

# THE WHOLEHEARTED YETZER HORA

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

*You should be tamim with Hashem your G-d.*

Be'er Mayim Chaim: What is the sense of the word tamim? It has been translated at times as "perfect" and "blameless." Surely, though, the Torah is not simply telling us that we should always be completely free of all sin. That is simply unattainable for most people. For the small number who can comply, the instruction would be gratuitous, because the Torah's prohibition of each aveirah would suffice without any further exhortation.

Chazal<sup>2</sup> apply the pasuk to probing the future through various means like astrology. According to them, we should probably translate tamim as "wholehearted." Temimus would imply that a person not concern himself with what the future might have in store for him. His wholehearted devotion to Hashem assures him that he is in good hands, and whatever the future will bring is supervised by Hashem's providence.

We can try something different. Chazal<sup>3</sup> tell us to serve Hashem with both of our inclinations, both the good and the bad. Just how are we to serve Hashem with the yetzer hora?

We recognize that the yetzer hora is bound up with the lower animal soul. This nefesh is the source of all unseemly personality traits, and of desires of ephemeral delights. Within it are the tendencies to pride, haughtiness, and anger; to lust and gluttony and theft; to improper forms of speech; to sloth, laziness, and depressed spirit. The yetzer tov, on the other hand, is related to the higher, rational soul. Through it we long to serve Hashem, and to observe all His mitzvos. This higher soul, however, stands upon the animal soul. So long as that animal soul is not purged of evil traits, the higher soul cannot lead a person to effective avodah.

"When Hashem favors a man's ways, even his foes will make peace with him." <sup>4</sup> Chazal<sup>5</sup> teach that the foe of this pasuk is none other than the yetzer hora itself, which at times can be utilized to accomplish much good. This must be so. Nothing exists only so that it can be banished. A spark of kedushah empowers everything in existence - even what we call "evil." Without this kedushah, it could not exist. This spark means that the evil can be used to our advantage. (We are reluctant to write too much about this, for fear that students whose learning is not fully leshem Shomayim will draw the wrong conclusions.)

The Zohar<sup>6</sup> offers a source for this, and some examples. It observes that between the "Do not" and what follows in a few of the dibros is a trop-mark that puts a break between words, rather than unites them. It is as if the Torah said, "No! Do steal!"<sup>7</sup> At times, theft becomes not only permissible but desirable to "steal a person's presumption." In other words, a sitting judge must sometimes use deception in order to ascertain the true facts in a case. The sparks of kedushah within theft animate its use for a constructive purpose.

Because these sparks are scattered in places quite distant from Hashem, one who succeeds in utilizing them and restoring them to their Heavenly source of kedushah brings great joy, kivayachol, to Hashem. Mishlei<sup>8</sup> says, "In all your ways you must know Him." The gemara<sup>9</sup> applies this even to aveirah! The gemara's point is that otherwise evil traits (there is no greater aveirah than harboring them!) can be used for good purpose.

Of all midos, the worst is pride. Yet, sometimes a person must attribute great importance to himself! We are supposed to tell ourselves, "The world was created for me." Attributing such importance to oneself would seem to run counter to our pursuit of humility, but it is important that at times we make this assertion to ourselves, if only to counter the guile of the yetzer hora. Our implacable enemy will sometimes offer us high-minded mussar, not for the right reason, but to demoralize us. When we realize how far off the mark we are, we devalue our avodah. We treat it as insignificant and worthless. We then balk at advancing in learning; even the mitzvos whose performance we are committed to we begin to perform mechanically, without feeling. We feel hypocritical when we insist on preparing ourselves properly for davening. Who are we to act with greater punctiliousness than those who came before us?

The antidote to all this negativity is for us to understand how important we really are, to feel confident in our self-worth. To do this we employ a sanitized version of the yetzer hora of gaavah. We remind ourselves of the worth of every mitzvah, even those performed by the least significant person. How could it be otherwise? If HKBH desired only the avodah of tzadikim, He would not have had to wait as long as He did to give Man the Torah. Great tzadikim were available before Klal Yisrael grew to 600,000 souls. Apparently, Man's avodah cannot be accomplished by the great tzadikim acting alone. Rather, it depends on the small contributions of many ordinary people, all taken together. The contribution of each individual is crucial to the effort. In that sense, it is fully appropriate for a person to tell himself that the world was created for him!

And the chutzpah to tell ourselves this gets a boost from our new friend, the yetzer hora!

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#### Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 18:13
2. Pesachim 113B

3. Berachos 54A
  4. Mishlei 16:7
  5. Bereishis Rabbah 54:1
  6. Zohar Shemos 93B
  7. Shemos 20:13
  8. Mishlei 3:6
  9. Berachos 63A
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