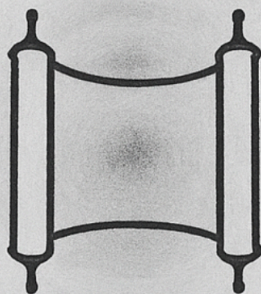


בס"ד

Reb Meir of Premishlan

Divrie Meir

Parshas Ki Teitzei



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Introduction

This discourse from Rabbi Meir of Premishlan centers on the mysterious Torah law of the “Yefas Toar”—the beautiful woman captured in war (Devarim 21:11). While the plain meaning, and even Rashi’s commentary, presents it as a concession to human weakness, Rabbi Meir reveals a deeper spiritual psychology at work.

Drawing on the concept that the *Yetzer Hara* (evil inclination) always opposes holiness, he flips the entire narrative: Hashem strategically *permits* the act so that the *Yetzer Hara* will switch sides—now opposing the very act it once tempted. This Chassidic interpretation reframes the Torah’s accommodation not as resignation, but as a subtle maneuver to give man a fighting chance at resisting sin through redirected spiritual tension.

Rabbi Meir of Premishlan (1780–1850), one of the most beloved Ukrainian Chassidic masters, was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and of Rabbi Mordechai of Nadvorna. Renowned for his open-hearted simplicity and miraculous conduct, Rabbi Meir’s teachings often illuminate difficult Torah passages with penetrating spiritual logic, layered in warmth and humility. This teaching is a perfect example of that spirit—unraveling a perplexing mitzvah into a subtle divine strategy for overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*.

וְרָאִיתָ בַּשְּׁבִיָּה אִשָּׁת יָפֶת תֹּאֵר וְחָשַׁקְתָּ בָּהּ וְלָקַחְתָּ לָּךְ לְאִשָּׁה דְּבָרִים כ"א, י"א

"And you see among the captives a woman of beautiful form, and you desire her, and you take her for yourself as a wife" (Devarim 21:11)

"And you shall take her for yourself as a wife"—Rashi explains: “The Torah only spoke against the evil inclination.”

וְלָקַחְתָּ לָּךְ לְאִשָּׁה. פִּירֵשׁ רַשִּׁי: לֹא דְבָרָה תוֹרָה אֵלָּא כְּנֶגֶד יֵצֶר הָרָע.

The question arises: Are not all mitzvos against the evil inclination? Why then does the Torah specify this phrase only regarding the “woman of beautiful form”?

קוּשָׁה, הֲלֹא כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת הֵן כְּנֶגֶד יֵצֶר הָרָע, וְלָמָּה כָּתַב הַכְּתוּב דְּוָקָא בְּיָפֶת תֹּאֵר?

I heard in the name of the holy Rabbi Meir of Premishlan זצ"ל the following explanation:

שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּשֵׁם הָרַב הַקְדוֹשׁ רַבִּי מְאִיר מִפְּרֵמִישְׁלָן זִ"ל שֶׁזֶּה פִּירוּשׁוֹ:

Behold, the evil inclination is always positioned in opposition to the mitzvah. If the mitzvah demands that one do something—or refrain from doing—then the evil inclination stands opposed: to not do, or to do the opposite.

דִּהְיָה הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע הוּא תָּמִיד כְּנֶגֶד הַמִּצְוָה, שְׂאֵם הַמִּצְוָה הִיא שְׂיַעֲשֶׂה אוֹ שְׁלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה, הוּא הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע לַעֲמֹת זֶה שְׁלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אוֹ שְׂיַעֲשֶׂה.

This is the meaning of what Hashem said: “If I do not permit her to him, then in the end the evil inclination will cause him to take her in sin.”

וְזֶה פִּירוּשׁוֹ: דִּהְיָה הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר: אִם אֲנִי לֹא אֶתִּיר לּוֹ—סוֹפּוֹ שְׂיַשִּׂיא אוֹתוֹ הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע וְיִקְחָהּ בְּאִסּוּר.

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He permitted him to marry her—so that now the evil inclination would oppose

מָה עָשָׂה הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא? הֵתִיר לוֹ שְׂיַשְׁאָנָה, וְעַכְשָׁיו הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע מַסִּית אוֹתוֹ שְׁלֹא יַשְׁאָנָה.

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the mitzvah and try to prevent him from doing it, saying:

“Don’t marry her.”

This is what it means: “The Torah only spoke against the evil inclination”—it spoke opposite the evil inclination’s stance, so that he would now resist the mitzvah itself.

וְזֶהוּ: לֹא דִבְרָה תּוֹרָה אֶלָּא כְּנִגְדֵּי יֵצֶר הָרָע—כְּנִגְדּוֹ, לְעִמָּתוֹ שֶׁל הַיֵּצֶר הָרָע.

And the words of a wise man are gracious.

וְדִבְרֵי פִי חֲכָם חֲנוּ.

[NOTE Summary

The Torah says that if a soldier desires a captive woman of beautiful form, he may take her as a wife. Rashi comments, “The Torah only spoke against the evil inclination,” implying this is not an ideal path but a concession. Rabbi Meir of Premishlan asks: aren’t all mitzvos intended to oppose the *Yetzer Hara*? Why is this singled out?

He answers that typically, the *Yetzer Hara* tempts a person to *not* fulfill a mitzvah. But in this case, the desire itself is so strong that if Hashem forbade it, the person would sin regardless. So instead, Hashem *permits* the marriage—now the *Yetzer Hara* flips roles and tries to stop the person from fulfilling the now-permitted mitzvah. The Torah, therefore, speaks “against the *Yetzer Hara*”—not in the usual sense of warning against temptation, but in the deeper sense of outmaneuvering it entirely by changing the battlefield.

Practical Takeaway

When we find ourselves tempted or spiritually blocked, we should pause and ask: “What is the *Yetzer Hara* really trying to prevent me from doing now?” Often, the test is not where we expect it. Sometimes G-d engineers the situation so that our evil inclination gets tripped up in its own strategy. When we notice that the *Yetzer Hara* has suddenly flipped—discouraging us from something good we’re allowed to do—we might realize that we’ve already won half the battle. Holiness lies in the awareness of the struggle and the wisdom to shift with it.

Chassidic Story

Rabbi Meir of Premishlan once overheard a young man in his town justifying a morally questionable act by saying, “But the Torah permits it—doesn’t it say that sometimes Hashem allows us to follow our hearts?”

Rabbi Meir turned to him and said, “That is true. But only because Hashem knew your heart might take you there anyway—and He wanted to meet you on the battlefield, not leave you to the *Yetzer Hara*’s traps. If the Torah permits it, then the *Yetzer Hara* is already whispering the opposite. Be careful—when it looks easy, it might be the hardest test of all.”

(Source: *Meir Einei Chassidim*, oral traditions from Premishlan) **END NOTE]**