

# WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE....

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

It seems that every older generation has the feeling that the younger generation is getting away with more than they were allowed to. "When I was your age..." is usually followed by how far the walk was to school, or how we knew our times tables like we knew our names, and how we weren't spoiled like this generation. Perhaps there is some truth behind the sentiment. If there is, what is it that might be a factor in the down slide?

I believe that one of the answers can be found in a discussion of Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, of blessed memory. Rashi tells us that the juxtaposition of our Matriarch Sarah dying, and the binding of Yitzchok in the end of last week's parsha is to teach us something. That is, that Sarah died as a result of suddenly hearing the news about Yitzchok being brought as a sacrifice. She died before hearing that he was not actually slaughtered. Rabbi Shmuelevitz asks why Sarah died from the news, while Avraham remained unscathed by actually living through the event. Rabbi Shmuelevitz explains the difference. The news came suddenly to Sarah. The thrust of the whole event all at once was more than she could digest, and she passed away. Avraham had time to acclimate to the idea slowly, so he could make peace with it. G-d didn't even introduce the entire idea all at once. "Take your son..., your only one..., ...Yitzchok. Each step was introduced gradually. Even after knowing what he had to do, Avraham had a three day trip to get to the place where the offering would be done.

From this we see the benefit of gradual exposure to harsh realities. Rabbi Shmuelevitz suggests that some people who survived the concentration camps did so because entering that hell was incremental. First the German occupation, then the ghettos, then the liquidations, and finally the camps. Otherwise, he says, its hard to imagine how anyone could have survived.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz compares this with another event in Torah. The midrash tells us that when The Patriarch Yaakov passed away in Egypt, he was brought to the Cave of Machpelah to be buried. His brother Esav showed up, and would not allow Yaakov's sons to bury him there. He demanded proof of ownership of the cave, a family inheritance. The sons decided to send Naftali back to Egypt to get the deed. Meanwhile, Chushim son of Dan, who was deaf, saw that Esav was preventing his grandfather from being buried. All he could think of was the disgrace being done to his grandfather for his burial being delayed. He knocked Esav over the head, and the burial proceeded without further delay.

Why was Chushim the one out of all of those present to be repulsed by the disgrace being done to

his grandfather? Everyone else was ready to send Naftali on a long trip to Egypt while Yaakov remained unburied. It's because Chushim was deaf, and unaware of the debate taking place. The others involved had already proceeded with the debate at the expense of Yaakov's honor, and the sense of impropriety was dulled in them. Chushim was still expecting to bury Yaakov there and then, and no other alternative was acceptable to him at that point. That is why sending Naftali back to Egypt was a ridiculous proposition in Chushim's mind. In this case becoming accustomed would be detrimental, and would immunize a person, so to speak, against the proper perception of events.

As in everything, this strength we have to become accustomed to realities can be used positively and negatively. On the one hand, we can elevate ourselves by accustoming ourselves mentally to higher ideals and standards, and measuring ourselves against them. However, we can also lower ourselves through accepting lower social, educational, and moral standards as the only barometer of our behavior. Perhaps this is one of the contributing factors to the educational ills of our society. When we measure ourselves against prevailing standards, we are selling ourselves short of what we are indeed capable of achieving.

The student of Torah has his own ideals and standards by which he measures himself. The Torah and words of the sages are his guide. His sights are set on those ideals, and he doesn't allow lower standards to cool him off, and extinguish his burning fire of dedication. He grabs the moment, because if he lets the moment pass, he may become immune to its beckoning. May we all merit to be exposed to great people from whom we can learn to tap the wellsprings inside ourselves, and realize great accomplishments.

Good Shabbos!

***This weeks DvarTorah is dedicated in the memory of Nechemya ben Chaim Dovid O"H***

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