

A Taste of Torah The War Against Evil

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Descending into idolatry is not a one-step process. Our Sages tell us that the Yetzer Hora (Evil Inclination) is a clever foe, and he realizes that he won't succeed in getting us to worship idols in one fell swoop. So, he takes his time. He starts off slowly, first convincing his unsuspecting victim that a small, seemingly insignificant sin is worth committing. After that, he works his way up, seducing his prey to gradually commit sins that are of greater and greater severity, until, before you know it, the poor fellow is kneeling before an idol.

In this week's parsha, we find a notable exception to the above. The Torah tells us, "Guard yourself, lest your heart be seduced, and you will turn away, and you will worship other gods..." (11:16) Rashi comments that the "turning away" mentioned in the verse refers to separating oneself from Torah study. When one ceases to study Torah, idolatry follows shortly thereafter. A rapid decline, indeed. How are we to understand this in light of the Yetzer Hora's usual machinations?

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman quotes a parable of his teacher and mentor, the famed Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan. If two nations are warring, and one is victorious over the other in a

battle, the war is not lost, for tomorrow, the loser may overpower today's victor. However, if today's victor completely disarms the loser, the war is over. If a nation at war is left without arms, it is impossible to be victorious in future battles.

In our lifelong war with the Yetzer Hora, as well, we may fall short at times, while achieving triumph at other junctures. The Yetzer Hora cannot easily overpower us so completely as to cause us to worship idols; he needs to use all the tricks up his sleeve to gradually bring us down. We, of course, must constantly be on the lookout for his nefarious schemes. But with what do we fight? Our Sages tell us that the Torah is the only weapon potent enough to bring down the Yetzer Hora. But if the Yetzer Hora takes away our weapon - the Torah - we are left unarmed. We have lost. There is no hope.

As long as we cling tenaciously to the Torah - our Tree of Life - and don't let our guard down, we can fight on towards ultimate victory over the Yetzer Hora. We are armed and dangerous. And the more we study it, the greater our firepower becomes. To let go of it, to throw it aside, is suicidal.

The Torah is our sole weapon in the war against the Yetzer Hora - make sure it's always at your side.

Ask the Rabbi Stay Covered

Dr. David Mitchell at Hebrew University writes:

Dear Rabbi,

Would you please explain the basics on kippot, whether it is a law or a custom, the different sizes and why women don't wear them.

Stories For The Soul

The Tale of Two Tefillin

There once was a boy who inherited an exquisite pair of tefillin from his father. He cherished this inheritance and from the time he turned Bar Mitzva, he donned his father's tefillin every single day. As he grew older, he was proud that he had never missed a day wearing the tefillin.

In his later years, he once stayed at an inn while conducting business in several nearby towns. One night, there was an unexpected blizzard and it prevented him from getting back to the inn. He slept over at the home of an old Jewish man - the only Jew in that little town. The next morning he had no choice but to borrow that man's tefillin, an old, worn pair. He intended to put on his own pair later that day. After all, who knew if the old man's tefillin were even kosher.

But the day's affairs detained the man longer than expected, and he didn't get back to the inn until late at night. He had missed the chance to don his father's tefillin. He carried remorse for this lapse for the rest of his life, all the way to his grave.

When the man passed away and went before the Heavenly Court, the prosecuting angels said that he had never put on tefillin and were about to hand him a grim sentence.

"What are you talking about? I put on tefillin every day of my life," the man cried. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to him, his father's prestigious tefillin had not been kosher.

A defending angel stepped forward and said, "Wait! He cannot be categorized as one who never put

Kollel Happenings

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING MON., SEPT. 5

The next legal holiday learning program will take place on Labor Day, Mon., Sept. 5 at Zera Avraham. Shacharis will be at 8 followed by breakfast and a class from 9:10-10:10. \$125 sponsorship is still available. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rye@denverkollel.org.



'GOOD GOSSIP?' AT SEPT. 7 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Dean Phil Weiser, Dean and Thompson Professor of Law, University of Colorado Law School. Former Senior Advisor for Technology and Innovation in the White House's National Economic Council and Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers Schwab for "Good Gossip? The Ethics of Speech Where Knowledge is Power" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., Sept. 7. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., SEPT. 12

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., Sept. 12, at 12:30 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. . The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at rya@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Avoiding Bal Tolin Part II

There is no bal tolin when a worker is hired through an intermediary. Therefore, if one has reason to believe that he may transgress this mitzvah, such as he suspects he won't have cash available, the worker should be hired through an intermediary.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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Dear Dr. Mitchell,

The wearing of a kippa first appears in the Talmud as an act of piety. Another word for kippa is Yarmulke, which means "awe of the King [G-d]" in Aramaic. This practice is codified in the Shulchan Aruch as an obligation at the time of prayer, and as something that one "should do" at other times. Therefore according to the Shulchan Aruch, a head cover is required by Halacha during prayer, and an important custom at other times.

However, the Taz suggests that although a headcovering was originally an act of piety, it gained the status of Torah Law, due to the custom of non-Jews to remove their caps as a sign of honor. Since the Torah prohibits Jews from "going in the ways of non-Jews," one who does not cover his head would therefore be in transgression of a Negative Commandment of the Torah.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in his Responsa, rules that, based on the

Taz, one should be stringent. He adds, however, that there are indications that even the Taz might agree that in America [and elsewhere] where it is no longer the way of Gentiles to remove their head coverings as a sign of honor - for the most part they don't even wear head coverings at all - the prohibition against going about with an uncovered head is no longer considered to be a Torah prohibition.

Since one is nonetheless obligated to wear a kippa, does it matter whether it is a custom or a law? It becomes important when we consider the case of someone who is denied work because he wears a kippa. Since one doesn't need to forfeit more than a fifth of his wealth in order to fulfill a Positive Commandment, Rabbi Feinstein writes that if a person cannot find work unless he removes his kippa, then he can remove it at work.

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Stories for the Soul

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on tefillin because he did put on a kosher pair once when he was in a small town on a business trip." With that, the man was spared a horrible fate.

This week's Parsha teaches us that one should perform a "light" mitzva with the same seriousness as one would perform a "weighty" mitzva.

The businessman never knew

how significant it was when he put on those old worn tefillin on that snowy morning.

We never know the results of our actions. It is not for us to judge which is small and which is huge. Every mitzva is a big mitzva.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.