

Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by pomegranate - 25 Feb 2025 21:01

Greetings Rabbosai,

I've been wondering about the story about Rav Amram Chadia in Kiddushin 81a. He calls out "there's a fire in Amram's house" to stop himself from sinning. The Rabbanan came and said that he was embarrassing them and he replied that it is better for them to be embarrassed by him in this world than in the next. **This is a powerful support for the strategy of reaching out for help! (Thanks GYE and HHM in particular for enabling this).**

Were the Rabbannan suggesting that it would have been better to do the Aveira secretly than causing a Chillul Hashem by publicizing that he needed help to avoid sinning?

Rav Amram counters the Rabbannan with a seemingly novel concept that not by saying that his embarrassment in the next world would not be worth it but that the Rabbannan would be embarrassed of him in the next world if he would have committed the Aveirah secretly. Why should they be embarrassed by someone else's aveirah in the next world? Is there a concept of Kiddush Hashem in the next world?

The Gemorro concludes that after passing the nisayon he made a shvuah causing the Yetzer Hora to leave him like a pillar of fire and Rav Amram declared that despite the Yetzer Hora being a fire and he himself being flesh, he was better (by succeeding in this Nisayon) than the Yetzer Hora.

His declaration seems to be a proof that it is more important to focus and celebrate our wins than our weaknesses.

What is the meaning of taking a shvuah to cause the Yetzer Hora to leave him? Does this allude to any practical strategy that we can apply in our fight?

I'm eagerly looking forward to any refutations, validation, answers or further observations to any of these points.

Thanks for this forum, it's really uplifting to be able to post.

Hatzlocho to everyone out there!

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by barackobama - 28 Jul 2025 02:19

What does it mean that he made a shavua and his yetzer left him? Like he didn't have a yh

anymore?

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by BenHashemBH - 28 Jul 2025 03:14

Some elaboration on the story of Rav Amram Chasida can be found in The Battle of the Generation.

Chapter 28- Why We Need Willpower

Developing strong willpower is an important part of our battle plan. Being excited to serve Hashem is not enough. To win the battle against the *yetzer hara*, we need clear knowledge of what we cannot do and a firm commitment not to give in **no matter what**.

Undoubtedly, our most essential weapon is excitement about accomplishing and attaining greatness. If a person thinks he only prevents a loss but doesn't gain by not giving in, even if he stops himself from giving in out of obligation and fear of punishment, he is fighting a losing battle. He tries to hang on against his will while his strength weakens and his desires grow progressively stronger. This misconception is draining and depressing. The person feels forced to do what he doesn't want to without gaining anything. Eventually, his willpower cracks and he gives in. For this reason, willpower doesn't work so well when it is a person's primary "motivator." A person can only hold out against himself for so long, especially if he is unhappy.

Furthermore, Hashem gave us the *mitzvos* as opportunities. They are not burdens. Hashem loves it much more when we do appreciate them and do them happily. Obviously, a person who wishes there were no Torah so he could pursue his desires, even if he controls himself using willpower, does not do the *mitzvos* happily. He doesn't really want to serve Hashem, even if he avoids such thoughts because he knows they are improper. This is another reason it is so important that we realize the great opportunity the *mitzvos* truly are.

In addition, if we are excited to do the *mitzvos*, we won't look for excuses no matter how strong our impulses are because we will want to win the battle. We will appreciate that we are acquiring eternity by overcoming our urges, which will energize us to fight. In contrast, a person who only feels obligated will look for ways to convince himself that self-control is optional or impossible in order to permit himself to succumb.

Another weakness of relying too much on willpower is that it takes tremendous exertion. When a person is challenged, his desires activate and *he* wants to give in. Fighting this with force is strenuous because the person is fighting against himself. The person quickly weakens and is drained of energy. A person in such a state is fighting a "losing battle," trying to hang on until he can't while his desires keep getting stronger. If the battle prolongs, he might eventually run out of willpower and crack. Thus, relying solely on willpower, especially for battles that last long, is dangerous, though of course willpower is vital.

Another limitation of willpower is that it is hard to use if one is struggling. It lacks effectiveness because it is undermined by the person's inconsistent behavior. It is difficult for a struggling person to say, "I don't do that!" when he knows he does.

Even worse, a struggling person will probably find willpower painful because working on it will highlight all he has been doing wrong. A struggling person rarely escapes in one shot, and doesn't feel completely removed from his mistakes. Thinking about how bad his sins are could debilitate him and make him give up. It takes great wisdom to find the right balance so he can use willpower to control himself without beating himself up over his sins. He must proceed cautiously to ensure that he doesn't damage himself while trying to improve.

Ironically, beating oneself up does way more damage than good, both in this battle and in general. We must proceed carefully with the proper guidance as we develop willpower. As always, we must primarily focus on the exciting feats we can achieve by overcoming our challenges. A positive outlook is vital for success in every area of our lives.

However, there are some major holes in the arsenal of a person lacking willpower. Excitement to accomplish alone is not enough. Even the most motivated person has stretches when he isn't motivated to fight. Moods fluctuate and things happen that make the person unable to feel excited to reach greatness. This makes the person susceptible to the enticements of the *yetzer hara*. Without willpower to stand up against desire in these situations, it is difficult to prevail.

In addition, there will be times when we are surprised by desire. When we face challenges that we're unprepared for, the desires quickly seep through our defenses and affect our thoughts. It is unlikely that we will have strong feelings of excitement to accomplish when we didn't anticipate the challenge, and we will be in grave danger. We begin to feel differently and to *really* want it before we can react to motivate ourselves. Then it is too late, because we want to give in so strongly and no longer want to do anything to hold ourselves back.

We will need to use our willpower to restrain ourselves in these situations. Even if our desires pull us in all different directions, we can still hang on and stop ourselves from doing anything wrong. Although we prefer not to lose control of our emotions because we can only last so long, we can still hold on for a significant stretch if we have strong willpower. Hopefully, we will persist long enough for the challenging situation to end or for our desires to fade. Although this is not an ideal plan, we need it for these situations because they do happen.

We don't want to miss out on success in these battles. A victory when we were caught off guard and had to really fight is remarkable because it is so difficult. Even lasting for a few seconds is amazing. Each instant and every time we push back is a separate, astounding achievement and a step on the path toward greatness!

Being infiltrated by raging desires that we couldn't shut off might cause us to feel ashamed, even though we hung on with willpower and didn't do anything wrong. Realizing that desire was pulling us instead of us controlling it can make us feel down. However, we must realize that

these accomplishments are the greatest because they are so difficult! Realizing this will make us proud of what we have accomplished rather than ashamed, which will help us succeed in our subsequent battles as well.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81a) relates a fascinating story:

A group of young women had been taken captive by gentiles and were redeemed by the people of Nehardea. They put the young women in the attic of Rav Amram Chasida (the pious one), figuring they would be safe there. The people removed the ladder to ensure that no man would go up to the attic.

That night, as one of the young women passed by the hatch in the floor of the attic, her shining face radiated light through the hatch, and Rav Amram saw her. He took the ladder — a ladder so heavy that ten people couldn't move it — and moved it by himself to climb to the attic. When he got halfway up the ladder, he planted his feet [to stand firmly with strength to overcome his desires — Rashi] and screamed, "There is a fire in the house of Amram!"

The rabbis came running and were shocked to see that instead of a fire, a scandal was unfolding. The rabbis told Rav Amram, "You embarrassed us [by causing the whole town to see that you almost sinned, after we left these captives in your house assuming that you wouldn't do anything]!"

Rav Amram answered, "It is better that I brought you embarrassment in this world and not in the next world [which would have happened had I sinned]."

Rav Amram then demanded that the *yetzer hara* leave him. The *yetzer hara* emerged, appearing as a pillar of fire. Rav Amram told the *yetzer hara*, "See that you are fire and I am flesh, yet I am stronger than you."

This story is baffling. Rav Amram was pushed around by the *yetzer hara*. He could not shut off his desires. He seemed to have completely lost control over himself as he employed superhuman strength to move the ladder in order to sin. He could only stop himself from sinning by embarrassing himself and all the rabbis. He should have been embarrassed about what happened, and relieved that he had somehow saved himself from sinning. Yet not only wasn't he ashamed, he even proclaimed to the *yetzer hara*, "See! I am stronger than you!" This is hard to understand.

But in reality, what Rav Amram said makes a lot of sense. There will be times when we face challenges that we are not ready for. When that happens, the *yetzer hara* penetrates and takes over our thinking before we can stop him. Things quickly change from how they were just a few minutes earlier, and we feel, "*I want it!*" We no longer want to do anything to make our desires go away. We feel overwhelmed. It takes tremendous exertion to refocus ourselves, and we don't even want to anyway. Getting what we desire becomes all that matters. Our desires influence every decision we make.

When this happens, the only shot we have at winning is to hang onto our willpower and attack the *yetzer hara*. We must say **NO** and mean it. This is very difficult, and the longer the battle rages on, the harder it becomes. Overcoming these desires might just be the greatest victory

there is. If we can pull it off, there is nothing for us to be ashamed of. In fact, the instinct to be embarrassed or upset that we desired is just the *yetzer hara* trying to make us feel down rather than excited after such an incredible victory.

We should not be disheartened over losing our equilibrium. That is what happens in these situations, and our goal is to nonetheless emerge victorious. Though we shouldn't go around telling everyone that we faced these desires — it is nobody's business other than our own — there is nothing for us to be ashamed of.

To the contrary, we should be excited when we succeed in this fashion. Because of the difficulty, it is one of the most precious accomplishments that exist. Even if we felt out of control, holding on makes us great.

This is why Rav Amram declared that he was stronger than the *yetzer hara*. Though it looked like the *yetzer hara* was pushing him around, in reality Rav Amram did something astounding! He defeated the *yetzer hara*, who is like a pillar of fire.

Rav Amram masterfully blended willpower with excitement to accomplish. He was so energized by his massive victory that he called out to the *yetzer hara*, "See that I am stronger than you!" This is the secret weapon of the successful: they are fired up to defeat the *yetzer hara*. Willpower alone isn't enough to conquer desire. We must feel that we gain immensely every time we win and every bit we try. We must be excited about the incredible opportunity we have to become great.

There is another lesson to take from this story. When Rav Amram broke through and regained control, he didn't just go down the ladder or even just leave his house. Rather, he did something that ended his test, even though it brought him great embarrassment. Why? Why didn't he just leave?

The answer is that Rav Amram realized that a real part of him desperately wanted to sin. He had been overwhelmed and barely managed to break free. He knew this sudden resurgence of determination would not last long. The desires raged within him, and it was only a matter of time before his willpower would crack. If the situation was not over by then, no matter how far away he would be, he would just return and sin. Realizing he would only win if his test concluded right away, Rav Amram did what it took to end it.

This is a hard lesson to put into practice. When part of us wants to give in and we are barely hanging on with our fading willpower, we don't want to end the test. We don't want to give up our "great opportunity" to get what we desire, because *we want it*. At that point, we want to fulfill the desire; we don't want it to go away. We surely don't want to create a situation where we will long to give in but be unable to, and certainly don't want to embarrass ourselves or sacrifice something important to make it end. To pull this off, we must go against our nature. We will have to get past this discomfort — whether it is evident or subconscious — to make the right choice. It definitely isn't easy.

Sometimes, we can even stop an entire series of challenges with just one action. One such

example is Internet-related challenges. As long as we haven't been sucked in too far, we can permanently end the challenge by eliminating our ability to give in. And even if we have stumbled and awakened our desires, and they won't completely go away just by removing what tempts us, we still benefit greatly. We lose a major trigger for our desires as well as much of our ability to give in.

If we can muster the strength to end such challenges despite the overwhelming difficulty, the payoff is enormous. We will be rewarded for having won every battle we avoided. Removing our ability to succumb is a phenomenal achievement.

This method can help you win the most difficult challenges. First, figure out what your weak spot is. Then, determine whether there is a way to avoid the trigger or to eliminate your ability to sin. It is so hard, but gather your strength and do what needs to be done. You will bask in your incredible accomplishment forever.

We must realize that whenever we need to use willpower to stop ourselves, we can only hold on for so long. As the battle goes on, we weaken and our desires increase. We can hang on for a while — longer than we think — but it is a matter of time until we are overpowered. We will only win if the situation ends or our desires calm down. But we avoid all this when we remove our ability to sin.

Ending the challenge guarantees success. It is the only way to ensure that we won't eventually succumb. Therefore, if it is possible, *it must be done!* We might regret it right after, as our desires desperately lash out, but it will be too late — we will no longer be able to sin. Eventually, our desires will calm down and we will realize what we just accomplished. We will be so proud of what we pulled off in the face of great difficulty, and we will see that we didn't miss out on anything.

To attain self-control, we need both desire to win and strong willpower. Using both in tandem will help us reach unfathomable heights in the battle of the generation.

Quick Recap:

- Although our primary motivator is our desire to succeed and reach greatness, we also need willpower to ensure victory.
- When we lose control and still hang on, **that is the greatest accomplishment.**

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by pomegranate - 03 Aug 2025 22:59

Thank you for your detailed response, it's take me a while to read it and I still plan to read it again.

Best wishes.

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by kavey - 04 Aug 2025 14:17

In Tif'eres Torah R' Pincus writes about two different yetzer hara's for Ta'avah. One is physical natural desires and the other is spiritual for people of high stature.

He uses this to explain why a kohein would look at woman through a reflection (I forget what the sugya was). And the distinction between R' Akiva and the yetzer hara that he chased up a tree vs Amoraim who said that women are like geese for him.

I wonder if the fire in this case is more of the spiritual desire. I think the lesson about embarrassment could still apply though.

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by pomegranate - 05 Aug 2025 16:52

Thank you, I don't have this sefer but I would like to see if I can find it. Do you have a more specific marei mokom?

Best wishes.

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Re: Rav Amram Chasida story

Posted by kavey - 06 Aug 2025 08:37

It's the second shtikel on Vayakhel Pekudei. I just looked it up and saw he writes about Rav Amram Chasida specifically. Hatzlacha!

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