

The Chafetz Chaim

It happened that those who sought to undermine the Jewish religion were finally successful in slandering the saintly Chafetz Chaim. The government, looking for any opportunity to put away anyone who was seditious, quickly arrested the Chafetz Chaim and placed him in jail. A few days later, they were finally able to capture the archenemy of the state, a man known for his vicious cruelty and evil, a man whose tentacles of power reached into every area of the government. It took years of meticulous and patient policework to gather the evidence and capture this mafioso. Shockingly, he was placed in the same cell as the Chafetz Chaim! Let us imagine the scene that unfolds before us. The aged Chofetz Chaim, a slight, bent over, elderly saint sharing a cell with a bear of a man whose cruelty was matched only by his vulgarity and size. One look from the mafioso could stun the Chafetz Chaim. Suddenly, wonder of wonders, the Chafetz Chaim turns to the mafioso and asks him a penetrating question on the Rambam! What is even more shocking, the mafioso responds, citing a Rashbah! We might think this is some sort of bad dream, but, it continues with the two proceeding with their dialogue throughout a vast array of halachos ranging from Talmud to Aggadah.

After the discussion, the Chafetz Chaim washes to eat, and the mafioso responds, "Amen." During the meal, the Chafetz Chaim relates a Torah thought to the avid attention of the mafioso. What is occurring? Are we losing our minds?

"No!" says Rav Chasman, this is not an analogy - it is reality! This happens daily in the fusion of the body and soul. The body is the mafioso filled with base lusts and passion if left to nothing but his physical essence. Everyone -- regardless of his moral breeding can and will descend to the nadir of depravity as evidenced by some of history's most infamous degenerates. Conversely, anyone who is able to subjugate his physical dimension to his spiritual development can attain the most sublime levels of holiness and virtue. Indeed, he can become a Chafetz Chaim. It all depends upon which is stronger: the spirit or the body.

As an individual grows, the potential Chafetz Chaim within him and the potential mafioso within him also grow. They interact - they dialogue - they respond to each other. Who will reign supreme? It all depends upon who is stronger.

Let us take a Shabbos table where the "two" are sitting together, and we will observe how they interact. The Chafetz Chaim sings the Shalom Aleichem with great devotion, his eyes glistening as he greets the Shabbos Kallah with great anticipation and longing. His Kiddush is filled with sanctity as he embraces the Shabbos and welcomes its holiness into his simple home. The mafioso is there - watching, waiting for that cup of Kiddush, so that the alcohol can soothe his timorous nature. The Chafetz Chaim washes his hands in preparation to bless Hashem for giving him bread. The mafioso cannot wait to sink his teeth into the delicious challah to satisfy his hungry belly. While the Chafetz Chaim is chanting the beautiful melodies of the zemiros of Shabbos, the mafioso is dreaming about the chicken and kugel whose delectable aroma permeates the air. They both eat, but, prior to taking a bite, the Chafetz Chaim says, "I'kovod Shabbos kodesh." I am eating this for a purpose, to enhance and enjoy the holiness of the holy Shabbos.

They both eat: one as a glutton to satisfy his physical desires; the other one to celebrate the sacred day. Our goal and purpose on this earth is to transform the mafioso within us into a veritable Chafetz Chaim, to dominate the spiritual over the physical. There is nothing wrong with enjoyment. It all depends how and what we enjoy. Some derive great fulfillment from a good meal; others, from a sporting event; and then there is the Chafetz Chaim, the ideal, who piques his delight from the study of Torah.