

## **Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem. (14:13)**

*Ibn Ezra* writes: “You shall not wage war. You will see the salvation that Hashem will make for you.” How is it possible for a nation of 600,000 men (over the age of twenty-years old) to just stand there and not fight their aggressors? The answer is that these people knew the Egyptians as their masters who lorded over them. It was impossible for the Jews who knew nothing about warfare to battle their Egyptian masters. Amalek attacked the Jews, and, without Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* prayers, he would have dealt them a weakening blow. Likewise, these Jewish expatriated slaves could not fight the *Canaanim* in *Eretz Yisrael*. It was their children, the next generation, who had grown up as free men who conquered *Eretz Yisrael*. *Ibn Ezra* explains (*Shemos* 2:3), “Perhaps Hashem caused Moshe to grow up in Pharaoh’s palace so that he would be used to royalty, and not fear entering into the halls of power. As a result, when Moshe observed an injustice, he acted immediately to right it, killing the Egyptian and later saving Yisro’s daughters from the Midyanite shepherds who were harassing them.”

*Rav Mordechai Hominer* explains that this concept applies equally in the world of *chinuch*, Jewish education (both in classroom and at home). A child must be imbued with self-esteem and self-confidence. A child who is belittled, ignored, disciplined to the extreme, will likely not develop a strong sense of self-esteem. When one’s parents and/or one’s *rebbe/morah* has little respect for his opinion, he has little hope to cultivate a sense of belief in himself. It is difficult to believe in yourself if no one else believes in you.

*Horav Yisrael Zev Gustman, zl*, was a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. At the young age of twenty-two, he was invited by the spiritual leader of European Jewry, the *Rav* of Vilna, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*, to serve on his *bais din* as a *dayan*. Following the war, *Rav Gustman* came to *Eretz Yisrael* where he visited the *Steipler Gaon, zl*. The *Steipler* asked *Rav Gustman* whether he was a relative of the famous *Rav Gustman* who had served on *Rav Chaim Ozer’s bais din*. When *Rav Gustman* replied that he was the one, the *Steipler* immediately stood up out of reverence for a *gadol*. A number of *yeshivos* turned to *Rav Gustman* in the hope that he would serve as their *Rosh Yeshivah*. He absolutely demurred from taking a position of leadership in a *yeshivah*.

These were the premier *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisrael*. Nonetheless, he said, “No. I do not feel qualified to serve as a *Rosh Yeshivah* after all of the degradation to which I was subjected during the Holocaust.” He felt that a *Rosh Yeshivah* must carry himself with a certain sense of dignity. After all that he had sustained during the war, he felt that he no longer had it in him.

We have no idea the harm that we cause a child: when we put him down; when we demonstrate a lack of respect for him; when we show that his opinion holds no value in our eyes. We wonder why a young person might just turn-off to religion. Quite often, it is the result of the attitude adults manifested towards him as a youth: no respect; even disdain; and, at times, derision – since, after all, he had not been acting in the “prescribed” manner “expected” of him. The little barbs that are

meant to motivate serve instead as lasting knives in the child's heart – knives which eventually destroy his relationship with *Yiddishkeit*. Our *gedolim* taught us the awesome respect we should show to each and every child, and the thoughtfulness that must be a constant and vital part of our relationship with them.

One incident has been in my mind since my early youth. I was in *cheder* with another young boy of similar background and extraction. His parents had also recently survived Hitler's inferno. Arguably, my friend was a discipline problem, and school was not his cup of tea. After another negative report from the *rebbe*, the boy's father lost it and yelled at his son, "Is this why I survived Hitler? To have a son like you?"

Certainly, the father did not mean what he said. He had lost his entire family and was an emotional wreck. His marriage after the war produced two children, a son and a daughter. His daughter married a distinguished *ben Torah*, and together they raised a beautiful *Torahdik* family. Sadly, my friend went off the *derech*, left the fold, and has not been heard from. Why? Who knows? He certainly did not have positive feelings about himself.

*Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, remembers that when the *Chazon Ish, zl*, spent a few weeks in Tzfas, a group of Jews *davened* with him in his apartment. The *Chazon Ish* would *daven k'vasikin*, at sunrise, which required a separate *minyan*. One morning, the *Chazon Ish* informed the men that, rather than *daven* in the apartment (which afforded them considerable room to maneuver), they would *daven* instead on the *mirpesses*, balcony, which obviously did not have sufficient room. He explained that a young boy was sleeping in the room where they had normally been conducting services, and, if he would wake up, he would be embarrassed for them to see him in his pajamas. This indicates a sensitivity to a young boy's feelings evinced by the *gadol hador*.

*Horav Yehudah Adass, Shlita*, asked a young boy, "What are you thinking about as we move closer to *Yom Kippur*?" The boy gave a shocking response. "I am certain that I am the worst person in the world. I am a *rasha*, wicked, of the lowest level." "Why do you say such terrible things?" the *Rav* asked the boy. "This is what my father always tells me!" the boy replied.

The *Rosh Yeshivah (Porat Yosef)* continued, "I was once walking down the street when I heard screams emanating from an apartment. I am embarrassed to repeat the words and maledictions that a woman was hurling at someone. Concerned that it could be a *shalom bayis* issue, matrimonial dispute, which could lead to serious ramifications, I walked up the stairs and listened by the door. I was shocked to hear the response of a young child, "*Imma*, I am sorry. I will never do it again." "You are a *rasha*! What will ever become of you? You are worthless!" These were the words coming from a mother to her five-year-old son. What positive growth do you think we can expect to see from this child?" *Rav Adess* asked. There is no question that these words were the result of an overwhelmed, frustrated, challenged mother – but try explaining that to a five-year-old.

I cannot conclude with a story that leaves a negative taste in the reader's mind. I wrote the

following story a few years back, but it is one that is worth repeating. It took place at a *sheva brachos*, nuptial reception, for a young couple, the husband being a brilliant scholar. The grandfather of the groom arose to say a few words. The grandfather was far from a scholar, and, as this was a gathering of elite scholars, the groom was nervous about what his loving grandfather might say.

The grandfather began, "As you all know, I hail from Europe. I would like to share an incident that took place in Europe. It is about a bright boy whose mischief took a front seat to his learning. He was so busy planning his next *shtik* that he had no time to learn. He had been warned countless times: 'One more time, and you are out!' The warnings and punishments left no impression on him. The final straw came when the boy took a goat and placed it inside the *Aron HaKodesh*. The next morning, when the *chazzan* opened the Ark to remove the Torah – a goat jumped out! The people were outraged. It did not take a master detective to trace the act to the mischievous boy.

"The principal of the *cheder* told the parents that he could no longer tolerate their son's insolence. He would have to go. It was not as if the parents were shocked. They had known that this day would come. It was inevitable. Their son, however, was floored, and he demanded to take the *cheder's* principal to a *din Torah*, adjudication, before the town's *rav*. Let him decide if he should be thrown out of *yeshivah*.

"The next day, the boy presented his case before the *rav*. 'Rebbe,' he said, 'there is only one *cheder* in town. If I am sent out of school, I have nowhere else to go. Where will I receive my Jewish education? I will have nothing. As a result, I will leave *Yiddishkeit* – a loss, not only to myself, but to all the generations that would emerge from me. Do you want to have this responsibility on your shoulders? Why should my descendants be sentenced to spiritual ignominy because of my mischief?' The principal could not help but agree with his recalcitrant student, who eventually turned his life around."

The grandfather concluded his story – paused for effect – and declared, "I will have you know that I was that mischievous boy. I put the goat in the *Aron HaKodesh*. Now look at my grandson, who is a brilliant *talmid chacham*. Can you imagine what would have occurred had I not succeeded in pleading my case?"

The story is powerful and, sadly occurs many a time – only not always with such a positive outcome.