

Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships, on the way of which I said to you, “You shall never again see it.” (28:68)

With this curse, Moshe *Rabbeinu* concludes the dread *Tochachah*, Admonition. *Ramban* explains why the tragic Egyptian experience serves as the climax of the Admonition. A slave dreads the idea of being forced to return to the very land where he had originally been subjugated and humiliated, and from which he was overjoyed to be liberated. Accordingly, we derive from here that returning to one's past, descending a notch in his spiritual journey, is devastating. **Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, expounds on the tragedy of one who had achieved spiritual eminence and then fell backwards, descending to a point which he had already surpassed.

The *Rav* quotes the *Rambam Hilchos Melachim* 10:3, who rules concerning a gentile who had undergone complete conversion and had been accepted as a *ger tzedek*, righteous convert – then decided to instead become a *ger toshav*, which is a gentile who rejects idolatry, but is not yet ready to convert to Judaism. The *ger toshav* lives among the Jewish People, but he is not considered to be a Jew. We do not listen to the request of the *ger*. Once he has become a Jew, he cannot go back. If he falters and refuses to maintain his new status, he is to be executed.

The *Rambam's* ruling is enigmatic. He did not commit a sin which would warrant capital punishment. Why, then, is he executed? It is because he descended from his spiritual perch, so serious is this breach in spiritual ascension. Once one has climbed the mountain and reached its summit, he is no longer permitted to slip. Going backwards is a sin. While the *Rambam* is addressing the law concerning a *ger tzedek*, the idea is applicable to anyone who merited spiritual distraction. *Yeridah*, descension, is unpardonable. Once one has merited to climb to a high position, he is now charged with maintaining his position with all of its ensuing responsibilities.

The *Ran* writes that a healthy person who becomes deaf is still considered a *bar daas*, knowledgeable person, and is thus viewed as being in his original state of good health. This *halachah* likewise applies to all *pikchim*, cognitively healthy people who “lose it,” such that they no longer possess the degree of wisdom which they had before. They are nonetheless viewed from the perspective of the past.

Perhaps we might take this idea to the next level. Judaism demands growth. Status quo with regard to *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, is tantamount to death. One who does not go up – goes down. There must be continued growth in one's relationship with the Almighty. A relationship which does not constantly get stronger – inevitably becomes weaker. One of the greatest impediments to continued growth is satisfaction with one's achievements, to the point that his reputation is safely ensconced on past laurels. Why push further when I am so far ahead of the pack? While satisfaction with one's lot is all-important, when it applies to spiritual growth, it is to his detriment.