

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

WAKE UP NOW

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

A published scientific study caught my eye last week and I would like to share with you some of its findings. It states that "most people realize they've changed in the past, but few expect to change in the future."

Instead, while acknowledging that their tastes, values and even personality have varied over the past decade, people tend to insist the person they are today is the person they will be in 10 years - a belief belied by the evidence, according to researcher Daniel Gilbert, a psychologist at Harvard University.

"It's not that we don't realize change happens, because we all admit at every age that a lot of change has happened to us in the last 10 years," said Gilbert. "All of us seem to have this sense that development is a process that has delivered us to this point and now we're done."

Gilbert and his colleagues dub this mistaken belief the "end of history" illusion. No matter what age, Gilbert said, people act as if history shaped them and then ended, leaving them in their final form.

The "end of history" illusion may be driven by two factors, Gilbert said. One is that people find it comforting to believe that they know themselves and that the future is predictable. Thus, people are motivated to see the present as permanent.

The other is that it's simply harder to imagine the future than to remember the past. People may struggle to imagine how they might change and mistakenly conclude that since they can't figure it out, they won't change at all, Gilbert said.



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Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita
36 Bury Old Road
Prestwich – Manchester
M25 0FT



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כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מפיאסצנה
הרב קלונימוס קלמן שפירא
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I find all this astounding, yet if we are honest with ourselves, we can imagine that to some extent we may all be guilty of this self-imposed fantasy.

How often do we find ourselves gliding into a comfortable place and refusing to push ourselves further? Challenging oneself to grow is no simple task, and it is all too easy to just slip into a world that asks nothing and seeks even less.

A Torah Yid is one that cries out against such complacency and seeks to change for the better, no matter where he finds himself. The prerequisite of Torah life is a will to evolve and grow.

Yetzias Mitzrayim was not only about our forebears; we learn of their experiences to gain direction in our own reality. These weeks of Shovavim have a special connotation: they are meant to reenergise our focus in matters all too easily ignored because they pose the greatest of difficulties. The Torah readings for these weeks speak of how Yidden who were moribund, inhabiting the lowest degree of spiritual filth, came to be worthy of receiving Hashem's greatest gift, the Torah, and did so with great kedusha. We learn these lessons for a purpose, not just to gain some reflected glory from deeds done in an ancient past.

We each inhabit a personal Egypt that is steeped in a murkiness that can seem impenetrable.

This is the challenge of the Torah Yid, to thrive on the need to grow and illuminate our inner souls. What keeps us vibrant is a realisation that we are meant to progress, to grow, and never becoming staid in our quest for spiritual expansion. If we become rooted in where we are holding today, then we are bound to falter and slip. Stagnation is not an option for Hashem's children; without growth, we are lost.

Those depicted in the above-mentioned study are intimidated by the challenges of life and hope they will get by with wishful thinking.

We don't have such options; the Torah screams to us to constantly change for the better. Unfortunately, the wider worldview often seeps into our personal landscape and we begin to look for that time when we can feel secure in our spirituality and rest on our laurels. The Torah is telling us differently: we each must strive for greater connection with Hashem. Rest comes after one hundred and twenty years. Until then, our role is to be alive and to seek more kedusha.

Sleepwalking through Shabbos davening, mumbling a bensching or an Ashrei is an opportunity lost. We must change; that is what our tikun on this world entails.

It is difficult in this comatose world to remain awake, yet our role as Hashem's children is just that.

We should never be pleased with feeling as though we won't ever change, for change is the nuclear energy of Torah life.

Let's take these days of Shovavim and embrace their lessons. The key to leaving our individual Mitzrayim is to be alive to Hashem's Will and our ability to change for the better.