



Battle Plans

Quick Rescue Guide



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The Yetzer Hara's Secret Code

1

DEFEATING THE ENEMY REQUIRES MORE THAN superior strength and strategy. For example, everyone knows the military strategy by which Israel won the Six Day War. Israeli fighter jets, flying below the tracking altitude of Egyptian radar, attacked and destroyed Egypt's entire air force on the ground in the first hour of the war. Few people know that Egypt could have totally avoided defeat had one bungling sergeant known how to decode an incoming message.

That morning Egyptian intelligence at a radar station in northern Jordan did indeed pick up the scrambling Israeli aircraft. They sent a red alert message to the bunker of the Egyptian Supreme Command in Cairo. At that point, Egypt would have had enough time to get its planes off the ground and into the air and thus save them, but the sergeant on duty in the decoding room attempted to decipher the red alert using the previous day's code. His failure to properly decode the message led to catastrophe for his country.

Army intelligence is as important to the Israel Defense Forces as its elite combat units. Intelligence includes, among other things, intercepting the enemy's communications and then properly decoding them. The most crack combat unit in the world cannot win a battle if intelligence fails to appraise it of the enemy's plans and strategies.

In the same way, we cannot hope to defeat the yetzer hara without intelligence: becoming aware of the enemy's strategy and properly decoding its messages. The Maharal starts his treatise on "The Power of the Yetzer Hara" by breaking the code of the yetzer hara's messages to us.

He begins with a quotation from *Proverbs*: "If your enemy is hungry give him bread, and if he is thirsty pour out water for him to drink, because you'll be pouring hot coals on his head, and Hashem will repay you." "The enemy," according to the Maharal, is the yetzer hara. This enemy is always characterized by hunger and thirst, that is, by lack. It is the voice inside each of us that carps on lack.

The message of the yetzer hara is always: "You don't have what you need." This encoded message has a thousand different versions:

- ◆ I don't have a spouse, so of course I'm depressed.
- ◆ I have a husband, but he's not emotionally sensitive to me.
- ◆ I have a wife, but she doesn't keep the house neat enough.
- ◆ I don't have children, so I can't get on with my life.
- ◆ I have children, but they have learning disabilities.
- ◆ My son won't be accepted to a good yeshivah or college.
- ◆ My daughter desperately needs a shidduch.
- ◆ I don't have enough money to buy a house.
- ◆ I have a house, but it's too small.
- ◆ The house is big enough, but I desperately need a new kitchen.

- ◆ The house is too big for me to clean by myself; I need household help.
- ◆ I don't have a job that pays enough.
- ◆ I have a lucrative job, but I don't have the kind of boss I need.

The Maharal reveals the secret that statements of lack are a code and the dispatcher is always the yetzer hara.



Battle Plan #1: Identify The Voice Of The Yetzer Hara

Whenever you hear your inner voice complaining about what you lack, go on high alert and assume battle position. You are under the attack of the yetzer hara.

This does not mean that you can't have legitimate wants: to get married, to have children, to own a home, to work at a good job. In fact, most of the blessings of Shemoneh Esrei are requests: for healing, livelihood, redemption, etc. These blessings must be accompanied by genuine yearning.

*You cross the line and start working for the enemy, however, when you heed the yetzer's commands instead of Hashem's. For example, if you find yourself complaining about or leveling hurtful criticisms at your spouse, or speaking **lashon hara** about your children, boss, or coworkers, you have fallen into the hands of the enemy. The feeling, "I don't have what I need," leads to many sins, as the yetzer hara offers you more and more blandishments to satisfy your needs by means that violate halachah.*

Once you have cracked the code, and you are aware that your laments about what you lack are messages sent by the yetzer hara, you switch from intelligence to combat. You take out of your arse-

nal two effective weapons developed especially to liquidate this form of the yetzer hara.



Battle Plan #2: “Everything I Need I Have”

The best armor to protect yourself from the yetzer’s attack is the attitude, “Everything I need I have (because Hashem provided everything).” Indeed, this is the meaning of the blessing we say every morning, “she’asah li kal tzarki,” thanking Hashem “Who provided me my every need.” At the time you recite this blessing and throughout the day, you should feel that, at this moment, you have everything you need. This does not preclude wanting things in the future, but a bedrock belief in Hashem’s goodness and kindness to you at this very moment is the best battle stance against the yetzer hara.

You achieve this attitude by shifting your focus from what you don’t have to what you do have. We are familiar with the automatic rifle carried at all times by Israeli soldiers: the M16. To fight the yetzer hara of lack we must carry one of two weapons: the G(Gratitude)16 and the G17. To use the G16, stop obsessing on what you don’t have and refocus your thoughts on the details of what you do have:

- ♦ *You may not yet be married, but you do have many of the components necessary to live a life of meaning, such as good friends and an interesting job. Take time to think about and be grateful for each one of your friends and the specific pluses of your job.*
- ♦ *You may need knee-replacement surgery, but your eyes and ears work just fine. Take time to think about and be grateful for all the complex gifts of vision and hearing, which allow you to achieve the most significant goals that you have set for yourself.*

- ◆ *You may not have a large-enough house for all your children, but you are blessed with children. Take time to think about and be grateful for the special qualities of each one of your children. Each one is an entire universe.*
- ◆ *You may not have a pleasant job with amiable coworkers and a reasonable boss, but you do get a paycheck every week. Take time to think about and to be grateful for everything your paycheck pays for, and how your job and your paycheck enable you to be a giver, as Hashem is a giver.*

The weapon G17 works like the precision missiles the Israeli air force uses to target particular terrorist leaders in the Gaza Strip. It can destroy a third-floor apartment without damaging anything on the fourth and second floors. The G17 is a very sophisticated weapon. While the G16 involves shifting your focus from what you don't have to what you do have, the G17 ferrets out the blessing hidden within the lack itself.

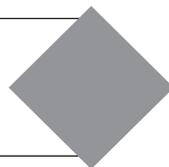
- ◆ *You may not have a spouse, but your single status allows you its own unique avenues for your spiritual expression. In fact, because you are not yet married, you have the time to nurture yourself and others spiritually and materially in ways you won't have time to do later when you have a family. One wonders whether Sarah Schenirer would have founded the Bais Yaakov movement, and thus changed the Torah world, if she had lived the life she no doubt wanted, taking care of a husband and children.*
- ◆ *You may not be healthy, but your illness may engender what you most want: a closer relationship with Hashem and with the people you love the most. Illness can bring about positive changes in your character and spiritual growth. Dr. Rahamim Melamed-Cohen avers that the years since he was*

stricken with Lou Gehrig's Disease and became completely paralyzed have been the best years of his life from the standpoint of inner growth.

- ◆ *You may not have children, but you do have a spouse and the time to devote yourself to your marriage and to that area that may in fact be your true mission in life. Witness the accomplishments of R' Yaakov Moshe and Chaya Sara Kramer as described in **Holy Woman**.*

Focusing on what you have rather than what you don't have is a foolproof weapon against the yetzer hara. Utter the formula, "Everything I need I have (because Hashem provided everything)," feel joy and gratitude to Hashem, and you've won the battle.

Uncovering the Disguises of the Yetzer Hara



The enemy can succeed in infiltrating your camp because he is a master of disguise. The Maharal offers clues to uncover the two basic personae of the yetzer hara.

The first form is called *yitzra d'ervah*, the yetzer hara of lust. Of course, if this yetzer hara came sauntering into your camp undisguised, wearing the bright red apparel of the base drive for illicit relations, you would immediately vanquish him. The *yitzra d'ervah*, however, has a much more subtle identity, which the Maharal reveals. This yetzer hara seduces you into using the pleasure of physical reality to fill the empty space within you.

Remember that the yetzer hara thrives on a sense of lack. The truth is that many of us feel a spiritual void in our lives. While this chapter will offer concrete ideas for filling that void, many

people are habituated to filling that void with physical things: food, designer clothes, a magnificent house, a fancy car, the latest hi-tech gadget, or other material objects. Using anything physical to fill the void is succumbing to the *yitzra d'ervah*.

This does not mean that a Jew must reject or avoid the physical world. According to Judaism, the physical world is purposeful and good. Take, for example, food. Food is terrific; it's nutritious and life sustaining, and it tastes good. Food, however, is not meant to fill the empty space within you. Food is dangerous when used as a solution for the "no one loves me" problem. Food is dangerous as a solution to the "I'm so bored" syndrome. Food is actually lethal when used to prove that you're in control, which is what eating disorders are all about. There is nothing wrong with food per se, but using food to fill the void is *yitzra d'ervah*. Similarly, exploiting any material object as an answer to the message, "I lack," is falling into the hands of the *yitzra d'ervah*.

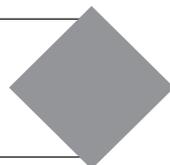
The second persona of the yetzer hara is called *yitzra d'avodah zarah*. Again, in its extreme form, the actual worship of idols, it would be decimated the moment it paraded into our camp. So it disguises itself. The Maharal reveals that *avodah zarah* is another ploy to fill the void created by lack. We could fill that void either by making ourselves bigger, which requires a lot of inner work, or by attempting to make God smaller and more immediate in our eyes, to the convenient point where we have no need to uplift ourselves because we have made God small enough to reach from where we are.

A common disguise of the *yitzra d'avodah zarah* is the worship of nature. It's easier to worship the creation instead of the Creator because the creation is more accessible, yet it still has a spiritual charge. Another way of attempting to make God small is the adoration of images, even images which do not purport to be God, such as a Christian saint or a meditative statue. These images reduce the Divine to a single quality, such as motherly nurture or tranquility. Anything which thus makes God small is *avodah zarah*.

When people worship idols they are taking some admirable aspect of themselves and worshipping that. Therefore, *yitzra d'avodah zarah*, in its deeper sense, means taking your yearning for meaning and connection, and degrading it by settling for something that is less than God, rather than stretching yourself toward the immensity and infinitude of Hashem. Therefore any act that glorifies and gives centrality to what is not God is the disguise of the *yitzra d'avodah zarah*.

No one reading this book is likely to worship a statue, but the worship of one's own ego is also *avodah zarah*. For example, speaking lashon hara is attaching importance to something less than Hashem, in this case your own ego. When you speak lashon hara, you elevate yourself as the judge over someone whom you portray as inferior to you. You also make yourself the center of attention, because you are the one "in the know" to whom everyone else is listening. Thus, every form of self-aggrandizement is a capitulation to the *yitzra d'avodah zarah* in its insidious disguise.

**"Drag Him to
the Beis HaMidrash"**



Once you have identified the enemy, you must give it the bread of Torah and the water of spirituality. If you allow that space in you to remain empty, you are making yourself easy prey for the yetzer hara.

The Maharal quotes the Gemara, "If you happen to find this despicable one [the yetzer hara], drag him to the Beis HaMidrash. If he is stone, grind him down, and if he is iron, blow him up."

How does learning Torah annihilate the yetzer hara? To explain how this mechanism operates, the Maharal divides mitzvos into positive and negative commandments.

Fulfilling a positive mitzvah entails getting up and doing something. Indeed, the void within can be filled relatively easily by

getting up and doing something that's spiritually fulfilling, as we've all experienced. The part of us that resists doing positive mitzvos is like stone.

Children say things that adults think but would never say. I [TH] was once telling my children stories about Reb Aryeh Levin, about his selflessness, his *mesiras nefesh* to help other people, his zeal to serve Hashem. At the end, I asked them, "Wouldn't you like to be just like Reb Aryeh when you grow up?"

One of my children answered, "I don't want to be like Reb Aryeh. I want to have a friend like Reb Aryeh, who'll do anything for me."

This child was vocalizing what we all feel sometimes: "I don't want to take initiative and do; I want to sit back and let others do for me. I want to rest. I want to lie on the couch and eat potato chips." That's the state of feeling like a stone.

The Maharal explains that this propensity to be like a stone is the nature of the physical body. The body was created from the earth, and the earth doesn't move unless you move it. So the more we identify with our bodies, the more our yetzer hara will manifest as stone.

On a deeper level, the human inclination to despair renders us like stone. When we despair, we no longer believe in our own ability to move situations or events. This yetzer hara paralyzes us with fears and doubts about our inadequacies. We don't do what we should do, what deep down we *want* to do, because we have lost faith in ourselves. This is always a consequence of having lost faith in Hashem, Who made us as we are.

This form of yetzer hara can cripple children as young as 8 or 9. If they don't do well in school, are not adept athletes, often lose or break things, or have trouble making friends, they may despair of their ability to accomplish anything at all. These children will not even try. Their parents often accuse them of laziness, but the actual villain who has them by the throat is the yetzer hara of despair.

The yetzer hara of despair can be fought by "grinding it down." This means taking the positive action that seems so formidable and

frightening, and breaking it down into small parts that are clearly within your capacity.

Many years ago, my [TH] son was volunteering for Yad Eliezer, an organization that distributes food to the needy. The organizer gathered a group of volunteers who were told to go to the North and ask farmers for donations of food. He told my son to bring back a few hundred cartons of eggs. My son was abashed. He protested, “How can I just go and knock on a farmer’s door and ask him for free eggs? The farmers are not rich. They’re producing eggs so they can sell the eggs, not give them away.”

The organizer replied, “I’ll tell you how to do it. Knock on the door. Say, ‘I’m collecting for the needy in Jerusalem. Could you give me an egg?’ See what happens next.”

So my son went up North, knocked on the door of a farmer, and asked for an egg. The farmer said, “An egg? You want one egg?”

My son said, “Yes, an egg. Please give me one egg for the needy of Jerusalem. It’s something.” The farmer ended up giving him many cartons of eggs.



Battle Plan #3: Grind Down The Yetzer Hara

The way to battle the yetzer hara that is like stone is to grind it down. This means taking small, even minute, steps to fulfill positive mitzvos in the same way you would grind glass, little by little. When you undertake such small steps, the yetzer hara is lulled into thinking that you have no possibility of victory, and will not even bother to mount a defense. Such small steps, however, gradually lead to the courage and the will to act.

Say, for example, you don’t feel you have the energy and stamina to host Shabbos guests. You feel you should do this mitzvah, but your dread of cooking, serving, and cleaning up from a table full of guests makes you want to

hide under the covers. The battle plan the Maharal is offering here is to start by inviting one guest. You know you can handle one guest. Then, when you see you have the ability to host one Shabbos guest, you start inviting two Shabbos guests. This is an effective strategy for grinding down the yetzer hara of stone.

A prime illustration of this is Rebbetzin Henny Machlis. In their modest Jerusalem apartment, Rabbi Mordechai Machlis, Rebbetzin Henny, and their 14 children host approximately 150 guests for every Friday-night seudah and for every Shabbos-day lunch, 51 weeks a year. (They go away for Pesach.) I [TH] once asked Rebbetzin Henny how they became involved in such a massive chesed project. She replied that she never intended to host 300 people every Shabbos. She and her husband just wanted to provide a Shabbos meal for these people this Shabbos. Gradually she realized she could do it every week. Instead of looking at the enormity of the task she was taking on, she looked at what was directly in front of her.

This is how to grind down the yetzer hara that doesn't want you to undertake positive actions.

The second form of yetzer hara is like iron, which is used in weapons of war. This facet relates to the negative mitzvos, the prohibitions that keep us from deeds that would destroy our relationship to Hashem and to people. When this yetzer hara grips us, we want to indulge in destructive actions.

Nietzsche, who provided the philosophical rationale for Nazism, said that destruction is as pleasurable as creation. We see this in children. They can spend an hour building a tower, and then with zestful glee, they knock it down. Adults too derive a sordid satisfaction from destruction, from their feeling of empowerment when they reduce someone to tears or break the limits of morality.

The Gemara states that this yetzer hara of iron, of destructive tendencies, can be exploded by dragging it to the Beis HaMidrash.

Learning Torah fills the empty space. The feelings of pleasure and empowerment that come from destruction can be replaced by the pleasure and empowerment that come from learning and incorporating Torah into one's life.

For example, imagine a person who was raised by extremely difficult parents, parents who were controlling and harsh. Now, as an adult, she is visiting her parents. Her father begins to yell at her and to berate her. She's about to counterattack, to let fly with accusations about what a failure he is as a father and as a human being. As a child, she was powerless to hurt him back, but now she is an eloquent adult, who could verbally beat her father to a pulp. The yetzer hara of iron, of destruction, is about to score a victory. But suddenly her Torah learning pops into her head. She remembers what she learned about the mitzvah of honoring parents, about the bottom-line level of gratitude to parents for bringing her into the world, about the mitzvah to honor parents being on the same side of the *luchos* as the mitzvos pertaining to Hashem. The very act of remembering what the Torah says puts her mind in control. Now she's thinking and considering what to do. *Why should I let my father determine who I am?* she ponders. *Do I really want to descend to his level and become a screaming, hurtful monster?* In this way, Torah learning vanquishes the yetzer hara of destruction.

The best way to blow up the yetzer hara of iron is to blow up the illusions it fosters. For example, your friend is sick and confined to bed for a couple of weeks. You decide that, even though she lives quite a long distance away, you will do the mitzvah of visiting the sick. As you're preparing to leave your home, you're trying to think of a present to bring, and music comes to mind. Music cheers the soul and a person in bed can easily listen to music. So you take the latest Chassidic pop-hit CD, and you copy it on your computer, and you bring your friend the copied CD. You consider yourself a real *tzaddik* because you're not only visiting the sick, but you're also bringing the perfect gift.

This, of course, is an illusion. You're not a *tzaddik*, you're a thief! Copying commercial CDs is a violation of halachah, as is printed on every album. In fact, the widespread *aveirah* of copying music CDs has all but ruined the Jewish music business, as no one but the superstars can now afford to release new albums without incurring financial loss.

My [SR] husband Leib Yaacov once had an experience that perfectly illustrates this method of “explode the yetzer hara.” For years he played keyboard in a klezmer wedding band. On his way to work one night, he listened to a Torah tape about labeling actions for what they really are. The following night, he played at a lavish wedding. He noticed that the benchers were exceptionally nice. They had a painting on the front, each page was laminated, and the print was large enough to be visible even to guests who had forgotten their glasses. Rationalizing that the benchers were a free giveaway, he collected twelve benchers and put them in his backpack. Then he remembered the Torah tape he had recently heard on labeling actions for what they are. With horror, he realized, “This is stealing.” By saying those words, he exploded the yetzer hara that had seduced him into transgressing the negative mitzvah against stealing. He hurriedly took the benchers out of his backpack, and went to look for the *baal simchah*. When he told him how much he liked the benchers and would like to have some for his own Shabbos table, the *baal simchah* graciously gave him a dozen.



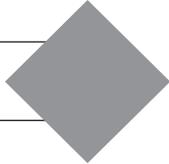
Battle Plan #4: Explode The Yetzer Hara

This battle plan requires exploding the illusions fostered by the yetzer hara by cutting through rationalizations and calling sins what they are. The way to explode such illusions is by learning Torah. For example, studying the halachos of “not moving the border marker” and of not stealing would

quickly eradicate the yetzer hara that prompts you to steal. The more halachah you learn, the more you will be able to slice through the yetzer's seductions with the sharp sword of true clarity. Thus:

- ◆ *When you yell at your children, instead of calling it "discipline," call it what it really is: the sin of onaas devarim, hurting other people with words.*
- ◆ *When you complain about a neighbor, instead of calling it "constructive," call it what it really is: the sin of lashon hara.*
- ◆ *When you criticize someone harshly, making him or her hate you and everything you stand for, instead of calling it the mitzvah of rebuke, call it what it really is: the transgression that follows the mitzvah of rebuke: "Do not bear a sin because of him."*

How Learning Torah Works



Learning Torah is an indispensable weapon to vanquish the yetzer hara. By setting firm guidelines for action, the Torah prevents us from wallowing in our base nature. Even more, the wisdom of the Torah fills that empty space with what is holy and sublime, so that there's no room for the yetzer hara to infiltrate.

This is why even a few days of true Torah learning can completely turn a person around, as we see with weekend seminars and learning programs for the general population in Israel. People who were engrossed in torpid or destructive lifestyles are quickly moved by the beauty and depth of Torah.

The bread of Torah fills the empty places, satisfies the sense of lack, and thus defeats the yetzer hara.

I [SR] know a young woman whom I'll call Bonnie. Raised in England without a Torah education, at the age of 17 Bonnie and

her friend Marna came to Israel to volunteer on a secular kibbutz. The girls' behavior was so wild that they were thrown off the kibbutz. They then spent a few months living on the beach in Eilat. At 18, Bonnie married an Israeli. They had a daughter. By the time she was 26, Bonnie was back in England, divorced and continuing to lead a vacuous lifestyle.

Meanwhile, her brother came to Jerusalem on the Aish HaTorah Fellowships Program. He was so moved by the classes in Judaism that he became religious and stayed at the yeshivah to learn Torah. When Bonnie became dejected because of the emptiness of her life, her mother convinced her to go to Jerusalem for one week to visit her brother. "And take out your nose ring and don't pack your jeans," her mother warned her.

Bonnie spent one week in Jerusalem's Old City. The example set by the religious Jews with whom she stayed and the impact of the Torah classes she attended totally transformed her. Today, she is observant, and married to a rabbi.

The Maharal continues by explaining how the Torah fills the empty space deep within us. When a person is actually learning Torah, at that moment he is comparable to an angel in terms of level of awareness and closeness to Hashem. At that moment his will is to do what Hashem wants of him, like an angel who exists only to fulfill its God-given mission. As the angels are described in the liturgy: "They are all beloved; they are all flawless; they are all mighty; they are all holy, and they all do the will of their Maker with dread and reverence." When a person is in that state, he is far, very far, above the place of lack, the breeding ground of the yetzer hara.

Learning Torah actually moves a person to the place of *sechel*. The *sechel* of Torah that the Maharal speaks about differs in essence from ordinary intellectual pursuits. Ordinary intellect is totally dependent on human observation. The process of attaining knowledge is observation, understanding, then drawing conclusions. Thus human knowledge is subjective because human observation is qualified by time, space, and the limitations of the observer. The truth

is, we humans don't see all that much. Our lives are very short, our subjectivity is very great, and our devotion to truth is very limited.

Torah, on the other hand, takes us above human observation to a place that is absolutely pure and objective. When a person enters the *sechel* of the Torah, the infinitude of the Torah could fill any empty space.

This presupposes, of course, that a person is learning Torah for a pure motive, not as a means of accruing material gain or aggrandizing the ego. While it is true that learning Torah for ulterior motives often leads to learning Torah for its own sake, one has to have as his ultimate goal to learn Torah for pure motives. Then the Torah can eliminate the baseness in our character—the materialism and the egoism—and fill our empty space with that which is pure and real.

The Maharal explains this even more deeply. He says that the Torah is perfect, and nothing else that we have is complete.

Rabbi Avraham Czapnik of the Jewish Learning Exchange in Los Angeles told me [TH] this story: His brother Yossi went to the funeral of the previous Bobover Rebbe, Reb Shloime. He noticed an unusual mourner, a large, black man, who was weeping copiously, like a baby. Rabbi Czapnik's brother was intrigued, because this man was obviously not a convert, not a Jew, so what connection could he have had with the Bobover Rebbe? He went over and asked him.

The man, whom I'll call Jackson, told him his story. Twenty-five years before, when he first began his profession as a house painter, the Rebbe called him and engaged him to paint his house. When Jackson arrived the first morning, ready to begin filling in the cracks and the other preliminary work, the first thing the Rebbe asked him was, "Did you eat breakfast?"

Jackson replied, "No." He thought the Rebbe would say, *There's a diner across the street. Why don't you go and eat breakfast and then come back?* But that's not what happened.

The Rebbe began taking out of the fridge all sorts of food that he would serve someone for breakfast. Of course, Jackson, coming from a different ethnic background, wasn't so thrilled with *chalav Yisroel*

cottage cheese and all of the other goodies that the Rebbe thought constituted a nice breakfast. But he ate it. And he did his work.

The next day he came back ready to begin the painting. The Rebbe said to him, "I want to tell you something before you start."

Jackson thought he was going to hear, *You'd better do a good job, because I'm paying you top dollar.* That's not what he heard. Instead the Rebbe said, "It doesn't have to be perfect."

Jackson was surprised. "What do you mean it doesn't have to be perfect? I'm a very good painter. Why shouldn't it be perfect?"

The Rebbe gazed at him and said, "In this world, nothing is perfect."

"Nothing is perfect?" Jackson faltered.

The Rebbe explained, "We Jews once had a Temple in Jerusalem that was perfect. But since then, nothing is perfect."

Jackson absorbed what the Rebbe said. He painted the house, and finished the job. Months later he was hired by another rabbi to paint his house. Jackson thought he knew the routine. Better eat first, otherwise you have to eat cottage cheese. He arrived and no one offered him breakfast. The first day he did the preliminary work. The second day when Jackson arrived, the rabbi said, "There's something I want to tell you before you start."

Jackson thought, *I know what he's going to say.* But instead the rabbi said, "I want a perfect job. I don't want to see any mess. I don't want to see imperfect corners. I don't want to see any paint on the ceiling. I don't want to see anything on the floor where your drop cloth didn't quite make it. I want a perfect job."

Jackson responded: "Rabbi, in this world, nothing is perfect. You Jews once had a Temple in Jerusalem and that was perfect. But since it was destroyed, nothing in this world is perfect."

At the Rebbe's funeral, Jackson turned to Rabbi Czapnik's brother and said, "That Rebbe, he's my man." He opened his wallet and showed a picture of the Rebbe, one of those card-collection pictures of *tzaddikim* that children trade.

Hashem is perfect. The perfection of the Beis HaMikdash was real because it brought Hashem's Presence into the world. The way

Hashem communicates His perfection to us is through the Torah, therefore the Torah is perfect. In the end everything else leaves a void, a place of emptiness.

Historically, when masses of Jews have abandoned Torah, we have felt the pain of the empty space, and we have sought to fill it with other things. Those things seemed to work for a while, but in the end they left nothing but disillusionment. For example, many of the early Communists were Jews. They were enamored of the prospect of social justice for all. The secular Zionists, too, clung to the ideology of building up the land, Jewish labor, etc. as a way to fill that empty space. But the act of draining swamps and building roads can't ultimately fill that empty space. That's why the same Zionists who built the land are now in the process of destroying it.

The Maharal asserts that the only way to successfully fill the empty space is with Torah, because only Torah is perfect.



Battle Plan #5: Learn Torah

“Dragging the yetzer hara to the Beis HaMidrash” for men means literally going to the Beis HaMidrash and learning Torah, surrounded by the voices of other men likewise engaged in learning. Since we are all influenced by our environment, the environment of the Beis HaMidrash itself is like fighting the yetzer hara from inside a tank. Even if a man’s learning is on a beginner’s level, he would do well to find a class taught by a rabbi in a yeshivah setting, rather than learning on his own.

For women, a similar principle applies. If her beginning stage takes place as an adult, a woman should surround herself by a Torah-learning environment, such as attending one of the many seminaries in Jerusalem. Throughout her life, she should attend classes to the extent her family’s needs allow. While men have a mitzvah to learn Torah every day, women are required to learn all the Torah they

need to know in order to properly fulfill the mitzvos. This would include classes on halachah as well as hashkafah [Torah outlook]. Since women, like men, are obligated in the Six Constant Mitzvos, which include loving and fearing Hashem, trusting Hashem, and knowing that no other power holds sway in life, every woman has quite a lot of Torah that is incumbent upon her to learn.

Even if a woman was raised in an observant home and received a thorough Torah education, she needs to be honest about her present level of inspiration. She may discover that her love and fear of Hashem have remained at the level she was at when she graduated Bais Yaakov, and they are no longer adequate now that she is an adult. When this is the case, listening to CDs, attending a shiur, learning on her own, or (possibly best of all) becoming a “partner in Torah” so that she must prepare a mini class to give over on the phone to another adult woman enables her to sharpen her hashkafos and deepen her own inner life.

Throughout her life, a woman can bring the “Beis HaMidrash” into her home by recalling what she learned and consciously living it. When faced with a decision, she should ask herself, “What is the Torah’s position on this issue?” This is using Torah to defeat the yetzer hara.

Learning Torah protects against both chronic and acute attacks of the yetzer hara. By incorporating Torah learning into your life regularly, whether it’s going to a class or learning with a friend chavrusa-style in person or on the phone, you are building a staunch defense against the yetzer hara. Acute attacks of the yetzer hara are those situations that hit you out of the blue, when you least expect it, like your child breaking a valued object or someone denting your new car. At such times, if you can bring to mind even one sentence you have learned, it can save you from losing the battle.