

## **“Sin rests at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it.” (4:7)**

Herein lies the folly of man. True, the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, is constantly on guard, looking for ways to entice us into sin. Man, however, does not have to succumb to its blandishments. He can prevail – if he really wants to: In *Rashi*'s immortal words, *Im tirtzeh tisgaber alav*. “If you want to, you will overcome it.” It is all up to us. If we want, we will succeed; if our desire to succeed is lackadaisical, we will fall into the clutches of the *yetzer hara*. The following episode gives meaning to the essential idea that it is all up to us.

*Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, came to visit his good friend from days past, *Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl*, who, at the time, was *Mashgiach* in Ponevez. *Rav Chatzkel* was quite happy with the visit, especially since *Rav Elya* had acquiesced to deliver a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, to the students of Ponevez. This was a special treat, since *Rav Elya* was a powerful and prolific orator. *Rav Elya* began his lecture with an incident that had taken place some thirty years earlier, in a small town in Lithuania. The gentile population's enmity towards the Jewish community was rabid. They would do anything to create a commotion, to start a pogrom; anything to rid themselves of the accursed Jews. They decided upon the usual, proven approach: a blood libel. One of their own murdered a young gentile child and threw his body in the back of the town's *shul*. Was more damaging proof than this needed to show that the Jews were a nation of murderers who preyed on gentile children?!

Word spread rapidly throughout both the Jewish and gentile communities. The gentiles were preparing for a mass slaughter, but times had changed. They could no longer decide at will to murder Jews. There were laws and authorities who administered these laws. The gentile mob came before the authorities, ready to “do their thing”, only to discover that the authorities were not going to permit them to carry out wanton murder. They would have to investigate the matter. If the Jews were guilty, the perpetrators would be punished. First, however, they needed conclusive proof that the Jews were behind this brutal slaying.

In those days, their idea of advanced criminal investigative science was the use of a special dog. This dog, the authorities claimed, was very gifted. One whiff of the body of the deceased, and this “brilliant” dog could immediately ferret out the murderer. The perpetrator was as good as behind bars. Since it was already getting dark, they decided to conduct their investigation the next day.

Meanwhile, the entire Jewish community crowded into the *shul* and began pouring out their hearts to the Almighty. Who knew what this anti-Semitic dog would discover? How could they rely on a dog? What if the dog was mistaken? They prayed throughout the night for Heavenly mercy.

The next morning, the entire town gathered in the town square: the gentiles in anticipation; the Jews in fear and dread. The corpse was brought to the square, after which the dog took a few

sniffs and began to walk around the people. It stopped at the feet of one of the town's gentile hooligans, who – after some “convincing” by the authorities – confessed to the murder. He was hauled away to jail, and the Jews let out a sigh of relief. They all went to the *shul* amid laughter and tears, to thank Hashem for saving them.

*Rav Elya* concluded the story, and, in a nonchalant tone, asked the students, “What kind of *Olam Habba*, Heavenly reward, did this dog deserve for saving an entire Jewish community? Did he receive a doghouse made of gold with the finest dog food? Clearly not! He received nothing! Why? Because he did nothing! Since he had no *bechirah*, ability to choose between right and wrong, he was compelled to act truthfully. He acted according to his nature. For that there is no reward!”

Suddenly, *Rav Elya* raised his voice and declared, “*Morai v'rabosai*, My friends! Who knows if we are not very much like that dog? Who knows if we are not, in fact, serving Hashem with dispassionate complacency and out of habit, just to fulfill our obligation? Do we really care? How are we going to stand before the Creator? What will we say?”

This is what the *pasuk* is teaching us. We make choices, and we live with the consequences of our choices. There are those who choose to go through life as “floaters”, floating from one religious observance to another, never really caring what they say or do. While it is nice that they attend, is that *davening*? Is that learning? We can either tell the *yetzer hara* to get off our case, or we can fall prey to its guile. It is all up to us. Are we human beings with common sense, ambition and resolution, or are we weak and no better than a trained dog? Our actions indicate the path we have chosen.