



אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאתגרו של
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

5780 - Parshas Ki Savo – Low and Slow

This week's parsha contains the "Tochecha" – the curses which Hashem promises to bring to the Jews lest they disobey the Torah. The passuk tells us, at first glance, referring to our enemies, (28:43) "The stranger in your midst shall rise above you higher and higher, while you sink lower and lower".

Yet the sefer Rabbeinu Efrayim al Hatorah explains that this "stranger" refers to none other than the evil inclination – the yetzer horah, who resides within us. In the unfortunate circumstance that the Jews do not follow the Torah, he will rule over us.

That being said, what does the Torah mean that he will rise "higher and higher," and we will sink lower and lower"? Why the double expression?

Rav Sholom Schwadron zt"l, the legendary "Maggid of Yerushalayim" once asked his rebbi, Rav Meir Chodosh, zt"l how a person should better himself before the Days of Judgement on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Rav Chodosh's answer changed his perspective.

"When I was a young man in Russia," Rav Chodosh began, "Following the fall of Czar Nicholas II in 1917, there was lawlessness in the land. Group of bandits and vicious anti-Semitic militia groups roamed the streets looking for Jews to kill at their whim. People were we were terrified to go anywhere.

"One evening, I had no choice but to leave my home, and as I was walking down the street, I realized that I was being followed by a group of thugs. They chased me towards the police station, and cornered me against a wall, their guns drawn and ready to shoot. I knew that it was only a few moments before they killed me.

"Suddenly, a window opened in the building, and a police officer stuck his head out and started to shout at the men to leave the area immediately! They ran away and left me alive!

"I immediately started to think thoughts of teshuvah. 'If Hashem saved my life, I must change! I remember vividly how I accepted upon myself to be careful in so many areas of halacha, and to make major changes in my life.

"Only a few months later that I forgot about most of my promises, and only a short time after that, I was unable to follow through on the big life changes I thought I was able to implement.

"I realized then, that the only way to change is to make small "kabalos" - changes that slightly improve your connection to Hashem and the Torah."

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l explains. The gemara in Shabbos (105b) explains the tactics of the yetzer horah. "Today it tells him do this, and tomorrow it tells him do that, until eventually, when he no longer controls himself, it tells him worship idols and he goes and worships idols."

The evil inclination works slowly and gradually. He strategically pushes his limits. Starting with convincing a person to ignore a minute detail of Jewish law, to eventually schlepping a Jew through graver sins, he finally hits the jackpot with idol worship.

One can Heaven forbid slip down his slippery slope quickly and unknowingly, and while the evil inclination rises step by step, "higher and higher," one can unknowingly slip "lower and lower."

The days of Elul are a perfect time to reawaken and reverse the trend. A small change, if implemented properly, will eventually propel you to greater heights.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky is the Director of Advancement at Yeshiva of South Shore - ישיבה תורת חיים-בית בנמין. He is currently compiling the vast storehouse of all the Torah thoughts from his grandfather. If you have any stories to share from his grandfather, you can email him at skamenetzky@yoss.org.