

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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פרשת כי תצא

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האשה החשובה צפורה ציפא
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לכבוד היארציט כ"ה אב

פרשת כי תצא

פי-תצא למלחמה על-איביך ונתנו יהוה אלקיך בינך ושבית שביו: (דברים כ"א י')

When you go out to war against your enemy, and Hashem your G-d will deliver it into your hands, and you will capture its captive.

אשר קרך ... ואתה עיף ויגע (כ"ה י"ח)

That he [Amaleik] made you cold...and you were tired and worn out

The War Against the Yetzer Hara

This *parshah* begins by discussing the *halacha* of *Yefas To'ar*, a woman whom one sees in the camp of the enemy while waging war against them. Although the simple understanding of the *pessukim* is certainly true and binding as pertaining to an actual war with the enemy and a woman whom he sees, the Ohr Hachaim and other *mefarshim* understand that this *passuk* על כי תצא למלחמה על איביך/*When you go out to war against your enemy* is also hinting to a different war – the war against the *yetzer hara*.

Besides for this *mitzvah*, there are also other places where the Torah discusses wars against our enemies. At the end of the *parshah*, the Torah discusses the war we are commanded to wage against Amaleik. There, we are told never to forget the injustice which Amaleik exacted against us, and about the revenge we are commanded to ultimately take. A third place in which the Torah discusses wars is in Parshas Behaloscha. There, the Torah commands us that when facing an enemy who is battling us, we are to blow the *chatzotzros*/trumpets as we cry out to Hashem to save us.

It would seem that we can extend the *remez* of the Ohr Hachaim to all of these three instances in which the Torah discusses the war with the nations. The Torah hints to us about three different applications and settings in which the war with the *yetzer hara* can occur.

1. The War against Amaleik – to Dampen our Enthusiasm

Let us begin with the war against Amaleik. The language of the Torah in describing Amaleik's deed is אשר קרך/*that he made you cold*. This refers to the קרירות/*the coldness* which the *yetzer hara* tries to inject within us for our *Avodas Hashem*. Rather than the warmth and excitement that we should have for *mitzvos*, the *yetzer hara* tries to bring us to the state of עיף ויגע/*You were tired and worn out*. This refers to the feelings of lethargy and laziness that the *yetzer hara* constantly tries to implant within us to prevent us from achieving any accomplishments in *Avodas Hashem*.

When it is time to wake up in the morning, we feel extremely tired, and the yetzer hara presents all sorts of reasons why today specifically is one in which we absolutely cannot wake up on time for Shacharis.

We try to concentrate on our various brachos throughout our day, but our thoughts are really elsewhere, and we barely focus on the words we are uttering.

When we are presented with an opportunity to help another yid in need, we imagine all sorts of excuses as to why right then is simply not a good time for us.

In short, the *yetzer hara* seeks to remove our enthusiasm and drive for our Torah and *mitzvos*. This is not a battle which we can be fought once and won; it is rather a constant battle which we must engage in continuously.

I heard from the Matersdorfer Rav z"l, that the Chasam Sofer z"l attested about himself that any day in which he does not engage in limud mussar for a half-hour, he feels his yiras shamayim begin to cool off.

If the great Chasam Sofer could say this about himself, how much more do we on our own level need to constantly reinforce ourselves. The *passuk* teaches about this battle, *לֹא תִשְׁכַּח*/Do not forget! i.e. never forget to be constantly alert for this battle, because the *yetzer hara*, in turn, will not let up in the attempt to dampen our enthusiasm. We must accordingly constantly reinforce ourselves in this area.

The Ohr Hachaim explains in the beginning of the *parshah* that the *yetzer hara* is called *אויבך*/your enemy for this very reason. The *yetzer hara* is not compared to a warrior who is merely trying to conquer a certain territory and therefore wages war against its inhabitants. Such an individual will eventually desist from fighting when he sees that he is not being successful. The *yetzer hara*, however, is compared to a mortal enemy who will never stop trying to destroy his opponent. No matter how many times he fails, his hatred of his enemy will push him to try again. We must be aware of this reality, and we must gear ourselves never to let down our guard in this lifelong struggle.

2. כי תבוא מלחמה בארצכם – When the Yetzer Hara Attacks

The second type of battle with the *yetzer hara* is hinted at in Parshas Behaloscha. There, the *passuk* describes how Klal Yisroel should react when faced with a threat to them in their own land from an attacking enemy. The *passuk* begins (*במדבר י' ט'*) *כִּי תָבוֹא מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם*/When you come to war in your [own] land. What are we to do? The Torah instructs us, *וּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצוֹצְרוֹת*/You should blow on trumpets – and cry out to Hashem to save yourselves from this *tzarah*.

Just as the enemy can level an attack at times, there are times when the *yetzer hara* can throw an all-out attack against a person. A person is suddenly confronted with a desire and temptation to sin a manner which is far removed from his level of *Avodah*. The *yetzer hara* is trying to knock him down many levels below his current one.

What should a person do in this situation? He should 'blow on a trumpet', i.e. cry out to Hashem with all his might to save him and deliver him from this *yetzer hara*.

The Gemara (קדושין פ"א) tells the story of Rav Amram who was ascending the steps to the second floor of his home. On his way up the steps, he suddenly felt the urge to commit a sin while on the second floor.

Rav Amram let out a loud scream. "FIRE!"

The neighbors in all the surrounding houses all came running to put out the fire. When they arrived, they were surprised to discover that there was no fire; only the fire of the yetzer hara in Rav Amram's heart. At that point, the Chachamim were somewhat critical of Rav Amram's behavior.

"You have brought shame to us," they admonished him.

"True," Rav Amram replied, "my action did cause us shame. However, better that we be ashamed in this world rather than in the Next World [i.e. if I would have committed the sin]!"

Rav Amram understood the severity of a sin against Hashem, both from the standpoint of its essence as disobeying the word of Hashem, and from the standpoint of the ultimate shame that is destined for those who do sin. Such a situation calls for drastic, emergency measures.

When there is a fire raging, one will scream at the top of his lungs for help. He will not be concerned about his personal dignity, because such concerns are waived in the face of a life-threatening danger.

We, too, must act in a manner which similar to the behavior of Rav Amram. This does not mean that we should literally scream 'Fire' when faced with an attack, but we must still take whatever measures we can to protect ourselves. This obviously includes davening fervently to Hashem to save ourselves, and it can also include revealing the *nisayon* to a friend in order to cause a feeling of shame to be associated with failure in the *nisayon*. A person can also try to distance himself from the actual scene of the *nisayon*. All of these are possible avenues through which one can attempt to save himself.

Will a person be successful in defeating his *yetzer hara* in the above scenario? It is not guaranteed. The *passuk* merely teaches us that a person should cry out to Hashem and take any possible measures to save himself from the *yetzer hara*. That is the person's task at that time, and he must do the best he could in the situation. Certainly, Hashem will see his efforts in the matter, and whether or not he is successful, he will be rewarded for the effort he applied in attempting to succeed.

3. כי תצא למלחמה על איבך / Going out to the War against the Yetzer Hara

There is, however, a different circumstance of battling the *yetzer hara*, of which the *passuk* actually guarantees our success. This brings our discussion to the third sort of fight with the *yetzer hara* which is hinted at in the beginning of the *parshah*.

Our *parshah* begins with the words *כי תצא למלחמה על איבך* / *When you go out to war against your enemy*. The Ohr Hachaim explains that the literal meaning of the words *למלחמה* is 'When you go out to **the** war against your enemy.' **The war** is a reference to the ultimate war which every human being must fight and struggle throughout his lifetime – the war against the *yetzer hara*. As explained earlier, the *yetzer hara* is a true enemy, who does not let up in his battle throughout a person's lifetime. All wars, says the Ohr Hachaim, pale in comparison to this difficult war against one's most bitter and dangerous enemy.

Battling against Iran with all its nukes and weapons of mass destruction, is child's play compared to the difficult battle one must wage against the yetzer hara.

The *passuk* is speaking here of a person who goes out to war, i.e. he initiates his own battle against the *yetzer hara* out of his desire to reach new heights in *Avodas Hashem*, and to protect himself from future attacks. What happens when a person takes the initiative of going to war against this most formidable of enemies?

The *passuk* continues *וינתנו ד' אלקיך בידך* / *And Hashem your G-d will deliver it into your hands*. In this circumstance, Hashem issues a guarantee that the person will succeed. Obviously, the measure of the person's success will be in accordance with the amount of true effort he applied in this war; but a person is assured that when he puts in effort, Hashem will grant him success.

Shloimy recognizes in himself that he has a tremendous temptation for loshon hara. He decides to nip the problem in the bud by committing to learning the Sefer Chofetz Chaim seriously and diligently. If he seriously wishes to combat his problem, he is guaranteed by the Torah that he will see a measure of success. He will soon begin to see a change in himself. Where it was once difficult for him to control himself, he will now find it natural to do so, and he will even find himself repulsed when he sees others engaging in the aveirah.

The Emptiness of the Yetzer Hara's Pleasures

The *passuk* continues *ושבית שביי* / *and you will capture its captive*. What is meant by capturing the *yetzer hara's captive*? Shouldn't the *passuk* have said *ושבית אותו* / *and you will capture it* i.e. the *yetzer hara* itself? The Ohr Hachaim explains that, in truth, the *yetzer hara* has no inherent substance. There is no real sense of fulfillment or gratification when a pleasure is satisfied; the only true reality is the person's desire for the pleasure. That desire brings an urge to satisfy itself, and a person does not rest until he does so. The pleasure then, is not the reality; it is rather the mental desire that is real. The proof to this is the fact that after a person satisfies his urge, he has no more desire. If the pleasure

itself was of inherent value, there should never be an end to the happiness one feels when feeding the pleasure. It is because the only reality is the urge itself, that when the urge is fulfilled there is no more desire or pleasure.

Ari is enjoying the Shabbos Seudah in his home. He partakes of each course together with all the side dishes, with great appetite. There are plenty of dips to be had as well. Ari has the fish, the liver and eggs, and then the cholent. He then enjoys a scrumptious ice cream desert. As he is about to bentch, his wife suddenly gives a start.

"Oy," she cries, "I almost forgot! I made a special new recipe of salmon! I'll bring it out right now. Please, enjoy!"

Ari looks at his wife with pleading eyes. "Chani, maybe we can save it for Shalosh Seudos?" he begs. "I cannot look at another bite of food!"

This concept applies to all pleasures, and even to addictions. Those who are addicted to substances or behaviors do not have satisfaction from the pleasure; it is only that their urge is quieted for a time, until it resurfaces.¹

Based on this point, we can now understand: How does the *yetzer hara* have any power? By capturing people into his net. The *yetzer hara* was given the power to instill an urge and a desire into people to sin. When a person overcomes the *yetzer hara*, he is thus recapturing the captive of the *yetzer hara*, by quelling that artificial urge that the *yetzer hara* places within him. The *passuk* therefore refers to the victory over the *yetzer hara* as *ושבית שבי* / *and you will capture its captive*, i.e. controlling the desire that the *yetzer hara* instills.

Connection to the Shechinah

What happens when a person is successful in overcoming the *yetzer hara* in these different scenarios that we discussed? The *passuk* continues *וראית בשביה אשת יפת תאר וחשקת בה* / *And you will see within the captivity a beautiful woman, and you will desire her*. The Ohr Hachaim explains that this refers to the *neschama* of a person. As long as a person is enveloped in sin, the *neschama* is caked in filth and grime. When a person overcomes his *yetzer hara*, he is suddenly able to perceive the beauty of his own *neschama*, and he will reach a level of desire for *ruchniyus* that he never felt before.

Aside from a person's connection to his own *neschama* that he achieves through conquering his *yetzer hara*, he also attains a connection to the *Shechina*. As the Ohr Hachaim prefaces his remarks, the entire world is dependent on the actions of Klal Yisroel, and when a member of Klal Yisroel overcomes his *yetzer hara*, the entire Creation thereby reaches a state of intense joy. Moreover, HaKadosh Boruch Hu Himself rejoices with us in such times.

If a yid were to be asked, 'When is the time that you are the absolute closest to HaKadosh Boruch Hu, from all the points in your life?' The yid would undoubtedly reply, 'During Neilah on Yom Kippur. I fasted the whole day, I klapped al cheit, I cried to Hashem for forgiveness, and now, I am begging so fervently to be sealed in the Book of Life. How could I ever be closer to Hashem than that?'

This yid, however, is making a mistake. There is a time when he is even closer to Hashem than Neilah. When is this time? When he overcomes his *yetzer hara*! Whenever a person is successful in defeating his *yetzer hara*, Hashem is so pleased with him, and his level of closeness and connection to Hashem is unparalleled.

¹ Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l would explain that this is the reason that in Parshas Vayishlach, when Yaakov Avinu defeated the *malach* in his struggle, the *malach* refused to reveal his name to Yaakov, even after Yaakov requested it. The reason for this is that a name reflects the essence of a being. The *malach* with whom Yaakov struggled was the *yetzer hara*, who has no essence. His very essence is expressed in the question, *למה זה תשאל לשמי* / *'Why do you ask my name?'*, i.e. 'Just follow my instructions although there is no meaning to them!'

The Struggle is Important – Even If We Oftentimes Fail

The struggle with the *yetzer hara*, as explained, is lifelong. Throughout a person's day, and week, and month and year etc., there are constant struggles. This, though, would seem to pose a problem. A person is only human, and certainly there will be many instances where he will lose the battle. If our purpose is to defeat the *yetzer hara*, and that is what the world is dependent on, what good is there in a life in which there is so much failure in this account? Moreover, how are we to go through our lives, knowing that in such large percentage of instances, we seemingly do not fulfill our purpose of existence? Is that thought not enough to depress us, and perhaps to compel us to surrender before we even begin?

The answer to this question is that indeed, we are not expected to succeed in every single instance. As the *passuk* says (אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא (קהלת ז' כ') / *There is no person who is righteous in the world, that will do [only] good and not sin.* What we are expected to do is to try – and try our hardest. The struggle against the *yetzer hara* is itself a tremendous *kovod shamayim*, because we thus demonstrate that serving Hashem is a goal for which to struggle. When we do apply all our efforts, we will certainly succeed in some of the times, and through those times, we will be *zoche* to the closeness to the *Shechina* described earlier. The world was created for the goal of defeating the *yetzer hara* – and for the tenacious struggle to achieve that goal. When a person engages in battle with his *yetzer hara*, this itself brings joy to Creation.

The following incident and *mashal* will illustrate this point:

When I was in Eretz Yisroel, I once told the following mashal to a bachur who was struggling with his yetzer hara.

There was boy who had grown up his whole life on a farm, milking cows, growing crops, etc. He was an intelligent boy, but he had never seen any life other than the rural life of the farm.

As the boy grew older, his father promised him a trip to the city for his first time. He was so excited and curious to finally see the life in the big world first-hand.

Finally, the big day arrived. The boy and his father traveled in a carriage for a few hours, until they reached the outskirts of the city. Before entering the city, they noticed a large group of people running around quite excitedly. The boy walked up to investigate, and he noticed that there were two distinct groups of people. One group was attired in white clothing, while the other was wearing gray outfits. After observing for a few more minutes, the boy realized that both groups seemed to be fighting over one white ball with black spots on it. Each group seemed determined to have the ball, and they just wouldn't stop battling over it. The ball was continuously switching back and forth from one group to the other.

After watching this exchange for a while longer, the boy finally decided to take matters into his own hands. He ran into the playing field and grabbed the ball and headed off the field into the bleachers. Well, did his action cause an uproar! The entire crowd began screaming and chasing after him. In terror, he let go of the ball, while a look of utter confusion settled on his face. One of the players took pity on the boy and walked over to talk to him.

"What's the problem?" the player asked him.

"I couldn't understand why everyone just keeps on squabbling over one ball," the boy exclaimed in exasperation, "so I decided that I'll help matters out. I'll take the ball for now, and I'll buy a second one in the city. This way, I can return with two balls, one for each side, and everyone can be happy!"

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The player motioned for the boy to follow him. He took him into the dugout and showed a bag full of soccer balls. There must have been 30 balls in that bag.

Now the boy was completely baffled. "There are enough balls in there for everyone to have his own!" he cried. "What is everyone fighting over? Everyone has to have davka that ball? Come on, let everyone grow up and take another one! There's enough for everyone!"

Let me explain the story here," the player told him. "The point over here is not to actually have the ball. This is a game of soccer – the point is the fighting! The whole fun is when each side struggles for the ball against the resistance of the other team. If everyone had a ball, there would be no struggle, and the point would be lost. We're specifically looking for the struggle!

It is the same thing, I told the bachur, in regard to the yetzer hara. We were put into this world to struggle with the yetzer hara. It is kovod shamayim when we demonstrate that serving Hashem is worth struggling for, against the resistance of the yetzer hara. Whether we win or lose the battle is beside the point; what matters is that we should be struggling. It is when we surrender completely that is the problem. When we give up the fight, it is then that the yetzer hara has truly succeeded in leading us astray from our proper course in life.

About a week after I had this conversation with that bachur, I was giving a vaad to group of kollel yungerleit. I repeated the mashal that I had told this boy, and the lesson that went along with it. At that point, one of the yungerleit took issue with me.

"What you are saying is not true," he protested. "We are put on this world to defeat the yetzer hara; not just to fight it!"

Upon hearing this, I got on a bus to Bnei Brak and went straight to the home of Rav Shach z"l. I recounted to him the entire incident, starting with the bachur who was experiencing difficulties, and the mashal I had given him. I then told him about the yungerman who had disputed my words.

"What is the correct approach," I concluded. "Are we here for the struggle, or for the results?"

Rav Shach thoroughly enjoyed the mashal, and he agreed with me completely. "Zayer gut!" he told me. "Zug ehm as der ikar is di shluggen [Very good! Tell him that the important thing is the fighting]!"

In Review

Let us remember all the different forms that our battle with yetzer hara can assume and let us be prepared to deal with each one as necessary.

- There is the daily, constant struggle in which the yetzer hara tries to dampen and cool our enthusiasm in Avodas Hashem. We must constantly struggle to maintain our enthusiasm and 'bren'.
- There are the instances when the yetzer hara wages an all-out attack against us. In such times, we must resort to emergency measures. We must cry to Hashem to save us, and we must take any possible steps to save ourselves from the yetzer hara's clutches.
- And let us strive to take the offensive against the yetzer hara by going out to war against it, so that we can strive for new heights of ruchniyus. When we do take the

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initiative in this manner, we are even guaranteed a measure of success in defeating the *yetzer hara*.

Let us remember that the *yetzer hara* is the worst of enemies, who will never surrender or admit defeat. We need to be prepared for a life full of struggles. Let us remember that more than the victory over the *yetzer hara* that is expected of us, it is the struggle for such a victory that is our task in life. By struggling in this manner, we are bringing joy to HaKadosh Boruch Hu and to the entire Creation.

Finally, let us remember the great closeness to Hashem that we reach when we do overcome our *yetzer hara*. This connection to the *Shechinah*, of a level even more intense than during Neilah on Yom Kippur, should serve as a motivation in applying our greatest effort in this struggle against the *yetzer hara*.

Chodesh Elul

The *passuk* of *Yefas To'ar* continues to describe a period of weeping for months' time. ובכתה ירה ימים את אביה ואת אמה / *And she should weep over her father and mother for a month*. The Ohr Hachaim understands this as a *remez* to the month of Elul, when we should engage in *teshuvah* for our previous failings and intensify our efforts in our further battles with the *yetzer hara*.

Bez"V we should engage in an *Avodah* of *teshuvah* during this Elul and indeed fight this battle with all our might, and with this we should be *zoche* to a *k'sivah v'chasimah tovah*.

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