

## Then Yitzchak trembled in very great perplexity. (27:33)

Yitzchak *Avinu* possessed the *middah*, attribute, of *gevurah*, strength. He feared nothing, because his belief in Hashem was so resolute that he understood that one has nothing to fear if he is with Hashem. The Almighty either protects the individual or He does not; if He does not protect him, fear is futile. Yitzchak had extraordinary control of his emotions. This was evident throughout the *Akeidah*, Binding (of Yitzchak), when he prepared to become an *olah*, sacrifice, for Hashem. He never questioned his father, Avraham *Avinu*, not even when he looked up at him and saw him poised with the knife. No, he seemed not to fear anything, but Yitzchak did fear one thing.

When Yitzchak was about to bless Eisav (thinking that he was a righteous son), Yaakov *Avinu* (at his mother's behest) walked in first and received the blessings. His mother encouraged him to take what was rightfully his, (as a result of his purchase from Eisav) regardless of the immediate and far-reaching repercussions. Then Eisav entered the room, and Yitzchak saw *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, open beneath him. It was at that defining moment that Yitzchak understood that his attitude concerning Eisav had been a grave error. Eisav, his older son, was a sham, a chameleon who had surreptitiously been fooling him his entire life. He was not a *tzaddik*, righteous person, as Yitzchak had believed; rather, Eisav was a consummate *rasha*. As *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl*, explains, Yitzchak – who feared nothing – was now confronted with fear. He trembled with fear, because he realized that he had erred. Everything that he had believed about Eisav had been a lie. That was sufficient reason to tremble.

We can learn from this incident. Many of us have made choices in our lives, choices which have determined our trajectories in life, choices which set the course for much that we have done for ourselves and for others. We have married spouses based upon our choices and raised our families commensurate with the choices that we made earlier in life. What if we were wrong? What a terrifying discovery that would be! How many opportunities in life did we miss? How many opportunities in life did we ruin? How much more could we have achieved? This becomes especially compelling when we consider how our decisions in life (which were often self-serving) affected others. Imagine, if Yitzchak *Avinu*, the *gibor* of the *Avos*, Patriarchs, trembled with fear when he realized that he had erred, what should we say?

Speaking about regrets, I came across a thought-provoking article addressing the regrets in life that people have. (Interestingly, choices in religious observance were not included in the topic.) At one time or another, everyone has regrets which revolve around the mistakes that he has made. We focus on the decisions we have made concerning acting upon something that we later discovered was a mistake. According to a Cornell University study, an old adage still rings true, expressing what is likely the biggest regret in most people's lives: "It is not the things you do in life that you regret, it is the things that you do not do that bother you the most."

We can identify three elements that comprise a person's sense of self. First, one's actual self consists of the qualities and attributes that we believe we possess. Second, our ideal self is

comprised of the qualities we want to have. Last, our ought self, which is the person we feel that we should have become, is based upon our obligations in consort with our qualities.

What about regrets? The researchers at Cornell surveyed hundreds of participants in six different studies. When asked what was their single biggest regret in life, 76% replied: They did not fulfill their ideal self. In other words, when we confront life as we would have liked to have lived it, what bothers us most is not what we should have been, but rather, what we could have been. What stings the most are the dreams and aspirations which we allowed to drift away and have never realized. The study concludes: "People are quicker to take steps to cope with failures to live up to their duties and responsibilities (which are ought related) than their failures to live up to their goals and aspirations (ideal related)."

When we evaluate our lives, we think about whether we are heading toward our ideal selves, becoming the people we want to be. At the end of the day, we have regrets that remain with us. We have to act on hopes and dreams and to realize that putting off our aspirations is a recipe for later regret. In the short term, we might regret our actions, more than our inactions. In the long term, however, when, at the sunset of our lives, we look back at what we might have been, what we could have achieved, our inaction causes us greater regret.

What does this have to do with *erlicher*, observant, *Yidden*? A nurse in Australia who has been counseling hospice patients for more than a decade began recording the regrets expressed by people on their death bed. She concluded that the most common regret of all was: "I wish I would have had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life that others expected of me."

Allow me to extrapolate and weave this theory into our way of life. In order for one to live a lifetime true to himself, he must have a target, a goal, a mission, a purpose. Living without purpose is living a life of abandon. When we have no target, we have no goal. Under such circumstances, we are clueless concerning how we should live. One must know what is expected of him, the clear purpose in life that is driving him forward. When one is unsure of what he wants (his purpose in life), then he listens/follows what others approve of or whichever way the crowd is going. If he is in an unobservant environment, he capitulates to popular opinion. The gray areas in life are dominant when we are undecided, when we have no prescribed goals.

How many of us get up day after day and follow the crowd? How many live life without purpose, without goals, just to satisfy what is expected of us in the milieu in which we happen to find ourselves? As *frum* Jews, we have a life of purpose, with goals and a mission. Yet, we feel that we must impress the world around us, those who do not adhere to our values, morals and spiritual goals.

Nothing is as important as knowing what our target, our purpose, is. This is what learning Torah is all about. It defines our mission, our purpose and objective in life. Clarity of purpose is everything. It overrides desires, the accolades or derision that we will hear from those whom we have the

courage to ignore. At the end of the day, the choice is quite clear: If we set our life's course now in accordance with the lodestar provided by the Torah, we will live a life true to ourselves and true to Hashem. Otherwise, we will have lived a life that later on will catalyze nothing but regret.