

אושר החיים

לע"נ ר' חיים יוסף ליב בן ר' שאול יצחק ז"ל

The Two Types of Yetzer Horah

We find two opinions in *Meseches Kiddushin* (30b) that describe the conduct of the *Yetzer Horah*. *Rabbi Yitzchak* describes it as being “*mischadeish alav bichol yom*”; it is continuously finding novel ways to come upon a person. *Rabbi Shimon ben Levi* relates that the *Yetzer Horah* is “*misgabeir alav bichol yom*”; he overpowers a person every day. So much so, that if not for the help of Hashem at his side, it would be impossible for this person to overcome him. We might ask, how can we explain these two views? How do they each understand the role of the *Yetzer Horah*?

In *Parshas Toldos* (25:22) it states, “*Vayisrotzizu habonim bikirba*” – the sons pressed to get out of *Rivka*’s womb. *Rashi* explains, that when she passed a place of idol worship, *Eisav* pressed to go out and when she passed a House of *Torah* study, *Yaakov* pressed to leave. The *Maharal* asks, we know that the *Yetzer Horah* only first overcomes a person after he is born into this world, as the *posuk* (*Bereishis* 4:7) implies, “*Lapesach chatas roveitz*”. If so, how did he have any influence over *Eisav* while in his mother’s womb? The *Maharal* explains, that the *Yetzer Horah* that causes one to sin only after he is born, is referring to the desire of man to sin; his *ta’avos*. However, while inside the womb of his mother, the fetus is only at the whim of his natural tendencies. This means, the *techunos hanefesh* or the innate characteristics of that person. Thus, when *Eisav* pushed to get out at the feeling of passing a house of *avodah zarah*, it was his natural instincts that caused this (see *Shiurei Chumash* from *Rav Shlomo Wolbe*).

What we can learn from the words of the *Maharal*, is that after a person is born, there are essentially two types of *Yetzer Horah* that influence mankind. One, is the *Yetzer Horah* that awaits to take advantage of the desires of a person. Man is comprised of both a *nefesh bahamis* and a *nefesh sichlis*. The *Yetzer Horah* is continuously seeking ways to arouse the *nefesh bahamis* of man by constantly supplying him with new desires. This may be the *Yetzer Horah* which *Rabbi Yitzchak* described as being “*mischadeish*” – coming anew – upon the person every day by presenting him with new *ta’avos*. The other *Yetzer Horah* is the one that makes use of the inner composition of each person. We each have *techunos* both for the good and for the bad that comprise our very essence. We may explain, it is true that before the child is born these natural tendencies are more dormant. However, once the person comes into this world, this *Yetzer Horah* tries to employ these inner deficiencies to overthrow one’s spiritual state. For example, the *Yetzer Horah* might not allow a person who has an innate trait of stinginess to give an appropriate amount to *tzedakah*. This may be what *Rabbi Shimon ben Levi* referred to as the *Yetzer Horah* that uses his great strength against us every day.

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פרשת תולדות תשפ"ה

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Regarding this second *Yetzer Horah*, *Rabbi Shimon* had said that it is impossible for a person to control it without special *siyata dishmaya*. It seems that the other opinion, *Rabbi Yitzchak*, implies that the *Yetzer Horah* to which he was referring – that of *ta'avos*, is indeed conquerable. This means, that inasmuch as this *Yetzer Horah* is “*mechadeish*” for us new wants and desires every day, we are capable of overcoming him through this same strength of “*chidush*”. Through our ability to be “*mechadeish*” in our *Torah* and *Tefilah*, to begin fresh and novel paths in *avodas Hashem*, and to continuously think new thoughts of *Torah*, we are undoubtedly able to vanquish the plans of this *Yetzer Horah*.

However, regarding the other *Yetzer Horah* that uses our *techunos hanefesh* in order to overcome us, it is much more difficult to completely find protection. This is because our natural tendencies is part of our very essence and is impossible to change. How then, are we meant to fight against the *Yetzer Horah* in this area?

The *Gr”a* (*Even Shleima*) guides us in how to deal with these challenges. He says (1:4) that it is necessary to create boundaries for ourselves. For example, if one has a tendency to become angry, then he should avoid situations such as zealotry, that will cause this characteristic to emerge. While others might not understand his conducts, he must choose directions in life that will help him avoid misusing his innate characteristics. The *Gr”a* instructs us further (1:7) that one should not try to uproot these inherent *midos* that are within him. Rather, he should train himself to use them in positive ways. For example, one who has an inner tendency to shed blood, should become a *shocheit* or a *mohel*, so as to use this *midah* in a kosher way or even for a *mitzva*. Similarly, the plan for one who easily gets angry, might be to first veer away from any circumstances that might bring him to anger, as we said earlier. But also, this hot-blooded nature can be applied to become a warm person to whomever he meets. Thus, he may use this *midah* to become unusually warm and caring to others.

With this understanding, we may now explain the beginning *pesukim* in this *parsha*. When *Eisav* was born, the *posuk* attests that he came out “*admoni*”, which *Rashi* explains was a sign that he would shed the blood of others. The *Torah* then calls him by the name *Eisav*. A few *pesukim* later, when he sees *Yaakov* cooking the lentils, *Eisav* says, “*Haliteini na min ha’adom ha’adom hazeh...*”. Only then, does the *Torah* call him by the name of *Edom*. The question may be asked, if we see that he was born *admoni*, meaning that he would be a murderer, why wasn’t this a justifiable reason to call him “*Edom*”? Why did it need to wait until later, when he gave in to his *ta'avos* of pouring the *adashim* down his throat? Moreover, the *Torah* does not even seem to call him by a name that represents his conduct, but rather by a name of the description of the food which he ate. What is the meaning of this?

Rather, we may explain that had the *Torah* given him the name of *Edom* because he had the *techunos hanefesh* to shed blood, one might contend that *Eisav* was not necessarily so bad. After all, everyone has tendencies both for good and for bad. As we said before, this *Yetzer Horah* is not something that is possible to completely rid oneself of, and needs the help of Hashem in how to navigate with these tendencies. *Eisav*, one might say, did not have the *siyata dishmaya* that was needed. However, when one sees the great *ta'avos* of *Eisav* and how he gave in with ease to this other *Yetzer Horah*, one cannot deny seeing his outstanding wickedness. Not only did he give in to the desire of grabbing what was before him. But we see his great passion and love for his desires in the fact that he not only spent the time to give a name for this food – “*Edom*”, but endearingly repeated it twice when he mentioned it – “*ha’edom, ha’edom hazeh*”! Indeed, this highlights the great wickedness of *Eisav harashah*.