

MORE FRAGILE THAN GLASS

by Rabbi Label Lam

All the people we saw were huge! There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of the giant from among the Nephilim; we were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes. (Bamidbar 13:32-33)

If I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then you are not you and I am not I. But if I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then you are you and I am I. (The Kotzker Rebbe)

When Lady Di died, suddenly and tragically, I wondered at the time, as many others, what had been the cause of her death and what practical lesson could be learned from it all. I developed my own supra-rational approach to the subject. Let's try it on for size.

The Chovos HaLevavos, The Duties of the Heart states a general rule with wide applications. "Whoever does not rely on The A-lmighty is relying upon something else....whether it's his wealth or good looks or strength....Hashem leaves him in the limited hands of that which he relies upon."

Whatever we trust becomes our boss. We serve its needs. We defend its honor as our own. We are desperate for its success and security, because we by design or default believe in it and we need it to survive.

If one relies upon a certain politician or an employer to ensure his well being, he will do almost anything; even to change principles, to see that person succeed. His enemies become yours. His friends are your comrades. One is literally made by his victories and destroyed by his failure. All of one's hopes are wrapped up in that vulnerable package, which when threatened yields panic and desperation.

To understand the standard of "reliance upon", we have a law in the arena of prayer, that one should not lean upon a lectern or anything else (under normal healthy conditions) while praying. What is considered "leaning upon"? If that object would suddenly be removed then the person would become immediately destabilized.

We've all heard the phrase, "Live by the sword, die by the sword!" It's not just a Karma phenomenon. If one thinks he can gain advantage in life by employing the sword, relying upon the might of his arms, that person will soon enough discover the weakness of his own methodology.

Similarly, if one lives by the media they die by the media. If one's entire image is a balloon built by media air but essentially an empty bubble, and one believes in the illusion that the publicity creates,

one may actually flee with dying desperation from a camera that threatens to pierce the veil of the myth.

Ironically, that same camera that opened a window through which Alice could be viewed seeks now with even more appetite to create a new cycle of news. After having built up the heroine larger than life, now attempts to publicly dismantle her. The illusion in the mirror and the mirror are shattered in the process.

The Alter from Navardock trained his students to survive the worst conditions by having them carry out foolish exercises such as attempting to purchase a loaf of bread in a hardware store, and a hammer at a bakery. They thereby hoped to conquer the need for public approval as a means of being guided through life, realizing that we are at constant risk of becoming prisoners of the ones we seek to impress.

The Maharal points out two elements as the symbol of pure materialism and hence low esteem. The donkey- a beast of burden lives only to carry stuff. His identity is eclipsed by the value of the object he has on his back. Water too takes the shape of the vessel that holds it. In that sense, it has nothing of it's own.

The spies, whose discouraging words caused a forty-year detour in the desert betrayed more than themselves when they said that "We were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes!" One who lives in a mirror is made of something more fragile than glass.

Good Shabbos!

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