

Your sons and daughters will be given to another people... you will bear sons and daughters, but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. (28:32,41)

At first glance, these two separate curses appear redundant. Upon closer perusal, however, one sees a striking difference. In the first *pasuk*, the Torah refers to the children as your sons and daughters. In the second *pasuk*, it is simply sons and daughters to whom you will give birth. Furthermore, in the first *pasuk*, your sons and daughters are “given” over to another nation. In the second *pasuk*, the children are taken away from you, captive of another nation.

These are two curses which I think are progressive. At first, the children still belong to us. They are at home and attend school/*yeshivah/Bais Yaakov*. They are physically with us. It is their minds and hearts which have publicly fallen prey to the blandishments of the outside culture, the non-*frum* world, the hedonistic society in which everything goes: smoking, drinking, internet, a society whose moral compass is no longer measured by the charts of simple human decency.

The next step in this bitter digression is when they are no longer home. Oh, they might come home at night to sleep, but, for all intents and purposes, they have been taken captive by the nations. Their allegiance to Jewish spirituality is no longer existent.

These two curses have plagued the Orthodox community throughout time. While some might think it is a recent phenomenon, they are wrong. I do not have the statistics, but I believe it was worse in pre-World War II Europe. Why? What are the causes? We can go on hypothesizing, laying the onus of guilt on parents, environment, society, schools, but, after all is said and done – we do not know. The explanation for one specific boy does not apply to the other ten in his group. Whatever rationale upon which we might agree concerning a certain girl will not hold water concerning the many others who have ended up like her. There are wonderful boys and girls from the finest, most committed families, who just do not make the grade. They drop out from a host of excuses.

While, indeed, of all the contributing factors and emotional issues that one can suggest may have catalyzed this specific boy or girl’s alienation from Jewish observance, the most significant and imposing reason is the extent to which a boy or girl has a positive feeling toward Jewish observance. When one enjoys an activity, when it has value and meaning, they stick with it. Otherwise...

At the end of the day, it all boils down to one word: curse. The *Tochachah* says it loud and clear: your sons and daughters will be given over to another people. All rationale is irrelevant. The scourge through which so many are living is a curse from Hashem. Now – it might serve us well to read the *tochachah* and see what it is that catalyzes this and the other ninety-seven curses. Perhaps we can get a handle on the problem and prevent more children from being alienated.

First and foremost, I certainly am not qualified to render reason or make suggestions. I am merely approaching this issue from the perspective of one who learns a *pasuk Chumash* and derives a lesson and perspective from its words. In its own holy words, the Torah says: “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant” (28:47). It seems like a simple command: serve Hashem with joy, as if you mean it, as if you care, as if it is exciting, out of deep gratitude and feeling. A person’s attitude toward observance is not determined by how large his *yarmulke* or *kippah* is, how black his hat is, etc., but by whether observance is a source of joy for him, whether being observant means something to him as a Jew, as a person. Is it all by rote, an act of complacency, or does it really engender in him a feeling of safety, calm, self-worth, pride, courage, love?

A dysfunctional home will inevitably have issues. Disrespectful children are most often from disrespectful homes. This, of course, does not explain the children from “wonderful” *frum*, observant, homes that drift away. Well, the Torah is teaching us a secret: how observance is viewed and modeled sends a piercing message to children and plays a pivotal role in their outlook of Jewish observance. If parents and other authority figures love observance and express their joy about it, their children will more likely maintain an affinity toward observance, over those who just act with neutrality, because it is how they were raised.

This is the beginning, but, without it, we end at first base. Afterwards comes belief, intellectual as well as simple understanding – that *frumkeit* is the only meaningful way to live, such that we will not be swayed by those who “talk the talk” and even “dress the part,” but, behind closed doors, do not “walk the walk.” It is important to separate Jewish observance from those who purport to be *frum*.

I was recently in *Eretz Yisrael* where I had the *zchus* of speaking with the *tzaddik*, **Horav Yaakov Meir Shechter, Shlita**. Despite having suffered a number of personal sorrows, he is the embodiment of *Ivdu es Hashem b’simchah*, “Serve Hashem with joy.” He gave me his latest *sefer*, “The Scent of Eden,” which he exemplifies in the manner that he lives. In *Likutei Moharon* (11:8), *Horav Nachman, zl, m’Breslov* observes that the best way to encourage someone to do *teshuvah*, repent, is by exposing him to the “scent of *Gan Eden*.” This penetrating and lovely insight defines *Rav Shechter’s* approach to Torah and *avodas Hashem*. Simply speaking with him, one senses the immense joy that he manifests in serving Hashem. Each and every one of his activities on behalf of *Klal Yisrael* – to his personal *avodah*, service, to Hashem – is infused with vitality and a sense of enormous pleasure. I take the liberty of citing from his discourse on joy and sadness, in the hope that it will inspire the reader – especially as we near the end of the Hebrew calendar year, in preparation for the *Yamim Noraim*, High Holy Days.

Do you ever wonder how an individual who is seriously devout, meticulous in observing each and every *mitzvah*, could possibly be suffering “mild” depression? *Horav Shechter* explains that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, has one goal: to separate us from Hashem. The best way to do this would be to convince us not to perform *mitzvos*, and, instead, act nefariously. This should do the trick, but the *frum* Jew will not fall for such a frontal attack. Thus, the *yetzer hora* has no recourse,

other than cloaking itself in a garment of piety and *mitzvos*, and saying to us, “It is not enough to ‘simply’ serve Hashem. You must grow every day. Push yourself. Do not settle for the ordinary *frumkeit*, run-of-the-mill service to Hashem. You must be very strict with yourself, overly demanding. Do not rest for a moment. Push yourself harder, faster – until you collapse.”

We are pushed toward unrealistic – almost irrational – goals. When we fall short of our perceived expectations, we become angry with ourselves or with anyone whom we can blame for our missing the mark set by the *yetzer hora*. Instead of serving Hashem with joy, we have become preoccupied with worries, and our hearts are burdened by a sense of spiritual inadequacy and failure. This ultimately leads to self-resentment and depression. We have just lost to the *yetzer hora*. Why? How? We were unaware that joy is much more than a byproduct, a consequence of serving Hashem. It is, indeed, the single most powerful weapon in our arsenal to battle the *yetzer hora*.

One would suggest that we should push as hard as possible to acquire the characteristic of joy. The problem, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah* (*Yeshivah Shaar HaShomayim*, one of Yerushalayim’s oldest *yeshivos* for the study of *Talmud* and *Kabbalah*, originally established by *Horav Chaim Leib Auerbach, zl*, in 1906), is that, if a person works directly to acquire the *middah* of joy, he runs the risk of ending up with its very opposite – depression. One of the laws of “spiritual physics” is that wherever one tries to push in a particular direction, an opposing force is automatically catalyzed. Thus, the best approach is not to force joy, but to distance oneself from depression. Once our minds are void of sadness, joy will enter on its own, as a natural consequence of the *mitzvos* that we perform. When a person acts in accordance with Hashem’s dictate, he feels good. When one feels good, he is happy. It is as simple as that.