

Rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it. (30:14)

A quiet tragedy plays itself out in the lives of many – not in failure, but in refusal to even take that step forward to begin. We are filled with excuses (some call it rationalizations): “It is just not me;” “I am not cut out for that;” “I cannot wrap my head around it;” “It rubs me the wrong way.” Obviously, we became more creative in excusing our failure to even try. For some, it is a fear of failure; for others, it is discomfort with initiating change, for yet others making up one’s mind is too difficult, too demanding, etc. *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*, famously said that the greatness of a person is not measured by his success, but rather, by his ability to come back, to rise up after falling down, to build on failure and transform it into success. But if one never enters the ring, he has failed. Giving up without trying guarantees that he will achieve nothing.

Life has a way of revealing the truth about all of these excuses, showing that they are all self-imposed. When survival is threatened, one suddenly finds the strength, acuity, stamina and courage to overcome all obstacles. When the option of walking away does not exist, we adapt and become resourceful.

Horav Yechiel Tzucker, shlita, cites the well-known *Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu (Zuta Parsha 14)* in which *Eliyahu HaNavi* chanced upon a hunter who was complaining about his hardships. Eliyahu asked him, “What will you respond to your Father in Heaven on Judgement Day?” “I will say that I was not blessed with the acuity critical for success in Torah study.” Eliyahu asked him how he was able to take the flax threads and make nets and traps to capture the animals and fish from which he earned a living. The same G-d Who gave him the ability to prepare the nets and traps could provide him with the vital perceptivity to study and excel in Torah.

What relationship exists between Torah study and making nets and traps? Obviously, Torah study demands greater cognitive ability, diligence and toil. *Rav Tzucker* quotes *Horav Bunim, zl m’Pshischa* who explains that one does not know his hidden talents, skills – both cognitive and physical -- which lay dormant within him, waiting for the catalyst that will release them. The catalyst is the kingmaker. When his life or the life of someone dear to him depends on him, these hidden talents and abilities come to the fore. In other words, it is not a question of “can” or “cannot,” but of “will” or “will not.” When one is pushed against the proverbial wall, circumstances make the decision for him.

Eliyahu HaNavi intimated that the hunter’s ability to construct nets and traps is catalyzed by his need to earn a livelihood. If he wants to eat, to live, to provide for his family, he had better get his act together and learn how to make nets and traps. Likewise, when one realizes that Torah – *ki heim chayeinu* – is our life, without which we merely exist in an unmeaningful, purposeless manner, he will find the ability to study Torah – and succeed.

A young couple had waited quite a while to be blessed with a child. They consulted with specialists and tried various treatments – to no avail. They were not giving up hope. They would not reconcile to accepting that they would not be blessed with a child. The husband researched every area of expertise involving reproduction. Finally, he discovered a physician in New York who had an innovative experimental procedure that he claimed could bring hope to childless couples. The husband contacted the specialist and sent him all the information necessary for making a decision concerning their acceptance into the program. Sadly, after reviewing all the pertinent data, the specialist replied that they were not candidates for this procedure. It is difficult to imagine the sinking feeling of despair that overcame the couple. This had been their last hope.

The husband refused to throw in the towel. He spoke to the specialist again and said that they were prepared and willing to take a chance. The specialist did not offer them hope, underscoring the fact that this treatment was still in its experimental stage –even though it showed promise. In fact, he would not charge them because he viewed them as trial participants. He lauded their courage and tenacity, but gave them no illusions about a successful outcome. He was wrong! With *chasdei Hashem*, the mother conceived and gave birth to a healthy baby boy!

When a person believes that it is his only chance, that his very life depends on it, he has hope for success. The hunter knows that if he does not make nets and traps, he and his family would starve – so he learned how to make them. Likewise, regardless of one's skills and acumen, if he views Torah as his only source of life – he will learn and *shteig*!