

Like the practice of the Land of Egypt in which you dwelled do not do; and do not perform the practice of the Land of Canaan to which I will bring you. (18:3)

The *Toras Kohanim* derives from the words, *yishavtem bah*, “in which you dwelled,” that Egypt was the most morally bankrupt nation (followed by the *Canaan*), specifically because the Jews lived there. Likewise, the moral turpitude of the *Canaanim* plunged even lower as a result of its Jewish conquerors/inhabitants. This statement begs elucidation. One would think that the moral standard which the Jews set should have served as an example for these pagans to emulate. Instead, *Chazal* indicate that they became worse. Why?

In his commentary to *Toras Kohanim*, the *Raavad* writes: “This means: as a result of the sin of enslaving the Jews, they came to committing these other sins (perverted morality) in order that they (descend to the nadir of depravity and) warrant the punishment of being destroyed. For *aveirah goreres aveirah*, ‘sin causes sin.’” The *Raavad* seems to imply that the sins previously committed by the Egyptians [This idea also applies to the *Canaanim*, because the Jews were about to conquer and inhabit the land which had heretofore been their place of habitation. Now that the Jews were returning “home”, the *Canaanim* had to leave.] would not have caused their ejection/destruction.) Since the Jews were about to live in Canaan, however, the pagans had to magnify their sins in order to warrant their punishment. Although this sheds some light, we still require an understanding of this concept: In order to make a nation/person “worthy” of punishment, he is “granted” the opportunity to sin. While this is part of the rule that “sin causes sin,” Hashem seems to implement it in greater force when necessary. It is almost like suggesting that a sinner is given the opportunity to sin more and more, so that he can receive his duly deserved punishment.

Horav Gedalya Schorr, zl, contends that this is exactly what the *Raavad* means. He quotes the *Rambam* in his *Pirush HaMishnah to Talmud Berachos* where he explains the *pasuk*, *Eis laasos l'Hashem heifeiru Torasecha*, “For it is a time to act for Hashem, they have voided Your Torah” (*Tehillim* 119:126). Simply, this means that at a time when so many have abandoned the Torah, it is incumbent upon those who remain loyal to it to intensify their own knowledge and observance, so that they ensure its perpetuation. *Rambam*, however, offers an innovative exposition of this *pasuk*. When the *eis*, time, comes for the nations/person to be punished --their stretch of sin has become too long -- Hashem “enables” them/him to abandon/deny the Torah (descending their sins to a new low), warranting swift, intense punishment. *Rambam* implies a powerful principle concerning Heavenly punishment. A nation, or a person, can have committed a number of sins – none of which warrant ultimate punishment. When the time arrives, however, that they must be punished (for whatever reason, such as: in Egypt, the Jews had to leave; Canaan; the Jews were about to arrive – or, if a person’s evil has become a seriously bad example and harmful influence), Hashem intervenes and “arranges” ways for them to increase their sinful behavior, so that it warrants said punishment.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* exhorts us to be concerned about the “little breaches,” the ones that skirt impropriety, subtly border on moral turpitude, or act within the confines of halachah but denigrate tradition. This is how the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, ensnares a person and ultimately takes over his life. The *yetzer hora* does not openly tell a person to worship idols or to commit an act that is morally despicable. He begins with minor misdeeds and then leads up to the major violations. The Torah exhorts us, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, “Be holy!” Abstain from anything that is not holy. As long as one does not give in on the little, subtle trespasses, he does not have to worry that the *yetzer hora* will convince him to act reprehensibly. Once one falls into the *yetzer hora*’s web of deceit, however, he becomes ensnared in his net. Then, Hashem steps in with the punishment that he deserves.

In conclusion: No one escapes punishment. He might attempt to convince himself that a string of “light” sins does not have a detrimental effect on him – but he is wrong. Sin is sin, and every single one counts. When one’s behavior reaches a point that Hashem feels enough is enough – he will maneuver added “weight” to his sins or chart a course for the sinner whereby his earlier sins will cause greater, more egregious offenses that carry stronger punishment. At the end of the day – he will pay.