

You shall safeguard the matzos... you shall observe this day for your generations as an eternal decree. (12:17)

Procrastination is a major hindrance when it comes to getting something done. Certainly, no one will hire a worker to complete a job knowing that this worker has a reputation as a procrastinator. On the other hand, one would find himself hard-pressed to call a procrastinator evil. Unreliable perhaps, but evil? Certainly not. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, teaches us that, with regard to *mitzvah* performance, procrastination, delay of any sort, is characteristic of the pull of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, over us, and, thus, sufficient reason to refer to it as an evil trait.

The Torah admonishes *U'shemartam es ha'matzos*, "You shall safeguard the *matzos*." One must take great caution to see to it that the dough that he is preparing for *matzah* does not become leaven. Laxity in guarding the dough can cause it to ferment, leaving him with bread – not *matzah*. This is still not evil. Laxity will not get the job done, but it is not evil. *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* who teach, "Do not read the word as *matzos*, but rather as *mitzvos*. (Different word – same spelling and letter structure.) Just as one must be diligent while baking *matzos* lest the dough become *chametz*, leaven, we must also be diligent in *mitzvos*, lest they spoil." We must grab the opportunity to fulfill every *mitzvah* which presents itself.

Zerizus means alacrity, immediacy in performing a *mitzvah*. *Zerizus* is not limited to baking *matzos*; it is a critical component in all *mitzvah* performance. Otherwise, the *mitzvah* is subject to *chimutz*, the leavening effect, spoiling it. Alacrity shows that a person: cares; values the *mitzvah*; respects for Whom it is being performed; demonstrates how much it all means to him. Some individuals are perennially late for everything. Is this a character deficiency or an indication of their true feelings towards the subject to which they were to attend? This might be true, but it is inexcusable with regard to *mitzvos*. Hashem is waiting.

Rav Wolbe suggests a deeper aspect to the *chimutz* failing. He cites the *Mesillas Yescharim* who teaches that one who does not perform a *mitzvah* at its earliest possible opportunity empowers the *yetzer hora* to prevent him from carrying it out properly. When we procrastinate, we are inviting the *yetzer hora's* participation in our *mitzvah* performance. Furthermore, the interim time between the opportunity and actual performance is in and of itself the creation of the *ra*, evil, which exists in the cosmic world. Therefore, the *mitzvah* can actually be the result of a negative force.

To further explain this concept, *Rav Wolbe* quotes *Chazal* who teach that, prior to Adam *HaRishon's* sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, no delay existed between conception and birth – the child was born immediately upon conception, with no gestation period necessary. Likewise, *Chazal* teach that in *yemos*, the days, of *Moshiach*, ready-made fabrics and fully-baked cakes will grow on trees. There will be no interim period for food or clothing preparation. This idea is an extension of the above concept, which posits that delay is in and of itself the consequence of sin. Thus, when sin is absent, so is delay. It all happens – immediately!

When an opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* or to carry out an act of *chesed*, kindness, to help another Jew presents itself, we must realize that what is presented and when it is presented is Hashem's doing. Imagine, Hashem asking anyone of us to do something for Him, we would fall over ourselves to execute His wish with utmost haste. Why do we delay in other instances, when we should live our lives with the knowledge that "situations," "opportunities," "needs," that present themselves to us are Heaven-sent for us to carry out – not to push off on someone else.

We rationalize, look for excuses, so that we can continue maintaining the status quo. Obviously, if Hashem has presented us with an opportunity, He is indicating to us that He wants us to resist the status quo and do something. Practicing *zerizus* is our way of subordinating ourselves to the will of Hashem. The *Talmud Sotah* 40a relates that Rabbi Abahu had an interpreter who explained his lectures in lay language to the general public. The interpreter's wife once boasted to Rabbi Abahu's wife, "My husband is every bit as learned and original as your husband, and he humbles himself to function as an interpreter out of his great sense of humility." Rabbi Abahu's wife related this woman's *chutzpah*, audacity, to her husband. Rabbi Abahu countered, "What difference does it make who is more brilliant? The end result is that between the two of us, the Divine teachings are conveyed to the general populace. That is all that matters."

In the early days before the city of Bnei Brak became the bustling Torah center that it is, the area was mostly fields for grazing, where shepherds would bring their flocks to graze. *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*, would often walk through these fields accompanied by students who drank up every word of Torah that emanated from him. Along his "route" sat an elderly shepherd, enjoying the calm, the air, the peacefulness of the moment. The *Rosh Yeshivah* would greet the shepherd warmly each time he passed by him.

One day, he took his walk and was surprised to discover that no shepherd was present. Upon inquiring of the other shepherds, he was informed that the elderly shepherd had passed away during the night. *Rav Shach* was upset and immediately asked about the funeral arrangements. No one was really sure of the arrangements or whether he even had a family. *Rav Shach* felt that this was a *meis mitzvah*, a person who dies and has no one to attend to his burial – and he immediately set himself to making arrangements and informing people to attend the funeral of a *meis mitzvah*. Who would not heed the call of the *Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*? Within a few short hours, people from all over joined the *Rosh Yeshivah* in paying the *kavod acharon*, last respects, to this elderly Jew. *Rav Shach* understood that Hashem had presented him with an opportunity. He could easily have dispatched a number of students to address all of the details, but Hashem had "spoken" to him – not to others. This is what is meant by *zerizus*.