

CHAPTER 2: MISHNA 2: PART 3

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

The yetzer hara, the force of destruction in a person, has no power over one who is in the process of "becoming." It is for this reason that "sitting" ("yeshiva") has negative implications. When a person is striving for perfection, he is demonstrating that he has not yet attained perfection but is ready for that perfection. He is in the process of "becoming" the perfection to which he aspires. In that situation, defects do not become attached to him. But when he is "at rest," the implication is that he has accomplished perfection and is no longer "becoming." At this point, the natural process of deterioration which exists in the created [physical] world sets in. When a person is at rest, not striving to accomplish, he is vulnerable to the yetzer hara. This is why all "sitting" implies "tza'ar" (pain and suffering) and "takala" (obstacle, stumbling block).

(There is a subtle balance that must be maintained. If one is satisfied with ones level of growth and accomplishment, then this attitude of having "made it" leaves the person vulnerable to the yetzer hara. On the other hand, if a person has low self-esteem, feeling that he will never amount to very much and not recognizing his own great potential, he won't be striving towards further perfection. A person who recognizes that he is not perfect, recognizes his potential for attaining greater perfection, and is striving towards that perfection, is in the process of growth, of "becoming." It is this person who is insulated from the yetzer hara.)

When man is striving for perfection in both elements of existence, then he is completely involved in the process of "becoming," and he is insulated from the yetzer hara. Derech eretz is man striving for greater perfection in the material dimension ("guf") where he is involved in having his physical side reach its potential. Torah is man striving for greater perfection in his spiritual dimension, moving his spirit ("nefesh") towards its potential. Therefore it is specifically a person who is striving in both Torah and derech eretz that is distanced from sin. For if either dimension is not in the process of being perfected, man is vulnerable to the yetzer hara in that dimension.

There is deeper level of understanding here, also. The striving in the two areas, Torah and derech eretz, oppose the two forces of evil that exist withing man (two yetzer haras, if you will, two different inclinations to evil): The inclination to improper sexual behavior ("yitzra d'ervah") and the inclination to idol worship ("yitzra d'avodah zarah," puruit of false values). Through striving in the derech eretz, to perfect his physical dimension, man eliminates the yetzer hara of sexual improprieties (which is the

uncontrolled drives of man's physical nature). The striving of his spirit in Torah study is eliminates the yetzer hara of worshipping false values. These matters go to the deepest levels of wisdom, and we will not elaborate here, since they have been explained in other places.

(The Maharal is referring to sections in Netivot Olam, Netiv Halshon, chapter 6, and in Netiv Koach Hayetzer, chapter 1. We have discussed these ideas in our classes on Chapter 1, Mishna 2. For those of you who weren't with us then, I recommend retrieving those shiurim from the Project Genesis archive.)

The Tanna then continues "And all Torah that does not have work accompanying it is ultimately nullified..." Due to the fact that he lacks work, which is a componenet of man's completion, if the Torah is not accompanied by work, man lacks something which befits him. This is a deficiency in his perfection, and as such it lacks the ability to endure.

"...and drags [in] sin." Something which has a deficiency draws to it other deficiencies. Sin is the ultimate deficiency, which is drawn ot something which lacks perfection. Torah accompanied by work is said to distance one from sin, even sins that to which a person is directly vulnerable (since man is being perfected on every level). On the other hand, Torah which is NOT accompanied by work attracts even sins that are not directly related to his lack of work (since the person has inadequacies that are not being perfected). Therefore, we are taught that it is ultimately nullified and drags in sin, which is what happens to something which maintains and inadequacy. And though we know that many Torah scholars did not do work (implying physical labor), they were involved in some kind of commercial interactions, which is comparable to work. Alternatively, there were special individuals who had such an affection for and a devotion to Torah that there Torah could be maintained without the accompaniment of and see work. (See Yevamoth 63b about Ben Azzai who never married. To better understanding the PRACTICAL ramifications of this Mishna, see Orach Chaim 156, which quotes this Mishna in the Halacha, and the Biur Halacha's commentary on it.)

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