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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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PARSHAS KI SAVO

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE TOCHECHA

CONTENTS:

- Part I. Listening to Tochecha - 5
- Part II. Not Listening to Mussar - 10
- Part III. Mussar With a Hint - 16

Part I. Listening to Tochecha

The Fearsome Aliyah

Twice a year, once in Vayikra and once in Devarim, we read the *tochecha* in shul. It's two occasions when we listen to the *baal korei* read the great prophecy of what is going to happen when the people do not listen to the Torah; the *tzaros* and calamities that will come upon the nation in order to steer them back to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Now, everybody knows that in most places it's not a portion of the Torah that people want to be called up for. Nobody wants an *aliyah* for the *tochecha* because it's very harsh words. And when it's read, the *baal korei* is a considerate fellow and so he lowers his voice a little bit when he gets to these *pessukim*. If he would keep his voice at a high pitch, it might

hurt the feelings of the *mispallelim*; they might not come again or they'll be angry at Hashem that He spoke so harshly to us.

Eager for the Tochecha

The truth, however, is that *al pi seichel* he should raise his voice and scream. That's really how the words should be said — with some bite. It should sting a little bit. Only we don't do that because *bein adam l'chaveiro* is also something as far as we are concerned. But even if we won't do it *l'maaseh*, at least we should *know* that actually these words deserve to be heard in the loudest possible tones. Because whatever is said in the *tochecha*, as terrible as it is, the more we think about it and the more we're afraid, the better off we'll be.

And we should be eager to hear it. Like Shlomo said, מוֹסֵר ה' בְּנֵי אֵל – *Don't reject the mussar*, וְאַל תִּקְחַן בְּתוֹכָהֶן – *and don't be disgusted by the sharp criticism* (Mishlei 3:11). Shlomo understood that the more a person is frightened into doing what's good for him, the better off he is, and the more wise he becomes.

Shlomo Hamelech's Chinuch

Shlomo said that from experience, by the way. You know, Shlomo got it from his father sometimes. And he got it from his mother, too. There's a chapter in Mishlei (31:1) where he says, אֲשֶׁר יִסְרָתוֹ – *a whole lecture*, מִשָּׂא – *that his mother chastised him*.

What happened? One time she caught Shlomo down in a wine cellar. He was a young boy, after all, in a rich house, and they had a wine cellar that could equal that of other kings. And so Shlomo went down there and he was admiring the different kinds of wines that the Almighty created. And in order to appreciate the difference, he took a little sample.

So his mother, Batsheva, came down in the basement, and when she caught him drinking some wine, she said, "What are you doing, my son?"

"Nothing. I'm just sampling the wine."

So יִסְרָתוֹ, she chastised him.

Wagging the Finger Whip

So you might think his mother was wagging a finger at him and telling him, "Shlomo, don't drink." That's how a mother today would do it — if she would do anything. No. Batsheva said, "Come here." But she was afraid that he wouldn't accept what she wanted to present to him, so

first she tied him to a pillar. מְלִמֵּד שֶׁכָּפְּאוּתוֹ אִמּוֹ עַל הָעַמּוּד – *There was a pillar in the basement and she tied him with ropes to the pillar* (Sanhedrin 70b).

She tied him to the pillar, and then she took out the gift and she started whacking him over the back. And as she was whacking him, she was saying as follows. “No, my son, Shlomo. I want you to keep what I’m telling you.” It’s a whole chapter. אֶל לְמֹלְכִים – *For a king, wine is out*. Forget about wine. וְלְרוֹזְנִים אֵי שִׁכָּר – *For rulers, no hard drinks* (Mishlei 31:4). A whole chapter of *tochecha* that she delivers to him.

You think he became a wise man just by accident? It was work put into him. Of course, later, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him a gift, but it was the *tochechos mussar*, the strong warnings, that made him worthy of that.

Recognize the Consequences

And that’s why the Surgeon General’s warning should be the main sign in very big letters on billboards that advertise smoking. In the corner, if you want, you can put a little picture of boys and girls smiling with white teeth to each other or maybe the Marlboro man with his cowboy hat riding in the countryside. But the main sign should be the Surgeon General’s warning: “Emphysema, cancer, heart disease,” all kinds of good things. That’s the most important part of the sign, when it tells you what can happen.

It’s a kindness to be told that. And so, when you read the *tochecha*, you should know the whole *tochecha* is a demonstration of Hashem’s kindness because he wants us to walk in the path of righteousness; we are getting the most precious medicine. But we shouldn’t take it like medicine — we should appreciate it like good wine.

That’s why it states there (Orach Chaim 428:6) when the *tochecha* is read, only one person gets an *aliyah* for the entire piece. Let’s say you have an *aufruf* that day and you have to give an *aliyah* to Cousin Jake who came in from Cleveland and Uncle Joe from Boston, you don’t divide it up in portions in order that each guest should be *mechubed* with an *aliyah*. No, for the *tochecha pessukim* you find one kind-hearted man who accepts, and the *baal korei* reads the whole *tochecha* for one *aliyah*.

Enjoy the Good Wine

Why is that? So our Sages (Maseches Sofrim 12:1) quote the *pessuk* we said before: וְאַל תִּקַּךְ בְּתוֹכְהוֹתָיו – *Don’t be disgusted with Hashem’s rebuke*.

And they gave it a secondary meaning: *Al takotz* means אל תַעֲשֶׂם קוֹצִים - Don't make the *tochecha* in pieces. Don't do it bit by bit; listen to the whole thing in one shot.

You know, when somebody is drinking a glass of good wine or good beer, so he downs it in one shot. But suppose he has to take medicine, a bitter medication. So he takes a little bit and swallows it; he waits till the bad feeling departs and then he takes another sip.

So the *Chachomim* say that when it comes to the *tochecha*, you don't do that; you don't do it in pieces because that demonstrates you don't appreciate that you are getting good wine.

The Good Wine of Rebuke

Good wine? How is it good anything? יִשְׁלַח ה' בָּךְ אֶת הַמָּאֲרָה אֶת הַמְּהוּמָה וְאֶת הַמְּנַעֲרָה וְאֶת הַמְּגַעֲרָה - Hashem will send upon you attrition and confusion and worry, יִבְבֶּק ה' בָּךְ אֶת הַדָּבָר וְגו' יִכְבֶּה ה' בְּשַׁחֲפֹת - He'll attach to you plague... and He'll strike you with lesions (*ibid.* 19-22). Each possuk is worse than the previous.

The answer is that *tochecha* is the biggest *bracha* of all the *brachos*. There's no blessing like criticism because יִרְאֵת ה' מוֹסֵר חֶכְמָה (Mishlei 15:33). It leads to *yiras Hashem*, to being afraid of Hashem, and that's the biggest *bracha*.

Of course, you may not like it for the moment. After all, *mussar* means rebuke and you may not like it when somebody tells you you're doing something wrong. It's uncomfortable. For me it is anyhow. I was once crossing a street and I didn't wait for the light to turn green. This was maybe thirty-five years ago. And a policeman stopped me and he said, "You shouldn't be crossing against the red light. You're a man of the cloth."

At the moment I felt, "What is it your business? What am I, a child?" I didn't say anything. It was quite uncomfortable, and I kept on going.

But later I considered the fact that he did me a big favor. He was right. It's a bad example I was setting. What if a child would see me and copy me? What if something happened to him because of my example? What if I was saved because of that warning? And so I became a better person because of that rebuke. And therefore it's a big *chessed Hashem*, the *tochecha*.

Listening to the Baal Korei

That's why when a man sits in the synagogue and hears how the *baal korei* reads the *tochecha* where Hakadosh Baruch Hu foretells what will happen when the Torah is transgressed, he shouldn't listen merely to the words. He should take these words to heart. That's why the Torah spends so much time describing various things that can happen, *pratei pratim*, for that purpose, so you should listen to it *b'iyun* and be afraid.

You know what happened when our nation stopped being afraid? The *tochecha* came true. And it came due with interest — the terrible prophecies foretold in the Torah were nothing compared to what happened in the concentration camps. When the people heard the *tochecha*, they didn't dream that there would be ovens to which trains carry twenty thousand victims every day. In their wildest nightmares, nobody imagined that mothers of little babies, small children, old men and women, would be marched through the frost for blocks and blocks — naked, of course, because the Nazis were thrifty Germans and they didn't want to waste anything — and marched directly into a bathhouse where you turned the faucets and no water came. They were waiting and suddenly there was a hissing and gas rushed into the room and in a few minutes they were a writhing mass. And then they were taken by special little elevators to an oven and they were transformed into smoke and ashes.

Would a Hottentot in Africa, with a bone through his nose and a belt of human teeth around his waist, have thought of such a thing? He'd kill if he's hungry, that's all. But for sport, for hatred, and on such a scale? Only the "brilliant" mind of the German nation.

Fulfilling the Tochecha

Now, such things only happened because the Am Yisroel forgot about the *tochecha* and were abandoning Hashem on a scale never done before. Who dreamed that Jews would intermarry in such great numbers? That in Berlin, more Jews would marry gentile women than Jewish women?

Nobody said, "But it says in the Torah that if we do so-and-so, then so-and-so will happen. Look at what's happening! Look at Hitler! Remember the *tochecha*! Do *teshuvah*!" Yes, the Chofetz Chaim said it. Rav Elchonon Wasserman said it. "Do *teshuvah*," they begged. But who listened to them?

In the yeshivas, yes, we cried out. I was in Slabodka Yeshiva when Hitler marched into the Sudetenland. We cried out. But outside, all of Slabodka ridiculed us. They looked down on us. A yeshiva *bachur* was despised and hated in Slabodka. I remember how they called me names. “Patron!” They called us parasites. You don’t realize how far the Jews in Europe had moved away from Judaism. There was a lot of *chillul Shabbos*! There was a lot of atheism. The youth no longer had any connection with Judaism. There were ten thousand Jews in Slabodka but by and large they had already forsaken the Torah. Even those who still kept Shabbos despised the Torah. We were two hundred yeshiva boys, but outside, nobody listened. And so, what *tochecha*, where *tochecha*? To them it was a big joke. They laughed at it, they made *leitzanus*.

The Blessing of Tochecha

Oh, that’s the opposite of what Hashem wants! אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁוּעַ לְמִצְוֹתַי – *How fortunate is the man who listens to Me, וְתוֹרָתִי וְדִבְרֵי יְשׁוּעָה עַל לְבוֹ – and all of My warnings he puts on his mind* (Birchos Krias Shema). And that’s why when the *tochecha* is read, we don’t divide it up into separate *aliyos*; because we have to show how eager we are to hear what Hashem has to say. He is giving us a prescription; He is the Super-Physician that knows that to hear the warnings of punishment is very good medicine for us.

That’s why when there’s a man who volunteers for the *aliyah*, so when we finish, I give him a special *bracha*. A special *mi shebeirach* for the man that volunteered for the *tochecha*. He deserves a special *mi shebeirach* because he’s giving a blessing to the people, the great blessing of being afraid of Hashem.

Part II. Not Listening to Mussar

A True Believer

Now, if a person trains himself to this principle of listening to the *tochecha* — if he understands that it’s not just a synagogue ceremony but a way of life — so he’ll be able to more readily see the *tochecha* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in this world. He’ll notice the *mussar*, the good wine of rebuke, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving all the time.

Of course, we understand that some people don't see anything. Even after they hear this, they'll say that it's imagination, that we're seeing things where really there's nothing, phantasmagoria. But that's only because they're not trained in the discipline. Even *frum* Jews who come to shul on Shabbos, they listen to *krias haTorah* every word, but they're not hearing. They don't really believe.

That's why you can have today people who when they talk about the Holocaust, "Oh, yes," the rabbi says, "it's from the deepest secrets of Hashem. We can't understand it."

Of course he can't understand it. Because he doesn't really believe in the *tochecha*. And therefore how can you expect him to see what's happening today in America and understand anything? How can you expect to tell his congregants that Hashem is displeased with them?

But warnings are being given and we better wake up and pay attention to them. All these things are Hakadosh Baruch Hu speaking. "Jews! Wake up!" But **וְאֵין עֹנֶה** – *He calls and nobody wants to listen* (Yeshaya 50:2). Nobody even hears. Yisroel is fast asleep. And therefore He has to take even more extreme measures, *chas v'shalom*.

Sleeping Through the Tochecha

It's like this. Suppose someone is fast asleep and a fire breaks out, *chas v'shalom*, in the house. Now, there's a smoke alarm and it begins to screech, but this man likes to sleep undisturbed, so he has taken precautions by putting plugs in his ears. In addition, he turned on the radio so there's lullaby music playing all the time. And he's in a far-off room with the door closed. So he doesn't hear the alarm.

Now, you're outside and you see smoke coming out of the window. What do you do? So you shout. But it doesn't help. He made sure already that nothing is going to disturb him. You're shouting but he doesn't hear a thing.

Hurting to Help

And so you have no choice. You take a stone and you smash his window. Crash! All the pieces fall with a clatter! You'd think that anybody would hear that. But not this man. He's already well-armed against any kind of warnings.

So what do you do? You have to save him so you call the firehouse and the firemen come with a ladder, climb up and they find this man sleeping peacefully, totally unaware of what's taking place. The firemen, however, are trained to do things quickly. So they take him by his arm and give him such a jerk that his arm dislocates. Oh, now he's awake. And so he runs to the ladder and he climbs down with one arm hanging loose.

Now, it could be he goes to his lawyer the next day and wants to sue the fireman for dislocating his arm. But they'll go to a judge who's sensible — it's very hard to find today, but for our story we have the right to imagine so — and the judge will say, "My friend, this man saved your life. You were dead asleep. You had music playing and earplugs and a pillow over your head! They had to wake you! So they dislocated your arm? The worst that can happen is you'll be out of commission for some time, but at least you're alive!"

Good Morning America

The American Jews are asleep! They have plugs in their ears! They have pillows over their heads! Hashem is calling but there's no answer. We're fast asleep. So who's going to complain if He sends a fireman who dislocates something?

This entire principle of listening to *tochecha* has been removed from their lexicon. *Yiras Hashem*, punishment — "no, it's not right for today's generation." The "enlightened" people say that such a motivation, to frighten us into virtue, is beneath our dignity. And so they're snoring away.

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu is trying. He's calling out, giving notices. One notice was when the Nazi party first started in America, a long time ago. Remember Fritz Kuhn, *alav hashnubbel*? He was preaching Nazi ideology. He filled Madison Square Garden with 20,000 supporters. That was a hint.

About Face!

But not a hint to give money to the Simon Wiesenthal organization or the ADL. No. In most cases those organizations *cause* antisemitism. It's a hint for all the dumb Jews who are neglecting their Judaism: "You'd better hurry up and come back." And not just to be *shomer Shabbos*. Turn around! All the Orthodox who send their children to a boy-and-girl

yeshiva are on the way out. All these people are facing towards the street even though they still wear *yarmulkes*.

Very many Young Israelites are on their way out. Most of Poel Hamizrachi are on their way out. No doubt about that. And a lot of people in Boro Park are on their way out. A lot! With beards. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. If people have no idealism and they stand around and talk throughout the *davening*, it shows they're on the way out. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to turn around; He wants us to walk only towards Him.

And therefore, the first thing we should think about when we come to shul and hear the *tochecha* is, "It's speaking to us! We have to turn around and start facing in." I mean the Orthodox. Later we'll worry about the unorthodox. If the Orthodox will turn an about-face, then there's hope. But they're fast asleep because they don't understand the principle of listening to the *tochecha*.

Earplug Rabbis

Their ears are plugged up, too, because nobody is willing to tell them the truth. The plug is the Modern Orthodox rabbi. I don't mean the *frum* ones, but there are Modern Orthodox rabbis all over America who are half-baked Jews; young rabbis who can speak a fine English and have a nice delivery and they mislead Orthodox congregations out in the suburbs.

Are they telling them the truth about co-ed yeshivas, that they're places of *tumah*, filthy places? It's a *chillul Hashem*, so-called "yeshivas" with boys and girls together in high school. It's *ossur* to even think about what goes on in those places! Even the Irishman or the Italian of fifty years ago knew that; fifty years ago, there wasn't an Irishman or an Italian who would send his daughter to a co-ed public school.

So the rabbi could say, "At least be like that gentile of fifty years ago. That's not too much to expect of you. Or be like a Persian, like Vashti Hamalkah, who had a separate party for women. Be like a good, decent goy. At least *that* we could ask of you."

The Deaf Leading the Deaf

Are the rabbis telling their congregants that it's *ossur* to go to the movies? A Modern Orthodox man called me. He lives in Queens. Among

other things, he tells me that every Wednesday night he goes to the movies with his wife. I said, "You go to the movies still?! Forty years ago it was a different story. But today?" I told him, "If you go to the movies nowadays I can tell you that אין לך חלק לעולם הבא."

So he tells me, "But my rabbi goes, too." Which means that these people are just talking through their hats about being Jews. They don't really mean business. That's the plain truth. They just want to fool themselves as they go merrily down the primrose path of assimilation that descends into the *be'er shachas*. There's no question that they are going on the same path that all the rest of the American masses are going. And so the rabbis, the ones who are hopping on both sides of the fence, are the earplugs.

Lullaby Lies

In addition to that, you have a lullaby playing all the time. The lullaby is the media. It's the television and the newspapers and they're telling you that black is white, that permissiveness is "progressive."

Even the Jewish magazines, the Jewish newspapers are filled with ridiculous ideas. Materialism, gentile ideas, even atheism.

The Jewish Action published an article by a fellow who considers himself a rabbi and he wrote that the world was created in millions of years. He says that's the meaning of the *pessukim* in Bereishis. And he said the Ramban wouldn't mind if he was told that he and a monkey came from the same grandfather! A terrible thing to say.

Since I was 18 years old, I've been studying evolution, and it's the most ridiculous thing. The possibility of it happening is zero. But unfortunately, there are some *frum* Jews who have been taken in by this, and that lullaby is playing all the time.

Society's Sins

In addition to that, you have a pillow over your ear. The pillow over your ear is society. Society is collapsing. And if out of every ten Jewish marriages, four end up in divorce, it means we're collapsing along with them. And so in such a time when society is collapsing that's a pretty big warning.

If women's lib takes over a society, that's Hakadosh Baruch Hu warning you! It means no families! It means killing babies! If we really

understood what women's lib entails, we would be horrified at the extent of their aims. They could force us, by means of the Constitution, to have yeshivas that have a mixed *beis hamedrash*. A suit could be brought against segregation of the genders in the synagogue. But not only that. One day they'll bring a suit against segregation in the bathrooms. Our stupid society is opening up a Pandora's box of every kind of corruption.

When Hashem Stops Soft-Pedaling

So let's see what the Jewish people have done. First, we put plugs in our ears. Secondly, we're playing lullaby music. And to make it better, we put a pillow over our ears. And so we don't hear the alarm. Crime is rising and against whom is it directed? Don't make any mistake; there's a pogrom going on against Jews all the time. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has raised up a generation of antisemites, but the Jewish world has its ears plugged. They think it's the politicians or the police or something else. You can't tell them anything. In fact, you're a lunatic to them if you think Hashem is giving warnings.

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "Well, if that's the case, I'll have to stop soft-pedaling. I'm going to cause the white supremacists to increase and multiply." They're getting stronger and stronger. What is that? All of a sudden? Hakadosh Baruch Hu is stepping up, making a crescendo, higher and higher warnings.

"You don't listen? Maybe you'll listen to this." He's smashing the glass now. Literally! "Wake up, Jews! Wake up!"

But nobody listens. They talk about making *aliyah* as if that's what Hashem is trying to tell them. They make organizations, antisemitic studies, but that's not listening.

The Kind Tochecha

We're forgetting about Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We think that we'll rely on the Constitution. Ah! A wonderful thing, the Constitution. Actually, it's a plaything in the hands of wicked judges. And the judges are only a plaything in the hands of Hashem. Oh, you'll see! If we don't turn around, some day in Washington D.C., in the White House, there will be a very big antisemite. I'm telling you, you'll see it.

And even then, if it will wake us up, it'll be a very big blessing for us. Maybe then at least the Orthodox Jews will start coming together crying

out to Hashem for help. The Reformers will never cry out, but at least the Orthodox will wake up and cry out to Hashem.

And therefore, whatever happens is a *rachmanus*, a kindness. It's like the firemen who wrenched that man's arm loose to save his life! Otherwise, he'll be burned! And Hakadosh Baruch Hu is trying to save us! It's a great kindness, that *tochecha*. The fellow who throws a pebble at your window is doing you a small kindness to wake you up from the fire. But if you don't hear that, so the fireman who clammers in and takes hold of your arm and gives a wrench and dislocates it so that you leap out of your bed — that man is the biggest blessing around.

Part III. Mussar With a Hint

Measuring the Misfortune

Now, the Am Yisroel in general has to listen to the *tochechos mussar* of Hashem, yes, but everyone on his own is responsible for his own life, his own *teshuvah* and perfection.

And therefore, we should take the time to consider one of the *darchei Hashem*, one of the ways Hashem manages things when it comes to misfortunes. And that is the great principle called *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure. Like it states in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 100a), בְּמִדָּה שֶׁאָדָם מוֹדֵד בָּהּ מוֹדָדִין לוֹ – *the way a man measures, that's how it is measured out to him*. It means that the punishment in some way resembles the sin.

Now, I'll explain that: Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to get the most out of misfortunes. He wants us to understand why they come and therefore He gives a clue to understand them; the *way* the trouble comes, that's a clue for *why* it came. And it's intended as a gift, a gift of awareness for us to utilize. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't send troubles that are closed up, that are entirely mysterious. He puts into each event some kind of a clue to give us a hint why it came in order that we should gain the full benefit.

Shimshon's Strategy

You know who did that? A great *tzaddik*, Shimshon Hagibor. You remember the story of how he wanted to marry a Pelishti woman, to

convert her and marry her? His parents weren't happy. "Don't you have enough girls from your own people?" they said. "What are you starting with *shiksehs*?"

But Shimshon was adamant. He said "קח לי – *take her for me*, כִּי הִיא יְשֵׁרָה בְּעֵינַי – *because she is good in my eyes*" (Shoftim 14:3). And so he converted her and married her.

Now, Shimshon had very good eyes and if he said "she's good in my eyes" he understood what he was talking about. He wanted to mingle with the Pelishtim as one of them in order to harass them, to keep them quiet so that they shouldn't harm the Bnei Yisroel, and his strategy was that by becoming a *mechutan* he would be able to rub shoulders with them and to know their business and to intimidate them. That's how he would keep them at bay. That was the plan of Shimshon.

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't agree: "That's your plan maybe but I don't like it at all. You should keep away from gentile women – even gentile women who want to convert."

The Final Act

Now, you remember when Shimshon was finally captured by the Pelishtim – Hakadosh Baruch Hu had taken away his strength now – and he was standing with his hands bound in the presence of a big audience that were mocking him and jeering at him; so at that last moment he did a heroic deed. He asked Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Please restore my strength to me for one last moment," and he seized the pillars upon which the roof was supported and he knocked down the pillars and the roof came crashing down and it killed a great number of the notables of the Pelishtim. He squashed so many Pelishtim dignitaries along with himself that the Pelishtim were quiet for twenty years after that. They didn't make any trouble – they were afraid; if one Jew could do that to them, they were afraid.

But that's not the important part of the story. It's nice to see our enemies squashed, absolutely – *ken yirbu* – but the moment before Shimshon did that, that was the important part.

Because you can be certain that Shimshon was fulfilling what our Sages said you should do: אִם רֹאֶה אָדָם שִׁסּוּרִין בָּאֵין עָלָיו יִפְשֹׁפֶשׂ בְּמַעֲשָׁיו – *If you see troubles coming upon you, search into your ways* (Brachos 5a). And

so we are certain that at that moment Shimshon was thinking, “Why did this happen to me?” “Ribbono Shel Olam,” he said, “what did I do that now I am blind? I was the hero and all my enemies feared me, and now I should fall into the hands of the Pelishtim as a blind victim? Could it be that I misused my eyes?”

An Eye for an Eye

Now, the *mishnah* in Sotah (9b) says that שִׁמְשׁוֹן הֵלךְ אַחֲרֵי עֵינָיו, *he went after his eyes*, לְפִיכָךְ, *and because of that*, נִקְרוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים אֶת עֵינָיו, *that's why the Pelishtim took out his eyes*. But Shimshon said it before the *mishnah* said it. In his last moments, he remembered that he had once said, קַח לִי כִי הִיא, *‘She is right in my eyes.’* יִשְׁרָה בְּעֵינֵי. “Aha, that’s it. I shouldn’t have said, ‘She is right in my eyes.’ Because what about בְּעֵינֵי ה’? What about Hashem’s eyes? Did I properly consider what He wants?”

And so Shimshon struck his breast and he said, “I sinned before You, Hashem. Forgive me and restore my strength to me so I can do one last deed of service to You.” And that is how Shimshon left the world. He perished with the Pelishtim but he was a different person altogether now; a different Shimshon, a more perfect Shimshon went into the Next World.

The Ancient System of Study

Now, this story is not intended just for entertainment. It’s a model for us. Did you ever try that? You never had a speck of dust fly into your eye and it was bothering you? So you were flushing it with water maybe, trying to dislodge it. But did you think for a half minute *why* it happened? After all, nothing is an accident. And that’s one of the *darchei Hashem*, that in the ways He visits misfortune on people, in many cases you are able to discern the reason why it came. Maybe your eyes looked where they don’t belong.

And don’t try to solve the problem by one second of thought or one minute. *Lehavidil*, if a person goes to college and he pays money for a course and the instructor gives a lecture, does he spend one minute trying to understand it? No! He goes home and he reads his notes because he wants to get his money’s worth. He tries to understand. And, *lehavidil* again, if somebody is in the yeshiva and he hears a lesson, a *shiur* by an *adam gadol*, a great man, does he think that by one minute of thought he can solve what the *shiur* is driving at? Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving you

a personal *shiur*, an important lesson about yourself, and you're going to just study it superficially? You have to study it with Rashi, with Tosfos and the *mefarshim*. It needs time and people shouldn't be lazy about it.

Now, we don't think that way because we have gone away from the system of the Torah. Things happen again and again, and even the best Jews, they also neglect to do this because today we are very far away from the *darchei haTorah*. That's how Jews used to be — everybody, men and women, boys and girls, they understood this principle and they searched and therefore they benefited. And so it's a good idea to go back to that system. If you are suffering, let's say in your stomach, maybe you misused your stomach. You're suffering in your mouth, so go and discover, maybe you misused your mouth. Whatever it is, I am not capable of interpreting everything, but you should use it.

Senior Citizen Teshuvah

How can it be that a Jew gets a heart attack, and he doesn't think once why it happened? He thinks it's only the cholesterol and the cakes and cookies but he's forgetting the main thing. Maybe instead of sitting in the square on King's Highway when the weather is good, just staring, why shouldn't he go someplace and find out what it means to be a Jew after all these years that he wasted? All these old people, men and women, instead of going places where they give them a free meal every day and they sit and consume the government's food and play games — that's all they do in their old age in the senior centers — let them go someplace and ask, "How can we prepare for the World to Come?"

He should think, "Am I wasting my life? Maybe that's why I had a heart attack. Hashem says you're wasting away anyway, so I'll help you out." If you are lying on an operating table, whatever it is, why don't you think before they administer the anesthesia what happened that I came to this?

But not only big things like that.

Teshuvah in the Dentist Office

Let's say you have to go to the dentist. So while you are sitting in the dentist chair why not think it over. He says, "Open wide." Why do you have to open wide? Maybe you opened wide some other time when you weren't supposed to, now he says open wide to admit the drill.

And as he's drilling way down and you feel that that drill is going down to your toenails, you shouldn't say it's because I didn't brush my teeth or because I ate candy. Brush your teeth from now on, no question. And don't eat candy, or rinse your mouth after candy, but right now you should say, "It's because I opened my mouth too much. I spoke too much." It could be. Why not?

Don't say it's a *mikreh*, an accident. **אם תלכו עמי קרי** – "If you'll go with Me in that way and say it's nothing but accident and it's not Me, **והלכתי אף**, **אני עמכם בקרי** – then the time will come when I'll yank out all your teeth and there'll be nothing left to drill" (see Vayikra 26:21-24). You don't drill in false teeth. So while you have teeth yet, utilize them.

That's the truth, that when troubles come upon a person – any troubles – Hakadosh Baruch Hu is teaching a lesson, and it's up to us if we want to be imbued with Torah attitudes. It's a solid Torah attitude to react that way and to think, "What is Hashem teaching me? What's Hakadosh Baruch Hu saying with this event?" And if you'll make use of the opportunity, even if you won't guess the real reason, let's say you will blame yourself for something else that wasn't the real reason, but at least you will get a benefit; because that one thing you will improve.

The Two-Week Prep Plan

And if that's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects of His people, so now is the best time to begin. We are near the end of the year and I'm sure all of you good people are afraid of the impending Day of Judgment; you're all busy learning *seforim* that teach you the way to repentance. You're thinking of more *mitzvos* now, of giving more *tzedakah* than you give all year. You're behaving with better character traits. All these things are excellent because the closer we get, the more urgent it is for us to be ready and clean and purified and innocent on the Day of Judgment.

After that, it'll be too late. A man's fate is to a great extent already decided on Rosh Hashanah. And so the time to do *teshuvah* is not *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*. *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is for minor forms of *teshuvah*, but the major *teshuvah* is done before Rosh Hashanah, because once the *gzar din* is sealed on Rosh Hashanah, that's it.

And therefore, what better time than now to begin applying this lesson? Even if it's only a little bit, a little bit of being **מפושט במעשיו** and utilizing Hashem's principle of *middah k'neged middah*, but it's an

excellent beginning. It shows that you're serious about it. You understand the lesson of the *tochecha*, of תּוֹכְחָתוֹ וְאֵל תִּמְאָס וְאֵל תִּקְלֵץ בְּתוֹכְחָתוֹ, מוֹסֵר ה' בְּנִי אֵל תִּמְאָס, and you're ready now for a year of living successfully.

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Let's Get Practical

Connect the Dots

The *tochecha* teaches us that misfortune is not merely something unpleasant that happens to us. It is Hakadosh Baruch Hu speaking to us, calling on us to wake up, take notice, and improve. And even when we cannot know exactly why a particular difficulty was sent, we can make sure that its message is not wasted.

Each day this week, *bli neder*, when I say בְּעֵינַי נָא רָאֵה in Shemoneh Esrei, I will think of one difficulty or misfortune that I personally, or the nation as a whole have experienced recently. In addition to asking Hashem to redeem me from it, I will remind myself that this too is from Him, and I will consider whether there is a lesson I can take from it or something in my life that I can improve.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

17 – Repenting in Happiness | **269** – Seeking Emunah | **375** – Reproof: The Way of Life | **405** – Chovos Halevavos III: Misfortune | **774** – Sing a New Song

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Harmony on Shabbos

It says about Shabbos: "You shall not kindle a fire in all your dwelling places on the Shabbos day." (Shemos 35:3). Chazal tell us that "kindling a fire on Shabbos" also alludes to the fire of anger (Tikkunei Zohar, Tikun 48). In other words, there is a special prohibition about getting angry on Shabbos.

In truth, anger is forbidden at all times. Chazal spoke against it very strongly, comparing it to idolatry and saying that someone prone to anger will suffer in the end from all types of Gehinnom (Nedarim 22a). Anger causes more damage than all the evils in the world. This is because when a person gets angry he loses his mental balance and self-control. He acts against his better judgment and is liable to do practically anything bad.

Sometimes an unfortunate incident brings something good in its wake. In life, there are many situations where a person loses control of himself and suddenly is overcome by anger, against his will. In such cases, this anger should serve as a warning to him, as Chazal say: Regarding a person who becomes angry, it is known that his sins are greater than his merits, as it says (Mishlei 29:22): "The wrathful person has greater iniquity." (Nedarim 22b). In other words, anger signals to a person that he's in a "danger zone," in a state of more sins than merits. This situation is dangerous, as the Rambam writes: Each and every person has merits and sins. Whoever has more merits than sins is righteous, and whoever has more sins than merits is wicked... If a person has more sins than merits, he immediately dies in his wickedness... (Hilchos Teshuvah 1-2). When a person finds himself angry, he has a clear sign - given by the Torah - that he's in the "danger zone." He's in trouble, and he should do teshuvah quickly - not just for the sin of anger, but also for the inordinate number of sins he discovered he has. In this way he can save himself, turning the unfortunate incident around and utilizing it for his own good!

But occasionally a bit of anger is appropriate — for instance, when it's necessary to disapprove of wrongdoing and stand up for the truth. At home as well, it's sometimes necessary to gently arouse one's anger in order to steer family members in the right direction. But even in these situations, it is absolutely forbidden to let anger take hold. Rather, as our Rabbis teach: "Anger should be on one's face and not in one's heart."

So what does our verse teach us? That there is a place for anger - but not on Shabbos! On Shabbos Kodesh, it is altogether forbidden to kindle the fire of anger. Shabbos and Yom Tov are days of rest and joy, when we shouldn't arouse our anger. A Jew whose occupation is Torah study resembles Shabbos Kodesh. Shabbos is the main fountain of kedushah in the world, and similarly, Torah learning is the source of life. It is the world's neshamah. So a person who dedicates his life to Torah study should minimize anger, avoiding it even when it seems permitted.

In honor of
Harry and Alice Adjmi

Adapted by R' Y. Levy from Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh, Rav Shimshon Pincus, Feldheim

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QUESTION

Chazal tell us that we should always make sure to speak *lashon nekiyah*, a clean language (Pesachim 3a). How should I know what's included or not included in the category of clean language?

ANSWER

Well, you start out when you're a young child and your mother says to you, "Don't say that!" If your mother tells you that, then you've started out on the road towards knowing what is not *lashon nekiyah*. And if your mother wants to wash your mouth out with soap, then you've surely received a very important lesson in the *sugya* of *lashon nekiyah*.

That's number one. *שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ וְאֵל תִּטֵּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ* (Mishlei 1:8). It's a very important lesson, by the way. Your mother, at home, is your first teacher. Your first lessons are at home. Also, your father sometimes.

And then you begin to learn outside the home as well. In Slabodka, they never said the word *shlecht*; they never said the word "bad." Never. I was there for six years. Six years and they never said that word. "Not good," they would say. But they never said *shlecht*.

They never referred to a goy as a "*sheiget*z." Because the word "*sheiget*z" comes from the word *sheket*z, a disgusting creature. But a goy is not a *sheket*z. He's a *tzelem Elokim*; he's not the best picture of a *tzelem Elokim* maybe, but he's actually that. And so to use that word is a contradiction to the doctrine of the glory of mankind's greatness. In Slabodka they called a gentile an "*arel*" or a "*goy*," but they never said "*sheiget*z." The word "*sheiget*z" is never found in Slabodka language.

So, in a good environment, if you make sure to stay in a good environment, you'll pick up what is called *lashon nekiyah*.

And it's very important! The man who *speaks* carelessly, *thinks* carelessly! The man who speaks violently, becomes violent in his character! And those who speak delicately and gently and respectfully become delicate and gentle and respectful in their characters. You are what you say.

November 26, 1998

Life Questions? 

Cybersecurity Questions? 

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