

In the morning you will say, “Who can give back last night?” And in the evening you will say, “Who can give back this morning?” for the fright of your heart. (28:67)

Rashi explains this practically, with conditions deteriorating on a daily basis to the point that the anguish of today will be so painful it will make one yearn for the suffering of yesterday. This can also refer to those who wake up too late to realize that the life which they led yesterday (in the past) was the precursor to the *tzaros*, troubles, which they experience today. Whether it be satisfaction with one’s personal spiritual growth or the lack of *nachas*, satisfaction and pleasure, derived from one’s children – nothing happens in a vacuum. The decisions that we make today will affect us tomorrow. It is tough being different, living a sheltered life when everybody is out there having fun (however that may be interpreted), but the rewards later in life far outshine and overshadow the effort and difficulty leading up to the final achievement.

The *Sifrei Mussar* quote the above *pasuk*, not only for the punishment it implies, but also as an educational guide for each and every one of us. *Boker*, morning, symbolizes the early part of one’s life, his youth, when his senses are working at their maximum, his strength is vigorous, his acuity and inclination are at top form. *Erev*, evening, refers to the twilight of one’s life, when he is getting on in years, his vitals are ebbing, when he no longer has the vim and vigor to do everything that he wants. Moshe *Rabbeinu* teaches us a vital lesson. When a young person is told to follow meticulously in the Torah way, not just to *daven* – but to arise early (as a lion) and pray with the proper *kavanah*, intention and devotion, to take great pain to perform *mitzvos* as they were intended to be performed – his response might be, “Later, when I get older. Now I want to live. The whole world is before me. How can I lock myself in the *bais hamedrash* when there is so much happening?”

When the twilight years creep up on a person, however, and his body no longer responds the way it did forty years earlier, he laments that it is so difficult to observe the *mitzvos*, to go to *shul*, to learn Torah, to *daven* with vigor. *Oy!* if I could only be young again I would take advantage of my youth and meticulously devote myself to Torah and *mitzvos*. This is all the work of the wily *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, who pushes us off when we are young and tells us to forget about it when we age. In the “morning,” we declare that we will act differently in the “evening” of our life; and, in the “evening,” we lament that we no longer have the strength that we had in the “morning,” during our youth.

In one of his *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, relates the following story: In a certain city in Lithuania lived a very wealthy Jew who had achieved the blessing of *Torah u’gedulah b’makom echad*, Torah scholarship together with material success. His Torah erudition was a match for his financial portfolio. He was a G-d-fearing Jew who, together with his wife, had raised a beautiful family. In short, he was the dream of every man. There was, however, one deficiency in his demeanor – he was a miser. While he did contribute to *tzedakah*, charity, his

generosity was limited to the minimum amount that he was obligated to give. Since he was wealthy, his *maaser*, tithe, was considerable; he nonetheless looked for every avenue to refrain from giving. It actually hurt him to be generous with his money. On the other hand, his passion for acquiring wealth knew no bounds.

On the last day of his life, as he lay on his deathbed, in pain but completely lucid, he called his entire family around his bed. He wanted to share a parting lesson with them, something from which they would learn, so that perhaps they would not err in the manner that he did. Apparently, this occurred approximately fifteen minutes before the *Malach Hamaves*, Angel of Death, put an end to his physical pain. "My children, I am at the closing moments of my life. Truthfully, I feel the end to be very near," he began. His children immediately begged him not to continue speaking. He would be fine. He dismissed them. He knew how he felt – and he did not feel well: "Nothing matters to me now. If someone were to present me with the greatest delicacy, I would refuse it. Honor means nothing to me anymore. Clothes are meaningless. However, if someone were to place a *kopek* (small coin) in my hand, instinctively I would place it under my pillow, so that no one would take it from me! That is how much money means to me!

"I know that this attitude is insane. What could I possibly do with a *kopek*? I have millions. What can one *kopek* add to my immense wealth? Nonetheless, since I never expunged the ugly desire for hoarding my wealth, I am leaving this world with this deficiency! I have nothing to gain, but, since I never purged this faulty *middah*, character trait, from my psyche – it will accompany me to the grave!"

When we reach the twilight of our lifespan, we regret the alterations that we did not make earlier in life. Sadly, now it is very late in the game. For some, it is impossible to change – as evinced by the above story.