

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Soroh Leah *bas* Moshe Yosef HaLevi *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Warning: Flammable!

SHELACH – 5775

The esteem in which Moshe Rabbeinu held Yehoshua, his prime disciple, is evident from the opening statement of Pirkei Avos (1:1):

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמָסָרָהּ לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ.

“Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua.”

From all the members of that exalted generation, it was Yehoshua who was entrusted with the pre-eminent task of safeguarding the very Torah given at Har Sinai, and to pass it down, unaltered, to future generations. His selection is a testament to his stature, erudition and trustworthiness.

Model of Consistency

It would appear somewhat strange, then, that Moshe had to offer the specific prayer that he did in this week’s *parshah*. The *passuk* makes mention of the name-change Moshe accorded to his disciple: וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בְּרִנּוֹן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ – “And Moshe called Hoshei’a bin Nun (by the name of) ‘Yehoshua’” (*Bamidbar 13:16*). Rashi explains the significance of this adjustment: It reflects Moshe’s prayer on Yehoshua’s behalf. The first two letters of this name signify a Name of Hashem, while the remainder is from the root-word for salvation (*yeshu’ah*). Thus Moshe solicited Hashem’s deliverance, saying: קַח יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִיַּד הַמְּסִיחִים – “May Hashem save you from the design of the spies.”

What was it, exactly, that Moshe was worried about? Did he fear that his eminent disciple, reliable enough to be entrusted with the transmission of the entire Torah, would fall into collaboration with the spies (who later turned the people against Hashem)? R’ Simchah Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, points to this as yet another example of the far and pernicious reach of the power of evil. As was discussed last week, no matter how great is one’s stature, no one is immune from the allure of its influence. Chazal had warned that “*Kol haro’eh*,” “all who see” the disgrace of a *Sotah* (suspected adulteress), must distance themselves from drinking wine; these protective measures apply to **anyone**, even the most elevated souls. And so even someone on the level of Yehoshua was at risk of falling under the spell of evil influence (*Yalkut Lekach Tov*).

(Interestingly enough, this is the same R’ Simchah Zissel who was featured last week in the incident of the scholarly drunkard. Upon learning that a certain Torah scholar had descended into alcoholism, R’ Simchah Zissel, then and there, unequivocally proscribed the drinking of wine, stating that it would never again grace his table.)

Igniting Evil

Quite a remarkable picture emerges from our study of the *parshiyos* over the last few weeks. We have seen, for instance, the concern Chazal had for the witnesses to the *Sotah's* ordeal. The *Sotah* had to undergo humiliation and disgrace, and the consequences of her impropriety were a horrible and public death. And yet there was still a fear that the onlookers could be tempted to follow her example, to the point that it was necessary for them to forswear drinking wine! This was a concern not only for common folk; even someone of impeccable righteousness was considered at risk. Apparently, the exposure to the mere fact that someone had perpetrated a sin was enough to create a danger that others would replicate the deed. How, indeed, are we to understand this phenomenon?

One proffered explanation attributed the concern to a matter of “desensitization.” Following the model of Amalek, once one nation attacked Yisrael, others would be emboldened to follow suit. So it is with sin – the perpetrator has demonstrated, in some sense, that sin is an “option,” which somewhat diminishes the inhibitions of the onlookers.

According to R' Reuvein Grozovsky, however, the matter goes much deeper. Imbued with an evil inclination, man possesses an inherent *neiyah* (propensity) toward vice. He illustrates this idea with a comparison to fire. For most objects to catch fire, actual contact is necessary. Even a twig, for example, needs to be placed firmly within a fire; it may even be held there for a few moments before the flame actually catches. But then there are items that are highly flammable. For example, a match contains, within its head, a certain chemical combination that makes it highly susceptible to ignition. As such, it is not necessary to even place the match within the actual fire; when it simply draws near to the heat, the head bursts into flame. And so it is with the evil inclination. It is primed for sin; when it simply draws near transgression, it is ready to ignite. The slightest exposure will set it off (*Peninim Mishulchan Gavohah, Parshas Naso*).

R' Leib Chasman – whose initial comments on this issue were cited last week – draws a parallel to our own lives. A wizened old sage, pristine and elevated, beholds a *Sotah* one time in the throes of her disgraceful ordeal. Nevertheless, he is in spiritual danger and must take unequivocal measures to avoid future pitfalls. How much more so, then, must we be vigilant, for we witness myriad transgressors and free-thinkers on a daily basis – people who condone and perpetrate all manner of deeds that run contrary to Torah values. And unlike the *Sotah*, who suffers humiliation and is held in universal contempt, these individuals dress up their deeds and ideas in all sorts of “sophisticated” terminology, such as “progressivism” and the like. Surely, then, we must apply safeguards upon being subjected to exposure of such outlandish behavior and attitudes.

What is supremely chilling about R' Leib's remarks is that they were made roughly one hundred years ago, and he was referring to his environs, the backwoods of Lithuanian *shtetls*! Continuing with his train of thought, then, we must extend his *kal vachomer* to our times: If such can be said about the Lithuanian streets of 100 years ago, how much more so must we, in the twenty-first century, surrounded by the cesspools of secularism and liberal hedonism, be attuned to the ever-present spiritual dangers. Certainly, it behooves us, as much as possible, to refrain from even approaching the fire.