

They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in Kivros HaTaavah. (33:16)

The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, works overtime in its efforts to sway us to sin. Hashem has provided us with a panacea to help us circumvent/overcome the allure of the *yetzer hora*: Torah. Our Torah is the *tavlin*, antidote, to protect us from falling into the *yetzer hora*'s grasp. This is alluded to in our *pasuk*. Once *Klal Yisrael* leaves *Sinai*, meaning the Torah which was given at *Har Sinai*, they fall into the clutches of *Kivros HaTaavah*, graves of lust/desire. Passion, lust, desire, hate, envy, anger: all of these negative character traits destroy a person. One's pursuit of passion, his obsession with various avenues that promote satisfaction so that he is able to quell the desires that overwhelm him, are all tools of the *yetzer hora*-which he employs in his attempt to manipulate and eventually control our lives.

In *Sefer Tehillim* (19:8-9), David *Hamelech* writes: *Toras Hashem temimah meshivas nefesh*, "The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul." In his commentary to *Sefer Tehillim*, *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, writes, "Only by subordinating themselves to the will of Hashem can His creatures on earth become that which they should be and fulfill the purpose that gives meaning to their existence." Man is in contrast with other living things who function in accordance with their instinctual drives and proclivities; hence, they are unable to choose between good and evil – which is the unique gift of freedom of choice given to man. "Man has been ennobled by the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem, for He has implanted within him a Divine spark of His own free personal Being."

Instinctively, man has the capacity to follow his animal drives which would denigrate him to animal status. This is the goal of the *yetzer hora*. Hashem protected us with a spiritual antibody, an antidote for overcoming the effect of the *yetzer hora*. Hashem's laws were Heavenly-designed to be in perfect accord with the nature and purpose of the creatures with which they deal, and also the nature and calling of ourselves to whom they were given.

Barasi yetzer hora, Basrasi Torah tavlin, "I created the evil inclination, I created the Torah as its antidote." When a person studies Torah, he reinforces his spiritual antibodies which allow him to fend off the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. Torah is *mesamchei lev*, rejoices the heart, because it energizes the individual and strengthens him. When one learns Torah, he is overcome with a feeling of quiet joy and serenity in the knowledge that he is doing what is expected of him. True joy comes with success. Success comes with fulfilling the will of Hashem. Otherwise, why are we here? A life of duty fulfilled; a life of obedience to the Torah; a life of service to Hashem: that is a life of joy. Those who would tend to debate this verity – should try it.

In a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl*, quotes a frightening statement from *Rabbeinu Yonah*. In fact, the *Mashgiach (Kamenitz)* comments, "I believe that if we did not have any *mussar* (ethical character refinement) texts, other than only this (one) comment from *Rabbeinu Yonah*, it would suffice to arouse a person to overcome his *yetzer hora*." *Rabbeinu*

Yonah writes: “Know that the soul of the *rasha*, wicked man, whose only desire in this lifetime is for physical pleasures and not at all for the service of his Creator, will descend downwards at its death to the earth, the place of its desires. Its end will follow the pattern of the dust, descending and not rising. His soul, however, will be brought up to the Heaven for judgment and justice, and to see how it exchanged the Heavens for the abyss... it will then descend downwards to the earth... as its nature, as a stone falls to the ground after it is thrown.”

We are presented with an entirely different picture of the *rasha*. He may very well be an observant Jew who attends *minyan*, *davens*, learns Torah and observes *mitzvos* – but demonstrates neither desire for nor interest in, his spiritual endeavors. His affinity is for the physical/material delights of this world. Such a person has the soul of a *rasha* within him.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, explains this phenomenon. Just as a person’s body is covered with clothing, so, too, is his soul. The spiritual raiment of the *neshamah*, soul, is fashioned from the individual’s *middos*, character traits. If his *middos* are spiritual in nature, his soul rises up to Heaven. If, however, the attire of his soul is comprised of the here-and-now, the temporal physical/material delights and frivolities of this world, it must remain in the world of materialism. It cannot separate itself from its clothing. It is, thus, relegated to remain with its clothing. Sad, but true.

They journeyed from *Har Sinai* and, as a result, ended in the graves of desire. The desire that had become so much a part of their lives ended up as their graves. They were buried in desire and ultimately remained buried. How true this is. One only has to listen to the news to hear of those who succumb to the various chemical substances that plague our youth, as well as our middle-agers – and seniors. It is a plague of epic proportions, often beginning with alcohol addiction, fostered through such unknowing opportunities as a *kiddush*, get togethers, various *simchos*, and then ratchets up to more concrete, harder substances. Pain and depression might be temporarily relieved, but the alternative is far more permanent – and deadly.

Torah remains the antidote. Torah is the panacea, but only if it is studied properly. When one imbibes the sweetness of Torah, when he realizes that he is studying from Hashem, he has discovered the antidote, he lives the panacea. Our Torah directs us to study Torah and transmit it to the next generation. History has proven time and again that, when we slack off in our Torah study, we open ourselves up to every spiritual dysfunction, with assimilation at the top of the list. Torah links the Jew with G-d – a link that becomes concretized the more that one learns.

When we study Torah, we are not confronting an archaic, abstract educational text. We are living Torah. We are engaged in discovering the very essence of Judaism: what makes it come alive; and what sustains it. When we study Torah, we are living Torah. This idea is underscored in the following story.

In “At His Rebbe’s Side,” *Rav Yehoshua Liff* relates an incident which occurred when he planned to

move his *yeshivah* (Ner Yaakov) to the Katamon section of Yerushalayim. The *baal habatim*, directors, had rented a suitable building and were assured that it was properly zoned, but, after investing considerable funds, time and effort, they were informed a mere few days prior to the beginning of the *zman*, semester, that the building was zoned only for residences. The building had served as a school building for many years, but, as a *yeshivah*, it would offend the many non-observant members of the community. They would have to go to court in order to obtain proper zoning. Their attorney warned them that their chances of winning the case were next to zero. They, of course, did not factor in that Hashem still was in control – even in Katamon.

The morning of the court date, Rav Liff davened with the *minyán* of *Horav* Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. After *davening*, he related his predicament to the sage and asked for his blessing. Rav Shlomo Zalman replied, “*Mir darfen davenen*; we must pray.”

Taking his advice, Rav Liff began to recite *Tehillim* fervently, as he waited outside the courtroom. Prior to entry, he was informed by his lawyer that there had been a change in judges. His previously assigned judge had been replaced by Judge Eliyahu ben Zimra, a religious Jew who held a high position in the country’s legal circles.

The judge began the case with his own musings. “I have been living in Katamon for the past fifteen years and remember well that this building has been used as a school in the past. Apparently, it bothered no one until the decision was made to allow a *yeshivah* to move into the neighborhood. After inquiring as to how many students the *yeshivah* would cater to, when was to be its opening date, and how much money Rav Liff had expended for renovations, the judge said he needed a few hours to consider the matter. The judge went to his chambers and Rav Liff (in accordance with Rav Shlomo Zalman’s instructions) began to recite *Tehillim*.

When the judge returned, he faced his audience and asked a rhetorical question, “*Mah zeh yeshivah? What is a yeshivah?*” Answering his own question, he said, “A *yeshivah* is a place where one studies Torah. A *yeshivah* is a place where one lives Torah. It is a house dedicated to Jewish living. It is a house of life” (I have altered the text from the book by design. A *pasuk* is quoted which I have been unable to locate. Nonetheless, the idea remains the same. One cannot view a *yeshivah* through the secular lens of an educational institution. One does not merely learn in a *yeshivah*; he lives in a *yeshivah*.)

“What does a Jew do in his home?” the judge asked. “*Hu lomeid*; he studies Torah” (referring to the *yeshivah* which supplants the home as a domicile for imbibing Torah). “He may learn with a study partner or he may teach a class.” (It is all a form of living in a house). “Based upon these considerations, I feel there is no legal reason to impede the building in question to be used as a ‘Jewish home’ in the way a Jewish home is used: for the study of Torah and *tefillah*.”

When Rav Liff heard the incredible news, he immediately called the home of Rav Shlomo Zalman. His grandson answered the phone, “Please tell the *zaide*, grandfather, that we won the case!” he

exclaimed. "*Der zaide vart der gantzer tzeit*, (my grandfather has been waiting this entire time.) He has not stopped *davening* for you since this morning!"

Apparently, when *Rav Shlomo Zalman* had said, "*Mir dürfen davenin*," he included himself.