

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Bamidbar The Chopp Holdings Edition

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בעזה"ש

פרשת חקת

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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נא שלא לקרות בעת התפלה וקריאת התורה

Part I. The Silent Snake

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

In *Parshas Chukas* the Am Yisroel finds itself only miles away from their final destination of Eretz Canaan and yet, they begin to travel a long and circuitous route around the nation of Edom whose land Hashem had forbidden them to pass through. And as they turned to begin this rigorous trek, the Torah tells us about an episode of complaining among the people.

They were passing alongside inhabited lands, past nations that were living, not in tents, but in real homes, and eating real food instead of *mann*. And for some of the Am Yisroel these sights caused a certain amount of dissatisfaction: וַתִּקְצַר נֶפֶשׁ הָעָם בַּדֶּרֶךְ - "*The spirit of the nation became impatient because of the way*" (Chukas 21:4). It wasn't easy traveling the difficult and longer than expected journey and so, וַיִּדְבֹּר הָעָם בְּאַלְקִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה ... וַנִּפְשְׁנוּ קֶצֶף בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל - "*The people spoke against Hashem and Moshe... saying: 'Our souls are loathing this light bread.'*" Now, it doesn't mean that the majority were complaining - but there were some who evinced, who demonstrated, some dissatisfaction.

PANCAKES: ALL YOU CAN EAT

Imagine if *we* were limited in our diet merely to one item, one food, for so long! How long would we remain patient? If your wife gave you pancakes for breakfast and then when you unwrapped your lunch in the kollel or at the office, another pancake. And when you get home, so now you're already looking forward to something real, some meat and potatoes, something with substance to it. And what does your wife bring out for you? A plate piled high with pancakes again!

And imagine such a thing happening day after day after day - Shabbos too! It wouldn't be a good ending. You would become impatient with pancakes and sooner or later you'd open your big mouth: "My soul is loathing these pancakes already. Why can't we have something else like the neighbor has?" I don't know if you'd be thinking about going back to Mitzrayim but I'm sure you'd be wondering if it's any better in the house next door.

A VALID COMPLAINT

And that's what they said in the *midbar*. לָמָּה הִעֲלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם - "Why did you take us out of Mitzrayim?!" "We had homes there! And food too; real food! If only we could be living like the Edomites are living, and eating like the Mitzrim are eating, then we'd be able to succeed in our lives. You expect us to succeed with such a diet, with this לֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל?"

And the *mann* couldn't even compare to those endless pancakes that would cause even a *tzadik* to grow impatient. Because although the *mann* supplied all the necessary nutritional requirements, it was so easily ingested that one didn't have to spend time chewing it. It was לֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל - food that was especially "light" and it didn't afford the sensation of eating. And therefore people who ate for pleasure were constantly looking elsewhere.

And just because of that; because the people were thinking about improving their living conditions, so Hakodosh Boruch Hu sent upon them a punishment - a visitation of poisonous snakes. *Nechashim ha'srafin* - fiery serpents were suddenly slithering everywhere, *va'yinashchu es ha'am* - and some of the people were bitten (21:6). Those who complained about their living conditions, suffered venomous bites and many were in danger of dying and they begged Moshe to save them.

RAISING THE FLAG OF THE SERPENT

Now, what happened then was something very queer. Because when Moshe Rabeinu turned to Hashem in prayer, at that time Hakodosh Boruch Hu commanded Moshe to make a form of a snake and to put it on a pole. עָשָׂה לָךְ שָׂרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל יָם - *"Make for yourself a form of a poisonous snake and put it on a standard, on a high pole, וְהָיָה כָּל הַנִּשּׁוּךְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וְחָי - and anybody who was bitten by the serpents, let him look at that pole and he will become healed"*. (Bamidbar 21:8).

And that's exactly what happened. וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וַיִּשְׁמְהוּ - *"Moshe Rabeinu made the form of a copper serpent and placed it on a high pole, וְהָיָה אִם נִשְׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ אֶת אִישׁ וְהִבִּיט אֶל נָחָשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְחָי - and so it was; that if a serpent bit a man, he would stare at the at this copper serpent and live"* (ibid. 21:9).

Now, this story demands an explanation - a good deal of explaining. Because here you have people who merely wanted some better food, they were yearning for a better situation, and what do they get? An attack of poisonous snakes! And how are they saved? By looking at a different snake! By raising up their eyes to a snake on a high pole, that's how they would be healed.

THE MYSTERIOUS POLE

Now, just to ascribe to this copper snake some sort of mystical benefit is not following the ways of the Torah. We don't find such things in the Torah. And even if you'll tell me that there was something special, something about this snake that had the power to heal those who looked at it - so why put it on a pole? Anyone who needed could come and look at it. It could be lying in a box and all those who were bitten could come over and take a look; it didn't have to be on a high pole.

And if you'll say there's a benefit of raising your eyes to heaven and praying, then we could understand that - it's true of course. The *mishna* (Rosh Hashana 3:6) says that: כָּל זֶמֶן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל - *"So long as they were looking upwards towards Hashem, and being mishabeid their minds to Him, they would heal."* But that's not enough of an explanation - because why did they have to raise their eyes to the serpent? It could be a tall pole with nothing on top and they'd look at the top of the pole. A pole pointing up to *shomayim*! And on top of the pole, you see the sky and you are reminded about the *Yosheiv*

ba'shomayim - Hashem, who Sits on High. That would be a way to be healed! But what's a snake doing on top of the pole?

MOSHE RABEINU'S SHIUR ON SNAKES

Now, when Moshe Rabbeinu fulfilled this commandment of Hashem, he didn't merely place a copper serpent on top of a high pole and retire back to his tent. Had we been there, we would have heard a long *peirush*, a long explanation of the lesson of this נחש הנחשת. Because there's no doubt that he asked these questions - and he answered them too - and he thereby taught the Torah of the copper snake to the Am Yisroel.

Moshe Rabbeinu began his *shiur* to the Am Yisroel from Bereishis, from the *parsha* of the *nachash* in the beginning of the Torah. Everyone knows the story of the downfall of Adam and Chava when they were persuaded by the *nachash* to eat from the *eitz hada'as*. That's something that every child knows; the first time the *nachash* appeared in the Torah, his function was to mislead; to test and to tempt.

That was the function of the snake - to make Adam and Chava feel dissatisfied. They had everything! אָכַל תָּאֵכַל מִכָּל עֵץ הָעֵץ - "You can eat from the fruits of *all* the trees" (Bereishis 2:16) There was only one thing that they didn't have, the fruit of just one tree. And the job of the *nachash* was make them see only what they couldn't have.

A TALE OF TWO SNAKES

The snake in *Gan Eden* was an exceptionally cunning being with a great deal of intelligence. It *had* to be a very capable being if it was able to converse with Adam and his wife. And what was the purpose of this cunning snake? It was created by Hashem for the sole purpose of putting Adam and Chava through a trial. Would they withstand the persuasion of a cunning and deceitful being that wanted to convince them that they *didn't* have it all? Would this *nachash* be able to persuade them that they shouldn't be satisfied with what they have?

And it's this function of the *nachash* in *Gan Eden* that is the key to understanding the entire subject of Moshe Rabbeinu's copper snake. The *nachash*, we must know, represents a great power that the Creator put into this world - we call it by its Talmudic name, the *Yetzer Hara*, the evil inclination. It's a certain force, a real force that

exists in the world to test mankind, to put us through ordeals and to test our virtue.

And it's with this key in our hands, the knowledge that the snake is the *yetzer hara*, that we can unlock the mystery of the two snakes, the *nachash* of *Bereishis* and the *nachash* of Moshe Rabeinu.

THE YETZER BORROWED HIS NAME

You'll remember that in order to punish the *nachash*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu sentenced the serpent to forever have to crawl on its stomach: **עַל גְּחִינֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ** - *You should go on your belly* (*Bereishis* 3:14). From then on the snake had to slither on his belly, that's how he moves about. But it was once explained here that the snakes we are familiar with existed from the beginning.

There were *always* slithering snakes - they're part of the ecology, part of Hashem's system whereby all living things work in tandem with each other as one perfect system, each one fitting in to the general plan. But the *nachash* in *Gan Eden* was a being of a different sort; we call it *nachash* only as a *sheim mush'al*, a borrowed name. At that time, the *yetzer hara* presented itself in the form of a being that was portrayed as a *nachash* so that we could better learn its ways of tempting us. And it was this *nachash* - *yetzer hara* - that was cursed forever to have to crawl on its belly.

Now why did Hakodosh Boruch Hu impose this existence on the *yetzer hara*? Why was that a fitting penalty? After all, in all the punishments that Hashem gives, there is some reason, some logic. So what purpose was there in this penalty? What does it mean that the *yetzer hara* was sentenced that it should have to crawl on its belly like all ordinary snakes?

WALKING IN THE BUNGALOW COLONY

And the answer is this. You know, if you ever go walking in the woods behind your bungalow colony you have to be careful where you step. If you're stepping over a log, make sure to take a good look before you put your foot down. Better yet, when you walk in the meadows, in the deep grass, make sure you're wearing special high boots because Hakodosh Baruch Hu gave the snake an opportunity to attack its victims by means of stealth and surprise.

Now, if a snake had legs, like a rabbit, and was hopping around, so you could spot him from a distance as he was streaking

towards you, and you would protect yourself. But now that he's as close to the ground as he can get, he's almost invisible. Many times, as you're sitting in front of your house in the bungalow colony, you don't even realize that snakes are slithering through the grass only a few feet away. That's their business - to travel by stealth and creep up on the unaware victim.

WHAT COLOR IS A COPPER SNAKE?

And that's why when people are out for a good time, when they're walking in the woods and they're not careful, suddenly they receive a poisonous bite without any warning. The camouflaged snake creeps up on a man and suddenly, he shouts, "I'm bitten." No advance warning! He does his work, and by the time you realize what's happening, it's too late. You're already a victim.

That's also why a snake is colored like copper and it's why Moshe Rabbeinu decided to fashion his snake from copper. Because he could have taken silver or gold. Maybe wood. Hakodosh Boruch Hu didn't even say metal. "Make for yourself a serpent," Hashem said. But Moshe made a נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת, a copper snake, because desert snakes are most often colored *nechoshes*. And that color is very important to its function - that's how it does its job in this world - it camouflages itself by means of its color.

When we say Moshe made it out of copper, it's not polished copper; we're talking about ordinary copper implements, like what they always used in the good old days. Copper is beige, it's inconspicuous and it's a color that allows the snake to blend into the background.

HOME DECORATING 101 FOR CLUELESS HUSBANDS

You know, sometimes it happens that your wife tells you to go out and buy an air conditioner and now you're in the department store and you don't know what color you should buy. You know that she wants a color that will suit the décor of your dining room, something that matches. If you buy a white one, she might say it's no good. A black one, no good. And you have no interest in making trips back and forth to the store all Sunday. So what's the best thing to do? Ask for a beige colored air conditioner. If you buy the beige one, she won't be able to criticize too much - beige fits in with everything.

And that's why when the snake is lying in the grass, you can't see his shape. As he lies among leaves, among the twigs, he blends in with everything. The snake's color gives him an edge. That's why *nechoshes*, copper, and *nachash* are the same word. The snake wants to hide himself from you - that's how he accomplishes his task best, by not letting you know he's getting close.

THE SPY FROM MOSCOW

Like a spy that comes from Moscow and as he gets off the boat or the airplane, he doesn't want anyone to pay attention to him. And if he reads the headlines in the New York Times, "Dimitri to Arrive from Moscow Tonight," he knows he's finished. Headlines in the newspapers! That's the *last* thing that he wants.

Of course, today, Russia doesn't have to bother to send spies across the ocean because America has so many lunatics in its government, so many *meshugener* communists in its educational system and in the public media, that they're doing the work for free. They're doing the work of disrupting the country without being paid. But in normal times the best way for a spy to operate is by working undercover, by blending in and remaining unnoticed. Only that today the public is so stupid that the lunatics can proclaim it openly, with big headlines.

THE HUMBLE YETZER HARA

Now, like our old-time spy, Dimitri, the *Yetzer Hara* doesn't appreciate when people talk about him. The *yetzer hara* is the one entity in this world that does not look for *kovod*. Everybody wants recognition; everybody likes publicity, but the *Yetzer Hara* prefers to remain unseen and unnoticed, because that's his greatest tool.

Hashem made the *yetzer hara* like a snake that crawls in the grass. He crawls up to you and you don't see him. He's talking to you and crawling around your thoughts, but he's camouflaged among everything else in your head. And that's why most of mankind are enticed by the *yetzer hara*, even though they don't dream that they have any contact with it. It doesn't even enter their mind because it's concealed in such a manner that nobody who is being ensnared by it realizes what's taking place.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE SNAKE

And now we understand why the *yetzer hara* was sentenced to crawl like a snake. It's a *mashal*. When Hakodosh Boruch Hu commanded him to crawl on his belly, it doesn't mean that the *yetzer hara* stopped existing and became a snake. On the contrary, the *yetzer hara* doesn't bother anymore with the form of a snake. He has other forms, new ways of appearing to man - all of them incognito.

Today he appears in the form of a college professor or a neighbor. Sometimes he'll even come as a man with a beard and long *peyos*. It has to be that way because if the *nachash* would have continued to exist in the form that it had in the time of the *cheit*, so we would already know to watch out for that fellow. We know, "Watch out for him!"

We say the *nachash* losing its legs was a punishment for him, but actually it's not so - Hashem was giving the *yetzer hara* what it needed most in order to function: **על גחונך תלך** - "You should always go on your belly," and make yourself unnoticed. At that time Hashem established the method by which the *Yetzer Hara* should function in the world forever - by remaining incognito.

Part II. Raising the Snake

THE RUSSIAN SPY IN THE WHITE HOUSE

In every field of life, in every activity and in every thought, it's important to realize that there's an evil inclination in man that participates with him. The spy is not outside looking through the keyhole to hear and see what the cabinet of the United States is planning. The spy is already in the White House! He's a member, an official member of the cabinet, and he's participating in all the discussions.

And that means that whatever you're thinking, even what you might consider the best thoughts, the *Yetzer Hara* is sitting and planning along with you. He's seated there and he's contributing his part in the discussion. Now that's not my statement; it comes from the Chovos Halevavos. And the *yetzer hara*, when he comes in to our counsel to participate, his job is to see that things turn out the way he likes to see them turn out. And what we're learning in *Parshas Chukas*

is that one of his favorite means is making you think that your situation is not the best one for you.

LOOK THE SNAKE IN THE EYE!

How does it happen that instead of being full of happiness, you're dissatisfied with your station in this world? Why is it that complaining constantly comes into your life, that all kind of wrong ideas come into one's mind? It happens by stealth. It doesn't happen openly – it happens stealthily, without you even feeling the change. And that causes you to think that it's something real.

And that's why Hakodosh Boruch Hu commanded Moshe Rabeinu to put the snake very high up on a pole – because that's the opposite of what the *yetzer hara* wants. He wants to be as low as possible, that nobody should see him. Nobody should know of him. That's when he's most effective. He says, "Don't talk about me. I'm an *anav*. I don't want publicity. My success is incognito." And so, "Put him on a high pole," Hashem said. "Let everybody see the peril, the *sakanah*, so that they can overcome it."

And that's what Moshe told the Am Yisroel when he raised up the copper snake and commanded everyone who was bitten to look up at the top of the pole. Moshe Rabeinu said, "Look at this copper colored snake that's camouflaged among your thoughts. I'm lifting it up high for you to look at, for you to see that all it is is a snake. The fact that you're not satisfied, that you're thinking you'd be better off in Mitzrayim is nothing but the wiles of the *yetzer hara*."

DISCOVERING THE SNEAKY SPY

Hashem has chosen the method of concealment for the *yetzer hara* because that is the whole plan of *Olam Hazei* - that we should be putting effort into discovering that sneaky spy and succeed in the test of unmasking him. The more you learn about him and understand his tricks, the more you're capable of dealing with him and living successfully.

And that's why it has to be spoken about; so that as much as possible we should become aware of the snares that the Yetzer Hara sets for men. And the more we learn about them, the more we can make war. *בְּתַחְבֵּלוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לְךָ מִלְחָמָה* - "With strategy you have to make war against the *yetzer hara*" (Mishlei 24:6).

WICKEDNESS FILLS THE WORLD

Now, there are many ideas which must be discussed in this big subject of putting the *yetzer hara* on a high pole for everyone to see. On all sides there is wickedness and lies and you have to learn his wiles. You have to learn his ways in order to overcome him and to succeed in your purpose in this world.

You don't see him?! That means he's doing his job well. You should know he's very busy. He comes in all forms of disguises and the world is full of error. And if you don't look beneath the facade, you will never see the truth. The falsehoods today fill the world. Big buildings, libraries, universities. And they have the media today to spread their falsehoods.

The *sheker* fills the world today because he's choosing the most effective forms possible and he is succeeding. Wherever you go today you can no longer say the truth - you have to use political correctness when you talk. A tremendous tolerance of *sheker* was erected right under our noses. The *yetzer hara* crawled and slithered and the world is full of falsehood.

NEW DISGUISES

The *yetzer hara* did not cease existing when that poor form of his was sentenced to crawl on his belly. Because he doesn't actually crawl on his belly. No! The *yetzer hara* didn't retire. He didn't go out of business. He just came up with new things, different words, different temptations. The *yetzer hara* is still around and he's not crawling on his belly - he's crawling on our minds.

The stealth of the *nachash* means that there's always something new, something that slithers into our minds. When I was a boy, all the *rabbonim* used to thunder against Reform Judaism. And so, every synagogue Jew was trained to abhor reform. But then Conservative Judaism came up, and these same Jews entered the Conservative temples. How could that happen?

The answer is because these Jews were conditioned to withstand the temptation of Reform, but Conservatism, that's something else. Because the *yetzer hara* saw that there's no use knocking his head against the wall, so instead of using the old label of Reform which was already discredited, so he adopted a new label, and that was enough to bite many Jews who eventually went lost.

RAV MILLER GETS A BLOODY NOSE

You know, if someone would come along today and preach Socialism to the Jewish masses, we would just smile at him. Socialism is a dead ideal; we've been through it already - it's a flop. But when I was a boy, Socialism was the wave of the future. I once had a fistfight with somebody because I was fighting to defend Socialism. And I retired from that debate with my nose bleeding.

In those days, there were rabbis, European rabbis with beards preached in the synagogue and showed with *pesukim* - Socialism *min hatorah minayin*, to prove that Socialism was the Torah way. At the same time that the Socialists were tearing down Torah and *mitzvos* and belief in Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the snake was cunningly pulling the wool over our eyes.

THE MORAL MAFIA

That's how it is - the ideals of *Olam Hazei* are composed of falsifications, it's all *sheker*, with millions of adherents. A tremendous amount of humanity today subscribe to Humanism which is all *sheker*. All the evolutionists are *sheker*. All the colleges - of course today we already know that the colleges are the worst place in the world. For the sake of achieving good morals it's better to be in the dens of the mafia than in the colleges. No question about that. I don't want to pollute the air in here by telling you stories - I could tell you for hours about the wickedness of the colleges - it's indescribable, *ein l'sha'er*.

Of course, people don't realize that they're customers for the *nachash*. You buy the newspaper and you think, "What's so bad?" It's a bite from the *nachash*. Turn the page, another bite. A man goes to the movies, it's bites and bites and bites. He's being swallowed up by the *nachash*! A TV man - if you bring a TV into your house, so you brought a very big snake into your house. You're letting loose a poisonous snake in your house to attack your children. And even if you don't do that, so outside the home, walking in the street, the snake is everywhere. The windows of the stores, the advertisements, the gentiles - if you adopt the ways and mannerisms of those around you, so you should know that the *nachash* is doing a job on you.

And therefore we certainly cannot do justice to the subject with merely a couple of hours sitting together; each disguise must be spoken about because **וְהַנָּחָשׁ הַזֶּה עָרִים** - the snake is very cunning, and it's important to unmask him.

THE END OF THE WORLD

But in the short time we have here, we'll talk about one of the ways that the *yetzer hara* uses to deceive men, the method he used in our *parsha*, when the nation began to yearn for real food and for a trip back to Mitzrayim. And actually it's a very prevalent *yetzer hara* today, but like the snake, it goes unnoticed by many.

And that's the famous verse that Shlomo Hamelech taught us in Mishlei: עֵינֵי כְסִיל בְּקֵצֶה אֶרֶץ - "*The eyes of a fool are on the end of the world*" (17:24). Looking for things beyond and beyond and beyond. Over there the grass is greener; maybe over there I'll find something happier. And when you get there, you see that it's nothing. This is one of the tricks of the *yetzer hara* that causes mankind not to see what's available right now in front of their eyes - instead they see only what they *imagine* is someplace else. The fool always sees that he would be better off somewhere else. Over there, everything would be good!

PICNIC LESSONS

You remember when you used to go on a picnic with your family - in the good old days when it was still possible to picnic in public parks. So your parents took out the basket of lunch; they wanted to sit down on the grass. And you said, "Ma, the grass here is all trodden out. Let's go down that road there; you see there on the hill, it's all green over there!" And when you finally get to that hill, you see that the grass is even less green over there.

One of the great efforts exerted by the *yetzer hara* is to make us unaware of the opportunities of life. He wants to make us think that we're not successful, that we're not happy, and that there are more things to get in life than what we have. And we have to know that we're in this world to contend with this force.

YETZER HARA'S TRAVEL AGENT

The *seforim* often refer to it as *dimyon*, imagination. Like people who think, "If I travel someplace else, then it's going to be enjoyable over there." And then when they get there, they discover that people from over there are traveling over here and that the whole thing is nothing but imagination. Walk outside and you see signs: Travel here, travel there.

You'll have to excuse me because I don't want to step on anyone's toes, but the vast majority of Mankind have been bitten by

this *yetzer hara*. Many from Jews have fallen victim to this *yetzer hara*. Even the ones who can't travel - they don't have the money to go traveling - but they wish they could.

Now, you may not agree with me, but the truth is that there's nothing to travel for! Why should you travel?! You'll travel, let's say, to Hawaii? It's hot there; and there are bigger mosquitoes there than you'll find here. Travel means paying expensive money to be bitten by bigger mosquitoes. There's nothing in Hawaii at all. Nothing at all! Except that it's far away. הָרוּצָה לְשֶׁקֶר יִרְחִיק עֲדוּתוֹ - "If you want to say a lie talk about far off things". Travel is nothing but *sheker*. There's nothing to travel for.

EVERYONE TO THE USA!

No place, anywhere, is worth going. They're offering travel to Cuba now. What's there in Cuba? What's good in Cuba? Cuba is an impoverished country, with a dictator. People are starving in Cuba, walking around in rags. All the Cubans would like to come to America if they could. Wherever you go, all the natives want to leave their country to come to America. The whole world wants to come here; wherever you go, you see they're trying to get here. And you're paying money to visit their country. It's so stupid! It's all *sheker v'chazav*.

The travel bureaus are doing the job of the *yetzer hara* and they're busy bluffing the world. They have pictures of beaches someplace else, an island someplace, and they want to persuade you to buy tickets and to travel there. What do you need travel for? I don't want to criticize people who go to the country, I don't want to make people unhappy, but there's nothing in the country. Unless you're going to *yeshiva* in the country, or maybe you have some good reason to be there, but there's nothing there. It's all *yetzer hara* that someplace else is better. עֵינֵי כְּסִיל בִּקְצֵה אֶרֶץ - *the eyes of the fool are at the end of the world*. The fool always looks over there, not here. And who makes you a fool? The snake that is slithering around in your thoughts quietly - so quietly that you think that there's nothing wrong with looking for opportunities בִּקְצֵה אֶרֶץ - at the other end of the earth.

People go, let's say, to a theater at night because they weren't satisfied at home. They pay money for it and then, a few hours later they come out of the theatre with nothing. It's all *sheker*; the story never happened; it was all imagination. You walk out in the dark

street, and now the lights are out and the actors are no longer there. "I gave away my money for nothing. I wasted three hours for nothing." Even though they won't say it, but they feel it; they feel that it's an empty life and they have to continue searching for something better.

AMAZON IS NOT AS GOOD AS THEY SAY

There was a doctor I knew in Manhattan, an *am ha'aretz*. So when he was very old, he told his family that he wasn't yet satisfied - has wanted to "accomplish something" in his life. So this old fool travelled to Brazil to visit the Amazon Rainforest and he took a trip down the Amazon River in a boat.

Well, he doesn't tell us what happened but I can picture it. This old fellow with his creaking bones - he had arthritis already - so he's traveling down the river and he's having *chai* times *charata* why he didn't remain home in his flat in Manhattan. And he's waving off those huge mosquitoes that were zeroing in on him. Back home he couldn't get such mosquitoes - he'd have to go to a pet store to see such big creatures. Anyhow, when he came home so this faker told his family - he couldn't admit that he was the *ksil*, the fool of *Mishlei* - so he said, "Now, I'm ready to die." Of course he was ready to die. Anybody would be ready to die after such a trip!

Part III. The Snake's Allure

IF ONLY...

Now we come to a point that is very necessary to emphasize. In this great campaign, many of us are overcome by the thought that we don't have the opportunities we'd like to have. If! *If only* I was living over there in my neighbor's house. *If only* I had a better job. *If only* I had more money. *If only* I had more time. All types of arguments the *yetzer hara* gives that make us think our situation is not what is best for us. Most of mankind - when I say most, I mean *the vast majority* of people, are not successful because they don't live in the present.

It's not only traveling to the Amazon or Hawaii - that's just one example of how the *yetzer hara* is working. Because even the one who stays in Flatbush, so his eyes are not "at the end of the world",

but they're at the end of Ocean Parkway. I look out my window on motzaei Shabbos and there are cars going both ways on Ocean Parkway, back and forth, back and forth. The people from this side are looking for satisfaction on that side, and from that side they're hoping to find it on this side.

PARENTS, WIVES AND MOTHER-IN-LAWS

And even those who aren't traveling on Ocean Parkway, in their minds they're looking elsewhere. Here's a boy who's thinking: "If I had a different set of parents, I would have been something. But with such parents, who can get along?!" That person is a failure. Because these parents were given to him so that he should become the very best son he could be *to them*. It's not that he should make the best of the situation – *this is the situation that was made for him!* And instead of utilizing his parents, he thinks, "If I had parents like this fellow over there." That's what it means *einei ksil b'ktzei aretz* – "The eyes of a fool are at the end of the earth." If only I was over there, in that place, in that family. That's the sure sign of a fool who's wasting his life away.

Or when he's married: "Oh, if I had a different wife, then I could be something" A fool! An imbecile! You know, people are breaking up homes over nothing. Here's a nice young man and a nice young woman and all of a sudden, they're living apart now. It's a tragedy. People are ruining their lives for nothing. He finds fault with her and she maybe finds fault in him. It's such a delusion.

A woman calls me on the phone and says, "If I had a different mother-in-law, then I could live a normal life; then I'd be able to succeed in building my family." Or better yet, no mother-in-law at all! "If only I would have married an orphan!" But she doesn't realize that she was placed purposefully into this situation so that she should make out of herself the best daughter-in-law that she could be.

THE PLAGUE OF LOOKING ELSEWHERE

It's the biggest *yetzer hara* to look around in other places for imaginary opportunities. That's why there's so much marital distress today - it's a universal plague. There are so many homes, even when they don't separate, but they're dissatisfied and there's unhappiness

everywhere. And it's because of this snake that is disguising himself in people's thoughts and making people into fools.

Don't say, "When I get settled, when I make my fortune and I retire, that's when I'll become an *oived Hashem*; then I'll start learning Torah for real!" Because by that time, if it happens, you'll look back with regret, "Ah! If I could be a young man in yeshiva now, oh would I succeed! When I was in the yeshiva and I was younger, I could sit longer and learn. That was my golden opportunity that I wasted away by looking forward to the future - and now I'm looking back to see what I lost."

That's what the *yetzer hara* does to deceive people; he tells you, "Now is not the time. Some other time." "One day I'll go to a shiur." "One day I'll have the opportunity to think about the things Rabbi Miller talks about." "One day I'll cook for my children *lisheim shamayim*." "If only this," and "One day this," is one of the great *pitu'im* by which people are persuaded by the *yetzer hara* to lose the opportunity to achieve something in their lives.

WHERE DO IMPORTANT THINGS HAPPEN?

We have to know that when you're sitting in the yeshiva and learning, there's a tremendous *yetzer hara* to walk out onto the street. Everything becomes glamorous compared to learning. Every stupid thing outside suddenly seems to be interesting. As long as you're in front of the *sefer*, you should know that you're a target of very great pressure from the *yetzer hara*.

Outside from your *avodas Hashem*, it's *hevel v'rik* - there's nothing there. What do you think is in the outside world? A little thought pops into your head, that here in the *beis medrash*, here in my little kitchen, or in the office, it's not so important. But outside, out there, maybe there important things are happening.

THE BUM ON THE FRONT PAGE

You're thinking, "Maybe the newspapers are reporting important news - maybe I should go out and look in the newspaper." The front page talks about a certain man, a top basketball player who was captured by another team. Oooh ah! Big news! A nobody. When he went to high school he never attended class - he stood in the schoolyard and practiced basketball. A bum, that's all. And this bum is on the front page, and everybody is talking about him. Or another bum who has nothing in his mind at all, no intelligence at all. Only

that when he holds a bat he's able to smack the ball. He can give the ball a smack and everyone goes crazy. A homerun! *Meshugenahs!* It's nothing!

It's a ridiculous world. The outside world is stupid - it's nothing at all. Only that the yetzer hara has fooled everyone. One way or another, people have been bitten by the *nachash*. For one person the *nachash* of sports has bitten him. For another person it's clothing or cars or money. *Arayos*, television, politics, whatever it is, the snake is biting.

THE WORST SNAKE OF ALL

But of all the things that this snake in the grass is able to persuade people, he is most successful in making you think that you can't achieve greatness where you are right now. And so the time is right now to study this and to live with the ideal that wherever you are now, Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants you to make the best of it without looking elsewhere.

If you don't raise up this *sheker* on a pole, if you don't recognize the snake slithering in your mind as nothing but a snake looking to bite you, you begin to think that there's something there, that your opportunities are somewhere else. And so the yeshiva man must know that the place that is most glamorous is right here in the yeshiva. And the woman cooking for her family should know that the most glamorous place is right there in front of the oven. The *yetzer hara* is crawling in the ground in the kitchen trying to bite her. "If only she could be working in an office, doing something important."

And the man who is working long hours in the shop to pay *schar limud* for his children, and to buy them shoes and to pay the rent - so he must know that he is the true hero in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And the more you think about that truth, the more we train our minds to combat the *yetzer hara* that makes what we're doing seem plain and ordinary, the more we've learned the lesson of lifting the copper serpent out from the high grass and placing it on the high pole.

THE SNATCHER SUCCEEDS

The secret of living successfully - not only to be happy, but to live a successful spiritual life, is by living with today, with the exact place where you find yourself, without being a fool who looks to the

k'tzei ha'aretz, the ends of the earth, for success. And we must realize that anything else is the *nachash*, the snake in the grass, that creeps into our lives. Maybe there's no grass in your dining room - you have a deep rug, or expensive tiles, whatever it is, no matter - there's a snake crawling there too.

There's a snake in every home and people are dissatisfied and that's a great pity. Everybody in this world is dissatisfied - that's the plain truth. And if you're not happy today, you'll never be happy. Only the person who knows how to seize the moment, to snatch the present, will succeed in this world. And if you don't, then you're missing out on the great opportunity for greatness in this world in the place where you are.

KICKING YOURSELF IN THE HEARSE

You know when you're going to discover that? If you don't recognize the *nachash* now, if you don't pull out that camouflaged snake from where he's hiding in the bushes and put him on the pole to see, you know when you'll finally recognize him? When it's too late - just before you enter the door of *Yerei'im*, in a hundred and twenty years from now. Or Maybe it will be I.J. Morris, or Boulevard. The *Yerei'im* people are there too - the big *Yerei'im* people are handling all the funeral places today. No matter; whatever funeral home it will be, just before you enter that place you'll look back and you'll kick yourself. You'll say, "What was I thinking?! I lost my opportunity! I missed out on the opportunity in this world. I was looking here and there while my opportunity was exactly where Hashem placed me; on *my* block, in *my* home, in *my* kitchen, at *my* job, in *my* yeshiva, with *my* parents, *my* husband and *my* mother in law."

And so, wherever we find ourselves, we're always looking up at the top of the pole to remind ourselves of the snake, the *yetzer hara*, that is always hiding in the grass. And when we remind ourselves of this cunning *briyah*, a creation stealth enough to fool Adam and Chava, we understand that our only hope is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. כָּל זְמַן שִׂישְׁדָּאָל מִסְתַּבֵּלִין בְּלִפְי מַעֲלָה, וּמִשְׁעָבְדִין אֶת לִבָּם לְאַבְיָהֶם שְׂבִשְׂמִים - הֵי יְיָ מִתְרַפְּאִין. And we therefore are always asking Hakodosh Boruch Hu for His help to succeed in this world.

THE BEST HELPER

And now we begin to understand what the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) says, אֱלֹמֵיָא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרִיךְ הוּא עֲזָרוֹ – “If Hakadosh Baruch Hu wouldn’t help a man, אֵין יָכוֹל לוֹ – he couldn’t overcome him.” It’s impossible to contend with the Yetzer Hara on your own. You must have supernatural help and that help is always ready. Of course, it’s important for us to ask for it. Without help from Hakodosh Boruch Hu all is lost, and with Him, everything is possible. And so we must ask for His aid against this otherwise insuperable enemy that’s stationed in our midst and participating in all of our counsel.

The gemara says however, that if somebody is a *ba’al ga’avah* – if he’s too arrogant to ask for help so Hashem decides not to help him. וְנִמְסַר בְּיַד יְצֵרוֹ – and he’s left over in the hand of his yetzer hara. But when a man is humble and he asks Hakodosh Boruch Hu constantly to save him from the *yetzer hara* that is constantly lurking, so those *tefillos* are one of the most important ways of raising up the copper snake onto a high pole. Because as much as you turn to Hashem, that’s how much you’re recognizing the danger that you find yourself in, and that is how we lift up the copper snake from the brush where he hides. And in proportion to your *tefillos*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu steps in and helps you to the extent that you desire to be helped.

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————— This week's booklet based on Tapes: —————

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With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

How should one curb his desire and the desire of his family to always "keep up with the Joneses"?

A:

Let him listen to these tapes. Play the tapes of these lectures in your home, to your family. It's of the greatest importance to create an atmosphere of independence in your family - "We don't follow the crowd!" It's important. It's very important. Here's a man who is in dire straits financially; he's on the verge of bankruptcy. But he has to marry off a child. And it costs him \$50,000. He can't help himself because his wife is pressing him, "How can we have less? We'll be ashamed to face our friends. How can we not have this or that?" So this man thinks that he is a prisoner of circumstance. And so he goes even more deeply into debt. He borrows to make an expensive wedding. What a shoiteh he is! What a fool! Who cares what the relatives will say?! Who cares what the neighbors will say?!

You can make a wedding even without a smorgasbord. Oh, of course, it's apikorsus to say such a thing. Let's say you were a German Jew. German Jews don't make a smorgasbord. And therefore, you have a good model to follow. In every aspect of life, we have to learn to be independent - independent of the foolish pressures from outside the home. Because constantly we're being pressured to spend money, to keep up with the relatives, and with the friends. Therefore, you're running on a treadmill. You're a prisoner of nothing, of false ideals. You're laboring and spending your substance for something that Hakadosh Baruch Hu never required you to do. That's called wasting your life. You won't get any reward for it, in this world or in the next world. You won't get any reward for keeping up with the so-called Joneses or the Levys.

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