

KI SEITZEI - GOING TO WAR AGAINST THE YETZER HORA

THE OPPOSING FORCES WITHIN CREATION

Parshas Ki Seitzei begins with, “When you will go out to war against your enemies.”

There are several kinds of wars which are fought. There is an obligatory war (*milchemes chovah*), a war fought for a *mitzvah* (*milchemes mitzvah*), and a permissible, non-obligatory kind of war (*milchemes reshut*).

Soon we shall explain a concept that each thing in Creation has an element that opposes it, and therefore, there are always warring forces within Creation. For each thing, we can find something that opposes it. Whenever there are two sides to a matter, the two sides are in opposition with each other. This opposition is the depth of all wars that take place in Creation.

The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* states that a person is constantly in a war, surrounded from all sides. We don't just go out to war at certain times. Rather, we are always in a state of “war”, because our life is a constant *nissayon* (test).

THE WAR WITH OUR EVIL INCLINATION

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says it even more clearly: Our worst enemy, the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination), is within. It is enmeshed into our psyche. It is in our body, our feelings and our senses. It is in our subconscious. It advises us every step of the way to listen to its voice.

In the same way that ingredients mix together with each other and connect with each other, becoming embedded in each other, so is the evil inclination mixed into our being. The evil inclination is a partner-

ing, neighboring force with the rest of our bodily, emotional and mental forces. Its voice is found in our conscious mind, as well as in our subconscious. In the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim*, before the sin of Adam, the evil inclination was a force that existed outside of man, and after the sin, the evil inclination entered into man, and now it is mixed into the psyche.

The simple understanding of the *yetzer hora* is, as the *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* states, that there are two inclinations which reside in the heart: the evil inclination is in the left chamber of the heart, and the right chamber of the heart is our good inclination.¹

But from the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos*, which is based on a *Gemara* in Tractate *Succah*², it is apparent that the evil inclination is hidden deep in the heart, for one of the names is *Tzefuni*, hidden one (and Rashi states that this is because it is hidden in the heart). Therefore, the *yetzer hora* is not just a partnering, neighboring force within man. Rather, it is mixed into man's psyche.

The depth of this is because there are two sides to everything. The evil inclination always tells you the opposite of what you should really do. That is its power – it opposes the will of a human being to do the right thing and to do the will of Hashem. So the evil inclination is not just a persuasive force. It is more than that. It wants to do the opposite of Hashem's will, and therefore it tampers with a person's will.

SEE THE TWO OPPOSING SIDES IN EVERY MATTER

This perspective is actually the way to

deal with the evil inclination. The clearer a person is about what the evil inclination is – that it is not just a neighboring force in man, but a force mixed into his psyche – one can be clearer about the way to fight the evil inclination, which is man's personal *avodah*.

And what is the way to fight it? One needs to get used to the idea of always thinking into the opposite. **Whenever you encounter anything, think of what its opposite is. Always see the two different sides and how they oppose each other.**

If one doesn't get used to thinking like this, he will only see what the *yetzer hora* says. The *Gemara* says that the wicked are ruled by their evil inclination.³ This means that until one gains control over his inner drives, he is only seeing what the evil inclination sees!

The exceptions to this are those who are great *tzaddikim*, such as Dovid *HaMelech*, who totally emptied out his heart from the evil inclination (as it is written, “My heart is emptied within me”) and many other *tzaddikim* as well, who also did this. But most people do not merit such a level, so what is the *avodah* of most people?

The *avodah* of the average person, the *beinoni*,⁵ is, that in whatever he encounters, he must see two sides to it. If he doesn't see two sides, he usually will see only the side of the evil inclination.

There is a sharp statement by the *Chozeh* of Lublin who was asked how to serve the Creator properly, and he answered, “Whatever you think you should do, do the opposite.” This is because the av-

1 *Berachos* 61b

2 *Succah* 52a

3 *Berachos* 61b

4 *Tehillim* 109:22

5 *Editor's Note: refer to the beginning chapters of sefer Tanya*

erage person is naturally inclined to follow the evil inclination's advice, so he needs to think against the evil inclination. This is known as the "the *kelipah* (the husk) that comes before the *pri* (fruit)".

But when one enters a bit more inward than this, in whatever he encounters, he must see two opposing sides to the matter. **As soon as he starts thinking like this, he has already left the evil inclination's view. The *yetzer hora* is no longer controlling his mind, once he starts thinking of the two sides to a matter.**

STEP 2: "WHAT IS THE YETZER TOV SAYING? WHAT IS THE YETZER HORA SAYING?"

After one sees the two sides to the matter, now begins a deeper stage of *avodah*, where he must wonder: "Which side is closer to good, and which side is closer to evil?"

The two chambers in the heart house the two different inclinations, which are each saying different things. If one clarifies to himself, "What is the *yetzer hora* saying, and what is the *yetzer tov* saying?", he has already won half of the battle, because he makes himself aware of what the *yetzer hora's* view is, which he didn't think about until now.

From then on, the rest of the battle is about whose voice he will listen to, the *yetzer tov's* or the *yetzer hora's*, and hopefully, he will listen to the *yetzer tov* and not to the *yetzer hora*. But the main part of the battle is before this, when a person discerns what the voice of the *yetzer hora* is and what the voice of the *yetzer tov* is. The depth of the challenge is because a person isn't clear what the *yetzer tov* is telling him and what the *yetzer hora* is telling him.

Understandably, sometimes it is clear. We know clearly that it's the *yetzer hora*, when it is a matter of clear-cut *halachah* or *mitzvah* which we feel a resistance towards. But if it's a more subtle kind of matter which isn't as clear cut, that is where the battleground is. A large part of our spiritual struggles is that we aren't clear if a certain thought\desire is coming from the *yetzer tov* or the *yetzer hora*,

what each of them are saying. Therefore, a person's main *avodah* when battling the *yetzer hora* is to try to clarify to himself if a certain argument or thinking is coming from the *yetzer tov*, or it's coming from the *yetzer hora*.

SUMMARY OF STEPS 1-2

So, to summarize, the first step is that a person should always see two sides to every matter. This is the beginning of fighting the evil inclination. At this stage, we must simply become aware of our two inclinations. If we don't become aware of our two inclinations, we are being ruled by the evil inclination.

When one gets used to regularly seeing two sides to every matter, and he slowly progresses with this stage, he eventually graduates from a person ruled by his evil inclination to a person who is on the level of a *beinoni*, of whom the Sages state, "*Beinonim* – this one and that one (both inclinations) rule them."⁶ Now is where the main battle with the evil inclination begins. He must now think what the evil inclination is saying and what the good inclination is saying.

EXAMPLE 1 – LEARNING MORE MUSSAR IN ELUL

For example, a person is in the month of *Elul* and he wants to prepare for the day of judgment, Rosh HaShanah, so he decides that he wants to learn more *mussar*, so that he will be well-prepared for Rosh HaShanah. Does this desire to learn more *mussar* stem from the *yetzer tov*, or from the *yetzer hora*?

At first, this appears to be a desire of our *yetzer tov*, because it is a desire to awaken ourselves, to become more spiritual, to prepare ourselves for the day of judgment. But on second thought, we can see that it may be coming from a desire to slacken off from in-depth Torah learning, and to instead go after our comfort zone, which, in this case, is to learn *mussar*, rather than learn *Gemara* in-depth.

Where is the *yetzer tov* involved with this, and where is the *yetzer hora* involved?

EXAMPLE 2 – HONORING PARENTS

Here is another example. The *mitzvah* of honoring parents is an important *mitzvah*. How much should a person honor his parents? This is an everyday issue in many people's lives. The *Gemara* says that it is impossible to fulfill this *mitzvah* perfectly, because it is very challenging, and therefore a person who tries his hardest at this *mitzvah* is considered praiseworthy. But, practically speaking, how much should a person honor his parents? Where do we draw the line?

If a person has a difficult father who deliberately causes him pain, he may not be obligated to honor him fully, and there are definitions about this. But in a normal case, how much should one honor his parents? What is the amount, and what are the boundaries where he stops? How is the *yetzer tov* involved in this, and how is the *yetzer hora* involved in this?

EXAMPLE 3 – CHESSED

Many people have a desire to do *chesed*. How far does one need to do *chesed*? If a *mitzvah* cannot be done through others and only through him – and the world is full of such cases – how far must one go?

Does a person need to go hospitals and old age homes to visit the sick and elderly who have no one to visit them, which is clearly an act of *chesed*? Does a person need to help all the widows and orphans in the world who have no one to help them? There are endless opportunities of *chesed* in the world, and a person could be busy with it from morning until night, without learning a word of Torah the entire day, and having no time other than to say *Kerias Shema* at morning and night. It is clear to anyone that a person learning Torah every day cannot be busy all day with *chesed*. But how much *chesed* exactly does one actually need to do?

THE CHALLENGE: DISCERNING THE VOICE OF THE YETZER TOV VS. THE VOICE OF THE YETZER HORA

We can give more examples if we want, but there are so many questions like this, to anyone who enters more inward into

life. The challenge is that people don't know where to draw the line between where the *yetzer tov* is and where the *yetzer hora* is. It is unclear.

When it comes to a clear-cut *mitzvah* or an obvious sin, it is clear if it's the *yetzer tov* or *yetzer hora*, and the only struggle is, which voice to listen to. But at least it is clear then which part belongs to the *yetzer hora* and which part belongs to the *yetzer tov*. But in many other areas of a person's life, it isn't so clear cut to a person, where the *yetzer hora* is and where the *yetzer tov* is.

What is the advice for this?

There are two fundamental ways, explained in the words of our Sages, and it is the depth of going out to "war against our enemies", as the Torah says in the beginning of *Parshas Ki Seitzei*.

THE FIRST WAY (THE RAMBAN'S ADVICE): CLARITY THROUGH LEARNING TORAH

The first way is written by the Ramban: Whenever a person is in doubt about what to do, and he sees two different sides and he isn't sure how to decide between the two options, he should learn Torah. From learning Torah, he receives the clarity to decide between the two options. This comes from the spiritual light of the Torah.

However, many people try this and they still don't get clarity, and they are back to where they started. What then does the Ramban mean?

The Ramban is only talking about a person who learns Torah *lishmah*, not a person who learns Torah *shelo lishmah*. When a person learns Torah *shelo lishmah*, he is learning Torah for himself, so he remains leaning towards only one side – which is himself. When that is the case, he does not get the "light of Torah" which brings clarity. He is learning Torah because it is his own personal will, and not because it is the will of the Creator. He is choosing the side that is more comfortable for him, so he stays on one side the whole time, and therefore he doesn't arrive at clarity.

In contrast to this, when one learns Torah *lishmah*, he is divested from any personal will of his own. As the *Nefesh HaChaim* says, learning Torah *lishmah* means to learn Torah for the sake of Torah, and even more so, to learn Torah for the sake of doing Hashem's will. He is divested of his "I" when he learns Torah. Then he receives a decision which comes from above his "I". This is the depth of the advice of the Ramban that a person receives clarity about his doubts by learning Torah.

But if a person learns *shelo lishmah*, he cannot receive such clarity from this higher place, because he is still within his "I".

Firstly, a person needs to be totally immersed in Torah, just as a person must be totally immersed in a *mikveh*. That is the elementary step, and it is the beginning of coming out of the "I", when learning Torah. Even more than this, one needs to learn *lishmah*, to learn Torah because it is the will of Hashem, and in this way he leaves the "I" totally as he is learning Torah. Then he can receive the "light of Torah" which gives him the ability to decide between his doubts, from a place that is above the "I".

Most people are learning Torah *shelo lishmah*, and therefore the advice of the Ramban doesn't help them achieve clarity, because the Ramban's advice can only work for a person who learns Torah *lishmah*. They don't get past their "I", and therefore they stay within their own will which comes from their "I" when they are learning Torah, so they remain on this one side.

THE SECOND WAY: NULLIFYING THE WILL

A second method of advice in clarifying our doubts is written in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, that the purpose of all our service on this world is to reach *hishtavus*, equality. This is personified by a person who nullifies all of his personal desires.

Whenever a person wants something, he is stuck in it. The evil inclination takes over whenever a person acts *shelo lishmah*, and as long as a person has a personal will for something, he is acting *shelo lishmah*

and the *yetzer hora* can control him. One needs to reach *hishtavus*, meaning he must be prepared to do the will of Hashem no matter what, and he must not personally want anything of his own. He must want to do something only if it is the will of Hashem to do it, otherwise, he shouldn't want to do it.

The classic example of this is a person who walks by a store and he smells the aroma of pork. Instead of saying, "This is disgusting, because it is a sin to eat it," [the Rambam says that] he must instead say, "Really I want to eat it, but what can I do already, if my Creator decreed I can't eat it!"

So one must be prepared to go against his will. He must have no personal will of his own. The *yetzer hora* uses the will of a person to want what it wants, and that is how it brings a person down. Therefore, one must leave his own will, by wanting nothing of his own, so that the *yetzer hora* cannot take hold on him.

When a person uses his power of *bechirah* (free will) when he is in the midst of a *nisayon* (spiritual struggle), by being prepared to nullify all of his desires, with a complete heart, to do only Hashem's will – this self-nullification is not just another quality to have, but it is the way to penetrate past the "I". This brings a person past his own "I", where there is nothing but Hashem's presence, and from that higher place, a person gains the power to decide between doubts.

From a deep understanding, the advice of the Ramban and the advice of the *Chovos HaLevovos* are the same advice, but they are just coming from two different angles. The Ramban is addressing the positive aspect which needs to be done: to learn Torah. The *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* is addressing which factor needs to be negated: that one should nullify his desires. Either method brings a person to the same place, where one penetrates past his "I".

The power of *lishmah* in Torah learning is when a person penetrates past the "I", and the same is for a person who nullifies

all of his desires, and he desires nothing other than to do Hashem's will (as explained above). In that way, he can decide between his doubts, from a place that is above the "I", not from himself.

IN SUMMARY OF THE TWO APPROACHES TO FIGHTING THE EVIL INCLINATION

The Sages state, "One cannot free himself from his own prison." How then can a person remove himself from the imprisoning voice of the evil inclination? How does one choose to do the right thing?

One way is to use the depth of using our power of *bechirah*, when the *yetzer hora* attacks, is, "Pull it into the *beis ha-midrash*"⁷, meaning that a person should learn Torah – and as explained above, this refers specifically to learning Torah *lishmah*. This changes one's personal will to be want solely the will of Hashem, and then he can overcome evil.

The other way is that a person can nullify each of his personal desires, so that he only wants to do Hashem's will.

When one has both these aspects together – learning Torah *lishmah*, and *bittul haratzon* (nullifying the will) - this is the depth of truly fighting the evil of the *yetzer hora*.

THE SECRET OF LIFE

One can reach this inner place in his soul of going to war against the *yetzer hora*. As *Rashi* in this week's *parshah* states, regarding *yefas toar* (the captive maidservant), "The Torah is only speaking here to counteract the *yetzer hora*."⁸

There is a deeper part to life, of penetrating past one's "I", and **herein is the secret to success in life. The secret is: Torah *lishmah*, and nullifying one's will for Hashem's will.** These are the two

powers that enable one to penetrate past his "I", and that he is how he can overcome the *yetzer hora*.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that only one who is above the garden maze can navigate his way through life. This means that a person needs to go above his own I, in order to succeed in life and at serving Hashem. Every time a person becomes confused, he can go above the confusion by going above his "I" [either through learning Torah *lishmah*, or through nullifying his will].

This is the depth of fighting the war against the *yetzer hora*, and this is the secret to all of man's inner *avodah*. There is a verse in the Torah, "I stand between you and Hashem", which is also interpreted on a deeper level that it is the "I" of a person which separates him from Hashem. That is why when one can get past his "I", he finds Hashem there....

The secret of our *avodah* during these days of Elul, "*Seek Hashem, where He is found*",⁹ is when one nullifies his very "I". That is how one reveals the *malchiyos* (kingship) of Hashem onto the world. To the degree one nullifies his "I", he breaks the barriers on his soul and he subjugates evil. He can then merit a truly "good judgment", and, most important, he can sense Hashem.

HASHEM DWELLS IN THE HEART

The sensing of one's own "I" conceals Hashem's presence from a person. Hence, the more that a person lessens his "I", he finds the deeper layer of the soul that is beyond his "I", the place where Hashem resides. This is the place of it which it said, "*I will dwell amongst them – within the hearts of each of them*",¹⁰ and that is the meaning of "*The rock of my heart and portion is G-d*",¹¹ and how "Hashem is the heart of the Jewish people."¹² Hash-

em resides in the "heart" of a Jew when one reaches the space in himself that is above the "I" – that is where the "heart" is, where He dwells.

OUR BATTLE - AND OUR GOAL

The good and evil inclinations, which also reside in the heart, are only on the outer layer of the heart. In the inner layer of the heart, there are no warring forces there. There is only Hashem's presence. The depth of our *avodah* requires us to battle the *yetzer hora* and conquer it from our hearts, but the purpose is to get to the inner depth of the heart, where there are no internal wars, no I, only Hashem's presence.

The Ramchal in *Mesillas Yescharim* laid out a ladder of steps in spiritual growth, beginning from *zehirus* (watchfulness) all the way until *kedushah*, sanctity. The depth of the final stage and the purpose, *kedushah*, is to reach the inner layer of the heart, where there is no "I". The war we have with our evil inclination is therefore not all that there is to our personal *avodah*. It is a stage that we have to traverse. The purpose of our *avodah* is to get to the inner layer of the heart, which is the place past one's own "I", and there he can find Hashem and sense His presence.

To succeed at the stage that comes before that - the war against the evil inclination - one needs to use either the power of Torah *lishmah*, or the power of *bittul haratzon*. And when one has both of these aspects together, he touches upon the true, complete level of sensing Hashem Himself, which is called "*no-chach pnei Hashem*".



7 Kiddushin 30b
8 Rashi to Devarim 21:11
9 Yeshayahy 55:6
10 Alshich to Shemos 25:8
11 Tehillim 73:26
12 Pesikta Rabbasi 15