

Desire: Temptation Toward Evil or Inspiration For Good  
Compiled and Translated by Rabbi Noah Gradofsky  
Slichot Discussion, September 8, 2007

*Note: Though this lesson is modeled on the UTJ's program, "Taking the MTV Challenge" and borrows a media clip from them, this lesson is not created or endorsed by UTJ.*

**1. Media Clip: "House, MD" Season 2 Episode 23 (Episode #44 in the series) "Forever."**

**Video:** <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/media/house.wmv>

*A mother, whose brain tumor led her to a psychotic episode where she killed her son, refuses treatment for her brain tumor. Dr. House accepts this decision, while Dr. Foreman, who recently survived a near-death experience, and is now treating every day as a blessing disagrees.*

**2. פרקי אבות ד א:א (pirkei avot) Ethics of the Fathers 4:1**

... איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו ...

Ben Zoma says: Who is rich? The one who is happy with his portion.

**3. Genesis Rabbah 9:7 בראשית רבה ט:ז**

*This midrash comments on the words of Genesis 1:31 where God sees all of God's creations "וַהֲבִיחָהּ אֱלֹהִים וַהֲבִיחָהּ אֱלֹהִים וַהֲבִיחָהּ אֱלֹהִים וַהֲבִיחָהּ אֱלֹהִים וַהֲבִיחָהּ אֱלֹהִים and behold, it was very good."*

רבי נחמן בר שמואל בר נחמן בשם רב שמואל בר נחמן אמר הנה טוב מאד זה יצר טוב והנה טוב מאד זה יצר רע, וכי יצר הרע טוב מאד, אתמהא, אלא שאלולי יצר הרע לא בנה אדם בית ולא נשא אשה, ולא הוליד ולא נשא ונתן, וכן שלמה אומר (קהלת ד) כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו.

Rabbi Nachman bar Shemu'el bar Nachman in the name of Rav Shemu'el bar Nachman said: "behold it was very good," this is the good inclination, "and behold it was very good," this is the evil inclination. [This commentary is] Shocking! However, were it not for the evil inclination, a person would not build a house, and would not marry a woman, and would not have children, and would not do business. And thus Solomon says, "(I have seen all the work and all the excellent work) that it is all man's jealousy of his fellow (this also is vanity and evil spirit)." (Ecclesiastes 4:4)

**4. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Genesis 4:7**

*Rabbi Hirsch is explaining God's words to Cain when Abel's sacrifice was accepted, and Cain's wasn't. God says, "Is it not that if you are good you will succeed . . ." Note this is the published translation of Hirsch, which was originally written in German.*

No single one of the powers and natural tendencies which are given to man is either good or bad in itself, from the most spiritual down to the most sensuous. They are given to him for beneficial purposes to accomplish G-d's will on earth. The Divine Torah gives them as a positive aim and a negative limit. In the service of this purpose indicated by God and within these limits set by God, everything is good and holy. Separated from these purposes and outside these limits, coarseness and evil begins. G-d has given sensuality an appeal to your senses, not that it should master and direct you, but that you should direct it.

**5. Media Clip: "Wall Street"**

**Video:** <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/media/greed.wmv>

**6. פרקי אבות א:יד (pirkei avot) Ethics of the Fathers 1:14**

הוא היה אומר אם אין אני לי מי לי וכשאני לעצמי מה אני . . .

He (Hillel) used to say: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, but if I am for myself, what am I . . ."

**7. Media Clip: "House, MD" Season 3 Episode 24 (Episode # 70 in the series) "Human Error."**

*Doctors House and Foreman debate what drives them as doctors.*

**Video:** <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/media/house2.wmv>

**8. Babylonian Talmud Horayot 10b**

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצות אפילו שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה; שבשכר מ"ב קרבנות שהקריב בלק הרשע, זכה ויצתה ממנו רות . . .

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: A person should always immerse in Torah and mitzvot, even if it not be for its own sake, because out of what was not for its own sake, will come to be for its own sake, for as a reward for the 42 sacrifices that the evil Balak sacrificed, he merited that Ruth came from him . . .

**Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 3b**

דאמר ר' חנינא: גדול המצווה ועושה יותר משאינו מצווה ועושה.

For Rabbi Chanina said: One who is commanded and does, is greater than one who is not commanded and does.

**Tosafot on Avodah Zarah 3b**

גדול המצווה ועושה - פי' מפני שהוא דואג תמיד לבטל יצרו ולקיים מצות בוראו.

**One who is commanded and does, is greater** - Explanation: Because he always worries to overcome her inclination and fulfill the commandments of his creator.

**11. פרקי אבות א:ג (Pirkei Avot) Ethics of the Fathers 1:3**

אנטיגנוס איש סוכו . . . היה אומר אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס אלא הווי כעבדים המשמשין את הרב שלא על מנת לקבל פרס ויהי מורא שמים עליכם

Antigonus, man of Socho . . . would say, "Don't be like servants who serve the master in order to receive a reward, rather be like servants who serve the master not in order to receive a reward, and let the awe of heaven be upon you."

**12. Rabbi Aaron Michelson (a colleague):**

"I remember a time when I was going for an interview for CPE training and I had the devastating realization that I was not being altruistic when I helped people (or at least tried to) since I derived satisfaction. Someone later pointed out to me that, by that standard, altruism is nonexistent and the real difference between people (in terms of their moral development) is which pleasures they seek."