

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound your head and you will bit his heel. (3:15)

The **Midrash HaNe'elam** applies a homiletic rendering to this *pasuk* and uses it as a tactic for prevailing over the blandishments of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. The serpent/*yetzer hora*/symbol of evil seduces the Jew to trample on the *mitzvos* with his *eikav*, heel. The Jew is able to triumph over him by using his *rosh*, head, and applying himself to the study of Torah. Why the heel? I think it is because the *yetzer hora* knows that if the *mitzvah* “gets off the ground,” the Jew will study it and eventually embrace it. It is best not to take the chance, and trample it while his foot remains poised over it. This is why our enemies, from without and from within, have fought against the study of Torah. By allowing the Jew access to the Torah is to create the necessary opening in which the Jew can learn about and understand what he has been deprived of. The problem is getting the secular Jew to “come in from the cold,” attend a Torah class. Once he has come, the light of Torah will guide his return home.

The **Lachmei Todah** offers an alternative exegesis to explain the concept of the *eikav*, heel, with regard to *mitzvah* performance. He explains that Hashem was telling the serpent, “If you attempt to cause the Jew to sin with his *rosh*, head, with his entire body, he will triumph over you. The Jew will not turn away with his whole body; he will not directly deviate from Hashem’s will. A Jew, however, sins neither wholeheartedly, nor maliciously. If you instigate him to sin with his “heel,” which is an allusion to the Rabbinic fences that have been erected around the *mitzvos Lo Saase*, prohibitive commandments, to protect and discourage us from transgressing the entire sin, you will succeed.” This, of course, in turn generates the domino effect of going beyond the fences and sinning without the catalyst.

Is this not how the primordial serpent misled Chavah? He began by exhorting her to distance herself from the tree, stay away from the object of sin. Heaven-forbid she should she touch the tree. G-d would not want that. Then, he pushed her against the tree and – lo and behold – nothing happened. No bolt of lightning descended from Heaven to strike her. Apparently, she received no punishment for touching, so there must, likewise, be no punishment for eating. Chavah thought about it for a moment and decided that the serpent was correct: There probably was nothing wrong with eating the fruit. Once she took her first bite and quickly noticed how sweet and delicious the fruit was, she was trapped. She broke through the fence; the rest is history.

Sadly, this has been the tragedy of Jewish observance – or lack thereof – throughout history. Whenever we break fences, it becomes the precursor for total deviation and full-fledged sin. The *yetzer hora* does not have the power to ensnare us to sin, but he does have the ability to convince those who are weak to overlook and disregard the *gedarim*, fences.

If we go back in time a few hundred years, we may observe this approach as the root of the

scourge that ate away at the underpinnings of Orthodoxy in Germany. The *Haskalah* was inspired by the European Enlightenment with a subtle Jewish bend to it. The term *Haskalah* is derived from *seichal*, reason, intellect, thus promoting a movement based upon rationality. Everything had to make sense, fit into the parameters of reason and intellect. Jews were encouraged to think outside the box and, thus, eschew anything that was beyond the scope of their comprehension. Understandably, this undermines belief in the Torah, which, being Divinely authored, is beyond the limited comprehension of the human mind. This is how it first started.

The next step in breaking down the barriers established for our protection was the rejection of *Yiddish*, our *mama lashon*, mother tongue, which had been the Jew's choice of language since the fourteenth century. German became the chosen language, since, as the secularists claimed, it was the language of culture and breeding, thus granting the Jews access to German literature and eventual acceptance by the outside world. Indeed, Moses Mendelssohn, the ideologue and progenitor of *Haskalah* and its reformation of Torah Judaism, authored a controversial literary venture, a commentary to *Tanach*, called *Biur*, which was a translation of the *Tanach* into German. The German text was printed in Hebrew letters, instead of the usual Roman Alphabet. This would facilitate easier reading and comprehension, allowing the student to develop greater proficiency in the German language. Unlike the Babylonian translations which sought to greater familiarize the Jew with the Torah, Mendelssohn's *Biur* sought to acquaint the Jews with the German language.

The *Maskilim* did not have the audacity to "take on" the religion *per se*, Torah, *mitzvos*, the *Mesorah*, tradition. They would not succeed in diverting the nation from Hashem. It was the subtle and not-so-subtle changes made to fences, customs and rituals that eventually catalyzed their temporary success. I underscore "temporary," because today they have nothing, at best nothing more than a sham replica of what they perceive to be Jewish culture. The Torah, *mitzvos*, Hashem, no longer play a role in their lives. They have nowhere to go, but back. It is our function to welcome them home.