

ANATOMY OF A SIN

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

Evil has fascinated man ever since the primeval sin in the Garden of Eden.

That man is a creature armed with free will means that his life is a constant struggle of choosing "good" over "evil". But what is the exact nature of sin? What forces are at work? And what effective strategy can aid man to withstand the temptation of its sweet waters?

Evil comes from man; not from G-d.

True, the capacity to choose "right" and "wrong" was divinely entrusted to us. However, it is up to the individual as to whether his life is one of illusion or whether it is of real growth and development.

It is the human being who gives evil "life". It would not - indeed could not - exist without him. Its survival is only because man lets it.

How evil finds expression is understood by analysing the internal struggle waging within man in the battle for supremacy between two rival components: (a) the Seichel, intellect and (b) the Dimyon, imagination (See Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Iggeres HaMussar).

Firmly grounded in "reality", the Seichel urges an intelligent and realistic awareness of one's station in life. It relates to our true spiritual selves. Who we are; what life is all about; and the responsibilities that man takes for his actions - the answer to these questions are man's guiding light to navigating life.

Sin - as the manifestation of evil - enters the picture fuelled by the Dimyon.

Where not restrained by the Seichel, the Dimyon runs riot. It unleashes an avalanche of passion that entices the senses. Synonymous to the world of "fantasy", of "illusion", Dimyon is where one lives in his dreams rather than in reality. Truth does not feature. Neither does morality. No consideration is attributed to what will be the ramifications of man's conduct.

The fantasy is all too seductive. Its temptation is hard to resist. Its attraction appeals to our senses. It is all about the freedom to indulge in passion, emotions, and the yearnings of the heart...but without reason, without soul, or without mind taken into the equation. Hence, what is gratifying readily triumphs over what is right!

And yet, it is not real. What Dimyon does is to create "reality" from "non-reality".

An excellent modern analogy of this phenomenon is the art of film-making. With advanced special

effects, computer-generated images, what appears including complex galaxies and innovative worlds created after actors have work against blue screens look astoundingly real. But it ain't!

Where man constructs an alternative "reality" courtesy of the Dimyon as he convinces himself that his dreams are real. His imagination, exclusively focused on the here and now, are pursued in the unwavering belief that otherwise he will be "missing out". He considers that his life will be deemed meaningless were he to forgo the experience of the "pleasure trip" in question - be it chocolates, a sports car, designer clothing, or a luxurious holiday.

Sin tears apart the bond between man and his Creator. It allies itself to the Dimyon unrestrained by the Seichel. Misdemeanors tragically fabricate an illusory "reality" that sacrilegiously treats G-d as a non-reality. Thus, a life of sin intensifies the evil and darkness in the world blocking out G-d: the True "Reality" of existence. Ironically, all else that is unconnected to Him is, in fact, synonymous with non-existence.

The Torah laws provide a framework where the Seichel features and successfully partners with the Dimyon so that man successfully establishes an eternal relationship with G-d. This is the determinant of the spiritual reality. Observing the positive commandments is how a Jew develops the connection; the negative commandments are what he must not contravene so as not to risk damaging that relationship.

It is the spiritual impact of mitzvos and aveiros that determine our true identities. And which, also, ultimately determine our everlasting reality. The course material is presented by Osher Chaim Levene, author of "Set in Stone: The Meaning of Mitzvah Observance" (Targum/Feldheim), a writer and educator in London.