

GOOD FENCES

Parshas Chayei Sarah records the lengthy process the servant of Avraham underwent in order to find a suitable partner for Yitzchok, Avraham's son. Before being sent on his critical mission, Avraham instructed Eliezer to only seek out a wife from Avraham's birthplace, and disallowed him from bringing Yitzchak outside *Eretz Yisrael*. Though the instructions seem simple enough to follow, Avraham made Eliezer swear that he would not deviate from his directions.¹

Eliezer was not a simple man. Eliezer was equal with Avraham in his total control of the *yetzer horah*.² In fact, Eliezer was one of only seven people who merited entering *Gan Eden* while still alive.³ Knowing the spiritual prowess of Eliezer, why did Avraham deem it necessary to have Eliezer swear that he would be faithful to his mission, was Eliezer's word not enough?

R' Yerucham Levovitz⁴ (1873–1936) explains Avraham's actions were not strange at all, but some background is in order. *Avraham Avinu* was well aware of the various tricks and schemes the *yetzer horah* employs in order to get a person to falter. The fact that something seems simple to do, or that a person is very trustworthy, does not diminish the prowess of the *yetzer horah*. No person is too great, and no failure is too small.

Avraham may not have been concerned for an out-and-out lie, but despite Eliezer's greatness, Avraham was concerned Eliezer may mislead, misrepresent, or misinform on some subtle level. Since *avodas Hashem* is paramount, Avraham took every precaution necessary to ensure Eliezer would be true to his word, even having him swear to keep true to his mission.

In our own *avodas Hashem*, we may find sometimes that despite the importance of the task at hand, we falter, and we stumble. A critical step in *avodas Hashem* is creating 'fences,' boundaries that distance us from the many mistakes one may make. By doing so, we ensure that our *avodas Hashem* will always be moving forward.

¹ Bereishis 24:1-9

² Bereishis Rabbah 59:8

³ Kallah Rabasi 3:25

⁴ Da'as Torah on Bereishis 24:3

**No person is
too great, and
no failure is
too small.**

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

There's no magic involved in creating fences. In fact, the process is quite straightforward.

The first step is to make a list of the areas of improvement — either things to avoid, or things that can be done better.¹

After creating such a list, the next step is follow-through. That is, determining which area(s) are those that will get the most attention.

If those areas are things to avoid, the next step is to determine the pitfalls, reasons and causes that have pushed oneself to falter in the past. Once those are ascertained, one can move on to the next step.

Sometimes one must face their potential challenges head on. But oftentimes it is wiser to avoid the confrontation in totality. And that is where 'fences' come in, where one determines what they can do, or avoid, in order to bypass the temptation in the first place.

Each person is unique, and therefore, their choices will be unique.² But in all instances, it will be a step up in *avodas Hashem*.

¹ Mesillas Yesarim, Chap. 3

² Mesillas Yesarim, Chap. 13

לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי
ר' צבי אלעזר בן ר' ישעיה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.



**I, too, cry when I learn the Sefer
Shevet Mussar.** - Chacham Ovadia Yosef
zt"l, after describing to his student, R' Eliyahu
Shitrit, how the Chassidic Master, R' Bunim of
P'shisha zt"l would cry when learning Sefer
Shevet Mussar. "Rabbeinu" pg. 112

GETTING THE JOB DONE

"I'm telling you, I'm never doing it again," said Yosef. He rapidly turned the pages of the *mishnayos* in front of him, as he shook his head. "I don't know why I do it — I sign up to learn *mishnayos* for someone, and then I forget, and then I have to finish a *mesechta* in one day!"

"I know what you mean!" said Gavriel, looking up from his own *mishnayos*. "I also once told myself I'd never sign up ever again. But a funny thing happened to me, and, well here I am!"

"What happened?"

"Maybe it wasn't so funny, actually. I had a relative who was not well. Very not well. I went to visit him in the hospital, and I spent about an hour there. Now, this relative was a learned fellow, had *chavrusas* every day, and so on. As I got up to leave, he said to me, 'Gavriel, something's bothering me. I want you to know, I never learned all of *mishnayos*. And it doesn't look like I ever will.'"

"I still remember the way he looked at me, a deep sorrow in his eyes. Like I said, he was learned, but he never actually finished all *mishnayos*. It shook me, because I realized I might end up the same way. I learn *Gemara*, I learn *Shulchan Aruch*, but since my younger years, I basically did not learn *mishnayos*!"

Yosef furrowed his brow. "I guess that makes sense, but why sign up for *mishnayos*, why the pressure? Why not just learn at your own pace?"

"That's what I said! And in the beginning, I did. I finished *Zeraim*, and then *Moed*. And then somewhere in *Nashim* I got bogged down. I forgot my motivation, and somehow found that I just didn't have the time any longer.

"That's when I came up with the idea of signing up to learn for people. Yes, it's an added pressure. But it helps me get the job done. And I've actually gotten better at my time management, not leaving it to the last minute."

"And you'll do an entire *mesechta* that you've never learned before, in just one month?"

"Not necessarily. I'll sometimes just sign up for a *perek* or two. But I found that putting myself in a situation where there is accountability, it pushes me further than I would have gone otherwise. And it's well worth it."

"It's an added pressure, but it helps me get the job done."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- One who refrains from things that are permitted in order to avoid potential *aveiros*, is given the title, "Holy one."¹
- One's *yiras shomayim* is more readily seen in the things they avoid, not the *mitzvos* they do.²

¹ Yevamos 20a

² Magen Avos on Avos 1:1, ש.ו. עשו סיני