

And (he) shall take up the ashes... upon the Altar, and shall put them down at the side of the Altar. (6:3)

There are people who live in the past, resting on the laurels of eras gone by, the achievements of yesterday, the successes that have been long over. One lives in the past when he does not have much of a present to speak of, and even less of a future to which to look forward. This does not mean that one should forget the past. Absolutely not. The past is a critical component in establishing the present and preparing for the future, but one must live in the present.

The *mitzvah* of *Terumas HaDeshen* which was carried out by the *Kohen* was the first service of the day. It was comprised of removing a portion of the previous day's ashes from the *Mizbayach*, Altar, and shortly afterwards, placing logs of wood on the main Altar fire. The ashes were scooped up with a shovel and placed on the floor of the *Chatzeir*, Courtyard. These ashes were from the burnt flesh of the *korbanos* of the previous day. **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, sees a theological pattern of lessons to be derived from the symbolism surrounding the *Terumas HaDeshen* service. He suggests that by taking a portion of "yesterday's" service and placing it on the side of the Altar prior to the commencement of "today's" service, the *Kohen* publicly affirms that today we will continue to serve the Almighty as we did yesterday, in accordance with the dictates of His will.

The lesson goes further and deeper. The removal of the ashes is meant to introduce the new day's service in terms of what had been accomplished on the previous day. As a permanent reminder of these past achievements, the removal of these ashes from the camp conveys the important message that, at the same time, the Jewish nation must begin its task anew each day. The start of every day summons us to set upon our task with full, renewed devotion, as if we had never accomplished anything before. The memory of yesterday's achievements must not detract from – or subdue the energy which we expend in carrying out today's service. Emphasis on what has already been accomplished can spell demise to what has yet to be done. The one who rests upon his past laurels often does so in smug complacency. He does not begin the service of today with renewed vigor, fresh devotion, completely committed to the task at hand, as if it were the very first day of his life's work.

The ashes were removed from the camp, so that every trace of yesterday's devotion was gone. Today's service was to begin on untouched ground. *Rav Hirsch*, thus, views the law that demands the *Kohen* to wear humble, worn garb upon handling the products of yesterday's functions as significant and endemic to the idea that we have stated. The past must recede into the background. It must not clothe us in pride, as we set out upon the new task to which we are summoned every new day.

A certain aspect of the past, however, must not be ignored. Memories of the past are a vital link to bygone eras, experiences that have influenced and inspired our lives, and, for some, as we will see, make a difference in the quality of our lives. Indeed, we must acknowledge the fact that after

all is said and done, all that we really leave over for the next generation is memories. A person lives – and dies – and all that is left of him are the memories of his life. We had better see to it that our children are left with good memories of a life filled with positive achievement.

I had occasion to read a chapter in Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski's, "Generation to Generation." He relates the story of Morris, a Jewish patient who was suffering from advanced cancer, and how the memories of the past were therapeutic for his present. Morris had undergone surgery and was suffering a great deal of pain. What made things worse was the fact that this pain was destined to accompany him in the months that followed until what would probably be his untimely death. Pain medication did alleviate some of the discomfort, but he paid the price by having a clouded mind.

Rabbi Twerski attempted to take Morris's mind off of his debilitating pain. He tried a form of light hypnosis which would allow his patient to go back in time and recall some pleasant experiences. It worked. Morris recalled himself at age thirteen riding a bike in the countryside. He remembered scenery, the solitude, the breeze on his face, and, above all, the fun and peace and quiet. After a few of these relaxing memory sessions, Morris declared, "I am hungry." This was truly a breakthrough, since he had not had much of an appetite for weeks.

The technique was continued. Morris began acting like a new person, especially after Rabbi Twerski taught him how to hypnotize himself. He related his memories, episodes of life that had long been forgotten, or stored away in the back of his mind. This went on for a short time until Morris succumbed to his disease. The memories did not prolong his life, but somehow they eased his pain and raised the quality of his life. He died peacefully – which in and of itself is a blessing.

Our minds are obsessed with the future. The future is our symbol of hope, our analgesic for coping with life. If the present becomes too difficult, we look forward to the future as an escape, as a source of enjoyment, as a pleasant repast from the pressures of the present. Rabbi Twerski writes that, when a person is suddenly confronted with the realization that his present is going to change drastically – as a result of disease, financial/family upheaval – he will become increasingly despondent. Why? Because, all of a sudden, he has no future for which to look forward to. Sadly, he feels that, for him, there is no future – period. This results in depression, complete loss of motivation and a withdrawal from the daily activities that keep many of us going. Additionally, when a person falls victim to this form of helplessness, the pain which he experiences becomes much more aggravated. Everything simply hurts more.

As Rabbi Twerski observes, however, there is a solution to this very real and all-too-common problem. Filed away within the countless brain cells of our mind are the many memories of our life's experiences. Via the medium of a relaxation technique, he is able to penetrate the barriers that time put into place.

One does not have to, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, be seriously ill to experience the gift of the "past," memories of days gone by and experiences heretofore consigned to oblivion. Open a diary,

a photo album, get together with old friends and rediscover the past. It can enrich our lives by recapturing and reliving the enjoyable moments of our lives. The trick, however, is to “relive the past,” not to “live in the past.”