

Your Imagination, Your Evil Inclination

written by Shaul Mizrahi | April 4, 2021



In Sichah 6 of Sichos HaRan, Rebbe Nachman explains the tricks of the trade of the yetzer hara. This evil inclination is like a prankster. He runs into a crowd of people with his fist closed and says “guess what I have” and runs away. Everyone imagines that this prankster has what he wants so he runs after him.

Rebbe Nachman says “afterwards he opens his hand, and his hand is empty”. If “afterwards” were only after a 400-meter dash through the marketplace, it might not be so bad. But in many cases, “afterwards” means after 120 years. A person does not realize that he has been chasing after nothing all of his life until it is too late.

To make the situation even more clear, Rebbe Nachman brings

another parable to explain the nature of the desires of this world. Worldly desires and pleasures are like sunbeams that come in through a crack in the window shade of a dark room. The beams appear to be like pillars that you could grab on to. Yet, when you try to grab them, you find you still have nothing in hand.

The Rebbe states elsewhere that the time has come to give the yetzer hara a new name. Rather than calling him the evil inclination, we should call him, "koach hamedameh", the power of imagination. As we see in this Sichah, the yetzer hara doesn't come to a person and directly try to convince him to sin. Most people would reject such an offer outright. Rather, he works by activating a person's imagination, getting him to think that there is something worthwhile to chase after. Naturally, for each person that something is different. Yet, he manages to trick everyone into imagining that what he wants he will find by chasing after him. In this way, he distracts him from what is truly important.

Imagination is not bad. Rather, we must learn to use it in the right way. We may imagine that money, fame, a sports car or a steak will make us happy in this world. The Rebbe tells us here that these things are like sunbeams. They look solid, but when you try to hold on there's nothing there. This is the imagination when directed by the yetzer hara. We can use our imagination for good and holy things. In a different sichah, the Rebbe says that if a person imagines how he will accomplish a certain goal in Torah study, and concentrates very much on it, he will succeed.

Everything starts by knowing where to invest our efforts. Then, we can direct our imagination and all of our mental powers in the right direction, instead of where the yetzer hara would like to take them. With the advice of our holy Rebbe, we can know what is important and how to achieve it.