

"And there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt." (10:22)

Chazal state that only one fifth of the Jews enslaved in Egypt actually went out during the Exodus. The other four fifths perished during the three days of darkness which engulfed Egypt. It is perplexing that such a large number of people would actually desire to stay in Egypt. They were beaten incessantly; their basic freedoms were totally restricted; their daily ritual consisted of pain, affliction and persecution. Yet, they chose to stay in Egypt rather than leave with Moshe! Did this represent a rational choice?

Why were these enslaved Jews not inspired by the wonderful miracles which Hashem wrought in Egypt on their behalf? Indeed, even Pharaoh was so impressed with the miracles that he was motivated to release the Jews, had Hashem not hardened his heart. Nonetheless, Pharaoh was somewhat justified in desiring to keep the Jews. After all, if such a large segment of the populace left, it would definitely affect the economy. From where else would the spoiled Egyptians have gotten slaves to perform backbreaking, inhuman labor for them?

The Jews, however, had no such justification. They should have jumped at the opportunity for freedom. Hashem saw that these intractable, iniquitous Jews would not budge from their complacency. It was decreed that many of them should die during the three days of the ninth plague. We must endeavor to understand why these Jews refused to be inspired by the miracles and opted to stay in Egypt.

Horav Chizkiyahu Cohen, z.l., offers a remarkable insight into the nature of these obstinate Jews. In the *Talmud Berachos 5a* *Chazal* teach us a valuable lesson in self-motivation, "*One should incite/make tremble the yetzer tov (good inclination) over the yetzer hara (evil inclination)*". As it says in *Tehillim 4*, "*Tremble and sin not.*" This *pasuk* homiletically exhorts *Klal Yisrael* to tremble so much at the thought of transgression that the very idea of sin becomes a source of disconcertment and trauma. *Chazal* continue and say that if following this advice does not prove successful, one should immerse himself diligently in *Torah* study.

If this counsel does not alleviate the problem, and one still feels that he cannot overcome the blandishments of the *yetzer hara*, let him remind himself of that day we all must face: Everyone must confront all of their deeds on the day of death. The obvious question which arises as we study *Chazal's* counsel is -- "Why allow for failure to strike twice? If reflecting on the *yom ha'missah*, day of death, which is the last resort, is effective, why not choose the proven course rather than experiment with methods that are not necessarily successful?"

Horav Cohen explains that evidently the educative power of *yom ha'missah* applies only to one who has already studied *Torah*. One who appreciates the positive value of *Torah* will be inspired and humbled by the awe of death. Alternatively, one who has not been refined by *Torah* study

could quite possibly go to the other extreme when confronted with the inevitability of death, as the *Navi* in *Yeshaya 22:13* states, "*Eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die...*"

We note from here that there are those who have sunk so low that they have reached the nadir of sin. **Nothing** whatsoever will inspire these individuals, not even the imminence of their approaching death. In fact, the depression resulting from this awareness may motivate them to continue their pursuit of physical gratification.

There are those in contemporary society who claim that if they were to see miraculous events, they would be inspired to religious observance. This assertion is a sham. Everything is determined by the heart's inclination. One who is inclined towards evil will not be impressed by miracles. Conversely, one who believes and seeks to perceive events in a positive light will not be "turned off" as a result of evidence that contradicts his belief. Those Jews who chose to stay in Egypt were so dominated by the *yetzer hara* that nothing could awaken them from their spiritual slumber. One must strive to prepare himself for Divine inspiration and revelation by first divesting himself of subservience to his physical/material desires.