

We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, also we were in their eyes. (13:33)

Probably the most common catalyst for sinful behavior is low self-esteem, which is often the precursor of depression. While depression alone is not a sin, it leads one to commit the most egregious transgressions. When one thinks ill of himself, he has little reason to act positively. After all, who cares? This, explains the **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, was the motivation for the sin perpetrated by the *meraglim*, spies. They felt worthless; they had no chance of overcoming such a strong nation. Their negativity was infectious, causing the entire nation to feel bereft of their leadership. They all began to cry. It was a *bechiah shel chinam*, unwarranted weeping. There was no reason to cry. It was all in their minds. As a result, they lost their will to fight, to go on. They were defeated before they had fired the first shot.

So many of us fear taking that necessary plunge, because we are afraid of failure. Rather than fail, we do not even make the attempt at trying to succeed. As a result, we go through life existing, not living, never achieving our potential. On a tombstone in the country is etched: "Here lies so and so – born 1810 – died 1890 – lived fifty years." How telling an inscription! A man lived a life, but for thirty years he did absolutely nothing. Why? He was probably too depressed. Hashem gave him the precious gift of life, and he wasted it.

The depressed person is also quite selfish. He thinks that it is all about him. If he does not sense success, then he has no interest in moving forward, regardless of the impact on others. The *meraglim* acted that way. They felt like grasshoppers, so why not make everybody else feel similarly?

After a day's hunting in India, a young Englishman, whose shooting skills left much to be desired, commented to his Indian attendant, "I guess I did not do too well today." The young man was quite the diplomat. He replied, "The young sahib shot very well, but G-d was very merciful to the birds." There are two sides to every story, two perspectives to every situation. While it may be true that the situation is not in one's control, it does not have to be due to his ineptitude. It could be because the other fellow is finally having a good day. When you think about it, often the one who is depressed – just wants to be that way.

There is a well-known comment attributed to an unknown author that goes something like this: "One day fortune knocked on a fellow's door. Sadly, the fellow did not hear it. He was over at his neighbor's house relating his latest hard luck story." We are so busy complaining, that we ignore the subtle messages that would provide relief and generate good cheer. Veritably, some of us would not know how to react to good fortune.

One who has low self-esteem obviously has little connection to Hashem. His *emunah* is clearly deficient. One whose faith in the Almighty is unequivocal always believes that things will either

change for the better, or that Hashem's reason for placing him in his current situation is overwhelmingly justified. The fact that he does not understand it now has no bearing on Hashem's reasoning. Perhaps, a most sobering lesson can be derived from the unique *brachah*, blessing, that women recite daily: *She'asani Kirtzono*, "That He made me according to His Will." This blessing, although recited only by women, has a powerful message for men, as well. Every person should seek self-understanding and self-acceptance. It does not have to be as we would like it; rather, it is as Hashem wants it, and we should, thus, be happy to accept it.

We are all born with varied levels of acumen, physical attributes and capacities. We must all learn how to make the best of what has been allotted to us, without complaining why "he" has it better or easier. Our concern should not be regarding others, but regarding ourselves. The world was not created to nurture our inflated egos. Many of us are destined to struggle with challenge and adversity throughout our lives. *She'asani Kirtzono* teaches us to reject bitterness, transcend depression, embrace hope and seek joy in every aspect of our lives.

The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, said, "Hashem cannot be deceived; one's neighbor may not be deceived; and one who deceives himself – deceives a fool." One of the most difficult tasks for man is to face himself, to resolve the personal conflicts which tend to absorb his time and energy. We must take a sober and honest look at our capacities, as well as at our shortcomings. There is no greater betrayal than self-deception.

Veritably, many in today's society whose faith has lapsed suffer from a lack of genuine understanding of "themselves." They have lost their connection with true reality, resorting to living their lives surrounded by materialism, steeped in physicality, basically living in a vacuum. Jewish history, uniqueness, pride are of no meaning. Is it any wonder that, when one has no sense of self, depression sets in?

A Jew without hope is missing an essential component of his Jewish DNA. Hope is an inherent part of the Jewish psyche. We do not give up hope. This is why we are called *Yehudim*, after Yehudah the brother who, when it appeared hopeless and the other brothers were cowering before Yosef, moved forward. He did not throw in the towel. This is how the commentators view Yehudah's bold approach toward Yosef.

Rav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, quotes the **Izhbitzer Rebbe, zl**, who explains the destructive effect of abandoning hope. He cites one of the most famous *sugyos*, topics, in *Meseches Bava Metzia; yiush*, giving up hope concerning a lost article. When a person loses an article, it does not mean he has lost ownership over it. It is still his until he has given up hope of ever finding it. Thus, anyone who finds the article must return it. It reverts back to its original owner.

The *Rebbe* wonders why a lost object is still considered the property of its owner. He cannot use it. He derives no benefit from it. What connection does he have to it? Why is it considered his property?

The *Izhbitzer* explains that one significant connection continues to exist between the owner and the article: hope. As long as the owner harbors hope that he will recover his article, it remains his in the full sense of the term. If, however, he feels a sense of *yiush*, hopelessness; if he abandons hope of every recovering the article, then his connection to it has been severed. Whoever finds it, may keep it. It no longer has an owner.

The *Rebbe* explains that a similar idea applies to a person who has become seriously ill and is in need of a major *refuah sheleimah*, complete recovery. If Hashem has created the illness, obviously He has also created an antidote, a therapeutic *refuah*, that will deliver a complete recovery. We must connect to this *refuah* if we are to beat this illness. As long as we hold out hope of discovering that cure – regardless of the challenges involved – then we maintain our connection to the *refuah*. If, however, we lose hope, we have also lost the *refuah*. It has slipped away when we “severed” its mooring.

It was this feeling of worthlessness and self-generated hopelessness which destroyed the Jewish People during that night that has gone down in infamy, the night that eventually became our national day of mourning: *Tishah B’Av*. The people threw in the towel; they gave up hope and wept bitter tears for no reason. Their weeping has accompanied our nation through its tumultuous history. Whenever we cry out, “We are unable”; “We cannot,” we demonstrate our sense of *yiush*, our lack of faith in the Almighty.

Last, when a person acts with deep faith, pride and strength of commitment, his attitude becomes infectious. Not only do others emulate his actions, he becomes respected by those around him. He becomes a leader by virtue of his stalwart pride. When a person realizes Whom he is serving, what he is about to perform, the deeper meaning of his lifestyle, he becomes elevated in the eyes of those who observe him. One should never be concerned about what others think of him, but what message he is conveying to them. If he is proud of his *Yahadus*, Judaism, they will respect him. If he is not – well, he is not really worthy of respect.