

And it will be that when he hears the words of this imprecation, he will bless himself in his heart, saying, “Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit...” Hashem will not be willing to forgive him. (29:18, 19)

We hear it all of the time, “It is not me... True, bad things do happen, but – to others – not to me.” We have convinced ourselves that we are immune from punishment; disasters happen to others; tragedies are events that we read about – but they do not happen to us. It is almost as if we have sprayed ourselves with Teflon, preventing anything bad from happening directly to us. *Ibn Ezra* offers a rationale for this delusion: “Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit.” I will live in the merit of the *tzaddik*, righteous, holy people, who outnumber me. Their merit will protect me, so I might as well enjoy life. This attitude does not define the *rasha*, wicked man, who acts with malice against Hashem. No – explains **Horav Gedalya Eisman, zl.** According to *Ibn Ezra*, the Torah is addressing the perverted attitude of an individual who is quite possibly G-d-fearing, a believer, who not only performs *mitzvos*, he even respects and believes in those who live the perfect life. Otherwise, he does not care that Hashem will not forgive him. The *rasha* could care less about admonition, threat of punishment. He either does not believe in anything, or he does not care about the consequences of his actions. The G-d-fearing Jew does care. He just believes that he will be spared in the merit of the truly righteous.

The fellow that attaches himself to *tzaddikim*, who attends the *shiurim*, lectures, *mussar shmuessen*, ethical discourses, goes to *davening*, recites *Tehillim* – who, for the most part, is a decent, upstanding observant Jew – he is the one to whom the Torah is speaking. You cannot save yourself by “hanging around” with the righteous, unless you personally repent and cleanse yourself of your indiscretions. Attending all of the *frum* events, from talks to prayer gatherings, does not absolve a person from personal introspection and “house-cleaning.” First – do *teshuvah*, remove the spiritual dross from your life; then – you can rely on the merit of the *tzaddik*.

Thus, the *Mashgiach* explains the apparent redundancy of the *U’Nesaneh Tokef* prayer. *Kein taavir v’sispor, v’simneh, v’sifkod – nefesh kol chai*, likewise, “So shall you cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living.” Each person is judged as if he were free – standing alone – without the support of the congregation. Once one has purged himself of his negative activities, his spiritual demerits that bog him down – then – and only then – can he be included in the merit of those who are consistent in the commitment to Hashem, who do not look for shortcuts in observance.

The *Mashgiach* adds that the litmus test for the *Yamim Noraim*, High Holy Days, is when we stand in trepidation regarding our past, while aspiring for a positive and encouraging future; praying *shalom viheyeh li*, “Peace will be with me.” The individual who believes that he is cool, that he will make it, he has nothing to worry about – he is the only one who truly has everything to worry about!

While what has been said is only common sense – no one gets a free ride – we delude ourselves into thinking that we receive a pass for good behavior, a little charity, attendance at a religious event. When the punishment is in the guise of illness, financial adversity, and the host of problems that plague us individually, we refuse to draw the line connecting the punishment to the deed that was its precursor. It is so much easier to ignore a situation, hoping that it will go away – rather than to confront the truth: We are the problem; we must make amends.

Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, zl, was walking one summer day, when he chanced upon the funeral of a man with whom he had been acquainted. He inquired as to the cause of death, since the man had appeared to be in good health. “He contracted a cold, which deteriorated and eventually caused his death;” he was told. “How does one get a cold during the heat of the summer?” the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. “Actually, he picked up the cold in October, and it festered throughout the winter, taking its toll on his weakened body in the summer.”

When the *Rosh Yeshivah* heard this, he contemplated for a moment and said, “Actually, the cold did not start in October, but earlier, on *Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur*! Just because the “cold” occurred during October does not mean that the decree that he become ill with the illness that would eventually end his life took place in October. The “cold” mishap, catalyst for whatever occurs in our life, occurs on *Rosh Hashanah*.

Imagine, something happens during the year, the common reaction is to lament something that we should have done or foreseen. We rarely stop to think that had we had a *Rosh Hashanah davening* which manifested our urgency, our fervent prayer and devotion; had our *Aseres Yimei Teshuvah* been observed with greater feeling, things now would have been different. The *gezeirah*, decree, takes places on *Rosh Hashanah*. It is executed whenever Hashem wants it to take effect.