

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

The Tricks and Traps

The Gemara (Berachot 17a) tells us that within every Jew lies the spirit which says, “I don’t want to commit any sin. I don’t want to! The problem is my yetzer hara, the so-called ‘yeast in the dough.’ It doesn’t let me go. It doesn’t loosen its grip of me.”

Why does the Gemara compare the yetzer hara to yeast?

Just as yeast causes dough to rise by taking something so flat and plain and expanding it into something so large, so too the yetzer hara is able to make something out of nothing. The yetzer hara can sell you any product. Something cheap, he can make it appear and appeal to you as something enticing and expensive. He can make something truly demoralizing seem fun and exciting. The yetzer hara is a master businessman.

Imagine a card which says in big, gold letters, “25% off!” You’ll assume that now you can buy that expensive item you’ve been thinking about for months. But then, you are told, you need to look at the fine, printed details. And what

do you find? A list of exceptions and exclusions, terms and conditions. As it turns out, there is no way you will be able to make use of the discount.

The yetzer hara is the same. It showcases us deals every day and every night, and blows reality out of proportion. All it requires is that we turn over the card and read the terms and conditions. We must simply wait and see the false rising of the dough, triggered by the yeast. From a flat clump of dough grows a large mountain of bread. But it’s all a mirage.

Every sin entices us with promises of sweet pleasure. But, written on the other side are the terms and conditions of distance and disconnection from Hashem. The yetzer hara knows the entire story, and so, he doubles down in doing everything possible to steer our focus towards the 25% and ignore the rest. But the downward effects are just around the corner.

But we know better than to fall for the tricks and traps of the inner voice within, our yetzer hara.

We know his strategy. We know his ploys. And we are ready to succeed against them all.

ten to the one hundred sounds of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah?

If the answers to these questions are

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi
The Tricks and Traps
Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi
Don't Pick and Choose
Rabbi YY Jacobson
The New Antisemitism
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
Kindness and Blessing
Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin
Message of the Moon

DEDICATIONS

L'iluy Nishmat
R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel
Pinchos
Manish ben Esther
Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov
Bechor ben Rivkah
Shlomo Zalman ben
R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi
Esther bat
haRav Avraham Halevi z"l
Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber
Miriam bat Yeshayahu
Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim
R' Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok
L'refuah Sheleima
Deena bat Shoshana
Chaya Raizel bat Dena
Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva
Reuven ben Rochel

Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi

Don't Pick and Choose

Ask yourself: Do you recline at the Pesach seder to the left? Do you lis-

yes, then here's the next question: why?

Because the Torah says so, you'll say. And that is exactly the answer. Now here's the point.

The same Torah which instructs us to observe the laws of the Pesach seder and Rosh Hashanah is the same Torah which speaks to the importance of Torah study, moral behavior, Family Purity, and on and on. It's all the same Torah. We weren't born with a pen in our hands and told, "You can make a checklist of the commandments you want to keep."

There are six hundred and thirteen commandments, and they are all as important as each other. Not one more than the other. Tefillin, tzitzit, Shabbat, Jewish marriage, Kosher food. It's not up to us to pick and choose.

We cannot accept just part of the Torah. We must accept it all, and be proud of the opportunity and privilege to fulfil it and come close to G-d.

Put Tefillin on proudly, recite blessings before you eat and drink with sincerity, and dress modestly

and feel your dignity within. None of these are actions to be embarrassed about. To the contrary, they are our honor, our virtue, our nobility.

No one and nothing can cool us down, turn down our pride or diminish our Jewish worth. The privilege we have been given by G-d to be His ambassadors to the world is a badge of honor. That flame, that pride, is all we have.

Wear it with pride. Live it with honor.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The New Antisemitism

There is a well-known saying, "Show me your enemies are, and I'll show you who you are." Who have historically been the enemies of the Jewish people? Once you have that answer, you can uncover the essence of Jewish identity and faith. People talk about the "New Antisemitism." In truth, there is a profound message hidden within this notion.

The world often wonders if the Jewish people are historically the same people who stood at Mount Sinai. Are we the same Jews who celebrated the miracle of Purim in Shushan with Mordechai and Esther? Are we the same Jews from whom Dovid Hamelech, R' Akiva, Rashi, Rambam, Baal Shem Tov, Vilna Gaon, and other great Jewish sages and luminaries were produced?

It's been thousands of years. Has

our role that G-d appointed us to illuminate the world with His G-dliness ended?

The "New Antisemitism" shows that the Jews have lost not an ounce of our vigor and our holiness. How else could you then explain the world's obsession with the Jewish people, which doesn't even constitute one quarter of one percent of human civilization?

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Kindness and Blessing

Imagine a world where everyone was the same. Everyone thought the same. Everyone looked the same. Everyone voted for the same party. Everybody liked sushi and hated meat. We'd all get along so well. And yet Hashem created the exact opposite. A world where everyone is completely different from every-

body else. We all have different personalities, different strengths and different weaknesses, and we all have totally different opinions. All these differences can and very often do lead to discord, harmful speech and hatred. Why did Hashem then create so many differences?

The Chofetz Chaim said that the blessing of Borei Nefashot means

that Hashem created a myriad of different people, each one of us with our own strengths, but more importantly, our own weaknesses. The doctor can't farm, so the farmer will make his food. The farmer never went to medical school, so the doctor will heal him. Hashem wanted a world of kindness, and so he created a giant tapestry of different people

who all need each other. That's the meaning of Olam Chesed Yibaneh, the world will be built on kindness.

It says in Parshat Pekudei that Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur from the tribe of Yehudah did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe. The tribe of Yehuda was the most elevated of the tribes, from whom came forth the kings of the Jewish people. Betzalel did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe. Nevertheless, Betzalel needed a partner, Ohaliav ben Achisamach, from the tribe of Dan. Dan was the lowest of the tribes. And despite this, or maybe because of this, Betzalel needed him.

Just as the world is built on kindness, so the Mishkan too had to be built on kindness. Maybe we can find a hint to this in Ohaliav's name for he is called Ohaliav ben Achisamach. Achisamach can be read as "My brother depended on me." In other words, even though Ohaliav came from the lowest of the tribes, without him,

Betzalel could not create the microcosm of the world of kindness that was the Mishkan.

But not only do we need the blessing of one another. We need the blessing of Hashem.

There's an elderly lady who sits in a nursing home in New York City, and every day she says to herself, "Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift of G-d. That's why we call it the present." How does a person sensitize himself to the present, that is the here and now?

Our sages told us to make at least 100 blessings every day. Making blessings helps to remind us constantly of all the blessings that surround us. The ability to see, to think, to enjoy the smell of fruits and the flowers, the sight of children, the sea, great mountains, the size of royalty, eating a new seasonal fruit or seeing an old friend for the first time in years. We have blessings when a baby is born, when a child becomes a bar mitzvah, and when a loved one dies. When we see blessings in our life,

we surround ourselves with blessing.

The Hebrew word beracha, blessing, is from the same root as bereicha, which means a pool of water. G-d is like an infinite pool of blessing, flowing goodness and enrichment into our lives. A beracha must include Hashem's name. This name has the same roots as the word Adon, which means a socket. In the construction of the Mishkan, the tabernacle, there were exactly 100 sockets into which the upright columns were mounted. What is the connection between the 100 Adanim and the 100 blessings where we call God by His name, Adon?

Just as the Adanim, sockets, were the foundation of the Mishkan through which G-d bestowed His holy presence on the Jewish people, so too are our daily blessings the foundation through which Hashem flows blessing into our lives.

Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin

Message of the Moon

HaChodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodoshim..., this month will be for you the beginning of the months..." (Shemos 12:2)

Bnei Yisroel were about to leave Egypt and embark on a journey that would change the course of their lives forever. As they were about to be freed from a life of slavery and servi-

tude to a new life of liberation and freedom, they were given their first mitzvah.

"HaChodesh hazeh... this month is for you..." The gift to sanctify time. The opportunity of new beginnings and fresh starts. A bestowal not only for the Generation of the Exodus, but "lachem" – for you, for us, for all generations.

How fortunate we are to have the

ability to live each day as the first day of the rest of our lives. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, in the Book of Our Heritage, writes that the word lachem in the Hebrew language has the same letters as the word melech – king, implying that the month of Nisan is not merely numerically first in the counting of months, but is in fact the "king" of all months. That the spirit of Nisan should be imbued within us

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throughout the year.

Lachem... for you. HaShem, with His infinite kindness granted us the gift of time. How we spend our days, what we do with our time, it's all up to us. Lachem, for you. We can be the melech, the king of our time. We can take control over our daily routine.

Rabbi Kitov shares a Yalkut Shimon, quoting Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi who compares HaShem's designation of Chodesh Nisan to a king who had a personal timepiece. When his son reached maturity, the king gifted him the timepiece. Similarly, HaShem was delivering an important message to the Jewish people. "Until now, the counting of the months and the years was in My hands. From now on, it is entrusted to you."

I think back about how upset my mother would get when she heard people say "I'll kill some time."

"What do you mean 'kill some time'?" my mother would say. "Every day is a gift, every minute a present. Use it all wisely, for it never comes back."

The Hebrew word for months is chodesh, closely related to the word chadash – meaning new. Each month is a chance for renewal, an opportunity for new beginnings.

HaChodesh hazeh, this month. Rashi tells us that HaShem actually showed Moshe the moon at its time of renewal, saying "When the moon renews itself, it will be the beginning of a new month for you." With a deeper understanding, HaShem was portraying to Moshe the eternal story of the Jewish people.

Rav Mattisyahu Salamon, the Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva, would impart words of inspiration

to his talmidim. One year, on Tisha B'Av, he told of a Holocaust survivor who was asked how he was able to survive five long, difficult years in the Nazi concentration camps. The elderly man responded that it was virtually impossible to observe most mitzvos. There was no Shabbos or Yom Tov, since every day was another day of forced labor. But the one mitzvah that he was able to observe was Kiddush Levanah, sanctifying the new moon. He would go outside at night, and look at the sky above. Night after night, he would watch the moon as it waxed and waned. The survivor spoke of the joy of spotting a sliver of silver in the sky, a small crescent that would illuminate the heaven, messaging to him that it was time to recite Kiddush Levanah.

"V'leavanah amar, shetischadeish, To the moon He said, that it should renew itself, as a crown of splendor... For those who are destined to renew themselves just like it..." (Kiddush Levanah)

A little moon that would grow bit by bit, till it became a full circle, a beautiful round moon. It would then temporarily be hidden from sight, only to renew itself and start the cycle once again.

The moon was the survivor's inspiration during that very dark period. He looked up to it and he saw his story, the story of the Jewish nation. A people who despite experiencing painful and difficult times, are able to renew themselves and continue on. Even starting over when necessary. It is the story of nation who survived slavery, wars, the Inquisition, pogroms, the Holocaust, terrorism, and endless anti-Semitism. A people who live the message of the moon and are

able to renew themselves.

To be a Jew. To look at the heavens above for inspiration.

This month shall be lachem – for you.

This Shabbos is referred to as Shabbos HaChodesh. We welcome the month of Nisan and read a special maftir, telling us of Bnei Yisroel's first mitzvah.

We are blessed to have two firsts in the Jewish calendar. In Tishrei, we celebrate Rosh HaShanah, which marks another year since the creation of the world. The month of Nisan, is the rosh chodoshim, the first of the months – we begin counting months from Nisan. The Lubavitcher Rebbe tells us that the Torah regards Nisan as the first of the months for the message of Nisan should carry through for all months of the year. Nisan means miracles. A Jew must always remember that all events in our lives are orchestrated from Above in a manner that transcends nature. The spirit of Nisan should continue with us all year long. Every month, we should look for the miracles of life – both big and small, revealed and hidden. To appreciate and internalize the words we say in the Modim prayer "V'al nisechah sheh'b'chol yom imanu, and for the miracles that are with us each and every day."

This Shabbos, as we bless and welcome the new month of Nisan, may the message of the moon, the levanah, be with us, and be a source of inspiration for all twelve months of the year.

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