

They turned and ascended the mountain and came until the valley of Eshkol. (1:24)

“Never allow the sadness of the past and your anxiety concerning the future to cloud the happiness of the present moment.” *Chazal* teach that Eshkol was the name of one of Avraham *Avinu*’s three friends, whom he consulted when he was commanded to have a *Bris Milah*. Anar advised against the procedure, claiming that it was too dangerous to chance at his advanced age. Mamreh told him to follow Hashem’s command. Eshkol concurred with Anar and added his own negativity, suggesting that Avraham’s enemies would take advantage of his weakened state.

Horav Elie Munk, zl, sees an analogy in the episode of the *eshkol anavim*, cluster of grapes, brought back by the spies. They sought to enforce their position that, just as the fruit was unusually large, so, too, were the land’s inhabitants inordinately powerful. This is why the place was already called Eshkol at the time of Avraham’s *Bris Milah*. It was characterized as a place where fears of one’s future enemies would discourage a person from doing the right thing today.

Nachal Eshkol was a place which bespoke fear of the future. People that carry with them the baggage of past sad experiences cannot properly focus on and enjoy the present. Likewise, those who constantly worry about what the future holds for them have great difficulty living in the moment. *Hayom, achshov*, today, now, represents a Jew’s faith. Today we are healthy, strong, united in our conviction. Yet, for some people, fear trumps faith, and, as a result, we refuse to accept what today, the present, has to offer, because we are afraid of the future. Eshkol feared the future. He symbolized one whose faith is frozen due to fear. Avraham did not listen to him, because his faith in Hashem transcended fear.

Someone once said that given the choice, we would all do *teshuvah*, repent. It is the right thing to do – today. What prevents us from following through on our logical positive intentions? Yesterday and tomorrow. We are anxious concerning yesterday’s mistakes and fret over what will happen tomorrow. Were we to focus on the present – we would make the correct decision. *Im lo achshav eimasa*; “If not now when”: Hillel’s well-known maxim (*Pirkei Avos* 1:14) should guide us concerning the importance of seizing the moment and making the most of it. *Ibn Ezra* buttresses this thought with his own: *Ha’ovar ayin, v’ha’asid adayin, v’ha’hoveh k’heref ayin, im kein daagah minayin?* “The past is no longer here; the future is not yet; the present lasts but an eye blink; so why worry and fret?” if, indeed, we live only in the present then we would do well to seek to accomplish our goals in the immediate “now.”

The only thing that we control is this very moment. Why waste it? This does not mean one should ignore the past – its lessons are critical. Neither should we completely disencumber ourselves from thinking about the future – one must have vision and goals. When one becomes overburdened by what might occur in the future, however, his present will be injudiciously slighted. We each have a spark within us that has the potential of igniting and becoming a powerful flame. Unfortunately, for

some, this spark is suppressed as a result of life's troubles and travails. If we focus on the "here and now," and seize the moment, we will succeed in mitigating the "yesterdays" and "tomorrows" and have a better, more accomplished life.

The concept of "now" plays itself out in another manner. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 6b) teach, "One should be meticulous in observing *Tefillas Minchah*, because it was at *Minchah* that Eliyahu *HaNavi* was answered." The *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, *Horav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, zl*, explains that, in the morning, one always has time to *daven Shacharis*; he can always wake up a half-hour earlier and then go to work. For *Maariv*, if he is running late, he just goes to bed fifteen minutes later. *Minchah*, however, is to be recited in the afternoon, right in the middle of the work day, the meeting, the conference, the trip. We recite it in the midst of intense activity. To be able to interrupt the business day in order to make time to recite *Minchah* is, indeed, an indication of dedication and commitment.

It is the same with regard to the life cycle. When one is young or old, it is relatively easy to make time for religious services. It is in the afternoon of one's life, the time reserved for "*Minchah*," that he manifests the greatest indication of commitment. It is during the "twenty to sixty" prime of life, when one has the vision and wherewithal to throw himself into world and business affairs, when the pursuit of material bounty absorbs most of his waking hours – it is then, if he invests time in spiritual matters, that he shows that he is deservedly meritorious.