



## THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB  
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

### “Summer, the Season for Self- Control”

Summer was the season we looked forward to when we were young children. My parents decided that the hot streets of Boro Park, Brooklyn were not where they wished to spend the summer, and certainly not the place for me and my two sisters.

In late June, we prepared for our yearly trip to Rockaway, a beach community a bit more than an hour’s drive from our home. Back then, neither of my parents knew how to drive, so we recruited my dear Uncle Yossel, may he rest in peace, to help us load his car as we excitedly crammed into the back seat.

Every summer, my parents would rent a small apartment in a sprawling boarding

house owned by a wonderful Irish Catholic family. There we remained until just before Rosh Hashanah.

How I enjoyed my pre-bar mitzvah summers there! Swimming in the ocean, visiting Playland and boardwalk arcades, Wednesday night fireworks display, fishing off a bay bridge with my friend Marty, viewing war movies that were then so popular, and enjoying weekly concerts on the boardwalk.

The summer before my bar mitzvah, my parents wisely decided to enlist a Boro Park *talmid chacham* to travel to Rockaway and study with me for several hours every weekday. Back then, I only knew him as Rav Abramczyk. He was a Holocaust survivor who studied and taught at Yeshivas Bais Yosef, named for Rav Yosef Yoizel Horovitz, of blessed memory, known as *Der Alter* (the “old man”) of Nevardek, the head of a many-branched yeshiva based in the town in Lithuania by that name. He was one of the major disciples of Rav Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Mussar Movement.

As a student of Nevardek, my tutor followed the methodology espoused by his mentors. It stressed avoiding temptation and mastering self-control so that one could focus one’s attention upon Torah study and the performance of good deeds. No wonder that he soon convinced me to control my “temptations”, such as they were, and focus upon my studies, honor my parents, no longer tease my sisters, and discontinue fireworks and movies and penny arcades.

Was I a perfect pupil of Rav Abramczyk?

Our lives have grown  
spiritually and joyously  
since making aliyah  
on August 4, 2004  
Thank you Hashem!

*Rachel and Isaac Z'L Botbol*



Decidedly not! But as I grew older, I became enamored of the Nevardek approach and continue to devote my personal studies during the summer months preceding the New Year to the teachings of the *Alter* of Nevardek. Hence the following lesson for this week's Torah portion, *Re'eh* (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17).

It is a lesson taught by another proponent of Nevardek methodology, Rav Chaim Zeitchik, of blessed memory. It is based upon this verse our *parsha*: "Three times a year - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot - all your males shall appear before the Lord your G-d in the place that He will choose" (ibid. 16:16).

One wonders how all those men could abandon their homes, farms, vineyards and olive groves for weeks at a time, exposing their families and belongings to enemies and bandits. The answer lies in this passage in Exodus 34:24: "...no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your G-d three times a year."

Rav Zeitchik, in an essay in the anthology entitled *Ohr Chadash*, sees the verse in our *parsha* as a *mitzvah* demanding self-control. We are commanded to resist understandable temptations of protecting our most vital possessions to travel to Jerusalem three times every year. We are to rely upon Almighty's promise that our homes and possessions will be protected by Him. That's the model of self-control that was advocated in Nevardek!

To uncover the sources of our ability to develop such extreme self-control, he quotes the following *midrash* (*Beresheet Rabbah* 43:9):

"Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons and take the possessions for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I lift my hand to the Lord, G-d Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap or

what is yours...'"

The *midrash* proceeds to quote three opinions: Rabbi Yehuda viewed Abram's refusal as his designation of the booty as sacred and therefore untouchable. Rabbi Nechemiah insisted that Abram's refusal was based on his oath not to accept something which was not rightfully his. Other rabbis maintained that Abram transformed the opportunity into song!

Rabbi Zeitchik bolsters the opinions of both Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemiah and accepts them both as reasonable. But transforming his refusal into a song? That calls for an explanation.

Rabbi Zeitchik's homiletic expertise inspired him to interpret the other rabbis thus: After refusing to accept even a sandal strap, a shoestring, Abram revealed within himself the capacity of self-control. Once he experienced that spiritual capacity, he sang a song of joy, giving voice to the depths of his soul. He sang the song of self-control in the face of temptation.

Rabbi Zeitchik elaborates further on the joy that comes with one's discovery of deep inner strength. He concludes his essay, however, with a story he personally heard while in the Nevardek yeshiva in Mezeritch:

"A simple but G-d-fearing Jew, a water carrier, lived in town. One Friday afternoon, *erev Shabbat*, he found a purse with five hundred American dollars in it, a fortune in those days. He began screaming so that a crowd of townspeople soon surrounded him. The crowd was stunned as they began to realize that he was

|                                                                                           |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dr Muriel Metzger MD, MSc</b><br><b>Endocrinologist-Diabetologist</b>                  |  |
| Emek Refaim 64, Jerusalem, 077-5560562<br>Nahal Tzeelim 6, Ramat Beit Shemesh, 02-9701100 |                                                                                      |
| <b>Osteoporosis, Diabetes, Thyroid &amp; Hormonal dysfunctions</b>                        |                                                                                      |

screaming so that they would become aware that he wished to ascertain the identity of the person who lost the money. He wanted to combat the temptation to keep his find for himself and thus violate the *mitzvah* of returning lost objects.

“It turned out that the owner was a needy widow who had saved the money to be able to afford a dowry for her daughters.

“The widow insisted that he take a significant portion of the money for himself as reward. He refused despite her pleas. He eventually yielded but asked for just enough money to hire the local fiddler. He then invited the entire community to the town square where he danced to the fiddler’s lively music and sang a song of thanks to the Master of the Universe for enabling him to withstand temptation and instead perform this great *mitzvah*. In the process, he was emulating no one less than Father Abraham, *Avraham Avinu*, singing the song of self-control.”

A powerful lesson for this summertime is when we are tempted to loosen our self-control and instead put some Nevardek *mussar* to good use.

Do not be surprised, dear reader, to find more Nevardek teachings in this column during the summer weeks, leading to the upcoming New Year and all that it signifies. Shabbat Shalom. ■





**THE STRONGEST...THE MOST GENTLE**

054-216-0087 • brothersmovingisrael@gmail.com



## BECAUSE A DRAWER ISN'T A VAULT.

**A WILL. AN ENVELOPE OF CASH.  
YOUR GRANDMOTHER'S RING.**

**IF IT'S IMPORTANT - IT SHOULDN'T BE  
AT HOME.**

**BRICKSTONE JERUSALEM'S PREMIER PRIVATE VAULT CENTER.**

Discreet. Secure. Biometric access only. Only you hold the key.  
Centrally located in the Clal Building, Jerusalem



24/7  
security



International  
standards



Personal  
service

**PRIVATE VAULTS NOW AVAILABLE.**

**300NIS OFF OF A YEARLY PLAN  
WITH THIS AD THRU SEPTEMBER**



**Clal building,**  
97 yafa street, Jerusalem.

**Rubinstein House,**  
37 menachem begin street, Tel Aviv

**\*9936 Ext. 2**  
[www.brickstone.co.il](http://www.brickstone.co.il)