

To fear or not to fear – that is the question

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Rebbe Nachman writes that it is crucial for one to live by the fear of Hashem. Although there are numerous levels of fear, the most basic is the fear of punishment for going against the will of Hashem. This fundamental fear is necessary for each person to survive. Even the greatest of the Tzaddikim who have moved to higher levels of fear, must still live by this foundation.

Reb Noson points out that there are many who fail in life exactly because of this dread. Contemplating the anger and punishment that awaits due to previous sins, is usually the first step of a downward spiral. One can become sad and dismayed by what he has caused. Rebbe Nachman teaches us that sadness is a root of evil, likely to drive a person to further

transgression, eventually giving up altogether. If so, how does one use the vital component of fear of punishment, and not succumb to a life of bitterness and worse? Wouldn't it would seem better to forget this whole fearing in the first place!

The answer lies in two other requisites. The first is sweetening the fear or justice with the kindness of Hashem. The great Tzaddikim teach us that no matter where we have fallen, or what we may have done to anger God, there always remains abundant love from the One above. Hashem is infinite, and is with us just as much after a sin as before. There are no grounds for becoming sad. When a person combines the fear with the knowledge of the unlimited loving-kindness of Hashem, the fear is used to make him rather than break him. He sees everything that happens to him as being from the caring hand of Hashem. Any possible punishment is part of His love for us, notwithstanding that any reprimand can also be avoided with teshuva.

Secondly, Reb Noson warns us against aiming for greatness in our own eyes. People who are haughty of their own service of God, those who feel that their devotion is supreme, are the ones set to fall due to fear. When the chips are down, such as person feels a tremendous pain of failure. How could someone such as 'I' have fallen from my exalted level. This is the beginning of the end for the arrogant. Instead we must live with humility. I am not so great, but I try hard. I can and will serve God even in my lowly state. Hashem is so great, that He even loves my imperfect service! Such a person will build on any failure, and will use it as a springboard to further his devotions, by finding the good points that he knows remain.

Perhaps this was the downfall of the spies sent into the land of Israel. Their primary concern was the "small" feeling they experienced in the land— "we were like grasshoppers". We are told that they were afraid of losing their exalted positions

in the holy land. In order for one to really experience holiness, as Reb Noson tells us, at times feeling like a grasshopper is itself the basis for success.

We should always aim for the utmost in our service of Hashem. However we cannot expect to always be great. Remember to be happy with the small things that we do. This is true greatness.

(Based on Likutei Halachos; Pesach 9)