



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת חיי שרה תשי"ע 5770

NICE NEIGHBORHOOD

The time had come for Avraham to find a wife for his son and successor, Yitzchak. This week's *parshah* relates how Avraham entrusted this sacred task to his faithful servant, Eliezer. Knowing that a wife suitable for a Patriarchal family could most likely be found in his native land, Avraham sent Eliezer to Charan. Eliezer was instructed to select a mate for Yitzchak from there and bring her back to Eretz Yisrael, where the righteous couple would build their lives and their nation.

Eliezer, however, voiced a concern. "What if the woman does not wish to leave the place of her birth?" he asked. "Should I then bring Yitzchak to her land?"

Avraham was very explicit in his response: under no circumstances was Yitzchak to leave. "If the lady will not want to go with you, you are exempt... just do not bring my son there!" (*Bereishis 24:8*).

R' Moshe Feinstein (*Darash Moshe, Ibid.*) notes just how striking Avraham's response was. Here it was, that a woman suitable to be a life partner for Yitzchak Avinu and capable in her own right of fulfilling the role of Matriarch of the Jewish nation resided in Charan. And she may even have been willing to enter into the marriage; but if she insisted on remaining in her land, then Avraham felt that the marriage should not go through. Better that Yitzchak should remain in the spiritually safe atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael rather than journey to a foreign environment. Even if that meant passing up a wife of Rivkah's caliber.

In other words, explains R' Moshe, Avraham took the threat of impure surroundings so seriously, he could not be sure that even his righteous son Yitzchak would be immune to negative influence. And so he decided that it was crucial that Yitzchak remain in Eretz Yisrael, in a better environment, even if that meant settling for a wife of much lesser stature.

Thankfully, as we know, Rivkah did agree to follow Eliezer back to Eretz Yisrael, and the rest, as they say, is history. Who knows what would have been if our Matriarch had decided otherwise? In any event, the lesson remains quite telling and relevant.

Apparently, the draw of one's surroundings is so powerful, not even the merits or piety of a Yitzchak can necessarily break its hold.

THE YETZER HARA'S DOUBLE IDENTITY

To get a better understanding of this phenomenon, it is worthwhile to reflect on the words of the late Mashgiach, R' Nosson Wachtfogel, zt"l. He illuminated the topic of the nature of everyone's greatest foe: the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination).

R' Nosson would explain that there are actually two types of Evil Inclinations: the Yetzer Hara of the "*p'nim*" (inside) and the Yetzer Hara of the "*chutz*" (outside). The Yetzer Hara of the *p'nim* is that inner voice that emanates from and disturbs our conscience. He stirs up passions, feeds desire for sin, heaves the weight of laziness upon our bones, and provides us with numerous convincing arguments and rationales

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by her son, R' Sholom Chayim Schneider, Brooklyn, NY

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as to why it's not "necessary" to do this mitzvah, or why doing that misdeed is really not so bad, it's probably permissible anyway, etc.

If this weren't enough to contend with, there is the second type of Yetzer Hara: from the *chutz*. As opposed to type number one, where the temptations emanate mainly from within ourselves, in some cases, the pull comes from the "outside": from one's environment and the peers who populate it.

What is the major difference between the two? Combating the Yetzer Hara is always a life struggle; as the Gemara in Sukkah (52a) states: "A person's evil inclination gets stronger by the

day." The major difference, R' Nosson asserts, is that – through great effort and toil, one can overcome the "inner" Yetzer Hara. But to withstand the Yetzer Hara of the "outside" – that is *impossible*.

JUST SAY "NO"

This idea is dealt with extensively by the Rambam. In *Hilchos Dei'os* (6:1), he writes: "It is the nature of a person to be drawn after his peers, in his thoughts and his actions (i.e., his thoughts and actions begin to resemble those of his associates)... Therefore, a person must befriend righteous people and always congregate with the wise, in order to learn from their ways. He should distance himself from the wicked, who walk in darkness, so as not to adopt their behavior... If he finds himself in an area where the general populace is wayward and the people do not walk on a just path, he should journey to a place where the people are pious, and they conduct themselves in ways of goodness..."

The Mishnah in Avos (1:7) sums up this concept with a succinct and poignant exhortation:

נְתַאי הָאֲרֵבֵלִי אוֹמֵר, הִרְחַק מִשְׂכֵּן רָע, וְאַל תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע.

"Nitai Ha'arbeili says: Distance yourself from a corruptive neighbor and do not associate with the wicked."

The draw of the "Yetzer Hara of the *chutz*" is so great and so impossible to resist that Avraham made sure to keep even his son Yitzchak far from a negative environment. May Hashem protect us and our children from both physical and spiritual harm.

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