

HA'AZINU - TWO WAYS TO SURVIVE THE END OF DAYS

YERIDAS HADOROS:
SPIRITUAL DECLINE OF THE GENERATIONS

[In *Parshas Haazinu*, the Torah writes, זכור ימות עולם, בינו שנות דור ודור, – “Remember the days of history, understand the years of generation to generation, ask your fathers and they will tell you; your elders, and they will say to you.”]

We say in *Shemoneh Esrei*, מגן ישע, – “Shield of our salvation; You exist from generation to generation.” Hashem provides salvation for us – when? When we recognize Him as the G-d who has been here from generation to generation.

Ever since the sin of Adam, the entire Creation has been undergoing changes. The world changed since Adam sinned, and the generations declined until the birth of Noach. After Noach, the generations declined even further, until the birth of Avraham, who began the Jewish people. And after the sin with the Golden Calf, when death was once again decreed on mankind, the spiritual level of the generations has been declining.

There has only been descent since then. There was a small period of history in which we enjoyed great spiritual heights, which were the times in which we had the Beis HaMikdash. But for the most part, there has been only de-

scend of the generations' spiritual level (*yeridas hadoros*). This is what *Chazal* refer to when they said, “There is no generation that is not more cursed than the one before it.”¹

Throughout history, we find that in order for a Jew to avoid the spiritual decline that was going on his surroundings, he had either one of two choices. Either he could disconnect himself from the current generation he was in and instead attach himself to the previous generation. As the *posuk* says [in this week's *parshah* of *Haazinu*:] “Ask your fathers, and they will tell you, and ask your elders, who will say to you.” Or, a person could connect himself deeply .with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*

We find this hinted to in these words of *Shemoneh Esrei*: מגן ישענו, אתה הוא – לדור ודור – no matter what generation is in, no matter what time or place he is in, he can always find Hashem and connect himself with Hashem, to the Unchanging reality, and be saved from all the changes of the reality of the generation in front of him.

THE TWO OPTIONS

Those are the two options you can save yourself with: Disassociate from the previous generation and instead connect yourself with the previous generation [via asking your leaders, who can show you the way], or the higher

method, which is to connect yourself with Hashem.

Hashem is “Shield of our salvation”. The salvation can always come, and we hope it come speedily. But through believing in the fact that Hashem exists in every generation, one can connect himself to the Reality that never changes, and thus be saved from all the changes around him. No matter what place or time a person is in, he can always connect himself with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The generation is always changing, but one who connects himself with Hashem is able to be above the generation.

If a Jew does not employ either one of these two options – if he does not disassociate from the generation he is in, or if he does not connect himself with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – there is no doubt that he will descend together with the rest of his generation. The generation continues to descend further and further, and he will be swept away with them in their demise.

THE 'BIRTH PANGS OF MOSHIACH':
RAPID CHANGES AND DESCENT

In the times of the Chofetz Chaim, there were many different events taking place that were shaking up the world. The Chofetz Chaim said that all of these earth-shattering events were a sign that we are closer to Moshiach, for the era preceding Moshiach is compared to

that of a woman in the ninth month of pregnancy, when she is amidst her birth pangs; there are many changes, and they come rapidly in succession. The Chofetz Chaim clearly felt the changes getting stronger and stronger, and he took this a sign that we are getting closer and closer to the end.

Our Rabbis already wrote long ago that the changes taking place in our generation are much more dramatic than in previous generations, and therefore, the spiritual level of the generation declines rapidly, because the closer we are to *Moshiach's* arrival, the more changes are taking place.

In this generation, the entire spiritual level can change in one moment. Every person in this generation, no matter what his\her age is, has already gone through many "generations", in proportion to how many changes that all of us have lived through.

To be sharper about this, it can be said that a person today who goes to sleep at night wakes up to a new generation the next day. In one night, everything can change. That's how fast the generation is declining. The changes happen so rapidly that it's like entire generations have passed in one moment.

Moshiach will come suddenly ("piso")², and we await that change to the world, in which everything will change over totally in one instant. We do not know exactly when the redemption will happen. But what we do know is that in the era directly preceding it, there will be massive changes, which

are reminiscent in their magnitude to the kind of changes that will happen when *Moshiach* comes.

The generation which you are in today is not the same one as the one you were born in. Anyone with a little feeling for truth can feel that he has gone through many 'generations' in his lifetime. If one doesn't feel it, he must be that he has become so callous to the situation we are in - which means that he is falling down together with the rest of the generation that is descending rapidly. A person who lives in this generation has to know, very clearly, that the generation in which he lives in today is a "new" generation than the one he was born in! The Torah itself never changes, and the *halachah* never changes, but the face of the generation can definitely change.

One who is born into this generation and doesn't think into the situation we are in, might think that there's nothing to make a big fuss about - after all, as long as he's born into a *Chareidi* family, everything's fine. He just doesn't understand what the problem is....

If one is sensitive to the situation going on, he has the chance of living life today through a clear lens.

But if one is unaware to the situation today we are in, then he will inevitably have the wrong priorities in life, and he will descend together with the rest of the generation that is descending, without even realizing - *Rachmana Litzlan* (May Heaven have mercy). If one does not know how to disasso-

ciate from this generation, he will for sure fall down together with the rest of the generation.

The changes that take place to our situation today are not just small changes. They are massive changes, reminiscent of the kind of changes that the redemption will bring to the world, which will alter the entire way Creation is right now. When *Moshiach* comes, the change will be cataclysmic, for it will be the time in which the world is purified from its depths of depravity. But even now in our times, before *Moshiach* has come, there are still massive changes going on, and while not being as dramatic as the post-*Moshiach* changes, they are still very big changes.

The descent of the generation that is going on today is not a small descent; they are life-altering and total. In our times, a Jew today in one instant can fall completely into evil, *Rachmana Litzlan*. That descent does not happen gradually; it can happen instantly. Just as a *baal teshuvah* and a convert is like a person born anew, so does this power of instant change exist in the side of evil, in which a person can instantly fall to evil and totally descend in his *ruchniyus*.

The changes that will take place are not merely that of the nations warring with each other, which will pave the way for the revelation of *Moshiach*, as our Rabbis wrote of; that is just on the surface of things.

The real changes taking place internally, in the depths of our souls. One

who has a little feeling and thinks into what is going on today can see clearly how fast a person can descend.

In the times we live in, there are people who were once *frum* and kept the entire Torah and *mitzvos*, who instantly throw everything away and “go off the *derech*”. There have even been cases of entire *frum* families who went off the *derech* together!! People who once kept Torah and *mitzvos*, have descended into *tohu* (the realms of nothingness)!

Entire foundations of our faith are being uprooted! It’s all being uprooted! In these times, if one does not clarify to himself what the 13 Principles of our faith are, there’s no doubt that his faith will be uprooted. A person doesn’t feel it taking place, though.

It is not only individuals who have totally gone lost. It is much more than that! It is difficult to speak about this. Each person in this generation must reflect a little into the situation we are in and clarify what is important to him. Each person must take some time to reflect about it.

It used to be that the “*tzibbur*” (*frum* society) was careful in keeping all of *halachah*. Today, that “*tzibbur*” is no more. There is a new *tzibbur* in its place, which is like a “*new generation, which does not know Yosef*.”³ All principles of our belief are being questioned and attacked.

As an example, even when the Chofetz Chaim lived, most of the generation had already descended so much

to the point that there were only few who were keeping Shabbos and family purity correctly. By the time he was *niftar*, most of the generation was not even keeping Shabbos, in spite of his many efforts and all that he did.

The *yetzer hora* wants to destroy mankind, both on the individual level as well as in the collective sense. It wants to destroy each person personally, as well as the generation as a whole.

When the Chofetz Chaim was *niftar*, most of the Jewish people had already been uprooted. This is also what we see going on today in Eretz Yisrael. The descent of the generation is not only talking about the secular. It affects even the [*frum*] *tzibbur* as well. The descent from mitzvah observance was already so bad in the Chofetz Chaim’s times that he had to expend great efforts in order to get the generation back to mitzvah observance. That’s how powerful the force of evil in the world has become.

The *tzibbur* that the Chofetz Chaim was born into was not the same *tzibbur* at the time of his death...

THE DIVINE PLAN - AND OUR ROLE

Hashem has many reasons why He orchestrates the world in the way He does.

For reasons unbeknownst to us, His plan is that the forces of evil be let loose upon the world; the impurity of the world today is at its lowest level. Hashem has many different “messengers” who can carry it out. But although this

is true, **ואנחנו הרשענו**, “And we have been wicked”, as we say in *Tachanun* each day.

The entire *tzibbur* has changed. Today you have different types of Chareidim, “working Chareidim” and now “modern Chareidim”, as if you can be “Chareidi” yet not have to fear going in the ways of Hashem and the Torah. Everything is being uprooted! Slowly as time goes on, there are fewer and fewer people today who are truly “Chareidi” in the inward sense.

This is not a mere ‘slackening off’, a period of ‘weakness’, or a *nisayon* (difficulty). It is much more than that. The generation today is found in *She’ol* (the “grave” – the depths of depravity). The entire lifestyle of the generation has changed and has gotten worse and worse; everything has been entirely changed over. Even the Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* couldn’t change his generation back around, in spite of all his superhuman efforts. That is what is going on today as well.

THE CHOICE

Surely the events we face today are part of Hashem’s Divine Plan. But Hashem has many messengers of how evil can come to us, and each person in this generation is facing the ultimate choice of *bechirah* (free will). Either one will choose the way of Torah - or the way of evil, *chas v’shalom*.

But if one chooses to disassociate himself from this generation, he will merit the protection of Hashem – **אתה** **הוא לדור ודור**. If one does not do so,

then it must be that he is unaware of the changes going on.

It must be clear, to each individual, that we are now in a different generation than the one we were born in! There are not merely “decrees” going on or more “*nisyonos*” we face. Our foundations are being uprooted! The foundations of our faith are being razed, just as the Babylonians razed the *Beis HaMikdash* from its foundation⁴.

SAVE YOURSELF

We do not know when the time of the redemption will be. But what we do know is that the entire foundations of our faith (the 13 principles of belief listed by the Rambam), are all being attacked. Each person needs to personally clarify for himself that he needs to separate himself from this generation. Besides for a few individuals, there is no more “*tzibbur*” that has remained loyal to Hashem.

There are in fact many individuals who succeed in our times to truly search for Hashem and to be loyal to Him. But they are individuals, for there is no *tzibbur* to join with in this endeavor. In fact, it is impossible in our days for one to really connect to the *tzibbur* of the current generation, which is a generation of *pirud* (disparity).

But although we have no *tzibbur* to join, at least each of us, as individuals, can still build our own inner and true life. In these times, one cannot

survive spiritually based on any “*kehillah*” (congregation) or “*kevutzah*” (sect of *Yiddishkeit*) that he is in; it will not be enough, because there is no *tzibbur* today that one can connect himself to and be saved. Rather, each person on his own, as an individual, needs to be “alone” with Hashem, just as Yaakov fought the angel of Esav “alone”, by himself. He was not really alone; he was alone from other people, and alone with Hashem, which meant that he was not really alone.⁵

On one hand, each person needs to disassociate himself from the generation, more and more each day. That’s the “remove yourself from evil” part. The “do good” part is to connect yourself with Hashem, Who is always with us in every generation – **אתה הוא – לדור ודור**.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* explains that a pious person spends his time secluded from society, yet he is not alone at all, for he lives with Hashem in the depths of his soul. There is no other advice than this: one must disassociate himself from the generation, more and more, with each day. (This does not mean, *chas v’shalom*, that one should disassociate himself from keeping Torah and *mitzvos*).

Of course, don’t become a total hermit; you need a few friends who live a truthful kind of life. But you definitely need to disassociate from the general whole of this generation.

The point is not to simply be alone from society, but to live in the depths

of your being with Hashem in your life, the ultimate companionship. When you feel that Hashem is your true companion, you are never alone, and you will derive great happiness from this companionship. Live with Hashem in your entire mind, heart, and with all the depth of your soul: connect your entire being with Hashem, and live together with Him.

IN CONCLUSION

The concept here has been described, but when it comes to carrying out practically, it will differ with each person.

May we all merit the coming redemption. But if we do not merit it, *chas v’shalom*, then at least we can merit to separate ourselves from this generation and instead live with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* in our life, Who is our true Friend that we must never abandon.⁶



4 *Tehillim* 137

5 See *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus* #019 – You’re Never Alone

6 See *Rashi to Shabbos* 31a