

Parshas Yisro

Rabbi Nosson Dubin

IMPERFECT IS IDEAL

When Moshe ascended Har Sinai to accept the Torah, the angels objected. They complained to Hashem, "How can the holy Torah be given to earthly mortals?"

Hashem instructed Moshe, "Hold on to the heavenly throne and respond to them."

Moshe replied to the angels, "The Torah commands not to serve other gods; are you living among pagan nations that serve other gods? The Torah commands not to covet, steal, or murder; do you desire to commit these acts? Do you have a Yetzer Hara?"

Hashem validated Moshe's response and presented the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu. [Shabbos 88b]

A remarkable exchange. A profound lesson. Modern society forces us to encounter secular morals and values, and material pleasures and temptations. Situations arise that test our resolve and assess our degree of Yiras Shamayim. We may wonder why we are put into such trying circumstances.

Nisyonos come in other forms as well: debilitating illnesses, Parnassah worries, Chinuch concerns, and family issues. Each person and family has their individual stressors. We struggle to understand why good people are diagnosed with difficult medical conditions. Why can't Hashem provide everyone with adequate finances? Why does Chinuch have to be so demanding?

The lesson gleaned from the conversation between Moshe and the angels, is that the challenges we face, and the temptations we encounter, are not by default - they are here by design. If life was idyllic with all our needs provided for and we never needed to battle wants and desires, we may not have merited receiving the Torah. We are not expected to be angels. The Torah was given specifically to us - because we are imperfect.

The first step in solving a problem is acknowledging that it exists. It's crucial to

recognize that we are merely human, and therefore need consistent, strong resolve and determination to stay on course. We need to avoid situations and locations fraught with Nisyonos, and be vigilant of an ever-present, ever-active Yetzer Hara awaiting us at every turn.

When faced with a Nisayon, instead of being frustrated that we were put into such a trying situation, let's think of it as a positive growth opportunity. This is precisely the reason the Torah was given to us and not to the angels; to encounter challenges and to overcome them.

During the late 1940's, Rav Sholom Shwadron (1912-1997), the famed Maggid of Yerushalayim, gave nightly Torah classes to Jewish teenagers. One boy, we'll call him Moshe, had been coming to learn regu-

an important point. There is a goalie who stands in front of the net and prevents the ball from getting inside."

"But still, does the goalie stand there twenty four hours a day?" countered Rav Shalom.

Moshe laughed again, "Of course not; he only stands there while the game is being played."

"Excellent! Let's go there now, kick the ball into the net, and save them all the trouble."

By now Moshe was getting exasperated. He tried again to explain, "The whole objective of the game is the challenge of trying to score a goal while the goalie is blocking you."

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larly, when he suddenly stopped coming for several days. Rav Sholom was concerned, and went to visit him at home. When Moshe answered the door, Rav Sholom said, "We missed you recently. Are you unwell?"

Moshe responded sheepishly, "I'm actually feeling just fine. You see, I'm an avid soccer fan, and they are in the middle of the tournaments. I just can't miss the games. Don't worry; I'll be back in just a few nights."

"What exactly is soccer? Can you describe to me how this game is played?" Rav Shalom inquired.

"There are two nets on either side of the field, and two teams compete to try to kick the ball into the other team's net."

Rav Sholom appeared confused. "So what's the big deal? Come with me right now and I'll kick the ball into the net as many times as you like."

Moshe chuckled. "I forgot to tell you

Rav Shalom turned to Moshe and said gently, "Are you listening to what you're saying? The objective of the game is to overcome the obstacle - the goalie. If the goalie is not there, anyone can get the ball into the net. If you resume coming to class next week, that's no big deal. If you want to really win the game, drop the tournament for tonight and come learn instead!"

Moshe was the first one to arrive for class that night. He scored big time.

Indeed, a paradigm shift. Living a Torah life is not an obstacle course - it is an abundance of challenging opportunities. Every Nisayon we overcome elevates us higher and higher.

Let's keep at it, and we won't be like angels - we can be way, way greater.

Good Shabbos!

