

AT RISK

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Belief in the One Omnipotent G-d is of the most basic tenets of Jewish thought. As such, the Torah mandates severe retribution for those who would cause the Children of Israel to sin with idol worship. "If, in one of your cities...you hear, saying, 'Lawless men...have caused the dwellers of their city to go astray saying, "Let us go and worship the god of others, that you have not known," you shall seek out and investigate and inquire well and, behold...the abomination was committed in your midst. You shall smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword; lay it waste and everything that is in it...No part of the banned property may adhere to your hand, so that G-d will turn back from His burning wrath; He will give you mercy and be merciful to you." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 13:13-18)

The Chofetz Chaim (1) notes the obvious truth that habit, over time, becomes ingrained as second nature, whether the routine is positive or negative in character. The unfortunate reality is that one who fights for the glory of G-d's name in this Wayward City, annihilating those who brought disgrace to His holy name and fulfilling one of the greatest mitzvos (Divine commandments), exposes himself to great spiritual risk. The nobility and importance of the cause notwithstanding, he is in great jeopardy of changing his prior nature to that of a cruel individual, lacking value for his fellow Jew. Thus, G-d promises this warrior that he will merit a Divine gift: to whatever degree his sensitivities were diminished by his participation in this war G-d will restore him to his original spiritual state.

No less corrosive is the affect of our progressive society on our traditional values. Day after day, our eyes and ears are filled with the sights and sounds of hedonistic pursuits, wanton violence and revisions of morality. No matter how we try to insulate our senses from the onslaught, it still penetrates. And worse. How much of these caustic influences are part and parcel of the media we voluntarily bring into our homes?

For the risk taken while actively fighting for G-d we are promised Divine restoration. But we bear responsibility for - and must contend with the very real effects of - the deterioration of our moral compass from prolonged exposure to society's acerbic elements. When the malady is physical, the conceptual path to good health is simple: utilize the appropriate medical remedy while removing the diseased party from contact with the attacking pathogen. Spiritual illness follows the same basic formula: exposure to the only remedy, Torah knowledge and scholarship, and, equally important, proactive cessation of the unhealthful exposure. But like every regimen to good health, it only works if we use it.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities

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