

## And you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice. (30:2)

The Torah admonishes the sinner to repent. The encouragement often comes in the guise of physical, emotional and financial challenges. Yet, there are those who ignore the message, claiming that it either is not addressed to them, or it really is not a message. It is simply “one of those things” that happen to the best of us. Just forget about it. The believer, however, knows better. Nothing “just happens.” Whatever occurs in our lives is meant to be and is most often a call from Hashem to get our spiritual act together. If so, why does the person not wake-up and respond accordingly? It must be that he is a “horse.” How does a horse enter into the equation? **Horav Sholom Schwardron, zl**, renders a practical analogy concerning the fear one should have as he approaches *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, *Rosh Hashanah*, the *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, and finally the *tefillos* of *Yom Kippur*, culminating with *Neilah*, the Closing of the Gates.

A businessman who earned his living buying and selling merchandise at a profit was doing well. He would purchase his wares in one city and turn around and sell them in another city. Over time, he became quite wealthy. This went on for years, until one day he made a bad investment which ruined him financially. He was now on the other end of the coin of financial success. A few short weeks later, he was offered a spectacular proposition, to purchase a large consignment of grain which could bring him a large profit. There was one catch: he would have to smuggle it past the border into another country. The trip would not take a long time, but it would entail much danger. If he was caught smuggling, he could be shot dead on the spot. He gave it some serious thought. This was his only chance of getting financially back on track. He would risk it.

As the businessman made preparations for his trip, he began to become anxious concerning what might happen. There is something about a bullet in the head that can do that to a person. He searched for a wagon and driver, one who knew his way across the border and who understood the inspectors at the border. He was fortunate to locate a man who was as proficient in guiding the horse and wagon as he was in dealing with the inspector if a problem would arise. A date was set for the trip, and the businessman began the countdown to the date of departure. A month before the departure date, the businessman was already fretting. What would happen if they were caught? He would probably be tortured and beaten and then sent to a slave labor camp in Siberia. If he was “lucky,” he would receive a bullet as a “going away” present. The driver, however, was not even anxious. He had taken this trip a number of times. It usually worked out. The inspectors were not in the mood to leave their cozy, warm building to search the contents of every wagon that crossed their post. True, he was carrying contraband, but it would be a problem only if the officers discovered it.

A week before the trip, the anxiety barometer intensified. Now, even the driver was beginning to get nervous. He no longer slept restfully at night, waking up a number of times with terrible nightmares which depicted his punishment for participating in a smuggling operation. It goes without saying

that the businessman was now a basket case. The slightest noise caused him to jump. Eating and sleeping were bodily functions which no longer meant very much to him. The trepidation that overcame him the night prior to the trip was something which he had never experienced in his life. Sleep was impossible; eating was unappetizing; nerves were on edge. This time it was not only the businessman who was seized with fear. The wagon driver was in no better shape.

Yet, one individual was not shaking with fear. Apparently, it was the custom for a driver to take along a boy to help feed the horse, carry packages, and be an all-around gopher for whatever was needed along the journey. Well, the gopher was able to sleep. The truth of the matter was that he had no clue concerning the contraband they were transporting across the border. He was hired as a worker – no questions asked – no questions answered.

The next night, they all left for the trip. Now the gopher was informed regarding the wares they were transporting. After seeing the anxiety that had subdued the driver and his passenger, he began to get nervous. What did he get into? Was this a one-way trip? He was too young for jail – or worse. This went on all night until they reached the border. If the guards had no prior idea that these people were involved in shady business, one look at their trembling faces told them everything!

The guard came over to the wagon with a gun in his hand. The hammer was cocked, and he asked, "What is it you are carrying in the wagon?" That was all he had to say. The boy began to stutter and sweat profusely. The driver was tongue-tied and about to go have a seizure. The businessman passed out from fright. It was all over for them.

One participant, however, continued to be calm. After all, a horse does not understand what is taking place. That is because he is a horse. His lack of intelligence allows him to ignore everything around him. In other words, the horse's fearlessness has nothing to do with innocence or even courage. He is a horse, a simple-minded, puerile, insensate, short-sighted horse.

This is to what various classes of people may be compared as they approach the *Yamim Noraim*, High Holy Days. The righteous, G-d-fearing people get their act together as *Rosh Chodesh Elul* approaches. The feelings of awe and trepidation immediately infuse them with a preparedness for the Days of Judgment. With each day, the intensity grows, the anxiety concerning the upcoming *Yemei HaDin* increases in fervor and fear.

The next level of Jews do not ignore *Elul*, but they certainly do not take those days very seriously. When the *Yemei HaSlichos* begin, even they begin to tremble. Then there are those who need the *Shofar* blowing of *Rosh Hashanah* to arouse them from their spiritual slumber. The Ten Days of Repentance see an increased intensity as each day brings them closer to *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

One individual, however, is very much like the horse, who does not move until he has been struck

repeatedly with the master's whip. Is this what we are waiting for? Have we not been struck enough?