

If a woman's blood flows for many days... You shall separate Bnei Yisrael from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination. (15:25,31)

One would think that, as people age, they become more amenable to perform *teshuvah*, to repent a life lived inappropriately, not in consonance with Torah dictate. Yet, this is not necessarily true. **Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl**, writes that as a person ages, the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, puts on a greater battle to lay claim to this individual's spiritual dysfunction. After leading him astray for a lifetime, he does not want to lose the battle at the very end. I have noticed this in speaking with seniors who agree with what they "hear," but are not prepared to effect a spiritual metamorphosis. They give all kinds of excuses, some even valid, but, at the end of the day, it is the *yetzer hora* putting up a valiant fight to protect his "interests."

The **Noam HaMitzvos** derives an important principle concerning *teshuvah* from the above *pasuk*. There are those who, upon committing a sinful act, immediately realize the error of their ways, regret their action, and repent. In contrast is the individual who not only does not repent, but he adds to his sin by continuing his downward spiral. He now thinks that, in his present circumstances, sunk in the miserable abyss of sin, he has no way out. He cannot climb out. He is eternally stuck in the murky quicksand of sin and guilt, being pulled down lower and lower.

The Torah speaks to him: Even after many "days" of spiritual contamination, he has hope. The door to *teshuvah* is never sealed. One just has to have the strength of character and courage to "knock." Despite this, one should make every attempt to resolve his *teshuvah* issues while he is still young. Once one reaches senior citizenship, he must learn to contend with a much stronger, willier and more desperate *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* has invested much during this person's lifetime to see to it that he dies a sinner. Certainly, as the end approaches, he is not going to slack off. On the contrary, he will work exceedingly hard to bring this person's life to an awful fruition.

In his *Michtav Mei'Eliyahu*, **Rav Dessler** relates the following episode. The *Chevrah Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, came before **Horav Eliyahu, zl, m'lzmir**, author of the *Shevet Mussar*, with a pressing question. Apparently, the "Don," head of the robbers, was at death's door. He asked that the *Rav* come to see him, so that he could confess his sins before he took leave of the world. The *Rav* did what he had to do when a person makes such a request, regardless of his deleterious background. He donned his hat and coat and proceeded to the robber's home.

The robber lay in bed, the color of his face ashen, his breathing very slow and labored. It was obvious that the end was near. The robber opened up his eyes and saw that the *Rav* had come. He said, "Now, we begin, 'Ashamnu, I have been guilty!'" He continued on, reciting the rest of the *Viduy*, his voice rising with each condemnation of his past. The tears flowed freely as this man, wracked with terrible guilt, poured out his heart to Hashem, asking forgiveness for a life of sin.

His gang of robbers stood by watching the scene. They, too, were moved by the experience – to the point that they began to shake with fear, as they, too, confessed their misdeeds. It was a scene that could bring the most hardened profligate to advance his own thoughts of *teshuvah*. Suddenly, out of the blue, the robber baron, just minutes from death, stopped his *Viduy* in midsentence and began to issue forth from his mouth expletives and vile cursing. He blasphemed Hashem, denied everything there was to believe in, and, in short, spoke like the miscreant that he had always been.

The *Rav* attempted to stop him, by encouraging him to recite *Shema Yisrael*, the last verse one recites as he is about to take leave of this life. The Don looked up at the *Rav* and said, “*Chas v’shalom!* Heaven forbid! I will not say *Shema Yisrael!* Do you not see who stands before me with an unsheathed sword, prepared to slice me into pieces if I utter another Hebrew word!”

Apparently, it was another of the ruses of the *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* convinces one to sin, then he becomes the *Satan* who prosecutes him. Afterwards, he has the “honor” of being his executioner, as he dons the mantle of *Malach Ha’Maves*, angel of death. This man was too weak to stand up to the last round of ammunition in the *yetzer hora*’s cache. He died a sinner, cursing until the very end.

When the *yetzer hora* sees that a person is about to throw in the towel, defer to the sense of right and truth, accept Hashem and repent his life of evil – he mounts a vigorous offensive. This is why it is a mistake to wait. Putting off *teshuvah* for a more propitious time is a “grave” mistake, because there is no better and more suitable time than now.