

Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, because I fear him. (32:12)

Rashi explains the apparent redundancy continued in the *pasuk*: *Miyad achi, miyad Eisav*, “From the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav.” Sometimes Eisav acts like my brother, showing love and friendship which conceal his true, nefarious intentions. Other times Eisav acts like the evil person that he is, challenging me and stirring up adversity for me to overcome. Both the **Kedushas Levi** and the **Chozeh m’Lublin** write that Yaakov *Avinu* prayed to Hashem to spare him the challenge of Eisav, the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, who was coming at him in the form of Eisav, his “dear” brother, as if to assist him in his *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, when, in fact, he was seeking to impugn the integrity of his service: *Ki yarei anochi*, “Because I fear him”. It is very difficult to triumph over the guile of the *yetzer hora* who comes (supposedly) to help us in our *avodas Hashem*.

The source of this concept (fear of the ability of the *yetzer hora* to taint our service to Hashem) is to be found in a Torah thought, originating from the **Baal Shem Tov, zl**, in his commentary to a *halachic* statement *Chazal* make in the *Talmud Shabbos* 75a: “One who slaughters (an animal or fowl), what sin (of the thirty-nine *avos melachos*, main categories of prohibited labor on Shabbos) does he transgress? *Rav* says (he is guilty of) *tzovea*, dyeing. “When one slaughters, he releases blood from the animal which, in turn, stains its body.” *Tosfos* comments, “*A’Shochet d’alma kai*”; this is a reference to ‘worldly/mundane/average’ slaughterer.” Simply, *Tosfos* is teaching that this *halachah* applies to anyone who slaughters an animal on Shabbos. The *Baal Shem Tov* makes a play on words, suggesting that this refers to the *shochet*, slaughterer, who slaughtered *alma* – the world; in other words, the *yetzer hora*, who, by its very manipulations, destroys lives and undermines spiritual potentials. The *Talmud* asks: “What sin does the *shochet/yetzer hora* commit? After all, is this not the purpose of his creation?” *Rav* responds, “*Mishum tzove’a*.” What does dyeing have to do with the *yetzer hora*?

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, explains that, veritably, the *yetzer hora* employs two different approaches in its effort to ensnare the unsuspecting and weak. At times, the *yetzer hora* does not conceal its evil intentions, overtly convincing its weak subject to sin. No guile is necessary – just plain old- fashioned *chutzpah*. Obviously, the *yetzer hora* is dealing with a person who is susceptible to sin and amenable to transgression, who has no qualms about satisfying his passions, gratifying his lustful desire. He is ready and willing, just waiting for that little nudge from the *yetzer hora*.

The advantage of this approach is that someone who is not weak and willing will see it coming and act accordingly to eschew the evil-inclination’s efforts. He will place himself firmly in the *bais hamedrash*, anchor himself to a spiritual bedrock and be unmoved by advances of the *yetzer hora*. When the *yetzer hora* employs the alternative approach, however, one should fear it and should make use of every avenue of escape and buttress himself against it with whatever ammunition he

has available. This is when the *yetzer hora* comes as a *tzove'a*, when he paints an image of *mitzvah* over the most odious sin. He uses guile to convince the person that, not only is this act not sinful, but it is, indeed, a *mitzvah* of the highest order.

Hashem created the *yetzer hora* for a purpose: to balance man's free will, so that he has a choice: either to act appropriately; or to turn to the path of evil. Thus, when man chooses to do good, he justly earns reward. He had a choice, and he made the correct decision. Hashem instructed the *yetzer hora* to reveal to man that he is leading him toward sin, but to convince him that sin is a choice. Why live the life of a goody-goody? One should have fun and do what he wants, not what he is told. This approach allows man to make a rational decision concerning whether he wants to live a spiritually correct life or one devoted to gratifying his physical desires.

The *yetzer hora*, however, takes his license to lead man astray one step further. Not satisfied with presenting sin in all of its ignominious glory, the *yetzer hora* would rather reach a different crowd: observant, committed, virtuous, but unsuspecting Jews, whom the anathema of duplicity and wiliness are beyond. This type of individual wants so much to please that he falls for anything. Discernment is not one of his most outstanding qualities, and faith in people is based upon a friendly smile. The *yetzer hora* can convince this person that a heinous transgression is actually appropriate behavior which will ultimately facilitate and reinforce Judaism. Is this not how the secular strains of Judaism began? The people convinced themselves that they were actually endeavoring to save Judaism. It is not much different today, with the modernists who feel that Judaism cannot survive unless it meets the challenges of our modern hedonistic society – and acquiesces to them. Their first error is in thinking that Judaism needs to be saved. Their second mistake is in thinking that they are the anointed ones who will succeed in doing so by modernizing *halachah*. Judaism does not need to be saved. It is the Jews who require saving, and, by deferring to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, they will only succeed in undermining and eventually impugning the integrity of our faith.

This is what our Patriarch feared most. He could handle Eisav when he came towards him as Eisav. It is when he donned the rabbinic garb of Yaakov and articulated all the right words and intoned all the proper blessings – all for the purpose of establishing his credibility, so that he could later worm his way into acceptance on par with the reputable Torah leadership – that Yaakov became anxious. We have no greater danger to our people's religious survival than the danger from within, from the *tzove'a* who paints himself as Yaakov, but *de facto* represents the antithesis of what the Patriarch stood for.