

Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled. (18:3)

The holy *Peshischa*, *Horav Bunim, zl*, renders this *pasuk* homiletically, deriving from the ensuing exegesis an important lesson for Jewish living. On an almost constant basis we are confronted with challenges to our spiritual well-being. These challenges come in the context of our base desires. We must exert extreme effort to overcome these physical passions, which scream out to us: “Why not be like everybody else?” Obviously, the optimum defense to triumph over the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, and its wiles is to circumvent a confrontation between the provocation of physical desire and spiritual ascendancy. By providing ourselves with a sort of fence, parameters which are protective barriers from sin, we are able to quell the urge to defer to physicality. How can we achieve success in this endeavor? What protective device can empower us in this way?

The *Peshischa* teaches us to take a penetrating look at those who think that they have satisfied their base desires and have absconded to a lifestyle of moral turpitude, of spiritual bankruptcy – and then ask ourselves: “Is this really what we want for ourselves?” All we have to do, says the *Rebbe*, is to look at these icons of a bankrupt society and ask: “Did they really succeed?” “Are they really satisfied?” Is one ever satisfied by moral profligacy? Is his demeanor respectable, dignified, something one would want to emulate? Anyone with a modicum of intelligence and an ounce of common sense will respond with a resounding, “No!” to these questions. Thus, the greatest deterrent from living life as an “Egyptian” is to take a deep look at his life. This should be all one needs to erect a fence to protect himself from sin.

All one has to do is open his eyes and read about the rich and famous whose names grace the front pages of the secular media. Who is unable to discern the vacuous nature of the secular lifestyle? They live a life of wanton abandon, bereft of discipline or scruples. Can anyone in his right mind be envious of such a life? The greatest deterrent to living their aberrant lifestyle is to take a cogent view of the manner in which they live and then ask oneself: “Is this really what I want out of life?”

When we look at the behavior of the modern-day *Mitzrim*, Egyptians, we are provided with a powerful restraint for our own life. Veritably, at first glance, to the eyes of the unknowing, immature, unsuspecting seeker of “fun,” it may appear to have all the ingredients for which he is searching. When he sits back and pauses, he realizes the vacuity and utter misery (at the end of the day) of their lives.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* views the *pasuk* as an admonition not to live, not to do anything in a manner similar to the way in which the *Mitzrim* acted. The manner in which we act must reflect Torah ideals, Torah values – hence, Torah demeanor. Our deportment must be unlike that of our gentile neighbors: we eat differently; we sleep differently; we behave differently. The Jew and the *goy* have absolutely nothing in common. The sooner we accept this verity, the happier and more self-

satisfied we will be. There are some fine, well-meaning, decent gentiles who (on the surface) act in a dignified, respectful and religiously appropriate manner. Their core values, however, are not Torah values. Their lives are neither guided nor inspired by Torah. Thus, they are different. Their level of decency is guided by contemporary culture, which is subjective. Our life is guided by Hashem. Need I say more? They might be religious, adhering to the dogma of their religion, but only an imbecile could compare it to Judaism and its structure of law. The term *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is a term that is foreign to them, since the concept of Hashem, with His constant *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, is a concept they neither fathom nor accept. When religion is subjective, then life is viewed through the idiomatic lens of "self." Thus, the only entity such a person worships is himself. Why would a Jew choose to emulate such a person with such a way of life?

Clearly, no dearth of stories exists that depict the character and commitment to the religion of Jews of old. For the most part, our people have historically lived in ghettos, isolated (not by choice) from any form of relationship with their gentile neighbors. From a religious perspective, this was a good thing. We cannot be negatively influenced when we are separate, distinct, away from the *goyim*. *Yahadus Ashkenaz*, Jewish living in Western Europe post French Revolution, saw the ghetto walls torn down, allowing them to interact with the gentile. Sadly, many could not handle the tension and assault on their religious commitment once they came face to face with their gentile neighbors. Relationship led to friendship, which led to the sin of sins: intermarriage, which was usually followed by a complete revocation of faith: apostasy.

The stalwart commitment of some Jews to Torah and *mitzvos*, however, withstood the challenge of the breakdown of the ghetto walls. For the most part, Orthodox Jews comprised the *Kehillah kedoshah*, holy congregation, of Frankfurt Am Main, under the leadership of *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*. The following is a characterization of one of these Jews, taken from "A Son Remembers His Father" (Rabbi Meyer Schwab).

The Jewish cemetery in Frankfurt Am Main is what remains (in Europe) of the glorious (not large), deeply committed Torah community started by a handful of laymen under the leadership of *Rav Hirsch*. They withstood the assault on the Torah perpetrated by the secular stream, products of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment and German Reform, who sought to undermine and eventually destroy Torah Judaism, which they felt was irrelevant to their progressive society. We see today how wrong they were. Torah Judaism is thriving, while the secularists are sadly no longer members of the fold, or even Jewish. By depriving their children of our history, they separated them from our community. As a result, even those who are biologically Jewish have adopted other faiths.

Buried in that cemetery are the remains of a number of Torah giants, scholars who achieved distinction in their day and whose merit continues to illuminate our lives. Additionally, another type of Torah giant is buried there, men whose devotion to Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, was peerless and without compromise. In a secluded section of the cemetery is one such grave, graced by a headstone erected in 1875, a tribute to the memory of a unique individual, a layman

who personified the true *ben Torah*. He was Yehudah Loeb, *ben* Moshe Schwab (Father of *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, *Rav* of the *Ashkenaz Kehillah* of Washington Heights – his brothers: *Rav* Moshe, *Rav* Mordechai – each a *gadol* in his own right). His epitaph is striking and underscores the distinction between a *Yehudi* and a gentile: “He feared sin more than any menace. He clung to goodness. Only there did he find solace.”

Rav Hirsch imbued his *kehillah* with an unequivocal sense of *yiraas Shomayim*: no shortcuts; no compromise. Mr. Schwab moved from southern, rural Germany to Frankfurt Am Main in order to enroll his children in *Rav* Hirsch’s newly-established *Reale Schule*, to afford them a Torah education. What made him do this? A sense of *yiraas chet*, fear of sin.

Rav Schwab distinguishes between fear of Heaven, *yiraas Shomayim*, and fear of sin, *yiraas chet*. *Yiraas Shomayim* is tantamount to fear of punishment. Obviously, there are various levels, but one who fears Heaven fears retribution. He knows that sinning against G-d catalyzes serious ramifications. *Yiraas chet*, however, is on a higher spiritual plateau. Such a person fears more than punishment. He shudders from the very thought that sin will taint his soul. It is not the punishment, but the violation that frightens him. His soul will be sullied. His pure G-d-given soul is no longer pure. This is what he fears most – even more than punishment. Punishment is a natural consequence of sin. It is to be expected – and accepted. Contamination through sin is a spiritual offense that besmirches his soul. This he cannot tolerate. Mr. Schwab feared the taint more than the retribution. This is what made him so special. Imagine explaining this to a gentile.

Rav Shimon Schwab would relate how his home looked prior to *Shabbos*. (This gives us an idea how his parents merited to raise children who became *gedolei Yisrael* in a generation that was torn by spiritual strife, in a country that was the epicenter of spiritual mutiny against Hashem and His Torah). On Friday afternoon the table was set, and the entire house was prepared for *Shabbos*. The little children, who were already bedecked in their *Shabbos* clothes, played in the parlor. Then, their father entered the home, uncharacteristically late due to last minute business matters. He enlisted the “services” of his children in getting him ready to greet the *Shabbos* Queen. To one child, he gives his shoes to be polished; to another, his coat to be brushed off; and to yet another, to brush his hat. He then would ask his children, “Why are you not yet ready for *Shabbos*?” They replied, “But we are ready, and have been so for a little while.” To this he countered, “But I do not see the *eimasa d’Shabbos* (the awe of the approaching *Shabbos*) on your faces.” Thus, the children were inculcated with a powerful lesson: with the heightened joy of the upcoming *Shabbos* comes (also) a strong sense of *yiraas chet*, dread of (Heaven forbid) violating the *Shabbos*.