

THE YETZER HATOV IS NOT A NOODNIK

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 528, Sending Someone on a Fatal Mission. Good Shabbos!

The Yetzer HaTov Is Not A Noodnik

This week's parsha contains the incident of Yosef's interaction with Potiphar's wife. She had her eye on Yosef and wanted to commit adultery with him. She pestered him day after day trying to get him to agree. According to Chazal, her motive was more than just passion or lust. Her astrologers informed her that she and Yosef were destined to have common descendants. She felt that Yosef was destined to father a child from her and that it would be most appropriate for them to have this illicit liaison. (She did not realize that it would be with her daughter -- Osnas - that Yosef would have his two sons).

Her "pestering" Yosef every day involved her repeating to Yosef her erroneous belief that they were destined to have children together: "It is a mitzvah"; "The future is dependent on this"; "This is G-d's Will". Nevertheless, Yosef's response was constant: "How can I do this evil act and I will sin to G-d." [Bereishis 39:9] In other words, he told her: "You tell me it is a 'mitzvah', I'm telling you it is an aveirah [sin]."

The Sefas Emes asks - how was Yosef so sure that it was a sin and that Potiphar's wife was in error? The Sefas Emes answers with a sharp Yiddish comment: The Yetzer Tov is not a noodnik. In other words, a person's "good inclination" does not pester him.

This is not just a humorous comment. This thought contains a basic truth. There is a pattern to the activities of the Yetzer HaTov and the Yetzer HaRah. Things that come easily, things that a person wants to do, things that a person is excited about doing and has the energy to do - those are the things that we need to be careful about.

Things that are a "pain", things that do not come easily and that are troublesome, and that we do not seem to always have the energy for - these are thing things the Yetzer HaTov would want us to do.

Rav Sholom Schwadron cites a teaching from Avos d'Rav Nassan: When a person is aroused by a

passion and is contemplating doing an immoral act, all his limbs listen to him - he has energy and he moves forward with a bounce and with enthusiasm. This is because the Evil Inclination rules over the 248 limbs of a person. Therefore when the Yetzer Harah orders a person to "do it", there is always energy for the task. On the other hand, when someone is on the way to do a mitzvah, all of his limbs become lazy.

It is hard to get out of bed to go to minyan. But if someone has a business appointment where he knows that he stands to make a lot of money, there will be no problem jumping out of bed. This is not to say, chas v'Sholom, making a business deal is a sin -- but it certainly can't be equated with doing a mitzvah. And how much more so does this apply when a person is on his way to doing something that he should not be doing.

This was the insight of the Sefas Emes. Yosef knew that if this woman was pestering him, over and over and over: "Do it, do it, do it" -- then it was obviously not a message from his "Good Inclination". Yosef knew that the Yetzer HaTov is not a noodnik.

It is with this perspective that we need to judge so many things in life. When we are weighing an act -- "Is this a mitzvah or an aveirah?" -- let us always apply the principle that the Good Inclination does not pester us.

A Sermon Before Napoleon

At the end of the parsha, Yosef finds himself in prison with two ministers of Pharaoh. They each had a terrible nightmare and were unable to come up with satisfactory interpretations. When the Sar HaMashkim [chamberlain of the cupbearers] recited his strange dream to Yosef, Yosef gave him the following interpretation:

The three tendrils are a three-day period. In another three days Pharaoh will count you and will restore you to your post, and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as was the former practice when you were his cupbearer, at which time if you would think of me with yourself [ki im zechartani...] when you will have benefited, and you will please do me a kindness and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building. For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and even here I have not done anything for them to have put me in the pit." [Bereishis 4:12-15]

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik comments on the flow of these pasukim. We would expect Yosef to first interpret the Sar HaMashkim's dream and then ask for a favor that if Yosef's interpretation indeed comes true, the Sar HaMashkim should help get him out of jail. Rav Chaim explains that the words "ki im zechartani..." -- introducing Yosef's request for assistance -- are actually part and parcel of Yosef's dream interpretation. The linkage of this pasuk with the previous pasuk indicates that it is all part of the message of the dream. "ki im..." may be translated "so that..."

Rav Chaim then related a story that goes back to the time of Napoleon. Napoleon had won a major

battle and made a big party. He invited everybody to speak in honor of the great victory. Speaker after speaker got up and no one said anything worthwhile. Napoleon then inquired if there was a Rabbi in the town and summoned him to expound on the occasion.

His lieutenants went out and found some Rabbi from a small nearby village and brought him to the banquet, ordering him to say something in front of Napoleon, the most powerful person in the world.

It happened to be Parshas Vayeshev. The Rabbi related the story of Yosef in prison with the royal ministers. He commented as follows:

Under normal circumstances, when someone in a high position of government is accused of a terrible crime, the most that he can expect to accomplish is to receive an acquittal and then go off into obscurity. In the natural course of events, it is never expected that such a disgraced official will get his old job back.

The Sar HaMashkim, one of the most prestigious posts in ancient times, was rotting away in jail for a crime that he committed. All of a sudden he has a strange dream and Yosef tells him 'not only will you be freed -- you will get your old prestigious job back as if nothing happened.' This is very strange -- it just does not make any sense. Why should the Sar HaMashkim have believed Yosef?

Yosef told the Sar HaMashkim: "Do you know why you and I are in this jail cell together? Do you know why you were stuck in this pit in the first place and why you will be restored to your old position of glory? It is all KI IM ZECHARTANI -- in order that you remember me to Pharaoh and help me get out of here.

The only reason it will happen is because it is part of G-d's master plan -- so that I should be able to get into the good graces of the King of Egypt. Therefore, it is important that you listen to me and play your destined role -- to mention me to Pharaoh.

The Rav then told Napoleon Bonaparte: How is it that you are so successful in conquering the world? It is because you have been good to the Jews. You emancipated the Jews and brought them freedom. This is the reason you have gotten as far as you have. Your key to success, Napoleon, is to continue being the friend of the Jews and continue with your noble work.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeishev are provided below:

Tape # 034 - Chanukah Licht on Erev Shabbos

Tape # 076 - Katlanis: The Twice Widowed Woman

Tape # 125 - Ha'Malbim P'nei Chaveiro: Shaming Another

Tape # 172 - The Complex Issue of Child Custody

Tape # 218 - Grape Juice and Yayin Mevushal
Tape # 262 - Yichud and the Open Door Policy
Tape # 308 - Secular Studies
Tape # 352 - "Chamar Medina" -- Used for Kiddush?
Tape # 396 - Artificial Insemination Before Chemotherapy
Tape # 440 - Third Night of Chanukah but Only Two Candles
Tape # 484 - The Ubiquitous Donor Plaque
Tape # 528 - Sending Someone on a Fatal Mission
Tape # 572 - Determining Paternity
Tape # 616 - Chanukah - Women Lighting for Husbands
Tape # 660 - Birthdays - A Jewish Minhag?

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and **Torah.org**.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim.