

# RECOGNIZING THE ENEMY

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

## ALWAYS ON GUARD

Chazal say that the *yetzer harah* does not suddenly try to tempt a person to commit severe *aveiros*, rather he does so in stages. At first, the *yetzer harah* convinces the individual about something small, then he pushes further and eventually tries talking the person into serving *avodah zarah*.

The Frieddiker Rebbe explains that the *yetzer harah* may even begin by approving to the *mitzvos* being done ("*asei kach*"), but rationalizes and limits the extent of their fulfillment. He encourages one to watch his health, be "normal", find favor in the eyes of others, and brings proofs and explanations for all his claims. This cools a person down and enables the *yetzer harah* to push him further into actually committing *aveiros*.

(שבת ק"ה ע"ב, סה"מ קונטרסים א' ע' ל"ז ע"א)

Throughout one's entire life, one should not rely on his righteousness, for Yochanan Kohen Gadol served eighty years in the Beis Hamikdosh and then strayed and became a *tzedoki*.

(ברכות כ"ט ע"א)

A person must always be wary of the *yetzer harah*, for even when one forgets about the *yetzer harah*, the *yetzer harah* does not forget about the person. He acts like a friend but in reality, is trying to destroy him completely.

A righteous person once met a troop of soldiers returning from a victorious battle, loaded with plenty of spoils. The man told them, "Now be prepared for the real war." Surprised, they asked him to explain. "The war the *yetzer harah* will fight when you celebrate with the spoils," he clarified.

(חובת הלבבות שער יחוד המעשה פ"ה)

The tzaddik Reb Meir of Premishlan related: "One wintery day, while traveling with my Rebbe Reb Mordechai of Kerminitz, our wagon reached an incline, and it seemed the carriage would topple over at any moment. Full of youthful courage, I prepared to quickly jump out, but my Rebbe held onto me with his hand and said, 'Sit down calmly; no bad will befall you.' So it was. The wagon passed the incline safely.

"After some time had elapsed, and I had already forgotten about my desire to jump out, the carriage, driving on flat land, turned over, and we all fell out unto the snow. Reb Mordechai began to laugh, 'Nu, you see?' But I did not understand to what he was referring to.

"Quite a while later, I realized he had been intimating a lesson in *avodas Hashem*: Sometimes a Yid is worried that he will *chas v'shalom* fall into the clutches of the *yetzer harah*, who is constantly out to

ensnare him, and Hashem helps him stay safe. However, when a Yid is assuredly going along his path, and does not even realize that the *yetzer harah* is ready to pounce, specifically then, he is likely to fall into his clutches..."

(תפארת צדיקים)

## KNOWING HIS TRICKS

In *yechidus*, the Rebbe Maharash told the Rebbe Rashab: "The *yetzer harah*, though called an 'animal', can at times act slyly, and clothe itself in the guise of a straightforward, humble *tzaddik*, requiring one to use much cleverness to uncover its tricks. The *yetzer harah* manifests itself in each person according to his nature. One person may suddenly feel a powerful desire to learn Chassidus, yet it is coming from the *yetzer harah* who is trying to prevent him from *davening* at length or similar."

The Rebbe Maharash concluded, "Take this as a general rule and remember it always. Anything that actually leads to active *avodah* (changing the *middos*) and is met up with opposition, even the most noble, is coming from the *yetzer harah*."

Relating this episode, the Rebbe Rashab added, "When I left *yechidus*, I changed my *avodah* completely. Until then, I had assumed that the *yetzer harah* can only encourage a person to do negative things, and it is therefore necessary for one to be cautious only concerning those matters. I had never imagined that there can be a *frum yetzer harah*, let alone a chassidische *yetzer harah*, who is there just to restrain him from being involved in his true *avodah*."

(היום יום כ"ג סיון, אג"ק מהור"י צ"ח ד"ע ע"ז)

The tzaddik Reb Nochum of Chernobyl lived in acute poverty. Once, a chossid brought him a gift of 300 rubles, and the *gabbai*, who also oversaw the needs of the home, was glad that the large debts would finally be paid up. When this chossid left Reb Nochum's room, tens of other chassidim had their turn, until they stopped to daven *maariv*. After *maariv*, the tzaddik closeted himself in his room for a while and then opened the door, asking for one chossid who had been in *yechidus* earlier. After the chossid left, the tzaddik continued seeing chassidim late into the night.

After all the chassidim had left, the *gabbai* entered the Rebbe's room to request some money, having already made a listing of the amount he would pay each creditor. Reb Nochum opened the drawer where he kept the money given for his personal use, and the *gabbai* was stunned to see only a few silver and copper coins, but no sign of the 300 rubles. The tzaddik told him to take all the coins, a total of 100 rubles, but the *gabbai* remained rooted to his place, downcast but

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unable to say anything. The tzaddik asked him why he looked so sad, if after all, Hashem had sent them money. At this point, the *gabbai* was no longer able to contain himself and asked about the 300 rubles.

The Rebbe replied, "When I received the money I wondered why I had merited such a sum. So when one of the chassidim told me about his lack of funds for tuition, rent, and his daughter's wedding, it dawned on me that Hashem has given me the special *zechus* of supporting this Yid. In fact, the amount the chossid needed, totaled the exact amount that I had received. However, upon deciding to give the 300 rubles to this chossid, another thought came to my mind, 'Why give so much money to one person, when it can be divided between six families?'

"Faced with the dilemma of these two options, I closed myself in my room. After thinking it through, I came to the conclusion that the second idea, to divide the money among a number of families, did not come from the *yetzer tov*, for then it would have entered my mind immediately. Only once I had thought of the *mitzvah*, did this thought come along to trick me." Reb Nochum concluded, "I fulfilled the advice of the *yetzer tov* and gave the chossid the entire 300 rubles."

Upon relating this story, the Frieddiker Rebbe added: "From this we see how important is discernment, always knowing from where a thought is coming. This discernment can only be acquired through working on oneself."

(סה"ש תש"ג ע' 67)

The Rebbe applied this concept: "If one is aroused to a help another or to spread *yiddishkeit*, he must evaluate: If he had been conversing idly, then this inspiration is coming from the *yetzer tov*. However, if this arousal has come to mind specifically during his learning, then it is not coming from *kedusha*... Likewise, if during *davening*, one is suddenly inspired to distribute *siddurim* or to watch someone else *daven*, he should know that currently this is an inappropriate activity."

(תו"מ חל"ו ע' 305)

Concerning those who, out of humility, abstain from *avodah*, the Frieddiker Rebbe said: "Even before becoming Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek would *farbreng* with the chassidim for Simchas Beis Hashoeiva, discussing Chassidus and *avodas* Hashem. At one such *farbrengen*, he said, 'My grandfather the Alter Rebbe and my father-in-law the Mittler Rebbe have made chassidim clever (*'klug'*) so that they should know how to recognize the *nefesh habahamis* in all his false costumes and clever antics."

(סה"ש ת"ש ע' 87)

The Frieddiker Rebbe related: "As a child, my father, the Rebbe Rashab, taught me Tanya, explaining in depth how a chassidische child must change himself. At that time, we learned the letter of the Alter Rebbe in which he strongly warns his chassidim not to scorn those Yidden who have fought with them, or raise themselves above them. My father explained, 'The *nefesh habahamis* convinces a person that such behavior comes from the good *middos* of *kedushah*. Being proud of his *avodas* Hashem, fools him into regressing further and further."

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' כ')

The Rebbe would often quote the Rebbe Maharash: "To fool Hashem, you surely can't, others – you also won't be able to fool; who then will you fool? Yourself! Is it a *kuntz* to fool a fool?!"

(תו"מ ח"ג ע' 130 ועוד, וראה סה"ש תרפ"ד ע' 79 בהערה)

## CLEVERLY COUNTERING

Shlomo Hamelech writes that one should wage war against the *yetzer harah* using clever strategies. Some record this as a *mitzvah midivrei*

*kabalah*, an obligation derived from Nach.

(משלי כ"ד, ס' חרדים פל"ה אות ב', ברכות י"ז ע"א ורש"י)

Chazal say that one should always use all kinds of sly tactics to achieve fear of Hashem.

Dovid Hamelech said to Hashem, "Ribbono Shel Olam! Every morning upon awakening, I would plan aloud, 'Today I will visit some place or someone's home,' and then I would lead my feet to the *beis medrash*, thereby tricking the *yetzer harah* and not allowing him to distract me."

(ברכות י"ז ע"א, רש"י, בן יהוידע, ילקוט תהלים תת"צ)

The tzaddik Reb Naftali of Ropshitz was known for his wit and cleverness. His Rebbe the Chozeh of Lublin challenged him, "Isn't it written in Torah that one should be simple and straightforward (*'tamim'*) in his *avodas* Hashem?" The talmid replied, "To reach the level of *temimus*, one must first have wisdom, as our Chachomim instructed to be clever in *yiraas shamayim*."

The Frieddiker Rebbe said that one should use the cleverness of Torah, and especially Chassidus, to recognize and counter the slyness of the *yetzer harah*.

(דור דעה ע' רל"ז, סה"ש תרצ"ו ע' 223)

Towards the end of one of his personal fasts, the tzaddik Reb Dovid of Lelov was out on the road and felt an extreme thirst. Suddenly, noticing a spring of cool bubbling water, his thirst intensified to the point that he was about to break his fast and drink. He stood still for a moment to consider the matter and found strength within himself to overcome his burning thirst. Continuing on his way, he felt a great rush of joy, for he had succeeded in subjugating his *yetzer harah*! However, a moment later, he said to himself, "This joy is not coming from the *yetzer tov*, but from the *yetzer harah*, who is trying to get me to be filled with pride!" To avoid falling into the trap, Reb Dovid returned to the spring and drank his fill.

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 527)

When some people tried to bring proof from Torah that children should be taught worldly matters at a young age, the Rebbe disputed their claim, explained their misunderstanding and added, "One should not be fazed when someone quotes a Torah source to prove something which is known to be wrong. It must be recognized that within this 'silk cloak' hides the *yetzer harah*."

(תו"מ חכ"ז ע' 103)

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