

DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT DOING THAT AGAIN!

PARSHAS SHOFTIM

There is a famous story about a wealthy Jewish rug merchant. He was enjoying his Shabbos meal with his family when he heard loud and persistent knocking at his door. It was the Sultan's messengers. The Sultan was having a party and needed some expensive rugs, immediately. The merchant apologized that he could not do business on Shabbos. The messengers left, saying that the Sultan would not be happy. Sometime later, the messengers returned with a message from the Sultan. If the Sultan would not receive the rugs immediately, he would stop doing business with the merchant and would also encourage others to stop doing business with him. The merchant apologetically refused. The merchant's wife and children were worried that the Sultan might harm him because of this refusal. The merchant said that it was Shabbos and they should not worry about it now. After Shabbos, the Sultan's guards came to the merchant's house to take him away. When he was escorted into the Sultan's chambers, the Sultan was smiling. The Sultan had made a bet with the prince of another country that a Jew would not desecrate the Shabbos, even for money. The merchant's refusal to desecrate Shabbos even under the threat of a large financial loss, allowed the Sultan to win his bet. The Sultan told the merchant that he would purchase more from him and encourage others to do so as well. The merchant's refusal to desecrate Shabbos facilitated his getting more money than before.

In this week's parsha, Hashem exhorts the Jewish king not to acquire too many horses. Egypt was known as the premier seller of fine horses and Hashem did not want any Jew to return to Egypt to purchase horses. The **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l (Biuri HaChofetz Chaim al HaTorah by Rabbi Yisroel Braunstein) questions the wording of the pasuk. First the pasuk uses the plural for horses, "*susim*", saying that the Jewish king should not acquire too many horses. The end of the pasuk uses the singular form, "*sus*", that the Jewish people should not return to Egypt to get many horses.

The **Chofetz Chaim** explains that the Torah is teaching us a very powerful lesson in human nature. Generally, a person will not sin for a minimal gain. However, if the potential gain is great, the temptation to sin will be greater. For example, a person who observes Shabbos

"Only he [the Jewish king] shall not keep many horses and not cause the people to return to Egypt to get many horses..."
(Devarim 17:16)

will not desecrate Shabbos for the benefit of gaining a few pennies. However, the temptation to desecrate Shabbos will be much greater for the benefit of gaining thousands of dollars. A person might be tempted to rationalize to himself and desecrate Shabbos.

The **Chofetz Chaim** continues, if a person does desecrate Shabbos because of the temptation of gaining thousands of dollars then he weakens his resolve of keeping Shabbos. In his mind desecrating Shabbos is no longer as terrible as he once felt that it was. He will more easily come to desecrate Shabbos. Our rabbis tell us, once a person sins and repeats the sin, the action becomes permissible in his eyes, "*na'ase lo ke'heter*". Little by little, the importance of keeping Shabbos will become less and less until he will be willing to desecrate Shabbos **even for the gain of a few pennies!**

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

This is the lesson that the pasuk is teaching us. The Jewish king certainly will not send a fellow Jew back to Egypt just to purchase one horse. However, if the Jewish king desires and acquires too many horses then it will break-down his barrier, and he will now be willing to send Jews down to Egypt to purchase even a solitary horse.

The **Talmud** (Kedushin 40A) explains **Rav Huna's** teaching. **When a person transgresses and repeats his transgression, then it becomes as if it were permitted to him.** He becomes accustomed to this behavior and no longer senses that it is a sin.

For this reason, **Rabbeinu Yona of Gerona** says (Shaarei Teshuvah) that **one who sins should repent his sin as soon as possible.** If he delays, then he will more easily succumb when the yetzer hara presents the same sin to him at another time. At that point, **teshuvah will be more difficult because the sin becomes permissible in his eyes and he will not feel the need to repent.**

There was a famous rabbi who fainted in shul when the *gabbai* announced that the month of Elul was approaching. The Rabbi felt the nearness of Rosh Hashana, the day that Hashem judges us.

The month of Elul is here. It means that Rosh Hashana is approaching. If we have not already done so, it is time to reflect on our actions. What needs improvement? How can we come closer to Hashem? Which sins do we have to quickly correct before we view them as permissible actions? To whom do we have to ask for forgiveness? How can we improve our relations with others?

May Hashem give us the strength to do *teshuvah* and may we all merit a year of health, and success.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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