

## But they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath, and hard work. (6:9)

One would expect that a man overwhelmed with misery would listen to anyone who would give him a respite from his pain. Any sign of hope would be greatly appreciated. Why did the Jews not listen to Moshe *Rabbeinu*? They were burdened by slavery and pain. They sought redemption from the purgatory of the Egyptian exile. The commentators explain that their rejection of Moshe had nothing to do with their level of *emunah*, faith. Their debilitating physical and emotional straits stimulated their rejection of Moshe. Moshe, however, blamed his speech impediment for his inability to reach them. What requires elucidation is why the people's inexorable faith in Hashem did not "kick in" to enable them to transcend their adversity. Faith conquers pain, misery and troubles. Yet, *Klal Yisrael* was so overwhelmed with their burdens that their faith was no longer sufficient to carry them through the challenge. Why?

I think the answer lies in the words, *v'lo shamu*, "but they did not heed/listen." One who does not hear does not think. One who skips step one – "listening," -- neither thinks issues through thoroughly nor develops the thought processes that would affect his actions positively. An entire pagan world was quite aware of Egypt's downfall at the hands of their Jewish slaves, yet only one person came to the wilderness to join them to pay homage to Hashem: Yisro. Why? Because *Vayishma Yisro*, "Yisro heard," He understood that the Splitting of the Red Sea was Hashem's medium for conveying a message. Thus, he listened and incorporated this lesson into his lifestyle. One who thinks without first listening might agree with the consequences for a given action, but he is likely to feel that they do not apply to him. When no one is listening, the message has no "address."

I recently read a story which I will share with the readers. It was written by a popular, observant writer, a *ben Torah* of the highest order. Exactly why he wrote about a secular, intermarried Holocaust survivor, I am not sure. My issue with the narrative is concerning its intended message. If it was correct, why did the survivor not alter his lifestyle and become a *frum*, observant, Jew?

A well-known secular thinker, a man of profound spirit and culture, who had distinguished himself through his powerful innovative ideas, was incarcerated in the Auschwitz death camp. This man was a gifted writer, who had completed a thesis which elaborated his ideas and expounded on his profound philosophy. When he was taken prisoner, he hid the manuscript on his person, hoping that he would not be caught. This was before the days of computer whereby one can save thousands of pages of text with the pressing of a single button. In those days, if something was lost, it was gone forever.

The Nazis had a simple perspective concerning the life of a Jew: it was meaningless. We were accidents of birth and had no right to live. Therefore, the dehumanizing process began in earnest as soon as the Jewish prisoners were "welcomed" into the confines of Auschwitz. Here, each

individual was a number; his status, emotions, personal philosophy, regardless how brilliant, were of no value. He existed by the whim of the Nazi. He was of no value to the human race.

While the Nazi's took much from this particular man, they could not deny him his ability to think, to cogitate, to question, to probe. He still had his manuscript. It was his life, because, in reality, in his notes he wrote down his perspective on life. It was how he lived. The low point of his internment was the day the Nazis discovered his manuscript. It was forcibly removed from beneath his shirt and torn to shreds. For him, life ended when the product of his toil and determination, his countless hours of deep thinking and reflection, was taken from him. Without his manuscript, he was worthless. The *viva d'vivre* which kept him alive had been extinguished. His ability to think had been expropriated from him. The concentration camp became for him what it had already become for most of his friends: a place to die.

He was given a new uniform, "compliments" of another inmate who no longer had use for it. As he donned the striped rag, which was the Nazis perverted idea of prison garb, he resigned himself to a nightmarish existence, devoid of hope and lacking meaning. Without his precious manuscript, he had very little to which to look forward.

As he was straightening out the garment, he noticed something in his pocket. He discovered a piece of paper which had probably been left by its most recent wearer. He opened up the folded scrap of paper; with some difficulty, he was able to decipher a Hebrew sentence. The words that had been jotted down appeared to be more of a scribble than handwriting. Written on the paper was Judaism's most famous seminal phrase: *Shma Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echod*, "Hear, O' *Yisrael*, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." It suddenly dawned on him: Hashem is in control. He guides us through the purgatory on earth and He will never forsake us – regardless of where we may be found. He now had his meaning in life. He had just located his lost manuscript!

This was the end of the story. Everybody lived happily ever after. The Jewish prisoner continued his assimilated lifestyle, taking a new wife following his liberation. Regrettably, she was not of the Jewish faith. She was nice woman, but she was not Jewish. As long as he had his manuscript, what had gone wrong? Was this really the message of the paper? If it was, how could he go on living a life of abandon?

The answer lies in the fact that he focused on the wrong words of the verse. He ignored the "Hear O' *Yisrael*" which meant: "Listen. Open up your ears. I am talking to you! Yes, this message is for you. Hashem is G-d; Hashem is One." It is a powerful message, but only if one is thinking and listening. Otherwise, he will not get the message.

*Pesach* night is a very special night. It is when we teach our children the story of the Exodus, employing a question and answer format for telling the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. When a question is asked, it involves the question in the answer. *V'higadeta l'vincha leimor*, "And you must tell your children" – *leimor*, "saying". What does the *leimor* add? The **Meor Vashemesh** explains that we

must tell it to our children in such a manner that they will one day also be able to tell it to their children. Teach it so that *leimor*, they will say it over. How does this take place? We must make them listen, be part of the experience; ask questions and listen to the answers. The message is for them to impart to the next generation, but, if they do not listen, it cannot be *leimor*.

We think that *kotzer ruach* and *avodah Kashah* are the end of the world, that adversity, moments of *hester Panim*, when the Divine Presence conceals Himself from us, makes it impossible to continue on, to maintain hope for the future. We err. **Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, explains that, specifically within these periods of extreme darkness, a great light is concealed. During these moments of obscurity, Hashem's greatest kindness becomes revealed. Yes, during moments of what seems like adversity, misery, pain and tragedy, we are able to discern Hashem's great and boundless love for us.

Rav Shimshon explains this with a powerful analogy. A father can manifest his love for his child in one of two ways: he can give the child a candy; or he can discipline him. The great, deep love that the father feels for his child achieves expression when he slaps him, rather than when he gives him a lollipop. Anyone can give a child a candy, but only his father can discipline him. In order to discipline the child, the one who is meting out the discipline must love the subject with all his heart and soul. It must be a labor of love. One can give a lollipop to anyone. It is not an indication of love.

The beauty of Hashem's *chesed* is revealed specifically during times of *hester Panim*. When He hits us, we see His love, His care, His desire to see us improve. Rav Shimshon observes that when one places a pot of boiling water on the stove and removes the lid, the water boils to a certain point. It never increases its temperature beyond a predetermined number of degrees, according to the Fahrenheit scale. If, however, the lid is attached, the heat of the water increases immeasurably. Indeed, no one knows how hot it can get. External heat has its parameters. There are no limits to internal heat. Likewise, when the "lid" is on Hashem's Presence, when there is *hester Panim*, there is no limit to what might be achieved.

Nobody seeks adversity. It is, after all, antagonistic to what one wants to accomplish. On the other hand, adversity is what makes us grow; it is what makes us who we are. One will not maximize his potential -- he will not even realize what that potential is -- unless he has traveled the road through ill fortune. The greater the challenge, the more difficult the struggle, the more prodigious the sense of success and triumph. Positive adversity is a dynamic that is intrinsic to the human condition. It is a "good thing."

Surely, at one time or another, we have all been humiliated, reprovved unnecessarily, demoralized. It may not – and it is not – pleasant, but it is, nonetheless, a positive phenomenon. It increases our determination, allowing us to achieve success under circumstances in which we would otherwise never have realized that we were capable of achieving. Failure is a part of life; no one always wins. Indeed, true winners do not always win. What distinguishes a true winner is his resilience and fortitude, his ability to bounce back after defeat – and win. He never loses confidence; he always

goes for the gold. Victory may be elusive at first, but, without trying, one will never know if he could have made it.

During the Holocaust, simple people accomplished superhuman feats of heroism, but then again, they were not really simple people. They thought they were simple, until the moment of need surfaced and they rose to the occasion. A Jewish woman who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto was in dire need of the services of a doctor. She had contracted a serious infection which, if not treated, could prove to be fatal. She left the ghetto to see a non-Jewish doctor. After the doctor, who was female, diagnosed and treated the infection, the woman was prepared to leave. The doctor implored her to stay. "You cannot go back to the ghetto where you will certainly die," the doctor said. "Stay here in my home, and I will tend to your needs. I will protect you."

The Jewish woman replied, "I would take my chances and stay here with you, but I cannot abandon my family. There are thirteen people in my family who are waiting for me to return."

"Bring them all here! I will hide your entire family in my attic." She did exactly that. For twenty-three months, until the end of the war, thirteen members of this Jewess' family were hidden with her in the doctor's attic. The doctor provided food, a degree of comfort and abundant hope.

A few years ago, two hundred descendants from that Jewish family celebrated a milestone event in America. In tribute and profound gratitude to the doctor whose heroic efforts facilitated this event, they went to Warsaw to bring her to America to share in their family *simchah*.

From where did a person who was not even Jewish obtain the incredible fortitude and courage to undertake to hide, protect and sustain a large family of Jews for almost two years? To be caught meant certain death. Every day must have been a traumatic experience. Why did she do it? How did she do it? When there is *hester Panim*, with the increasing darkness and gloom, a Heavenly light like no other begins to illuminate in the least expected areas. This overwhelming, unusual light penetrates the darkness in a manner that otherwise would never have occurred.