

Good to see you again

We are up to our final perek in Netivas Koach Hayetzer. Hopefully we will finish this week and next and start something new.

Our topic this week isn't going to be about the Koach of the yetzer but rather our responses to an enemy who is so strong.

He says that every human being was created by Hashem with the yetzer hara within them and he has to do his best to get rid of it, and even if the person's image of himself is accurate, that he is a tzaddik, that most of his time their thought speech and action are devoted to Hashem, or chassid, most of the time they walk the extra mile, that they do more than they have to do, let them not see defeating the yetzer hara as easy because it is very hard.

Meaning, the person has to pray continually to Hashem that He should help them get rid of the yetzer hara because to do it by yourself is very hard. He didn't say impossible, he said very hard and that the key is bringing Hashem into the picture. It is as though we are imprisoned by a king who is old and foolish, but he has imprisoned us. The rule is a prisoner can't free himself from prison, which by the way, noticing this will help us be more compassionate toward others. If we treasurer a moment of terrible failure and realize how powerless we felt, that is how other people feel in their moment of failure as well. With help from Hashem we need someone else to free us. Hashem can take us out of prison.

We have a gemara that tells us, there was a person who used to say we can aim at the yetzer hara's eye, he would start up with the yetzer hara and say he would spit in his eye. So, he would say, I can defeat and overcome the Satan. He was fearless. What happened to him? The Satan was able to defeat him by bringing him to an obstacle he could not contend with. The more you say I can do it, I can defeat the Satan, I can defeat my inner accuser, the less likely you are to succeed. Why? Because that same koach acts against you. So what should we do? Instead of saying I can do it, I know, instead say, I can't do anything, Hashem you defeat the Satan, you give me help. What help do we expect to get from Hashem? The help is not that He make the initial choice for us, that has to come from us. Here is where I don't want to be and here is where I do want to be, that comes from us. But the inspiration and the strength and the situational backup - that comes from Hashem and without that we don't do it. It is worthy for a person to pray that Hashem should cause the Satan to move from him and that Hashem should push him aside.

If a person is trying again through his own power to oppose, that power is not going to allow the person to exist without Hashem's help. In the secular world, it is widely acknowledged that in all the ways of defeating obsessional behavior, the twelve steps work the best. The statistics are clear, and the first step of the 12 is bringing Hashem into the picture, I can't do this myself. Conversely, all of the self help plans that say I can do this myself never work.

Therefore, we have a prayer in which we ask Hashem to guard us from the yetzer hara, and this is very important. Rebbe Meir, whose level we can't even begin to imagine, would mock the yetzer hara and Rebbe Meir was almost defeated, and the yetzer hara said except because it was declared in heaven not to destroy you, you would have been finished. This is Rebbe Meir, whose level is so far from ours.

Rabbi Akiva mocked people who sinned. What happened? It was declared on high that except for this, the Satan said, it was declared in heaven, watch out for Rabbi Akiva, watch out for his Torah, or he would have been finished. What this tells us is we can never look at ourselves and say I can defeat this on my own. When a person thinks they can win like any battle, a person should not say I can defeat the yetzer hara easily, they should say rather it is very hard and I need help from Hashem. So notice the difference in the two approaches. One the person takes themselves and fills the page with himself and his own ability to oppose, his own sense of empowerment and strength. The other is when the person reduces himself to being small and sees that only Hashem's strength can defeat evil.

Taking this further, he concludes by saying that a person never comes to a point where they are reliant on their own strength, but conversely they should say it is only by Hashem's strength that I can defeat this. He finishes this in which he repeats the same thing a number of times and it seems simple but it is very deep. What is deep? What is deep is what he calls the ability to oppose. Once it is unleashed, two things can happen. One is we can easily take that capacity and move it to where it doesn't belong and be defeated by the yetzer hara in a whole other and new form. Another is that the self-empowerment creates so many illusions that it easily could in and of itself be a cause of defeat. So again there are two enemies here, one is the illusion of self-empowerment, and the other is unloosing our power of opposition which once it is gone we can't stop it and we find it erupting in many different and surprising addresses.

A person who is going to try to get rid of their yetzer hara has to listen to the fathers of the world. He says look in Pirke Avos where it tells us to remember that we came from a drop of putrid semen, that we are headed toward accounting for our lives, think about Who we will have to stand before in judgment. The more we think about this, the more the picture of Hashem's grandeur and our smallness will keep us from sin. Nowhere in Pirke Avos does it say, look at yourself, you are so marvelous, so controlled, surely you can overcome evil. It does not say that there.

It begins by telling us another gemara. The gemara says a person should be careful not to believe the nonsense the yetzer hara tells us. The yetzer hara will corrupt the correct ideas. For example, we are small and Hashem is infinite. The yetzer hara will say, yes, Hashem is infinite and His mercy and compassion have no bounds. Therefore when you sin, He will certainly forgive you why, to Him, sin is nothing. Don't believe this. This is the yetzer hara out to destroy you.

He says and we should not rely on the leader (Hashem) to take the first step, we shouldn't let the picture of infinite compassion cause us to trust Him to make the initial step instead

of us, the commitment to eradicate evil. We have to want to get rid of the yetzer hara. The smaller we make ourselves, the more likely it is that Hashem can help us. But we can't expect Him to be on our side and defeat evil if we don't want evil defeated. You see this syndrome amongst people who say to one degree or another "I meant well, Hashem will forgive me." We might be doing our best but it we are not doing the best. For example, let's say there is a child who does not know Hebrew and does not make any effort to learn it, and instead does other things with his time, thinking it is the heart that counts. The heart counts but Hashem wants us to become something because He cares about us. His compassion is not like a parent who lets a child eat potato chips for breakfast.

What makes us accountable? Everything in our surroundings testifies to what we have done with our lives. This includes everything in our homes and the angels we make with our actions. Hashem is not going to ignore their testimony. Why? Because he gave us power to affect the world.

A person's soul testifies. What sort of testimony are we talking about?

Q. What does overcoming the yetzer mean if not opposition (albeit with humility)

A. I'll give you an example. It is not unusual for people to lie to get out of trouble. Why were you late? There was traffic. Translate – I had a second cup of coffee. Here is the difference between effort and opposition. Opposition sounds like "I can take this on myself, I am a person of character and I won't tell a lie, I can overcome this tendency. I am trustworthy and I can get past this." That is opposition. The other side sounds like this "Hashem I am trapped here because I have done this more than once. If there were a magic button to push, I would push it. I am opening myself to you. Here are the efforts I am making -I am trying this and that and the other. Help me so it works because I have no power without =Your guiding me." That is the difference.

The opposition is the part of me that says "I will defeat" and villainizes the yetzer hara as being an enemy who can't be dealt with except through bitterness and opposition, that person is doomed. A person who conversely says, I have to do what I can and I will do this and that because I know the yetzer hara will destroy me otherwise, but Hashem you help me, is in a completely different situation.

A person's soul testifies for them. A person's soul that lies in his bosom testifies, a person's limbs testify, Hashem says you are my witnesses. He tells us that the yetzer hara has two presentations, one is Hashem is so great He won't punish you, and the other is that Hashem isn't interested in punishing people, which is the voice of k'vera. We are told that we shouldn't believe our own minds which tell us that Hashem is not interested in punishing man, and we should not believe that we won't have to account. Both views take Hashem out of the picture.

What he is saying is that the yetzer hara uses imagery and the tool we have to defeat it is truth, which lives in the mind. But the mind can be corrupted. How? If the mind tells us that Hashem will not hold us accountable. Who thinks like that? In the Knesset there was

an argument over legislation – a left winger said to a religious member, do you want to say that Hashem will kill an innocent person because you drive on Shabbos? No matter what the religious Knesset member would answer, he would be wrong, because he can't deny there is a correlation between what happens and what we do, but he would also be wrong to say that the innocent died because of mikal Shabbos, because he can't possibly know that. What the chaver Knesset was trying to do is take the issue of accountability and make it seem ridiculous by using the intellect as a weapon. We have to believe that our intellect is too small to grasp Hashem's judgment, and all we can do is ask for His mercy.

What he says (remember what we said a moment ago, that a person's house and furnishings testify against him). The Maharal has an enormous chiddush here. It is not his literal house, it is the house he builds for himself in Olam Haba that testifies. To understand with depth, the gemara says there is only one accusation Hashem makes against man, but it encompasses everything. He has defiled my sanctuary. I gave you a body and a soul and a world and you defiled it. The world we create is what brings testimony to us. There are people who create in terms of their spiritual consciousness within themselves a world that is beautiful and wherever they go, they take beauty with them. That is their world, their home, that is the self they live with in the future life. Conversely there are people who make a home within them with vengeance, anger, and that is what they take with them. That is what is meant that the stones of their home give testimony. If he is attached to things that are exalted or things that are belittling. A person goes to beit olamo – the house of his eternity.

Q. What powers do we really have to effect the world?

A. I will give you two examples of powers we have. We are saying a bracha on a pear with devotion and focus. They have changed their own awareness and they have also changed their pear, thinking about all that was involved with it's creation, there has to be in fact the whole universe. The person has taken the pear and defined it according to Hashem's will. The pear and everything that accompanied it physically has changed. Additionally, the person has changed the spiritual balance of the world which if it was on the edge, and the Rambam tells us to always see the world as though it is on the edge, could go this way or that. That one deed can change the world to being viewed as a world that is basically spiritual. But there is a more direct thing that happens as well. More tangibly, they have changed what people see as possible, they changed the possibility horizon by introducing factors that may not have been there before. So this affect is huge.

We create our house in eternity, and in the future life each person has their own dwelling. When it says the stone of their house testifies against them, every stone is unique and created by them. So in this world, the person we become within ourselves creates our home for eternity in Olam Haba. The people who bring beauty wherever they go, in Olam Haba, they have a mansion of spiritual beauty and goodness, which is something to think about.

The second pshat is that the angels we create testify. Every time we do anything we create spiritual forces. What we send up comes down. Every person is born with two

malachim to guard us. We will call this conscience. To sin, we have to silence our conscience. What is the testimony? The testimony is I could have stopped myself but I chose to silence the part of me that would keep me choosing. A person can take the malachim Hashem sent to guard him and sends them away. All he has to say is I don't need to hear this. I don't want to feel guilty. The classic example is Pharaoh who through his deeds and choices made a situation arise within him where he no longer deserved to be guarded and every test he had offered enough room to defeat himself but it was his doing.

The third is a person's soul testifies against him. Hashem made a pure and whole and clean spirit within him. The soul Hashem gave us a pure soul. If we return it in purity, the soul testifies to the efforts we made to keep it pure. Conversely, if we return it distanced and impure, then the condition the soul is in testifies to the choices we made to reject and defile it.

So this is what it means to return a soul in purity. A person could be in a situation where they are on the right side of the law but they are not pure. For example let's say you work in an office with Mr. Goldberg, a Jewish decent man who is a little closer than he has to be and he is trying to make you an office wife, someone to confide in, share a joke. No actual line was crossed, no physical contact, isolation, no suggestive talk. But there is not purity. What is purity? If I say this is pure honey or pure water, it only honey or water. If I say that this is a pure soul, it is soul and nothing other than soul. One of the attributes of the soul is middos hayesod, the ability to bond. Pure bonding between men and women takes place only in marriage. Anything else is sullied. A person's soul can testify and say Mr. Goldberg was looking for bonding where no bonding should be. Now let's say the woman is not innocent either, she enjoyed the whole situation feeling important and close to someone even though no line has been crossed. There is still lack of purity. And even if they crossed lines subtly, even if within the law, if he speaks to her in a way that says I see you as a woman, the impurity is greater.

Q. How does this fit in with someone who doesn't know better?

A. There are different levels of not knowing better. I'll take you to a spectrum of perspectives. The classical case of the child taken to Babylon and then finds out he is Jewish and comes back and confesses...he has to offer a sacrifice and he is forgiven because it wasn't from choice. But he does have to make an offering – he is not off the hook, there has to be some act of elevating the physical which is what korbonos is about because the physical state has been degraded. Similarly, a person is affected by sin even if they made no choice, but that effect doesn't have to be that which is meid against them. To understand more clearly, the Maharal says the following elsewhere. What is the difference in level between a tzaddik and a bale teshuva? Imagine two points connected by a string. If the string is broken and then knotted the two points are now closer than before but the place of the knot is weak. A tzaddik is analogous to two points held together by an unbroken string, but the yearning and devekus that can be turned on by the process of teshuva has not come into play, so the distance is greater than that of a bale teshuva because the devekus and yearning are part of the teshuva. For the bale teshuva the sin leaves an impression and that is why in the place of the sin there is a certain

weakness. Everyone is affected to some degree, but the degree to which there is opposition determines the degree to which this knot is weak. The general rule is when a person is really forced against their will Hashem who is merciful, will exempt them from all of the damage, meaning He will heal the wound.

A person's neshama can be changed, and the one who says it is a person's limbs who testify against him. He concludes by telling us about a person's limbs. If a person is a tzaddik they use their limbs constructively and beautifully so the spiritual source of those limbs and organs testify for him. In Shaare Kedusha, the author tells us that the same pattern that the physical body has reveals its spiritual source, which is the Divine image within us. This is why there are so many anthropomorphisms in Torah. It talks about Hashem's hand (force), eye, (hashgacha, vision) which are not visible. Similarly, on a person, the body is a parable through which the soul can be observed. If a person sins, it is as though they harmed the circulation of blood to give the limb or organ of the spiritual body. If the circulation is restored, nothing terrible happens but if not, it can be tragic. A person's state of being spiritually is analogous to physically what can become of a person. The limbs and organs - for instance, there was a tragedy where a young mother was killed in an accident and the father could not take care of the children and people were there - they wanted to raise the children- to take the children even though they were not easy children. These people used who in the spiritual life will have astounding beauty - their spiritual arms were used in a way that is beautiful. In the future life, the organs testify and it will be beautiful.

Conversely there are people who misuse their organs. In the future life, their ugliness as humans shows. Hashem Yirachem Aleinu.

The medrash - a difficult gemara to understand. There are sorts of yearnings appear appear to be unrelated. The first is the yearning of a wife for her husband. Chava, after the sin, you will desire your husband. Next, the yetzer hara desires Kayen the jealous one, the murder and his companions. Next, the rain yearns for the earth and it wants to be absorbed by the earth, and finally Hashem yearns for Israel. What does this mean?

Of all of these four, the Maharal chooses the yetzer hara yearning for Kayin and his friends. Maharal says wait -the yetzer hara goes after Yisroel, not Kayin. He explains. He says that the yetzer hara is out for people and even more out for the Jews because his interest is to defeat something with tangible presence and to bring it over to his side, illusion, which is why it is called ra,. Because of this, the yetzer hara is most threatened by the Jews and talmide chachamim. The person who is destructive wants to burn down a building that exists, to destroy it. The Jews are the constructive house. Who wants to break down a house that is broken already? He brings a gemara that we already learned - if a person is stricken with yetzer haraitis, confront it, bring it to the bais hamedrash, say the shema, and remind the yetzer hara that one day you will die, remember the day you die. As soon as you admit your mortality, the yetzer hara's interest in defeating you is less sweet. This brings us back to the beginning, don't try to attack the yetzer hara, don't oppose him. What we are saying, the smaller and more mortal you are, the less investment the yetzer hara has in your total defeat.

This takes us back to the fact that the yetzer hara is already attached to people who are evil. As soon as death enters the picture the yetzer hara is quiet. The more a person or a situation seems to be powerful, the more the yetzer hara attacks. But not attacking, but devekus, and in that sense, the yetzer hara yearns for Kayin because they are wicked.

We have two sorts of relationships, one of principle and attack. And the other of devekus. The first is I am stronger than you, you are powerless, and we are unless we turn to Hashem. The other is that the yetzer says I am you, I am your identity. When Kayin heard the yetzer hara, they were hearing that form, you are a killer, that is who you are. Why should you let Hevel get away with this? The yetzer hara was the lawyer, the friend. But for tzaddikim, the yetzer hara attacks them. One of the great Rebbes, before he would speak publicly he would look in the mirror and his gabbai once heard him say “Holy man, wise tzaddik” and the gabbai asked him what he was doing, and the Rebbe said I am listening to how ridiculous this sounds before the yetzer hara makes it seem credible. Now there is nothing to oppose and I can hear how ridiculous it is. Later, I might believe it. The idea there is again, don't do battle with the yetzer hara, do battle with your own humility and bring Hashem to your side. Never say I can do this alone because that is a sure way to defeat.