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At The

SHABBAT TABLE

BS"D
By Michael Sionov
5786

PARSHAT TZAV

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Driving Drunk?

An Englishman was once driving through Scotland, a bit too fast for his own good — several dozen miles over the speed limit — when he slammed into the car in front of him. Both drivers pulled over. As the Scotsman stepped out of his vehicle, the Englishman's thoughts raced: "I'm in big trouble. I rear-ended him — my fault — and when he hears I'm English, it's going to get worse."

The Scotsman approached with a friendly smile — and a bottle of wine. "Are you all right? You look a bit shaken," he said.

"Y-yeah, I'm fine," the Englishman replied nervously.

"Here, have a drink. It'll help you relax." He poured a glass, which the Englishman gratefully accepted. One glass became two, then three, until the bottle was empty.

The Scotsman walked back to his car. The Englishman's stomach tightened — what was he going to bring next?

Moments later, the Scotsman returned, this time with a large bottle of whisky. "You still don't look yourself. Drink some more." Glass after glass was poured until the second bottle was finished. The Englishman was now thoroughly relaxed — and thoroughly drunk.

"So," he slurred, "what do we do now?"

"Well," the Scotsman said calmly, "I'm going to call the police and have them come over right away. And you... you're going to try to convince them that you're not drunk." [1]

It sounds like a clever trap, but in truth, it's an old trick. This is exactly how the Yetzer Hara operates. He doesn't shove us into sin all at once. He offers "just one sip." Just one compromise. Just one more indulgence. And when we're not

satisfied, he keeps pouring: "Go on, have more, it'll make you feel better." Step by step, cup by cup, until we're so intoxicated with distraction that we can no longer think clearly.

And then, he vanishes. We're left standing before Hashem, trying to convince ourselves, and Him, that we were really in control all along.

We are about to enter the holiday celebrating the Exodus — the story that, in many ways, began with Pharaoh employing a strikingly similar strategy. As the Midrash relates, the process did not begin with outright oppression, but with compensated labor. The Jews were initially drawn in under the guise of voluntary, even rewarded work.

Gradually, however, the demands intensified. What began as reasonable labor became increasingly burdensome, until the conditions grew overwhelming. Over time, this subtle shift evolved into full-fledged slavery, where the Jewish people were no longer working for compensation at all, but were subjected instead to relentless toil, suffering, and torture.

The lesson is clear: the Yetzer Hara's strategy isn't a head-on collision — it's a slow intoxication. Our strength is not in winning one giant showdown, but in having the presence of mind to stop after the first cup. To pause before the small compromise. To say "no" when it still feels small and insignificant. Because in that moment, we've already won the bigger battle.

[1] Heard from R' Aharon Pessin

A student of R' Yisrael Salanter spent hours scrubbing his home for Pesach. He proudly told the Rav, "Not a crumb of chametz remains!" R' Yisrael looked at him and asked, "And what about the crumbs of pride? The crumbs of anger? The crumbs of impatience? Those chametz take longer to clean."