

And Rachel took the teraphim and put them into the camel's pack-saddle and sat upon them. (31:34)

Rachel sat upon Lavan's idols, which she had stolen, in an attempt to hide them. Lavan did not ask her to rise when she explained to him that the way of women was upon her. The *Zohar Ha'kadosh*, however, reveals to us an entirely new explanation for Rachel's actions. She sat upon the idols because of her utter contempt for them. The *teraphim* were like many of the other idols which also had the ability to serve as mediums for divining the future. Rachel stole the *teraphim*, so that Lavan could not use them to find out where Yaakov had gone. In order to ensure that there would no longer be any supernatural powers of impurity left in the *teraphim*, Rachel sat upon them, thereby humiliating and degrading them. Why did she do this? Was it not sufficient merely to remove them from the house and bury them in the ground? Their entire power is founded in the respect and dignity that one accords them. Attributing power to them bestows power upon them. Thus, the *Zohar* explains, by degrading the *teraphim*, Rachel rendered them powerless.

Horav Avigdor Nebentzhal, Shlita, observes that this idea applies similarly to various other "forces" which control our lives. They have an effect on us only as long as we ascribe significance to them. Probably the greatest of these forces is the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, whose goal it is to ensnare us in its clutches. *Chazal* tell us that the *yetzer hora* is compared to the *se'or she'b'issa*, yeast/rising agent of dough; it provokes a person to "rise" in arrogance and defiance to sin in the same manner that yeast causes dough to swell and rise up. The *Chachmei Ha'kaballah* state that the nullification of *chametz* prior to *Pesach* symbolizes -- and thus encourages -- our nullification of the *yetzer hora* within us. Indeed, according to Biblical law, it is sufficient to be "*mevatei*," nullify, one's *chametz*, so that he will no longer transgress the prohibition of having *chametz* in his possession on *Pesach*. Rabbinic law added the prerequisite of burning the *chametz* as an additional precaution in the event one were to find *chametz* in his possession.

Why is this? Why is nullification considered a sufficient form of purging *chametz* from our midst? *Horav* Nebentzhal suggests that it is consistent with the nature of *chametz*. Dough becomes *chametz* as a result of its being "blown up," just as misplaced arrogance causes one to inflate himself out of realistic proportion. By nullifying the *chametz*, the Jew negates any significance it may have. Thus, the reason for its prohibition has been undermined. One's lack of recognition of the *chametz* removes its power; the *se'or she'b'issa* no longer has any effect; it is no longer "*chametz*." This parallels the *yetzer hora* which has an effect only as long as one ascribes *chashivus*, importance/eminence, to it. When we attribute power to a force of impurity such as the *yetzer hora*, we are granting it the capacity to influence us. The evil inclination can sway only those who are inclined to heed it.