

Do not look behind you. (19:17)

Neither Lot nor anyone in his group of survivors was permitted to look back at the carnage that was taking place. Their merit in being spared was on condition that they not be in the midst of Sodom during its destruction. Thus, they could be saved before the upheaval began. Furthermore, they were not entitled to witness the destruction of Sodom while they remained unscathed. Lot's wife did not listen. When she turned around to see what was happening to her fellows, Hashem punished her.

A deeper meaning can be attributed to the words, "Do not look behind you," one from which we can all benefit. We all have questions after the fact. Could I have acted differently? Would the end result have been different? *Rav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, quotes the Lomza *Mashgiach, Horav Moshe Rozenstein, zl*, who asks a meaningful question. One the one hand, we say and believe with complete faith that Hashem, *Asah, Oseh, v'Yaaseh es kol ha'maasim*, "He alone made, makes and will make everything." Only to Him may we ascribe events and how they will conclude. Nonetheless, it is up to us to endeavor and do whatever we can. If our *hishtadlus*, endeavoring, will not alter the course of the end result – why bother? Our actions are an exercise in futility. The *Mashgiach* explains that, indeed, we are charged with doing all that we can do. Nothing we do will affect whatever our fellow is destined to have. The businesses who compete with one another may throw all their efforts into achieving success. They should know, however, that no one else will lose due to his competitor's endeavor. He will have what is destined for him to have, and likewise, his competitor will not reap greater benefit than that what is Heavenly-designated for him. He must act. Hashem will do the rest.

This is only, explains the *Mashgiach*, with regard to the future: We must do/act/perform. With regard to the past, however, what was already done/achieved, this we must know was already determined by Hashem. One should not ruminate over what was: "I could have done this or that differently. Had I worked harder, advertised better, used a different sales person, etc." This is where our belief in Hashem as the One Who decides what will be the outcome of every situation comes into play. We can and should do all that we can. What ultimately happens is from Hashem.

Survivor's guilt, which plays itself out in a scenario where one blames himself for not trying hard enough to save his fellow, is a classic case. Adult children quarreling over what is the best doctor/nursing home/health care to provide for an elderly parent is another. We must endeavor to provide the best care, do everything to help our fellow. After the fact, however, we should not point fingers. What has occurred was Hashem's will from the very beginning.

Rav Galinsky explains that this idea is intimated by *Shlomo Hamelech (Mishlei 16:1)*, *L'adam maarchei lev, u'mei Hashem maaneh lashon*, "It is for man to arrange his thoughts/feelings, but eloquent speech is a G-dly-gift" (what he says depends on Hashem). In his commentary, *Rashi* explains, "Man prepares his words that he will articulate. (All of his thoughts and feelings are applied in preparing his message/response.) The actual words that he says, however, come from

Hashem. At times, Hashem causes him to stumble with his words (say the wrong thing, which undermines his purpose), or, if he merits, Hashem prepares a good reply for him.” In other words, Hashem is the final Arbiter of what we say.

Lot was instructed not to look back. This means that one should realize, acknowledge, appreciate and respect that Hashem is *Asah, Oseh, v'Yaaseh*. What is done – is done – by Hashem. There is nothing more to be done. Do not look back.

In *Kohelles Rabbah* (16:21), Rabbi Meir teaches, “When a person comes into this world, his fists are clenched as if to say, ‘The entire world is mine; I will inherit it.’ But when he departs the world, his hands are open as if to say, ‘I did not inherit anything from this world.’” Rav Galinsky supplements this, applying the above idea. When a person enters the world, he thinks that he will conquer, control, create and do whatever he wants. When he leaves the world, he realizes that it was really Hashem Who did everything. We must endeavor to do what we can and to accept what will be.