

**The Kohen shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, “Hear, O’ Yisrael, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid; do not panic; and do not break down before them.” (20:2,3)**

There is a well-known passage in the *Talmud Berachos* 5a which addresses the strategy one should employ upon being confronted by man’s greatest enemy from within: the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination. *Chazal* give us four options which, based upon a person’s spiritual level, should assist him in staving off the *yetzer hara*’s crippling influence. The first approach is *yargiz yetzer tov al yetzer hara*, agitate one’s good inclination against his evil inclination. Take the *yetzer* head on, using the good inclination within oneself to overwhelm the evil. If this does not prove effective, *Chazal* advise engaging in Torah study. If this does not succeed in vanquishing the *yetzer hara*, *Chazal* suggest that one recite *Shema Yisrael*. Apparently, reciting *Shema* garners greater devotion on one’s part than Torah study. If these three methods have failed, the last suggestion rendered by *Chazal* is, *yazkir lo yom ha’missa*, “one should remind himself of the day of death.” While this last approach carries with it the possibility of the dire side effects of sadness and depression, the alternative of falling into the clutches of the *yetzer hara* apparently outweighs the negative.

The *Kli Yakar* posits that these four approaches toward our constant battle with the *yetzer hara* are alluded to by the [above] *pasuk*: *Shema Yisrael atem k’raivim ha’yom la’milchamah al oy’veichem*, “Hear, O’ Yisrael, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies.” War is an especially dangerous time for the soldier – not merely in a *physical* sense, but also from a *spiritual* perspective. When one is exposed to an enemy bent on killing you, surrounded by a harmful environment without the protection and stability of home and family, the *Satan* in the guise of the *yetzer hara* can wreak havoc on his spiritual demeanor. How does one vanquish the *yetzer hara*, assuring his continued affinity with good, and not falling victim to the evil? *Chazal*’s four approaches are suggested. The *Kli Yakar* applies these in his interpretation of the *pesukim* which relate the declaration made by the *Kohen Mashuach Milchamah*, High Priest, who was anointed especially to be the spiritual anchor during the Jewish nation’s wars.

Let us digress and address the last approach: *yazkir lo yom ha’missah*, “One should remind himself of the day of death.” I have always wondered why *Chazal* emphasize “day” of death as opposed to “death.” One would think that it is the thought of death which shatters a person and causes him to tremble from head to toe. It is the concept of mortality that makes an individual wake up from his spiritual slumber and fortify himself in his battle with the forces of evil. Why the “day” of death?

I think that *Chazal* are teaching us a profound lesson. While some of us can possibly reconcile

ourselves to the concept of death, we realize that as of yet no one has lived forever. Every man has his ultimate end, his last hurrah, but how many of us think about that “last **day**” – the events leading up to his demise? Imagine sitting at a wedding and enjoying oneself with friends and family when suddenly, an uninvited guest, the *Malach Ha'Maves*, Angel of Death, appears and announces that your time has come! “But I am not ready,” “I have unfinished business to address; I have not said my final good-byes!” The Angel of Death does not care. One dies at the exact moment, the precise time that has been decreed by Heaven Above. His excuses fall on “deaf” ears. *Yom ha'missah* is like that. It catches us by surprise. Even one who is terminally ill and has reconciled himself to the end is not prepared for the *yom ha'missah*. It is the one day when all our preconceived plans and notions are shown to be futile. That is more frightening than even death itself.

In his *sefer*, *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz*, *Shlita*, has an inspiring analogy about death, one that believe it or not spurs us to think positively and encourages – rather than depress us and make us sad.

It was moving day. The post- middle-age couple had sold their sprawling house and were about to take up residence in a much smaller, more functional and practical apartment. The children were all married with large families of their own. *Yom Tov* was now spent with the children and grandchildren at their homes. It was time to move on.

The movers were quickly emptying their beloved home of many years. Each time another piece of furniture, another box, another fixture was removed, it brought back memories. It was a quiet time for reflection, a subtle tear, a secret smile. The move was very emotional. The goodbyes to trusted neighbors were made, new phone numbers transferred. Forty years were being moved out of the house – forty years of family life, challenges, struggles, successes, failures, joys and sadness were all locked away in the boxes and pieces of furniture.

The new apartment had been carefully sought out. Location, accessibility, and opportunity for the children and grandchildren to visit were all taken into consideration. Nothing was left to “chance.” The apartment was well-lit, spacious, comfortable and very clean. For what more could a person ask? But, after all was said and done, it would take some time to get used to it. It was not the “old house.”

The husband turned to his wife and said, “You know, this move is much like *Olam Ha'zeh*, This World.”

“What did you say?” she asked, clueless about his line of thinking and what he could be suggesting with his somewhat strange remark.

“When we leave our earthly abode,” her husband began, “we know that we are leaving This World for a much better world. Our separation from This World is very difficult, because we are leaving

family, friends and the life we have made for ourselves. The leaving, however, is somewhat ameliorated with the knowledge that we know that we are going 'home' to our Source."

When his wife heard his ruminating, she said, "I think it is time to leave. There is really no reason to linger any longer. It is time to move on."

When they arrived at the new apartment, the husband almost passed out when he noticed that their dining room window had an incredible view – of the cemetery! He had never bothered looking earlier when they had negotiated for the apartment. What could he do now? How could he live opposite a scene that was a constant reminder of *yom ha'missa*, the day of death?

As he related this story a few months later, he said, "Actually, living opposite the cemetery had a most calming effect on me. Whenever things do not go my way, when life's challenges seem to fall at my feet, I take a look out the window and realize, 'It won't be long now. Life in This World is temporary. There is a better place where these problems will have no effect.' Indeed, when I look out my dining room window I relax and am comforted with the realization that there is a better world, with a noble purpose. We do here what we can so that we will merit a ringside seat in the World to Come.

"*Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, writes that the thought of *yom ha'missah* should engender a feeling of joy. *Shlomo Ha'melech* says in *Mishlei* 31:25, 'She joyfully awaits the last day.' She awaits the inevitable last day of life with confidence that she will have earned the respect and honor. Now that I am exposed to a constant reminder concerning the *yom acharon*, last day, I realize the futility of life, the brevity of life and, thus, the overriding importance of not wasting one minute! I hope Hashem will bless me with continued *arichas yamim*, longevity, and that I should not lose sight of the *yom acharon*."

I conclude with yet another perspective on *yom ha'missah*. I came across an article written by *Rav Avraham Fishman, zl*, a *yedid* from Telshe, who wrote an appreciation of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Rav Mordechai Gifter, zl*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* would place great emphasis on the words of *Rabbeinu Yonah* in his *Shaarei Teshuvah*: "When a man begins to grow old, and his strength begins to dwindle, he should give heart to the closeness of his end and understand what will become of him. It is indeed cause for great wonderment. If one finds himself in the middle of his days and sees his days passing, how can his eyes be so blind and his heart not understand that he is continually advancing to his final resting place."

Rabbi Eliezer's comment quoted in the *Talmud Shabbos* 153 was one of *Rav Gifter's* more famous quotes. "Let a person repent today for he may die tomorrow; this way he will find himself living all of his days in a state of *teshuvah*, repentance." This is how the *Rosh Yeshivah* lived his life – ever-cognizant that tomorrow might be fraught with insurmountable challenges. One must reach for the heights of achievement – today – because tomorrow it might be out of reach. He would often relate concerning the famous *Rav Meir Anshel Rothschild*, who had an *aron*, coffin,

custom made for himself. He would lie down in it nightly as a reminder of the day of death which no one escapes.

A student once remarked to *Rav Gifter* that it was no great feat for the *Rosh Yeshivah* to be so proficient in every *Tosfos*, commentary to the *Talmud*, since the *Rosh Yeshivah* was considerably brilliant.

*Rav Gifter* immediately responded to the student, "You are mistaken. When I learn a *blatt*, page of *Talmud*, or a *Tosfos*, I view it as if it is the very last time I am going to see this *blatt Gemorah* or *Tosfos*, before I stand before the Heavenly Tribunal and take my ultimate *farher*, test, on what I have learned in this world. That is why I remember it well. If you would learn *Gemorah* and *meforshim*, commentaries, in the same manner, you would also remember it."

This is how he lived – recognizing that every moment could possibly be his last. He had to be prepared for the ultimate *bechinah*, test.