

Now Rachel had taken the terafim, put them into the camel's packsaddle and sat on them. (31:34)

There is no question that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, maintains a powerful hold on man. As much as we try to extricate ourselves from its grip, it is very difficult. It is a never-ending battle from which we often do not emerge triumphant. Is there a strategy for overcoming the blandishments offered up by the *yetzer hora* with which it ensnares us? Why do some fall prey, while others survive the battle, often unscathed? In *Mayanei HaChaim*, **Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, shares with us his secret for success.

Lavan was searching for the *terafim*, his little idols, unaware that his daughter, Rachel *Imeinu* had hidden them in the saddlebags of the camel upon which she was riding. The question which many commentators touch upon is an obvious one: Why did she bother hiding them? Why did she not smash them, burn them, throw them into a river? **Ibn Ezra** explains that, by burning them, she was attributing significance to them. When one is compelled to destroy something, it is an indication that that item has value, is of consequence. This is the last thing that Rachel wanted to do. The *terafim* were nothing. They were meaningless. An idol's relevance is determined by the way it is treated by intelligent people. If it is treated as a non-entity, it has no significance. If, however, a person feels that the idol must literally be destroyed, it shows that he attributes an element of distinction to it.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* states that one does not recite the *Motzoei Shabbos Havdalah* prayer over a candle belonging to a gentile. The simple reason for this *halachah* is that a candle owned by a gentile has not “rested” on *Shabbos*. Second, by using a candle that belongs to a gentile, one lends distinction to the gentile. With regard to Hashem, he has no relevance.

Rav Zaitchik suggests that herein lies the “strategy,” the maneuver for overcoming the *yetzer hora*. Just as Rachel was compelled to contend with her father's *terafim*, each and every one of us is challenged by his own personal *avodah zarah*, idol. It is called the *yetzer hora*. Yes, the evil-inclination within each and every one of us is an idol to which we regrettably defer. This is worship! One does not have to genuflect before the idol to be considered to be an idol worshipper. If one has no control over himself, if his *yetzer hora* exerts its dominance over him, he is a slave to an idol – no more and no less!

The key to winning the war against the *yetzer hora* is to apply Rachel's strategy: denigrate it; deprive it of its value; devoid it of significance, diminish its relevance. Sadly, we find this stratagem to be difficult. When the *yetzer hora* waves the “carrot” in front of our eyes, we are prepared to do anything.

The *yetzer hora* entices us with *kavod*, honor, tempts us with the fulfillment of our most base desires, convinces us that we can have it all. But what does “all” really mean? Is it of value? Is

honor real? Does living out our fantasies really make for true self-satisfaction? It is all a game to which the unknowing give relevance. If we would apply even a modicum of intelligence, we would see how meaningless and purposeless it all is. When we have reached that point, the *yetzer hora* becomes putty in our hands. After all, the *yetzer hora* has only the significance which we give to it.