# "RECALCULATING"

והיו חייך תלואים לך מנגד ופחדת לילה ויומם ולא תאמין בחייך (דברים כ"ח:ס"ו)

"The life you face shall be precarious; you shall be in terror night and day, ***with no assurance of survival.***" (JPS)

"Your life will dangle before you, and you will be afraid day and night ***and will have no faith in your life.***" (Alter)

---

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, (Bantam, 2004) pp. 108-109

The doctor said his physical agony was dreadful, and that was true; but even more dreadful was his moral agony, and it was this that tormented him most.

What had induced his moral agony was that during the night, as he gazed at Gerasim's broad-boned, sleepy, good-natured face, he suddenly asked himself: "What if my entire life, my entire conscious life, simply was *not the real thing?*"

It occurred to him that what had seemed utterly inconceivable before—that he had not lived the kind of life he should have—might in fact be true. It occurred to him that those scarcely perceptible impulses of his to protest what people of high rank considered good, vague impulses which he had always suppressed, might have been precisely what mattered, and all the rest not been the real thing. His official duties, his manner of life, his family, the values adhered to by people in society and in his profession—all these might not have been the real thing. He tried to come up with a defense of these things and suddenly became aware of the insubstantiality of them all. And there was nothing left to defend.

"But if that is the case," he asked himself, "and I am taking leave of life with the awareness that I squandered all I was given and have no possibility of rectifying matters—what then?" He lay on his back and began to review his whole life in an entirely different light.

When, in the morning, he saw first the footman, then his wife, then his daughter, and then the doctor, their every gesture, their every word, confirmed the horrible truth revealed to him during the night. In them he saw himself, all he had lived by, saw clearly that all this was not the real thing but a dreadful, enormous deception that shut out both life and death. This awareness intensified his physical sufferings, magnified them tenfold.

**Reflections from the Class of 1971**

**What has been your most gratifying experience in life?**

- "Having made, however modestly, some positive change in some people's lives"
- "Taking care of my mother in her old age"
- "Seeing my sons become men with good hearts"
- "Watching folks who have worked for me get ahead in ***their*** lives and careers"

**What do you regret most in life?**

- "Deciding that growing up meant spending less time with my parents and family"
- "The time with my children and spouse lost forever to the pursuit of money and success"
- "Hurting people, especially those who cared about me along the way"
- "I'm not sure I was well trained for only middling professional success"

**How have you fundamentally changed?**

- "I am learning to be less self-centered"
- "More tolerant, less self-occupied"
- "I no longer feel that my whole value depends on getting the highest ratings"
- "More humility. More compassion for myself and others"

**What advice to you have for classmates?**

- "People are always more important than things"
- "None of us is indispensable or irreplaceable to life on earth, despite our illusions…Get over yourselves, and get an inner life instead"
- "Realize that the envy part of life is about over. Isn't it?"
- "Your kids and grandkids aren't going to love you because of your resume."

---

From Hillel Zeitlin, Rules for the Yavne Fellowship (ספרן של יחידים, Warsaw, 1928)

Break your ego. The ego is the strongest and most profound idol there is. It is the false god within the human being, and it entrenches itself deep within his physical being. The battle with the ego is one of the most difficult battles there is, but know, that as long as the ego controls you, you will be unable to enter the holy sanctuary of truth. Because the ego sees only itself, and eclipses from you not only God, but everything that God has done in this world. The ego is the great lie of the "I", that separates you from God. When one begins to sense that the separate "I" is a lie, it now begins to melt away, because its only strength is in its ability to pose as the truth.

<u>תלמוד בבלי, נדה ל:</u>

דרש רבי שמלאי למה הולד דומה במעי אמו לפנקס שמקופל ומונח ידיו על שתי צדעיו שתי אציליו על ב' ארכובותיו וב' עקביו על ב' עגבותיו וראשו מונח לו בין ברכיו ופיו סתום וטבורו פתוח ואוכל ממה שאמו אוכלת ושותה ממה שאמו שותה.....וכיון שיצא לאויר העולם נפתח הסתום ונסתם הפתוח שאלמלא כן אינו יכול לחיות אפילו שעה אחת ונר דלוק לו על ראשו וצופה ומביט מסוף העולם ועד סופו.....ואין לך ימים שאדם שרוי בטובה יותר מאותן הימים.....ומלמדין אותו כל התורה כולה.....וכיון שבא לאויר העולם בא מלאך וסטרו על פיו ומשכחו כל התורה כולה .....ואינו יוצא משם עד שמשביעין אותו.....ומה היא השבועה שמשביעין אותו תהי צדיק ואל תהי רשע.

---

<u>From Kurt Andersen, *Reset* (Random House, 2009), pp. 26, 53</u>

Ralph Waldo Emerson found some silver linings in the Panic of 1837 and its aftermath. "I see a good in such emphatic and universal calamity as the times bring," he wrote. "That they dissatisfy me with society."

After the Panic of 1837 and the resulting recession, a booming, rollicking new era arrived that seems uncannily familiar to anyone who's been living in America for the last couple of decades.

The postwar generation was the first to refuse to grow up, but Gen X and the rest have followed in those footsteps. And the selfish, heedless, if-it-feels-good-do-it approach enshrined by young boomers subsequently enabled the risk-taking, party-hearty paradigm that has governed so much of American life, economically and otherwise, for the last quarter century. Now, in the twilight of their hegemony, with this crisis and the necessary reshaping of America, the boomers have their last best shot at helping to straighten out the mess they helped to make. In their empty-nest years, for instance, perhaps they can channel some of the vast energies and micromanagement they lavished on their children to pro-social enterprises and volunteer work.

---

כיפה של חשבונות היתה מחזק לירושלים, וכל מי שמבקש לחשב הולך לשם, שלא יחשב בירושלים ויצר. (שמות רבה. פקודי)