

ADDRESSING THE EVIL INCLINATION / BEGINNINGS -- CRITICAL AT EVERY STAGE

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: CD #1129 – The Ani Who Picked Up Your \$20 Bill. Good Shabbos!

The Torah Addresses The Evil Inclination Here

Parshas Ki Seitzei begins with the laws of the *Yefas Toar* [beautiful captive woman] in time of battle, one of the most difficult *parshas* in the Torah to understand: "When you will go out to war against your enemies and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its [people as], captives; and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you will take her to yourself for a wife." [Devorim 21:10-11]. Because the woman is a goy, the Torah instructs that she be brought into the Jewish soldier's house, made un-appealing (by cutting off her hair, etc.). He must then wait a month, and if after that he still wants her... "you may come to her and live with her, and she shall be a wife to you." [Devorim 21:14]

Rashi here comments (based on Kidushin 21b) "the Torah is speaking here only against the *Yetzer HaRah* [evil drives within a person], for if the Holy One, Blessed is He would not make her permissible, he would marry her in a forbidden manner." Under normal circumstances, the Torah would never permit such a thing. It would say "Listen here, get control of yourself, and walk away from this forbidden woman." However, the Torah made an exception here. War is different. It weakens a person's power of resistance to his animalistic instincts. At any rate, this is Rashi's approach – the Torah here has made a concession to the *Yetzer HaRah*.

The Shalo"h HaKodosh has a very interesting take on this Rashi and on this whole concept of "the Torah speaks against the *Yetzer HaRah*." We must remember, the people who went to war in Biblical times were not your average recruits that show up at the local recruiting station who think "Hey, I have nothing better to do with my time; I may as well learn how to shoot!" At least some of the people in today's armies are not from the upper echelon of society. However, the Jewish wars of Biblical times were carried out by wholly righteous individuals. (People who were afraid of dying in battle for even "minor sins" they may have committed were exempted from going to battle.) We had

an army of *Tzadikim*, and yet somehow even people of this caliber were vulnerable to falling into this moral trap.

The Shalo"h explains the idea based on the statement of the wise *Shlomo HaMelech* [King Solomon]: "Stolen waters are sweet." [Mishlei 9:17] This means that forbidden fruit is tastier than fruit which is permitted. Water may quench my thirst and on a hot day it is delicious but water has no taste. And yet *Shlomo HaMelech* says stolen waters are **sweet!** A thing that has no taste – if it is off-limits – can be sweet.

Consider the case of a person on a carb free diet. He goes somewhere and they are serving baked potatoes. Not French fries – but rather simple baked potatoes with no butter and no margarine. However, if he is on a "**no carb**" diet and he sees a baked potato – there is no greater temptation in the world than that baked potato. Why? It is because it is forbidden to him. Once something is forbidden, the principle of "stolen waters are sweet" kicks in.

Similarly, a fellow goes to war. War is terrible. A person loses his humanity in war. He sees a beautiful captive woman – and he craves for her. The Torah says, "Take her home." We are giving you a pass on this. Take her home. Just let her sit there for a month, replace her seductive clothing with simple drab garments, shave off her hair, let her nails grow long. Once the Torah says she is permitted, the result will be that the craving will subside. The soldier will not want her any more. She becomes like a baked potato for someone not on a carb free diet. Who wants a baked potato? Give me French fries! Give me potato kugel! A baked potato? Ug! This is the approach of the Shalo"h: The Torah allows the *Yefas Toar* in order to remove her allure of 'stolen waters are sweet' and to hopefully bring the Jewish soldier to a point where he can let her leave his house and go back home to where she came from.

With this approach, we can understand a famous Gemara [Chullin 109b]: Yalta says to Rav Nachman (her husband), "Let's see, for everything the Torah has forbidden, it has permitted a corresponding item." For example, blood is (normally) prohibited, but liver is permitted even though "it is entirely blood." The *chelev* [certain fats] of domesticated animals (*beheimos*) are forbidden, but *chelev chaya* [the corresponding fat of non-domesticated animals, such as deer] are permitted. The Gemara goes through a series of items which are forbidden and for which a person might have a curiosity to experience. His desire to consume that which is **forbidden** intensifies the curiosity -- so the Torah **permits** a similar tasting item, to relieve the curiosity and thus remove the *yetzer hara* for the forbidden item.

Yalta then tells her husband, "I wish I could taste the flavor of meat cooked with milk (*basar b'chalav*)," which is of course forbidden. In effect she told her husband, "I want a cheese burger. All my life I have been waiting for a chance to taste cheese burgers." Rav Nachman told her that the Torah permits the udder of a milk producing animal which is saturated with milk and has the taste of *basar b'chalav*.

What is the point of this Gemara? The point is this principle of the Shaloh haKodosh. If you know something is permitted, you have an escape hatch from the clutches of the *Yetzer HaRah*. This removes the cravings. The item no longer becomes "stolen waters." An item being "off limits" creates the *tayvah* [lust] for it. When the Torah permits the item -- albeit in restricted circumstances -- it takes away the *tayvah*. It is the same in the case of *Yefas Toar*. It does not mean the soldier will eventually marry this woman; but the Torah allows him to do so because it "speaks to his *Yetzer HaRah*." Once the *Yefas Toar* ceases to become "forbidden waters," hopefully the "sweetness" of contemplation of the forbidden act will dissipate.

Beginnings Are Critical At Every Stage of Life

If you need to speak at a *Sheva Brochos* this coming week or you need to speak at a *Bar Mitzvah* or you are going back to teach in front of a class and need a nice thought to share with your audience -- this is the "vort" you are looking for.

As we just mentioned, the parsha begins with the laws of *Yefas Toar* and then mentions "If a man has two wives -- one he loves and one he hates..." he is not allowed to switch the first-born status (for inheritance purposes) from his true first born, the son of the "hated wife" to the younger brother, the first-born son of the "beloved wife." The true first born is the one who must receive the "double portion" of inheritance.

Following this, the third set of laws in Parshas Ki Seitzei is that of the *Ben Sorer U'Moreh* [the Wayward and Rebellious son]. Already at a very young age (right after *Bar Mitzvah*), he begins acting in a way that will lead to a life of corruption and aggression. The Torah decrees that it is preferable to put him to death "when he is still innocent" (of the future crimes he is destined to commit) rather than execute him later when he will already be deserving of the death penalty. This is a difficult parsha which we have talked about in the past. We are not going to try to explain it right now.

Rashi says the sequence of these three sets of laws -- the beautiful captive woman, the beloved and hated wives, and the wayward and rebellious son -- teach a homiletic lesson: If someone marries the *Yefas Toar* because he became infatuated with her, he will eventually have two wives (his original wife and the one he found in the battlefield). Eventually, he will come to hate the second wife. Furthermore, once he has such a wife (that he should not have taken in the first place) he will have a child from her and the child will be a trouble maker. He will become a *Ben Sorer U'Moreh*.

The Shem M'Shmuel [Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain (1855-1926), the second Sochatchover Rebbe, and son of the Avnei Nezer] makes a very interesting observation. Why does the Torah put the *halacha* that the first born gets a double portion here? Even if the Torah wants to tell us that one who marries a *Yefas Toar* will eventually hate her, why should the Torah insert the unrelated rule that a *Bechor*

gets *pi-shnayim* [a double portion of inheritance] here? There is an entire section in the Torah at the end of Sefer Bamidbar describing all the laws of inheritance. The law that a first born gets a double portion should be placed there. It seems incongruous to mention it here between the laws of *Yefas Toar* and that of *Ben Sorer U'Moreh*. It does not relate to the flow of the narrative.

The Shem M'Shmuel writes that the Torah is trying to tell us a very important lesson – **beginnings are very very important**. Beginnings set the tone. He asks – why is it that the first-born gets double? Being a first born, after all, is merely an accident of birth. What did he do? Why should he get double the portion of his father's estate over and above the rest of his brothers? The Shem M'Shmuel answers that it is because the *Bechor* casts an influence over the entire family. The children that come after the first-born are influenced by him. Therefore, the *Bechor* gets double because he set the tone for the entire family.

For example, the Rosh Yeshiva [Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman (1900-1987)], zt"l, married a woman named Feiga Kramer. Her father, Rav Sheftel Kramer, had five daughters. One of them was Rebbetzin Ruderman, one was Rebbetzin Neuberger, one was Rebbitzin Heiman, one was Rebbitzin Skaist, and one was Mrs. Lewin. There were five daughters, no sons. But the *Bechora*, the first-born was Rebbetzin Ruderman. Family legend has it that her father told her – you need to marry a *Talmid Chochom*, because the type of person you marry will set the standard for your other sisters as well. Admittedly she married a very big *Talmid Chochom* and all the other sisters – perhaps they did not marry *Talmidei Chachomim* of the *Rosh Yeshiva's* caliber, but they were all very distinguished individuals, all *Talmidei Chachomim*.

How did that happen? The oldest sister set the standard. She set the bar, which the other sisters measured against. She did it because she was the first born. Firstborns have this effect.

Thus, the Shem MiShmuel points out that the Torah is trying to tell us over here that the *bechor* gets *pi shnayim* because beginnings have an effect on all that comes later.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin says that the entire period of time when it is possible for a boy to become a *Ben Sorer U'Moreh's* is only three months. (That – among other reasons -- is why it is so hard to meet the conditions under which such a punishment could ever be carried out.) The whole chapter addresses a 13-year-old child for only the first 3 months after his *Bar Mitzvah*. Yet, the Torah is already concerned that the child is acting out, he is stealing, he shows gluttonous behavior, etc. Why is this so serious? It is because when a child is that age – *Bar Mitzvah* – how he acts in that beginning stage of his life as a mature adult sets the pattern and has a tremendous influence on what the rest of his life will be like as well.

That is why it is very important that the tone be set in this "*Bar Mitzvah* year." Like any structure, the foundation is critical. Any building is only as strong as its *yesod* [foundation]. The first months after *Bar Mitzvah* are critically important.

And – *m'inyan l'inyan b'oso inyan* – the first year of marriage is very important as well because how a

family begins, how it starts out and where it starts out and how it is built can have an effect for years and years to come. That is why the Torah provides a draft deferment to a newlywed and sends him home to his wife, free of communal duties, during the first year of his marriage – to gladden the heart of his wife. The first year is the foundation of the marriage.

The *sefarim* say "All beginnings are difficult" (*Kol Hascholos Kashos*). Simply, this means that it is hard to start a new project. But on a deeper level, it means beginnings are "*kashos*" because it is essential that they be executed correctly. You need to do it right at the beginning of any endeavor. How things are done initially sets the tone for all that follows.

Therefore, if someone is a Rebbe in a Yeshiva and needs to give an opening shmuze, it is very valuable to stress the uniqueness of *Chodesh Elul*. *Chodesh Elul* is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it sets the foundation for the whole year. That is why Rosh Hashannah and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* are such critical periods. It is the beginning. Beginnings have a lasting effect on that which comes after them.

For this reason, the Torah writes the parsha of *Bechor* and right after that the parsha of *Ben Sorer U'Moreh*. The Torah is telegraphing to us the importance of the beginnings at every stage of life.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Ki Seitzei is provided below:

- CD# 020 - Non-Halachic Marriage Ceremonies
- CD# 065 - Polygamy and the Cherem of Rabbeinu Gershom
- CD# 110 - Mamzeirus: Possible Solutions?
- CD# 156 - Reconciling Divergent Customs Between Husband and Wife
- CD# 203 - The Pre-War "Get"
- CD# 250 - The Mitzvah of Ma'akeh
- CD# 293 - "Get Me'useh": The Prohibition of the "Forced Get"
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