If for the needs of the body/physical dimension, we understand the critical importance of working as long as the 'candle is burning,' how much more so should we apply this attitude to our spiritual advancement. As long as the candle burns, there is life and physical ability to continue our spiritual growth, and we may not slow down – even for a moment. Wasting time is wasting our most precious commodity."

Days later, *Rav* Yisrael could be heard reminding "himself" – as long as the candle burns, there are still things to do – areas to correct. He never allowed himself to wane for a moment. After all, the candle was still burning.

The venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponevez, **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, was noted for many things. His erudition in Torah was overshadowed only by his extreme diligence in studying it. When he advanced in age, he no longer accepted the *sandek* honorarium, which was given to a close relative or *Rav/Rosh Yeshivah*. (The *sandek* holds the baby on his lap as the infant is circumcised.)

Once, one of his close students asked him to consent to act as *sandek* at his son's *Bris*, circumcision. *Rav Shach* demurred, explaining, "I have already been blessed with advanced age. It will not be long before I am summoned to stand before the Heavenly Tribunal to give an accounting of my life. Once I concede to act as *sandek* at your *Bris*, I will no longer have an excuse to refrain from attending other such functions. This will preclude me from learning Torah. How will I be able to explain my lack of knowledge? I will not be able to say that I spent every available moment studying Torah diligently." Indeed, as attested by *Rav Shach's* close students, the *Rosh Yeshivah* always carried with him the *Sefer Even Shleimah*, with a fold in the page that addresses the *yom ha'missah*, day of death, and what is to follow afterwards. This is how he lived – with one eye on the future. He lived a life that exemplified fear of sin.

One morning, **Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl**, *Rosh Yeshivas Porat Yosef*, arrived at the *yeshivah* to give his daily *shiur*, lecture. He began the lecture with the following episode. "On my way to the *yeshivah*, I stopped at the bank with the intentions of making a withdrawal. I was certain that my available balance was sufficient to cover this withdrawal. How shocked I was to learn from the bank manager that I did not have even one *agurah* (smallest coin denomination) in my account!

"What a powerful mussar lesson may be derived from this," *Rav Tzedakah* continued. "A person goes about his business in this world, calm and serene, confident in the belief that he possesses *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, many *mitzvos* and good deeds – sufficient in number to gain him entrance into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. The truth is: Who knows? Perhaps, he is deluding himself into believing that his account is full, when, in fact, he is overdrawn! Veritably, he performed many *mitzvos*, studied much Torah, and prayed fervently, but what about all of the worldly pleasure that he experienced? What about the honor and accolades that he received, the joy and fun? These are withdrawals! How careful we must be that when we arrive 'there,' that our account will be substantial."

The *Sefer Shaal Avicha V'yageidcha* quotes an inspiring parable from **Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl**, concerning *Chazal's* depiction of *Olam Habba*. The *Talmud Berachos* 17a, makes the following statement: "A familiar lesson often stated by *Rav*. The World to Come is not like this world. In the World to Come there is no eating, no drinking, no propagation, no business, no jealousy, no hatred and no rivalry; rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence." What are *Chazal* teaching us concerning *Olam Habba*, and why are they emphasizing the difference between the World to Come and our temporary world?

The *Telzer Rav* explained that once a Lithuanian native had to go travel to America. A century ago, this meant months of travel with various layovers. The ship first traveled to France, where it picked up supplies for the overseas voyage. The schedule allowed for a two-week stay in France. The traveler knew that it is quite difficult to navigate a country without knowing its language. Since he would be visiting both France and America, it made sense to learn both French and English. There was, however, insufficient time remaining to learn both languages. He decided that, since France was his first leg in the journey, he might as well become proficient in French. He was a quick study,

and, in short time, he picked up French. It was to his benefit, for, upon arriving in France and throughout the duration of his stay, he was able to converse with people, thereby getting around without any drawbacks. On the other hand, when he arrived in America, he was at a total loss. He could not go from point A to point B without assistance, for which he had difficulty asking, since he was not conversant in the language. When questioned why he chose proficiency in French over English, he replied, "France was my first layover." The idea that he would remain in France for two weeks, while America was his final destination where he would probably reside for years, probably never entered his little mind.

The lesson is simple. *Rav* would reiterate this constantly. "*Ben adam*, man/human being, you come to this world for a short time, seventy, eighty years. This world is merely a layover, a stop along the journey to eternity. Your final destination is *Olam Habba*, where you will reside forever. The language of the World to Come is quite different than this world. In the World to Come, there is no conversation whose language is comprised of envy, hatred and rivalry. Food and drink are also not discussed. There, it is all Torah and satisfaction, basking in the glory of Hashem."

People spend a lifetime on this world picking up the wrong language. In *Olam Habba* there are other "interests," another way of "speaking," and an altogether different language. If we do not prepare ourselves for our ultimate destination, we will not be able to navigate ourselves there, so that we will be relegated to remaining outside.