

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Behold, you will lie with your forefathers, and this people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land... And I will forsake them and I will conceal My face from them.'" (31:16,17)

The punishment for he who "strays" seems exceedingly harsh. Hashem does not "hide His face" and "turn away" from the average sinner. Why does this individual stand out in his punishment? This punishment is mentioned particularly in sharp contrast to the words of the *Navi, Malachi*, *ofhkt vcuatu hkt ucua*, "Return to me and I will return to you" (3:7). Or, as the *Navi Hoshe'a* declares, *lbugc ,kaf hf lhekht 's sg ktrah vcua*, "Return O Yisrael to Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (14:2). In these instances, the Jews are given a chance to repent, to return to Hashem.

Horav Moshe Swift, z.l., describes two types of sinners: The first is one who makes a mistake, who falls prey to passion and desire. He is the one who, in the words of the *Navi*, "stumbles." The second type of *choteh*, sinner, is the one who transgresses with *chutzpah*, wantonly, with insolence, with complete disdain for the Almighty. Our *pasuk* is not speaking about the Jew who simply "goes astray." This person *vbzu oe*, rises up and goes astray! He rebels with arrogance, he defames without shame; he defies without remorse. He attempts to satisfy his whims and fancy, eating what he chooses, going where he pleases, and observing that which is convenient for him. Yet, he has the *chutzpah* to call himself a Jew of conviction, a man of religion, committed to observance and the furtherance of *Am Yisrael*.

This is not a sinner who "stumbles," who has slipped up or has made an error. He is not the sinner for whom Hashem waits patiently to return and repent his ways. This man has performed the ultimate transgression. He has sinned with *chutzpah*. He has not simply "ignored" Hashem; he has defied Him contemptuously. The process of *teshuvah* for such a person is long and agonizing. He must demonstrate serious remorse and go through the process of contrition as he entreats Hashem to "turn back" to him.

Chazal in the *Talmud, Yoma 52b*, comment that the phrase *vzv ogv oeu*, "And the people will rise up", can be read in two different ways. It can be attached to the preceding words *lh,uct og cfa lbv*, "You will lie with your fathers" and *oeu*, "You will rise up." This refers to Moshe. The other reading is as we have interpreted it in reference to *Klal Yisrael's* iniquity. *Horav Swift* suggests that these alternative readings bespeak the key to Jewish survival.

Everything depends upon what we leave over when we pass from this world. If the *oeu* does not define the type of transgression then our behavior may have been lax, perhaps inconsiderate, but never actions reflecting arrogance or *chutzpah*. If we demonstrate a genuine attempt to return to Hashem, shameful of our past indiscretions and sinful activity, then Hashem ensures us of *oeu*,

"We will rise up" at *techias ha'mesim*, the resurrection of the dead. Our link with eternity is not broken. There has been a lapse, but our children, who have not learned from us, will carry on. A mistake can be understood by a child. Contempt, on the other hand, becomes ingrained in his character.

Alternatively, if the *oeu* is attached to the *vbzu*, then it defines the level of transgression. If our children have been raised on our lack of gratitude and respect for the Almighty, if they have been nurtured on disdain for our age old tradition, if we have derided our spiritual mentors and leaders before their eyes, if they have seen us brazenly defame a religion for which so many have died, then they will ultimately sever their relationship with it. Consequently, the *pasuk* will read, *lh,uct og cfa lbv*, "You will lie with your fathers." The end of the line of Jewish tradition has been reached -- by you. Your children will not carry on what you have so blatantly ridiculed. Your link with eternity will have been severed.

These are perhaps strong words, but as the *Navi* cries out to us, *of,ban ohbah urug*, "Wake up o' slumberers from your sleep." There are times when a simple wake-up call just will not suffice.