

And not be reckoned among the nations. (23:9)

The **Viznitzer Rebbe, zl**, was wont to interpret this *pasuk* as an imperative. The Jew does not want, nor should he care, if he is *nechshav*, acknowledged, considered, appreciated by the gentile world. Our goal as Jews is to be acknowledged by Hashem and by our people. What the world thinks of us is a factor only in the sense that a negative impression made by us will somehow create a *chillul Hashem*, desecrating Hashem's Name. If, for some reason, the gentile people view us as "different", who cares? Their opinion of us has no bearing whatsoever on our lives.

Indeed, if one were to peruse history, he will note that, regardless of our bending over backwards to be accepted by the gentiles, it has proved unsuccessful. Their opinion of Judaism and its adherents has never changed, in spite of our assimilation with them. The **Klausenberger Rebbe, zl**, would relate the following story. Sadly, it is repeated often in Jewish life, when those who have turned their backs on Hashem and His People realize that they are still viewed as "Jews," either as people of no consequence or in an even more negative manner.

In the camps, the *Rebbe* was forced to share quarters in a small, stuffy room with forty-one other inmates. There were no beds. Thus, the men were forced to sleep on the floor. Forty-two starving men, exposed to disease, enveloped in darkness, surrounded by insects, was a recipe for disaster. Within two weeks, forty of the original prisoners who had shared these quarters had succumbed to the elements. The *Rebbe* and an assimilated Jew from Budapest were all who survived the horrors of those first two weeks.

The *Rebbe* asked the man, "Are you Jewish?" "Of course, otherwise why else would I be here?" he answered. The *Rebbe* continued to probe the man's background. "Who are you?" he asked. "You do not know who I am? I am the president of the National Bank of Hungary. I am (was) the most important financial figure in the country. Indeed, my picture is on Hungary's currency".

The *Rebbe* asked again, "Are you Jewish?" This time the response was negative. "But I thought you said earlier that you were Jewish". The *Rebbe* asked, "Are you Jewish or not?"

"Well, I was born Jewish, but I converted to Christianity, and I have lived most of my life as a Christian". Clearly, seeking to better himself and achieve acceptance in climbing the cultural social ladder, the man had reneged his Judaism.

"Are you married?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Yes," he replied, "but my wife, too, is Christian". "Did she join you here?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Why should she come to this wretched place? She is not Jewish. Why should she be subjected to such indignity and suffering as I?" he retorted somewhat angrily.

The *Rebbe* looked at the man and responded innocently, "I do not understand. Does she not care for you? I would think that a devoted wife would follow her husband wherever he is taken. Would a

good wife leave her husband in midst of such travail?" The *Rebbe* did not wait for an answer, nor was one forthcoming. "Tell me", the *Rebbe* asked, "Did you have a good marriage?"

"Good marriage? In our thirty years together, I bought her expensive jewelry; we traveled all over; our lives were intertwined in happiness", was the man's reply.

"Yet, in hard times, she left you alone. This seems difficult to understand".

The night passed, and a new day was dawning. Time for more questions. "Did you have a prominent position?" "Of course," the man answered, "I was personally responsible for designing and ultimately saving the financial structure of the economy. Do you really mean that you never heard of me?"

The *Rebbe* shrugged as if it was a meaningless question. What would he have to do with the fields of finance and banking?

"Do you have children?" the *Rebbe* asked. "Yes. Three sons: a lawyer; a physician; and a prosperous businessman. I provided them with a superior education, and they are eminently successful," the man proudly declared.

"Yet, they are neither here, nor do they seem to identify with your plight," the *Rebbe* intimated.

"Why are you provoking me?" the man asked. "Perhaps you can tell me why you are imprisoned here?"

"I am just a poor rabbi. I never did a thing for the gentiles. I never even gave them a glass of water. You, however, did so much for them. Yet, you are relegated to suffering alongside me. I would have expected them to come to the concentration camp and demand your release. They should carry you out on their shoulders!

"I cannot understand it. You converted to Christianity. You gave them everything – your life, your marriage, and your children. What did they do in return? They placed you in a death camp. Please forgive me; I do not want to aggravate you more. I just want you to understand how bitter your situation is".

They continued talking throughout the night. The *Rebbe* spoke about the beauty of *Yiddishkeit*, the religion of this man's ancestors, and how, regardless of his sacrifices, he would never be accepted or reckoned by the outside world. They spoke until sleep overcame both of them.

The next morning, the man said to the *Rebbe*, "I have been thinking about your words, and I have come to the conclusion that I really have made a mess of my life. I committed a gross error in thinking that conversion, a gentile wife and gentile children would gain me entry into their world".

He then began to cry bitterly, "I am a Jew! I will always be a Jew! I only hope that G-d will take me back!"

That night, the banker was taken for his final earthly walk. The *Rebbe* later remarked that he was grateful for the opportunity somehow to have encouraged this man to die as a repentant Jew, realizing that this is the only way for a Jew to live and die: *U'bagoyim lo yischashav*.