

Hashem descended upon Har Sinai...; Hashem summoned Moshe to the top of the mountain, and Moshe ascended. (19:20)

Elevating *Klal Yisrael* to the level of *Kabbolas HaTorah*, receiving the Torah, was not an overnight task. The Jewish People had been enslaved in Egypt for two-hundred and ten years, suffering persecution and degradation, misery and emotional pain, until they cried out to Hashem. This catalyzed their return to Him, effecting their spiritual development, and preparing them for the seminal movement in Jewish history: the Giving of the Torah. Egypt was the crucible that tempered their spirit. The era of Egyptian bondage served as their incubation period, during which they evolved from the Hebrew people to *Bnei Yisrael*, endowed with the spiritual persona inherent in a Torah Jew. We wonder why Hashem did not prepare them in the same manner that He prepared Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Hashem could have sent them to the Heavenly Academy where Moshe later obtained the Torah. Instead, He sent them to Egypt to be slaves to a nation that was both spiritually and morally bankrupt, a nation that had descended to the nadir of depravity and felt quite comfortable there. Why?

In his *Michtav MeiEliyahu*, *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, presents an incredible thesis on the significance of removing light from darkness – serving Hashem with both inclinations: the *yetzer hara*, and the *yetzer tov*. He explains that when the sight of evil rouses one to pursue good with such zest that he might otherwise not have felt, he uses the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, as a catalyst to develop a tremendous drive to holiness.

This approach is clearly not for everyone, nor is it valid under all circumstances. However, the individual who is compelled to live in less than refined surroundings – with people who are morally and ethically depraved – will emerge a much stronger person by resisting their influence, and by having confronted and successfully overcome their challenge. When he has resisted the pull of evil with such determination that he remains unaffected by its harmful influences, he will find that the mere sight of evil will arouse feelings of revulsion within him. Indeed, the more evil he sees, the greater he is repulsed by it.

Regrettably, this spring-like reaction works both ways. One, who despite living in the company of righteous individuals, nonetheless chooses to follow an opposite path will, over time, develop an implacable hatred for all that *tzaddikim*, righteous people, represent. Indeed, he will be worse and act more reprehensibly than the “average” *rasha*, evil person. This is the reason that Eisav *ha'rasha* sank so far into evil that Satan himself became his guardian angel. Falsehood and evil became his very essence. His descendant, our archenemy Amalek, hated us with such venom that he attacked us for no apparent reason. We were no threat to him. Yet, his desire to combat G-d was riveted into his psyche. This was his “inheritance” from his grandfather, Eisav, a legacy of evil that he bequeathed to his descendants. Where did it all begin? It began with Eisav, who was raised in a home in which two *tzaddikim*, Yitzchak *Avinu* and Rivkah *Imeinu*, lived. As a result of his

exposure to such good, his gravitational pull towards evil became an obsession. Eisav's moral compass was perverted. It was necessary for him to resist holiness at all costs.

Rav Dessler notes that whenever Hashem seeks an opportunity to empower a *tzaddik* to rise to unprecedented heights, He throws him into an environment that is completely alien to him. He is compelled to endure the company of the most nefarious individuals, the lowest of the low. By observing the base individuals and the evil which they have wrought, the *tzaddik* learns how absolutely despicable evil is, how repulsive it can be. His reaction will be to do everything within his power to distance himself from the evil. He will make a supreme effort to soar upward, to ascend to the maximum of his spiritual potential. He will not settle, because he understands that complacency dooms him to mediocrity.

A number of examples are cited. In the *Haggadah*, the story of the Exodus leading up to the acceptance of the Torah, commences with a description of our collective roots. Avraham *Avinu* grew up in Terach's home, overcoming the evil effects of *avodah zarah*, idol-worship. Is it really necessary to trace our lineage to Terach, Avraham's father? It could simply have stated that we descend from Avraham, the father of our nation. Why did the Torah include Terach in the equation?

The point is that here we recount Avraham's true eminence. Born into a home of idol-worship, living in an environment and culture steeped in paganism – in which defying Hashem's word and flagrant disobedience were the norm – Avraham rose to the zenith of spirituality. How? He received an incentive from his environment. Yes, the evil all around him conveyed a powerful impetus to reach for the stars, to climb the ladder of spirituality and reach its apex. This driving force to abhor evil and reach for ultimate good became part of his descendants' DNA, inspiring them to follow suit.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* had a similar experience, as he was raised in the moral depravity that permeated Pharaoh's palace. He was acutely aware of Egypt's national defilement. Thus, he sought to rise above it. Being in close proximity to Pharaoh, the source of this pollution, only motivated Moshe more to rise above it.

We now understand why *Klal Yisrael's* internship as the Chosen People could only have been served in Egypt – the antithesis of spirituality. Being slaves to a nation mired in the depths of degeneracy brought them to the point of *teshuvah*, repentance – “crying out to G-d” from their affliction. The opposite extreme that catalyzed repentance brought *Klal Yisrael* to the level of readiness to accept the Torah and be privy to an unprecedented Revelation of the *Shechinah*.

A word of caution must be added to this thesis: In no way does it suggest that one should seek opportunities for exposure to the depraved and evil. This catalyst is clearly not for everyone. It is for those select few whom Hashem seeks to elevate beyond the norm. Hashem knows their incredible capabilities, and places them in such a situation, so that they will maximize their potential.