

Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field. (28:3)

A Jew shall remain blessed whether he is in the city together with his *chaburah*, social group, or if he is alone in the field, away from everyone. **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, recalls his years as a student in the *Novaradok Yeshivah*, an institution which imbued its students with a sense of commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* that transcend time and place and even social support. Wherever a *Novaradoker* student found himself, he was somehow able to transcend the vicissitudes of life and the challenges they presented. For example, *Rav* Galinsky and a group of students were banished to a prison camp in the frozen tundra of Siberia. On a warm day, it was forty below zero. No beds, sleeping on the floor in the freezing cold, being forced to subsist on scraps of vegetables, because kosher food was non-existent. Yet, this was not the end of the world. They were able to survive amid deprivation; indeed, they thrived in frozen captivity.

It was not the physical challenges that made life difficult. It was the emotional challenge – the desolation and loneliness, separated from family and friends, all alone in the bitter cold, compelled to cope with the overwhelming silence of forced solitude. How did they survive in a world isolated from humanity?

He quotes what became the motto of these *bnei Torah*. The *Navi Malachi* (3:16) says, *Az nidberu yirei Hashem ish el reieihu*, “Then those who fear Hashem spoke to one another.” Theirs was a pre-established relationship that transcended time and space. True, they were physically separated from one another, but the love and devotion for one another which permeated their essence remained with them, imbuing them to overcome the loneliness that enveloped them during the toughest of times, granting them the ability to endure, to survive, to thrive.

This was Novaradok. A *yeshivah* – a movement – of extreme dedication to the point of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice for one objective: to seek the truth. Their commitment to Torah was fabled. Their devotion to one another was legendary. There was a unique, unbreakable bond between students and *rebbeim* through which they nurtured one another. The *pasuk* of *Az nidberu*, emphasizing the relationship between friends, became their motto.

Chazal state, “One who takes leave of his friend should do so only through a *halachic* discourse, since from this (it will be a catalyst through which), he will remember him” (*Brachos* 31a). The *Yerushalmi* adds that it refers to a specific *halachah* of, *Yachid v’rabim, halachah k’rabim*. “If there is a dispute between an individual and a group, the *halachah* follows the majority.” Why is this *halachah* selected over all others as the *halachah* to emphasize upon departing from one another?

In Novaradok, they gave the following answer: When two people are together, when a group of friends, students are aligned with one another, it is easy for one person to encourage another and, likewise, to receive inspiration, intellectual and emotional stimuli, and support that endures their

separation from one another. This *halachah* alludes to the idea that one is never alone. He is always part of the group – even when he has moved away from them.

This is the meaning of our opening *pasuk*, “Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field.” (As) You are blessed when you are in a *chevrah*, group, of like-minded, Torah oriented, G-d-fearing Jews, who share your common goal within the *shul*, the *bais hamedrash*; so shall you be blessed when you must leave, when you are on your own, often in a place far-removed from Torah and *mitzvos*. The friendship of the *rabim*, group, will infuse and maintain you even when you are a *yachid*, alone.

It is difficult when one is alone and must confront the spiritual elements that oppose him. We have only to study the life of Yosef *HaTzaddik* to understand the depth of his loneliness, as he was forced to survive spiritually during his wanderings. First, he was alone in the field searching for his brothers. Then, he descended into the immoral depravity of Egypt, living in the house of Potifar whose lecherous wife sought every opportunity to bring him down. This was followed by a stay in the dungeon of Egypt with its criminals and other low-lives. When he was finally elevated to the position of viceroy, he was not yet safe. He still remained very much alone, a religious Jew among the lewd aristocracy of Egypt. How did he do it? What gave Yosef the strength of character to remain faithful to Hashem, despite the lack of social support?

The **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, explains that the answer lies in the question posed to him by the man/Angel that originally met him when he was searching for his brothers: *Vayishaleihu ha'ish leimor mah tivakeish*, “And the man asked him, saying, ‘What is it that you seek?’” (*Bereishis* 37:15). The man gave him the clue, the key, the secret to surviving the harsh spiritual elements that overwhelm us in this world. “Do you know what you are seeking? Do you have a purpose, a goal, an objective? Do you know where you are going? Do you know what you want?” It is all one question: What is your purpose in life? These are the opening words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*: “The bedrock of piety and the root of flawless Divine service lie in man’s effort to clarify and verify his duty in the world. He must determine for what he is aiming, and how to achieve this – in all his labors throughout his lifetime.” There it is in a nutshell. Do you know where you are going? Do you have a goal?

Rav Galinsky quotes an analogy from the *Alter m’Novaradok*, **Horav Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, zl**, which underscores this idea. A simple farmer, who had led a bucolic lifestyle far-removed from modern convention, saw a locomotive for the first time. He was absolutely amazed to discover that one steam engine could pull many train-cars laden with human passengers, agricultural and industrial freight. He wanted to know which of the many cars was the locomotive and which were the cars. He was told to wait until the cars had disengaged from the locomotive. The car that could move by its own locomotion was the locomotive. The other trains were just pulled along.

“Likewise,” commented the *Alter*, “in the *yeshivah*, we have many students. Some are compared to cars, who are doing well as long as they have someone to follow, to emulate. Then there are those

who move of their own volition. These are the locomotives. How can one discern between the two types of students? When the connection is severed, when they must go out on their own, then it is quite clear who can make it on his own and who will falter.” There are the “Yosefs,” and there are the rest of the crowd.