

Yosef said to them on the third day, “Do this and live; I fear G-d.” (42:18)

What is the significance of *Es haElokim ani yarei*, “I fear G-d”? What does this have to do with the fact that it was three days into their “visit”? Simply, Yosef was conveying to them that he had no plans to keep them all in Egypt while their families starved at home. He would detain only one of them as a hostage. He was doing this because he was a G-d-fearing man. Apparently, Yosef felt that by adding his G-d-fearing nature into the equation, it would immediately relax them and counteract the anxieties they must have been harboring concerning their “future.”

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, underscores the significance of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, acknowledging that there is a Higher Power, a Supreme Authority, Who determines right and wrong and discharges appropriate punishment when necessary. On the other hand, if one is up against an individual who only pays lip service to G-d, to whom fear of the Almighty is something he declares, but does not mean, who thinks that it is all about “him” and that he has license to do whatever he pleases – he is in serious trouble. The *Shivtei Kah* were acutely aware of this verity. Thus, when Yosef assured them that he was G-d-fearing, they realized that they were not in danger.

There is a famous insight of the **Malbim**, which was quoted by **Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl**, in a lecture to a group of *Rabbanim* in Germany in the early 1930's. Going back to *Parashas Vayeira*, as Avimelech complains to Avraham *Avinu* for claiming that Sarah *Imeinu* was his sister when she was actually his wife, Avraham replied, *Rak ein yiraas Elokim ba'makom hazeh*, “Only because I said there is no fear of G-d in this place” (Ibid. 20:11). A lack of Heavenly fear was prevalent in Gerar. Thus, Avraham feared for his life. The *Malbim* underscores the Torah's use of the word *rak*, “only,” as if intimating that, indeed, Gerar was a wonderful place. It had culture, refinement; its people were upstanding, kind and polite. Regardless of the community's exemplary qualities, however, at the end of the day one's life could still be forfeited, if he were to stand in the way of someone's desire. Why? “Only” because Gerar lacks *yiraas Elokim*, fear of G-d. When mortal, subjective, prejudicial man is the ultimate authority, if laws are man made, then they have little value. Man makes the law; man can alter the law as he sees fit. The only law that will compel society to be disciplined and law abiding is Heavenly Law, the code authored and regulated by Divine Authority.

When Rav Elchanan spoke, it was prior to the malignant change in Germany's government. When the Nazi party came to power, it was all too obvious that Rav Elchanan's message was on the mark. Suddenly, the polite, cultured, refined German became a cruel monster, capable of committing the most heinous atrocities.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, relates a story he heard in the name of **Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl**, which gives practical expression to the above. When Rav Hutner was learning in Slabodka, he

remembers that *Horav Avraham Elya Kaplan*, *zl*, who later became rector of the Seminar in Berlin, went to Germany. He returned prior to *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, reverently known as the *Alter m'Slabodka*, asked *Rav Avraham Elya* for his impression of the German people.

Rav Avraham Elya raved about the German People's kindness, their impeccable manners and refinement of character. He even cited their manner of speech as demonstrating extreme politeness to one another. For instance, if someone asked for directions, the response would not simply be a curt set of directions. Rather, after completing the directions, the man would politely ask, "*Nicht wahr?* Is this not correct?" This indicated their refinement. By refraining from asserting himself in a definitive manner, he would always conclude the sentence with, "*Nicht wahr,*" thus maintaining the questioner's dignity.

The students who were privy to this exchange between *Rav Avraham Elya* and the *Alter* debated if it was appropriate to praise the Germans. It was not as if we derived a way of life from other gentile nations. Why should the Germans be any different? What did they have to offer us that others did not? We do not learn from the gentile world how to live. *Baruch Hashem*, we have a Torah that guides our lifestyle. One student among them persisted in defending the Germans, maintaining that any people who ended their statements with "*Nicht wahr?*" indicated a sense of modesty and politeness worthy of emulating.

It took a half a century for the truth to be publicized, for that same student to declare his error publicly. *Rav Hutner* had just concluded his *shiur*, lecture, when a Jew walked in and asked, "Do you remember me? I was that student in *Slabodka* who complimented the German manner of speaking, who was amazed by their gentle manner and refinement of speech."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* said that he did remember the man and stuck out his hand to give him "*Shalom aleichem*." The Jew reciprocated, but, instead of a hand, there was a hook, where his hand had been amputated. Apparently, he had lost his hand during his internment in the concentration camp.

The man looked at *Rav Hutner* and said, "When the Nazi cut off my hand, do you know what he said?" He said, "It hurts – *Nicht wahr* – Is this not correct?" – You were right – I was wrong!"

Rav Elchanan observed; Hashem created man after He had created all of the creatures. Animals, both domesticated and wild, all fowl and beasts – all preceded mankind. *Rav Elchanan* commented that man is a composite of all of the preceding creations. He has in him the nature of every creature. Thus, at times, he may manifest the qualities of the most docile creation, while, at other times, he acts like a venomous snake or a vicious man-eating lion. What keeps all of these natural inclinations in check? What controls are in place to see to it that the man remains a decent, ethical and virtuous human being? Only one guarantee exists: *yiraas Elokim*, fear of G-d. With it – one is a *mentch*. Without it – he is sadly capable of the worst abominations and the most cruel, heinous brutalities against his fellow man.