

Pharaoh approached, Bnei Yisrael raised their eyes and behold! Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened; Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem. (14:10)

Did it have to be this way? Finally, after 210 years of brutal enslavement, the Jews were leaving. It was a happy day, but it did not last very long. A few days later, when the Jews were standing at the banks of the Red Sea, suddenly Pharaoh and his minions were chasing after them.

Understandably, the nation broke out in all-consuming fear followed by their audible crying to Hashem. We return to our opening question: Did it have to be this way? *Chazal* (*Shemos Rabbah* 21:5) ask this and give a simple, but profound, explanation: Hashem desires the prayers of His children. They present a penetrating analogy, comparing *Klal Yisrael* to a young maiden in distress. Her cries were heard by the king, who came and overpowered her attackers. The king was impressed with the maiden's character and sought her hand in marriage. All went well for a few weeks, until the king realized that his wife hardly ever spoke. In order to provoke her cries (once again), he went to "hire a thief." He gathered a group of "thieves" to frighten his wife. All this for one purpose: to get his wife to cry out to him. Likewise, Hashem was used to the Jews crying out to Him. Once they were liberated, it all came to a stop. To alleviate this "problem" and satisfy His desire to hear their cry, He sent Pharaoh and his men after them.

Are we to accept the notion that once liberated, the Jews abandoned their prayers? *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, explains that *Klal Yisrael* certainly did not cease praying to Hashem. It is just that they no longer prayed in the same manner as they had before. As long as a person does not sense that, without Hashem, he has absolutely no chance of resolving his present issue, his prayer is incomplete. We are used to exhausting every avenue of salvation, among them, praying to Hashem. This is our error. One who does not pray on a regular basis to Hashem, as if He were the only avenue of salvation, does not offer a complete/perfect prayer. This is what Hashem sought. He is not the last resort. He is the only resort.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who explains *Chazal's* statement (*Berachos* 10a), "Even if the blade of a sharp sword rests on a person's neck, he should not refrain from begging for mercy." The simple *p'shat*, explanation, is that even at such a last-ditch moment, when all indications are that one has no chance for salvation, he should still pray, because, even at such an impossible moment, Hashem can come to the rescue.

Rav Yeruchem explains that he should pray because now his prayer is different. Now, he sees the end. Now he sees and realizes that his only hope is Hashem. Such a prayer is unique; it is real, because now he is acknowledging that only Hashem can save him. Veritably, he has prayed often and hard, with devotion and passion, but it was not the same as in the present. He is up against the proverbial wall. He has no source of hope, other than Hashem. He knows that this is crunch time; the sword is pressing against his throat. When he prays now, it is from the very bottom of his heart, from where he should have prayed all along, but did not, because he relied on the doctors, the

medicines, the bankers, everyone but the only One Who can truly help him – Hashem.

This is how we must *daven*: as if we have no other hope, but Hashem. Sadly, we rely on Hashem only when all other hope has been exhausted. If we would only think of Hashem first, instead of last, we would never give up hope, because when it comes to Hashem, we always have hope. For a Jew, giving up hope is not an option.

The following vignettes underscore the notion that one should never give up hope and that when, despite all odds, one perseveres, he/she should be lauded. When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, it was after unsuccessfully having tried 2,000 experiments. A young reporter asked him how it felt to have failed 2,000 times. The inventor thought for a moment and replied, “Actually I have never failed. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2,000 step process.”

A school teacher had a student early in his career who was troublesome and disruptive. He bullied other students and helped himself to whatever they had in their lockers. Finally, as a last resort, he was suspended a number of times. The teacher was wont to have the class memorize famous inspirational sayings. He had the students repeat them back to him at roll call. Among them were, “If you see the obstacles, it is an indication that you have lost sight of the goal.” (One who is goal-oriented focuses on his goal and ignores the obstacles as if they were not there.) “There is no failure except in no longer trying.” While the troublesome student continually complained about school, it was this routine about which he complained the most. The breaking point came when the principal could no longer tolerate his attitude towards the suspensions. This time the suspension was final. He was expelled.

Fast-forward five years. The student who had been such a problem appeared one afternoon at school and proceeded to his old classroom in search of the teacher. Meekly, he entered the room as the teacher was preparing to go home: “Hello. I just wanted you to know that I have turned around my life. When I was expelled, I had not yet reached the bottom. This came a year later, when my various antics led to juvenile detention and then progressed to adult prison. One day, I became so disgusted with myself that I took the razor blade way out of my troubles. As my life slowly ebbed out, I suddenly recalled the dumb quote you had me write one day: ‘There is no failure except in no longer trying.’ Then it suddenly all made sense to me. As long as I was alive, I was not a failure, but, if I allowed my life to end, I would most certainly leave this world a dismal failure. So, with my remaining strength, I called for help. That was the beginning of my new life. Thank you!”

The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, thrives when we throw in the towel. He wants us to give up hope. It makes his “job” that much easier, because we do it for him. Early on in our spiritual journey, the *yetzer hora* presents a negative image of the journey, making it appear terribly compelling. I came across the following story which should make us all think.

A Jew came to a certain town with the intention of collecting *tzedakah*, charity. The man was an

eloquent and dynamic speaker, impressing even the *rav* of the community. After the speech, which he delivered to a full house, the fellow asked the *rav* if he would accompany him as he went from door to door to raise money for the poor. Having the community's *rav* alongside him would elevate his standing in the eyes of the people, and this esteem would translate into more funds. The *rav* consented.

People were generous, opening up their hearts and their checkbooks, with sums that had been unheard of in the past. After the first few people, the *rav* took this Jew into a dark, isolated alley and grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket. He said to him angrily, "What is this scam? If you do not immediately tell me the truth about yourself, I will make sure that you will not leave this alley on your own volition."

The fellow begged the *rav* to put him down. He agreed to confess and to tell the whole truth. "I am actually a *meshumad*, apostate, who reneged my Jewish heritage and joined the church. I worked my way up and became a priest. I was collecting for my church. I do not understand where I slipped up. I was so careful. How did you see through my ruse?"

The *rav* laughed and replied, "Actually, you were perfect. You did not slip up at all. You had me completely fooled. This is not the first time that I have collected money in this community. Whenever a