

If he would not listen to her to lie beside her, to be with her. (39:10)

Yosef *HaTzaddik* suffered greatly from the attempt of Potifar's wife to seduce him. *Chazal* (*Yuma* 35b) describe her machinations in order to take Yosef down: "Every day, she would attempt to seduce him with words. The clothes she wore for him in the morning, she would not wear for him in the evening. The clothes she wore for him in the evening, she would not wear for him in the morning. After varying her wardrobe in order to arouse him, she said, 'Surrender yourself to me.' He responded, 'No!' She threatened to have him put in jail. He responded, 'Hashem frees the imprisoned.' 'I shall bend your proud stature.' 'Hashem straightens those who are bent.' She threatened to blind him. This, too, did not move him. She offered him a large sum of money - to no avail. Last, she asked him to lay beside her. He refused everything."

As a result of this incredible willpower, *Chazal* teach that Yosef *mechayev es ha'rashaim*, "Yosef obligates the wicked." For if we ask a wicked man, "Why did you not engage in Torah study?" and if he responds, 'I was handsome and entangled with my evil inclination,' we ask him, "are you any more handsome than Yosef?" In other words, Yosef had every reason to defer to his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. He did not, because he had tremendous willpower and self-control. **Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl**, notes that the wicked man's excuse, "I was entangled with my evil inclination," is a weak response. In fact, it is utterly foolish. Imagine if the *Mashgiach*, ethical supervisor of a *yeshiva*, were to approach a student and question his whereabouts the day before. "Why did you not attend *seder*, study period?" "*Rebbe*," the student would reply, "I would have come, but I was very busy," "What were you doing that had greater importance than attending the study period?" "I was spending time at the local bar with a group of hooligans." The excuse (where he was) is certainly much worse than not attending *seder* – or is it?

In order to underscore the foolishness of the excuse, *Rav Blazer* cites another analogy from the **Ben Ish Chai**. One *erev Yom Kippur*, a man came before the *Rav* of the city with a request for assistance in performing *teshuvah*, repenting for a sin that he had recently committed. "What *aveirah*, sin, did you commit?" the *Rav* asked. "I did not wash *mayim achronim*," wash hands after a meal prior to *bentching*.

"Why did you not wash *mayim achronim*?" True, it is not right, but it is not the worst of sins. "I did not wash *mayim achronim*, because I did not wash *mayim rishonim*." (In other words, he did not wash prior to eating.) He figured that if he did not wash before the meal, why should he bother washing after the meal?

The truth was slowly emerging. "Why did you not wash before the meal?" the *Rav* asked. "The truth is that I felt uncomfortable washing, since I was about to eat unkosher food," the sinner replied. "I do not understand," the *Rav* asked. "Out of all the restaurants in the city, why did you select an unkosher restaurant?" "I had no alternative," the man replied. "It was *Shabbos*, and all of

the kosher establishments were closed.”

Yet, this man came to perform *teshuvah* for not washing *mayim achronim*. Is it different than the wicked person who claims that he did not learn Torah because he was entangled with his *yetzer hora*? It is like trading one *aveirah* for another, which, quite possibly, is worse than the first. Imagine a person saying, “I could not learn Torah, because I was busy committing various sins.”

Rav Blazer explains that the sin of *bitul* Torah, wasting time from learning Torah, is worse. “Entangled with my *yetzer hora*” is a sin, but it does not come close in gravity to the sin of not learning Torah. The wicked person is willing to accept the punishment for the sin of deferring to his evil inclination –as long he does not have to answer for wasting time from learning Torah.

The *Ben Ish Chai* underscores the *aveirah* of *bitul* Torah with the following observations. Whenever we have reason to identify a person by name, it always includes his father’s name. Hence, Yosef *ben* Shimon. This occurs when we call someone up to the Torah, an inscription on a tombstone, and signing one’s name as a witness. When we pray for someone who is ill, we always use his mother’s name. Why is this?

The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that the father also might carry the weight of the sin of *bitul* Torah. Therefore, when a person is ill and one wants to circumvent the possibility of a negative merit, he does not use the father’s name. A woman does not have the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*. Thus, she does not transgress the sin of *bitul* Torah.

What about neglecting Torah study is so condemning? *Chazal* say in *Kiddushin* 30b, *Barasi yetzer hora barasi* Torah *tavlin*, “I created the evil inclination; I created the Torah as a cure/antidote (to save one from the effects of the *yetzer hora*).” In other words, when the *rasha* asserts that he could not learn, because he was entangled with deferring to his passions, we say to him, “Had you studied Torah, it would have refined you, so that the *yetzer hora* would have no effect on you.”

When one learns Torah, he establishes a relationship with its Divine Author, Hashem. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 8a) teach that, since the *Bais HaMikdash* has been destroyed, Hashem has only one place in the world where His Presence is to be found – the four *amos shel halachah* – in the *bais hamedrash* where people are learning. Each of our *batei medrash* is a mini *Bais Hamikdash*, as Hashem is to be found therein. Thus, when a person learns Torah, he is establishing a relationship with the Almighty. The *yetzer hora* cannot influence an individual who is in direct contact with Hashem.