

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi



WHEN THE
YETZER HARA
MAKES
GAN EDEN
FEEL LIKE
GEHINNOM

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Title: When the Yetzer Hara Makes Gan Eden Feel Like Gehinnom

THE DERASHA

1. “Sin Crouches at the Opening” — But What Does That Even Mean?

The pasuk tells us:

“**L’petach chatat rovetz**” — “At the opening, sin crouches.”

Or, if you’re reading one of those very old translations: “croucheth.”

This line becomes the foundation of a remarkable conversation in the Gemara — a conversation between one of the greatest Jewish leaders of all time, **Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi**, and... the **Roman Emperor Antoninus**.

Talk about an unusual chavruta. Not a Syrian and a Persian. Not an Ashkenazi and a Moroccan. The **Nasi of Israel** and the **Roman Emperor** — studying Torah together. Only in Jewish history.

Antoninus once asked Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi:

“**When does a child receive the Yetzer Hara?**”

We know the Yetzer Hatov arrives at bar/bat mitzvah. But the Yetzer Hara?

Rabbi responds:

At birth.

The moment the child enters the world — “*at the opening*” — the Yetzer Hara is waiting.

But the Slabodka Alter, Rabbi Meir Chodosh, raises a powerful question:

If the Yetzer Hara is present from birth, how do the Sages know it wasn’t already present *before* birth?

The Gemara answers:

Because if a baby had a Yetzer Hara in the womb, he would kick and fight his way out.

Which leads to the obvious question...

Really? That’s what the Yetzer Hara pushes for — to escape wombs?

Is the Yetzer Hara’s first evil desire... prenatal jailbreak?

Of course not. Something deeper is being taught here.

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2. But What About Yaakov and Esav?

Your brain should immediately jump to the famous story:

- **Yaakov**, in the womb, kicks when passing a Beit Midrash.
- **Esav** kicks when passing a house of idol worship.

If there's no Yetzer Hara until birth, how was Esav kicking?

Answer:

Just as Yaakov's spiritual instinct appeared early (even before his Yetzer Hatov), so too Esav's destructive inclination appeared early (even before his Yetzer Hara).

Their tendencies were wired into their *very being*.

But these were exceptions.

For normal babies, the Gemara says:

No Yetzer Hara in the womb. Otherwise, they'd kick to get out.

Which brings us back to our question:

Why would the Yetzer Hara want a baby to escape the womb?

3. The Alter from Slabodka Drops a Bombshell

Here is the Alter's breathtaking insight:

****The Yetzer Hara's core strategy is:**

To make **Gan Eden** feel like **Gehinnom**,
and to make **Gehinnom** look like **Gan Eden**.
To make you run away from perfection.**

A fetus in the womb has:

- Perfect nutrition

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- No discomfort
- Total environmental protection
- No breathing problems
- No digestive problems
- And the best of all:
A Malach teaches the baby the entire Torah.
His vision reaches from one end of the world to the other.

That womb is practically **Gan Eden**.

So why would the Yetzer Hara push the baby to leave?

Because the Yetzer Hara's nature is to make you abandon ideal situations.

He convinces you:

- "This isn't good."
- "There's something better out there."
- "Run."

Human beings do this constantly:

- A relationship is good → "Maybe I can find better."
- A job is stable → "Maybe I'm missing some huge opportunity."
- A home is comfortable → "Maybe I should uproot everything."
- You're dating someone wonderful → "But what if someone even more perfect appears?"

This is the Yetzer Hara's masterstroke:

He makes the best thing in your life feel like it's not good enough.

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He makes the womb feel like prison.

4. The Jews in the Desert — Living in Gan Eden, Begging to Return to Egypt

Need a real-world example?

Look at the Jews in the desert:

- Clouds of glory
- Constant miracles
- Manna with infinite flavors
- The Be'er Miriam traveling with them
- Protected, cared for, guided
- Every need provided

And what do they say?

“Let’s go back to Egypt.”

Egypt!

Land of slavery, torture, and infanticide.

Why return?

Because that’s what the Yetzer Hara does:

It convinces you that slavery is freedom, and freedom is slavery.

It reverses the emotional polarity of life.

5. The Giants, Tommy DeVito, and the Video Tape of the Yetzer Hara

Now let’s talk football.

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The Giants bring in **Tommy DeVito**, a third-string quarterback nobody expected anything from.

He wins a game.

Then another.

Then another.

Suddenly he's Tommy "Cutlets," the pride of Jersey.

Then... he falls off a cliff.

Why?

Not because he's worse.

Not because he forgot how to throw.

Not because he secretly switched to the Jets.

But because:

The NFL figured him out.

There's tape:

- How he reacts when the pocket collapses
- His favorite receiver under pressure
- When he runs
- When he checks down
- When he panics
- When he improvises

Once the defense sees enough games, they know every move.

My friends:

We have THOUSANDS of years of videotape of the Yetzer Hara.

We can predict his plays.

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His tendencies.

His manipulations.

His illusions.

He always rolls left.

He always whispers that the grass is greener.

He always shows you a “perfect escape hatch.”

Once you know his playbook, you can see through the illusion.

6. “At the Opening, Sin Crouches” — The New Meaning

The pasuk doesn’t mean:

“Sin is waiting at the physical opening of the womb.”

It means:

**The Yetzer Hara always presents you with an “opening,”
an escape route from your own Gan Eden.**

A relationship is magnificent

→ and suddenly your ego tells you to pick a fight.

Your home is peaceful

→ and suddenly you feel trapped and restless.

Your marriage is flourishing

→ and suddenly you find yourself nitpicking and resentful.

The Yetzer Hara whispers:

“Get out. Run. Escape.”

“You deserve more.”

“Look at the bars. You’re trapped.”

But the bars are an illusion.

7. The Window Screen Parable

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Stand before a window with a screen.

Take a photo of the screen.

What do you see?

- Bars
- Lines
- Mesh
- A cage-like pattern

Now zoom your camera onto the scenery beyond the screen.

What happens?

The “bars” **disappear** entirely.

Because you changed your focus.

So too with life:

- Focus on the limitations of marriage → it feels like prison.
- Focus on the blessings of marriage → the limitations vanish.
- Focus on the frustrations of parenting → you feel trapped.
- Focus on the miracle of having children → the “bars” dissolve.

There are couples spending **\$40,000... \$80,000... \$120,000** trying to have a baby — and they would give anything for the privilege of getting spit-up on.

It's all about focus.

8. PTA Shows, Diapers, and “Tree Energy” — A Polished Farhi-Style Humor Expansion

Every parent knows this:

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You wait four hours for your child's school performance.

Four hours.

Your child has practiced one line — loudly — for three months straight in your living room.

And then, the moment they get on stage?

They whisper it into the microphone as if the FBI is listening.

You don't hear a word.

But you clap like they just won an Oscar.

Next year you tell the teacher:

"Maybe my child could be the tree. He has very strong tree energy."

When you're in the moment:

- The traffic
- The diapers
- The spilled juice
- The forgotten lunch
- The last-minute school project due tomorrow
- The sleepless nights
- The endless carpools

You feel imprisoned.

But ten years later?

You'd give anything to go back to those days.

The "bars" fade when you zoom out.

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9. Marriage, Compromise, and The Five-Minute Game Joke

Every marriage requires compromise.

Sometimes it feels restrictive.

But the payoff is immeasurable.

A husband complains:

“My wife said she’d be ready in five minutes!”

Reminder:

You once told your wife the football game would be over in five minutes.

We all say things under pressure.

But a marriage built on humility, patience, and compromise

becomes so strong that years later, you don’t even remember the inconvenience.

10. The Tragedy of Adam HaRishon — And Our Lives

Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge.

But here’s the heartbreak part:

**Had he waited just one more night,
Hashem would have given it to him anyway.**

How many blessings do people destroy
because they couldn’t wait a little longer?

How many marriages break
moments before the breakthrough?

How many opportunities vanish
because patience ran out at 99%?

This is the Yetzer Hara’s most devastating move:

**He convinces you to destroy the very thing
you were about to receive anyway.**

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11. The Rabbi's First Year — The Bars and The Trust

When I first took this job seven years ago, the Foundation overseeing the shul wanted to check everything.

Not interfering — just ensuring the ship was running right.

Every flyer, every program, every decision — “Just keep us posted.”

If I had focused only on the “bars,”
I would have felt imprisoned.

But I looked beyond the moment.
I understood:

Trust takes time.

I stayed the course.
Served with integrity.
Showed consistency.

And you know what happened?

Slowly...
The calls stopped.
The questions stopped.
The oversight relaxed.
They trusted me.

Had I pushed back early —
I would still be living behind those “bars.”

THE TAKEAWAY

 **The Yetzer Hara does not need a thousand tricks.**

He only needs one:

**To convince you that your Gan Eden is a Gehinnom.
And that your Gehinnom is a Gan Eden.**

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If you learn to recognize that play —
if you watch the videotape —
you can defeat him.

When you feel trapped,
shift your focus.
Zoom out.
See the beauty in the distance.
See what this relationship, this family, this job, this life
is *becoming*.

Don't escape your blessings.
Don't abandon Gan Eden.

And don't let impatience rob you of gifts
that are already on the way.

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SHABBAT-TABLE QUESTIONS

1. **Where in your life do you confuse comfort with confinement?**
What “bars” might disappear with a shift of focus?
2. **Can you identify a moment when the Yetzer Hara convinced you that something wonderful wasn’t good enough?**
3. **What is one area where waiting just a bit longer might change everything?**
4. **Where have you seen the “grass is greener” illusion in your life — and how can you expose it as illusion?**
5. **If you made a “videotape” of your Yetzer Hara’s moves, what repeat patterns would you find?**
