

Haritzut - Decisiveness

*All of your acts should be preceded by deliberation;
when you have reached a decision, act without hesitating.*¹

To act without appropriate forethought is often to allow the *yetzer hara* to preclude the possibility of acting with the other in mind. However, to hesitate to act after appropriate forethought is often to allow the *yetzer hara* to impede acting with the other in mind. Procrastination is both a tool of the *yetzer hara* and a consequence of the action of the *yetzer hara*. Decisiveness narrows the field in which the *yetzer hara* has to do its work. If we imagine that this *middah*, like the others we have studied, is one of the dynamic elements that are engaged in the formation of our soul, then we must return to the paradigm of soul-formation that we have outlined in order to better understand its mechanics.

In this regard we remind ourselves that we have posited that our consciousness is constructed along a continuum of choices made between the *yetzer hara* and the *yetzer hatov*. We have posited that there are necessary and legitimate reasons for choosing the *yetzer hara* over the *yetzer hatov*. Since we have defined the *yetzer hara* as acting for and in defense of the self while the *yetzer hatov* is the equally indigenous inclination to act for and in defense of another, the soul is the imagined “space” where both reside. Our soul is, by definition, the site where the needs of our self and the needs of another reside together. We have suggested that the *middot* function as the lens through which every choice in life is made. Therefore, each *middah* will reveal whether we are choosing the *yetzer hara* or the *yetzer hatov* and whether, in the particulars of our situation, those choices are legitimate or not.

In the case of haritzut the implication is that we have engaged in an appropriate process of deliberation, aided by other *middot* such as *savlanut*, *sefer*, *menuchat ha-nefesh* etc, and have made a decision. The decision we have made will perforce appropriately define the internal “space” at that moment allocated for our self and allocated for another. Haritzut comes into play regarding the time we take to implement this decision on the assumption that the more time that passes before any decision is implemented will be time for the *yetzer hara* to use to push beyond its legitimate borders

¹ Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. (1845). *Chesbon ha-Nefesh*. (D. Landesman, trans.) Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995. Page 135.

and reduce the “space” for the other. It is, in other words, the *middah* that recognizes the innate strength of the *yetzer hara* as opposed to the fragility of the *yetzer hatov* and identifies time as the ally of the former as opposed to the latter.

That time should be the ally of the *yetzer hara* should also not surprise us. We have already learned that our experience of time is a function of the same dynamic that we have discussed here. That is, time experienced as present is the time of the *yetzer hara* and time experienced as future is the time of the *yetzer hatov*; time experienced as present is the time of the self while time experienced as the future is time of the other. The other and the future are always unpredictable, surprising, not amenable to being fully comprehended while the self and the present are fully known, hesitant to change and threatened by the future/other. In reaction to that threat the self/present/*yetzer hara* respond out of fear (*pahad*.) In the context of *haritzut* that means that as present time expands between the making of a decision and acting on that decision, the self will push the other out of the “space” of the soul, reducing the soul back into a self.

The process of *heshbon ha-nefesh* around *haritzut* requires that we engage in an evaluation of what fear of the future engages the *yetzer hara* such that it takes back the space we have cleared for the other in our original decision making process. When we procrastinate we must ask: who is the other or others toward which this decision was made? What am I afraid of when I hold back from acting on this decision? What are my obligations in regard to the burden of the other that I have undertaken by making this decision? What sources of joy am I choking off when I turn from the future of the other to the present of myself? Investigating some of these strategies will occupy our next *shiur*.