

THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION
IN MEMORY OF MRS. CLARA CHOPP A"H AND MENUCHA MARKOWITZ A"H

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

CHODESH ELUL



PARSHAS NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE

לעילוי נשמות

מוהר"ר ר' יצחק מרדכי בן מוהר"ר ר' משה אליהו ע"ה

נלב"ע י"ג תשרי תשפ"ו לפ"ק

ולעילוי נשמות

האשה החשובה מרת בלומא ע"ה בת יבדלחט"א מוהר"ר ר' חיים שמעון הי"ו

נלב"ע י"ג חשוון תשפ"ו לפ"ק

לזכות יוסף ארי' בן שרה חי' וכל משפחתו

להצלחה ולהרחבה גדולה בכל ענינים

IN MEMORY OF CLARA CHOPP A"H

חיה ריזל בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה
ולעילוי נשמת מנוחה חיה ע"ה בת יכל"ח הרב עמיחי שליט"א

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NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE

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Part I. The Criticizer

Moshe Rabbeinu's Final Words

When we read in this week's *sedrah* some of the last exhortations of Moshe Rabbeinu — to the Am Yisroel, to the Leviim — we see that his words are quite harsh: **כִּי אֲנֹכִי יֹדְעָתִי אֶת מְרִיבָךְ וְאֶת עֲרֻפְךָ הַקֹּשָׁה הֵן בְּעוֹדִי חַי** — *“For I know your disobedience and stiffneckedness. See that even while I am still alive with you, you have been rebellious against Hashem; how much more so after my death!”* (Devarim 31:27). He spoke with teeth! Very harsh!

And it wasn't an exception — that's how he always spoke to the people. Moshe Rabbeinu, with his eagle eyes, was always looking over

our shoulders and he was a very stern character. It was mentioned here once that the words **יְשׁוּמַח מֹשֶׁה** are in the *siddur*, not in the Chumash. In the Chumash you don't find that; it's only **וַיִּקְצַף מֹשֶׁה** and again **וַיִּקְצַף מֹשֶׁה**. All the time he was telling them that they have to keep the letter of the law, that they have to become better.

Don't think it was easy for people to live with Moshe. Everybody was afraid of him. They knew that he wouldn't keep quiet for the smallest infraction and therefore they toed the line of duty. They kept every smallest thing because they were always thinking, "What will Moshe Rabbeinu say?"

Drilling Through Mountains

Because what happened when you crossed the line of *din*? Moshe didn't stand for it. "The Will of Hashem must stand! If we're going to be the Torah Nation, then the Torah must be allowed to drill through mountains if needed. **וַיִּקַּב הָרִין אֶת הָהָר**! That's the way of the Torah Nation!"

You know what it means to have a Torah Nation, a nation that will be loyal forever? They have to be forged in fire! And so it went into their bones, "What will Moshe say?!" Even a thousand years later, they were still thinking about it. You know, Flavius Josephus lived at the end of Bayis Sheini – he wasn't in the Midbar; it was more than a thousand years after Moshe Rabbeinu lived. But listen now to what he wrote in the book *Contra Apion*, a remarkable statement: "Every one of us, even today, if he's thinking about doing something wrong, he's thinking what would Moshe Rabbeinu say about him."

Now, Josephus, you have to know, wasn't the most *frum* Jew you could find – far from it. He was an ordinary Jew at best. And so when he speaks, he's telling us the thoughts of the regular Jew on the street. And he says that Moshe Rabbeinu lived on in the minds of the Jewish people. When someone was contemplating doing something wrong, his first thought was, "What would Moshe Rabbeinu think of me?"

Now, such a thing doesn't happen by itself. It comes as a result of something. It was a result of firmness. And that's why at that time Hakadosh Baruch Hu needed the most firm, the most emphatic man that the world ever had – a teacher, a *rebbe*, a ruler who was the strictest in

every detail of the Torah. It wasn't always "sugar and spice and everything nice"; we needed a Moshe Rabbeinu to teach us what Torah means.

Tough Love

Of course, we know that no one loved the Am Yisroel more than Moshe. Moshe prayed for them more than anyone else. You remember right after he publicly castigated them for being *mamrim*, for being rebellious, what did he say? "I prayed for you for forty days and forty nights" (Devarim 9:25). He didn't say, "You'll suffer the consequences and too bad." He *davened* for them! For forty days and nights! That's called *ahavas Yisroel*!

And yet his great love for his people was most demonstrated by his strict and constant surveillance and stern rebuke, because it was *that* which caused the nation to achieve the superlative excellence of a Torah Nation.

And what was the result? The greatest generation in our history! I told you the results were felt a thousand years later, but that was only a *shirayim* of what it was. A thousand years later the nation was still running with that push of the Generation of the Wilderness, but they didn't compare to them at all.

Friday Night Misconceptions

You know, about the *Dor Hamidbar* there are misconceptions because Jews are constantly saying that they're no good. And the truth is you're saying it from good sources. Every Friday night, you start right away in *Lechu Neranena* and you're criticizing them: אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה אָקוּט בְּדוֹר – "For forty years I quarreled with that generation," Hashem says. וְאָמַר עַם – "I said they're a nation whose heart, whose mind wandered away from the truth, תַּעֲיִי לִבָּב הֵם – "I said they're a nation whose heart, whose mind wandered away from the truth, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי – and that they did not know My ways" (Tehillim 95:10). So there you are! Every week we become more and more convinced that they were no good.

We? We are very good, no question about it. All of us saying Kabbolas Shabbos are very good; nothing wrong with us. Whether you live in Williamsburg and you have a long beard and *payos*, whether you live out in the Five Towns and you have no beard and no *payos*, whatever it is, everybody knows he's pretty good. But *they* were very bad. That we know.

Of course, it's all wrong. Stick around till the end and hopefully we'll have time to explain the *possuk*, what it really means, but first let's hear what people who know about the subject said about it.

The Tana'im Clarify

In Sanhedrin (110b), we read: **דִּוְר הַמִּדְבָּר אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא**. It's an opinion there that the Generation of the Wilderness has no share in the World to Come. And he quotes the end of that *possuk* in *Lechu Neranena*: **אִם יָבֹאוּן אֶל מְנוּחָתִי, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאָפִי** – *I swore in My wrath, that this generation will never come to My resting place (ibid. 11).* That's the opinion of Rabi Akiva.

But Rabi Eliezer says, **רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר בְּאֵין הֵן לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא**, – “Of course, they're in *Olam Haba*!” **שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אֶסְפוּ לִי חֲסִידֵי** – *Like Hashem said, ‘Gather together to Me My devoted ones, בְּרִיתִי בְּרִיתִי עָלֵי זֶבַח* – *the ones who made a covenant with Me with sacrifices.’*” It means when they accepted the Torah; they brought *korbanos*. “They are *chassidai*, My devoted ones, and I will gather them into Me.” “Into Me” means with Me in the Afterlife. Those who accepted the Torah, that generation, will be with Me forever in *Olam Haba*.

But what do I do with the *possuk* that says, “I swore in My wrath that they won't come to My resting place”? So Rabi Eliezer says it means, “I swore, but I retracted. I changed My mind.” When Hashem swears to do good things, He never takes it back. But when He swears to do bad things, He takes it back if you do *teshuvah*. And the *Dor Hamidbar* did such a perfect *teshuvah* that Hashem retracted.

So we have now two opinions; we have Rabi Akiva and Rabi Eliezer. Now, when there's a *machlokes* of Tana'im, we have to listen to what the Sages who came afterwards had to say about it. What did they decide?

Rabi Yochanan's Psak

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן – Ah! Rabi Yochanan is speaking. But before I tell you what he says, I want to introduce Rabi Yochanan to you. Rabi Yochanan is found on every page of the Talmud. He's an Amora, but he was a chief teacher of all the Sages in Eretz Yisroel. The entire Talmud Yerushalmi is either Rabi Yochanan personally or his disciples in Eretz Yisroel. It's interesting to know that. The Talmud Yerushalmi is all

Rabi Yochanan. And in the Talmud Bavli he's almost as prolific. The Bavli is almost all Rabi Yochanan. He's found on every page.

And suppose there's a difference of opinion between Rav and Shmuel, these great Sages of Bavel, everybody knows we follow Rav in *issurim* and we follow Shmuel in money matters (Bechoros 49b). But when Rav and Shmuel are saying something *together*, it surely is authoritative. רב ושמאל תרויהו is very authoritative! You can rely on that!

Until Rabi Yochanan opens his mouth. If Rabi Yochanan speaks then his words outweigh their words. The halacha is like Rabi Yochanan even against the great teachers Rav and Shmuel (Rosh, Bava Kamma 5:11). So now you know who Rabi Yochanan is.

The Talmud's Verdict

So let's listen now to what Rabi Yochanan says in this subject; what he said when he heard that Rabi Akiva said that the *Dor Hamidbar* has no share in the World to Come. Listen to his words: "שָׁקָה רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא – לְחֶסֶדִּיתָהּ – Rabi Akiva has forsaken his piety." He has thrown away his piety. You hear such a criticism of Rabi Akiva? By Rabi Akiva saying such a thing, he lost his piety. Of course, it doesn't mean he lost his piety altogether; it means he had done something that's a very great impiety.

שָׁנְאָמֵר – And Rabi Yochanan quotes a *possuk* (Yirmiyah 2:2) to show how great that Generation of the Midbar actually was. Hashem said to Yirmiyah Hanavi, הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר – Go and proclaim in the ears of Yerushalayim; that means the Jewish people, and tell them as follows: כֹּה אָמַר ה' – Hashem is speaking and He says, זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ – "I remember for you the kindness of your young days towards Me, אֲהַבְתִּי לְלוּלְתֶיךָ – the love of your bridal days when you became My bride. At Matan Torah, you became My nation; I took you to Me and I remember, לָכֵתֶךָ בְּמִדְבָּר – how you went after Me into the wilderness, בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זָרָעָה – into a land where nothing grew."

Now, what is the *possuk* saying? What's Yirmiyah saying in the Name of Hashem? Hashem is telling the Jewish nation that forever and ever He's going to give them credit for what their forefathers did. "Out of love for the *Dor Hamidbar*, I'll never forsake you. I'm going to always favor the Jewish nation in this world and the next because of the merit of that generation who went into the wilderness after Me."

And so Rabi Yochanan concludes, וְמָה אַחֲרֵים בָּאִים בְּזִכּוֹתָם – “If others will come to the Next World because of the merit of the Generation of the Midbar, הֵם עֲצֵמָן לֹא כָל שָׁכֵן – then they themselves surely.”

So now we have the final verdict of the Talmud! Rabi Yochanan is the voice of the Talmud. As I said, he's the whole Talmud Yerushalmi and he is also the entire Talmud Bavli. That's the verdict!

Final Arguments

Now, just in case you're not convinced yet, so to close the case here's a statement in Medrash Tehillim (119). It says, אֲשֶׁרִי תַמְיָמִי דָרָךְ – how fortunate are those whose way is perfect. הֵהוּלָכִים בְּתוֹרַת ה' – And they walk in the Torah of Hashem. They're perfect and they walk in the Torah of Hashem; who's that?

So the Medrash says: it's talking about one generation in our history: תַּמְיָמִים וְחַסִּידִים הָיוּ דוֹר הַמִּדְבָּר – Those of the Generation of the Wilderness were perfect and were chassidim. It means they were entirely devoted to Hashem!

And so you can put away all your doubts now. Forget about what you thought, what your rebbe in cheder said. The Dor Hamidbar was the best!

Moshe's Final Critique

And how did they become so good? It's only because they had Moshe telling them off all the time. All the time, he was pointing out the smallest faults and criticizing them with the harshest words.

And so now he was saying goodbye, and it was his last opportunity, his last chance to mold these great people into the Torah Nation. The living presence of Moshe had been an immense inducement for proper behavior, and now that he was prepared to take leave of his people, Moshe fully knew how very great the loss of his presence would be. And so on his last days he criticized! He said, כִּי אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת מְרִיבְךָ וְאֶת עֲרָפְךָ הַקָּשָׁה – I know your rebellious nature and your stiffneckedness. Even now while I'm alive you've been rebellious with Hashem, and all the more so after I die” (Devarim 31:27).

Part II. The Exaggerator

A Real Picture

Now, the question is, if they were such a holy nation like I am putting them up to be — not me; it's the *psak* of the Torah — so what about all the stories that we know about how much trouble they made? Don't we know they were always complaining?

וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה נִּשְׁתָּה – *They complained to Moshe, “What will we drink?”* (Shemos 15: 22-24). Right away, complaining. That's our picture of them: complainers.

So now let's picture the *real* picture. We're walking for three days in the desert. Forget three days — suppose you had to walk a half a day and there's no water available. Also no Cherry Cola. Nothing. Would you complain?

But let's go before that. Let's start at the beginning. You're in Egypt and somebody came along and said, “Look. I have a project. Let's get out of this place. We'll travel someplace better. Hashem sent me and I'm taking you to a good land.”

So you say, “Alright. I'm trusting you, however. I'm taking your word for it so no shenanigans!”

And now he's taking you for a long hike. And you walk and walk and walk and walk, and not a single grocery store in sight, not a single candy store.

“Hey, what's this?” you start yelling. “Six hours walking, nothing to eat?!”

Now, let's say you didn't walk six hours. Suppose you walked for three days. And forget about no grocery stores. There's nothing to *drink*! It's a miracle you could still walk. And not only you're walking there, but you happen to have a wife and children too, little children. And their tongues are hanging out by the middle of the first day. And your heart is breaking for them.

So in the middle of the first day, you're thinking, “What's happening here? Look at the children!”

And your wife is saying, “Chaim! Look! Don’t keep quiet! The children are dying!”

So you say to her, “Wait. Wait. Moshe Rabbeinu told us that it’s okay. We have to have faith in him.”

So your wife waits another hour and then she’s frantic. And the children are really fainting. It looks like they’re going to collapse. And you understand it because you’re fainting yourself.

People Aren’t Angels

And another day passes. A day passes without drinking water! And another day! *וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים* – *They went three days!* (*ibid.* 15:22). At the end of three days they said something. What do you expect them to be, angels? If they wouldn’t have complained, we could say they’re lunatics.

And what did they do? They offered a polite complaint. They should have taken stones and smashed his head! That’s what you’d do! And not after three days! After a half day you would take stones and break his head! And they went three days and didn’t break anybody’s head. They complained a little bit.

So what about it? It’s a glorious nation. On the contrary, that episode tells you it’s a glorious nation!

The trouble is when we learned Chumash, our *rebbe* put on his spectacles and the spectacles were as black as could be. And he was teaching, “Three days and they went and they asked for water! Such a wicked people, hehe.”

Ask your *rebbe* to go two hours without water.

Slabodka Chumash Lessons

I once gave a speech about this. I was speaking to lady teachers. There was a meeting someplace and they asked me to speak to them. I said, “You’re teaching antisemitism.”

It’s the truth. Imagine a pious lady teacher. She knows Chumash, she knows Rashi. She was never in the Slabodka *shmuessen*. She knows it like she learned it, superficially, and she puts in all the venom, all the poison she can into these words: “They asked for water and they rebelled. They were complaining and badgering and crying. Such wickedness!”

So if you teach Chumash that way, of course you'll raise up a generation of antisemites. And that's what the Jewish people have become by learning Chumash in such irresponsible ways.

It's not realistic! It's common sense, after three days, if they're still speaking polite words, then they're the most noble people that ever lived. They're a perfect generation!

A Criminal Nation?

Of course there is no such thing as perfect among human beings. What it means is *compared to other people*, the Generation of the Wilderness was a perfect generation. They were crowded together – at least two million people! Now imagine two million Arabs for forty years. How many murders would there have been? Imagine two million Puerto Ricans crowded together in a small space for forty years. How many deeds of adultery would there have been? Two million Germans for forty years. How many crimes would have been committed?

In the Midbar, nothing is reported about any crime at all. What happened? One man was found gathering wood on Shabbos. In forty years that's the only one crime that was done. When the *mann* fell they were told not to pick the *mann*, יִצְאוּ מִן הָעֵם, and a few went out to pick the *mann*, to see what's doing. But they didn't find anything so they didn't do it. That's in forty years, and that's all.

And therefore, it was a generation that was as perfect as could be. Not a single case of committing adultery! Not a single case of incest! That generation was the most perfect generation that ever existed. Never again did they have an equal. Not only they didn't have an equal generation; no generation ever came close to them in greatness.

Unsnagging the Snagged

However, it remains to be explained all the bitter criticisms. That's what snags people. They read Moshe Rabbeinu's words of criticism in Parshas Vayeilech and many other places too and they're snagged.

I remember years ago, I had a big argument with a man in my shul. He couldn't tolerate what I was saying that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loved the *Dor Hamidbar* intensely. I said that those who went out of Mitzrayim were beloved by Hashem, that He called them *yedidim*. וְנָתַנּוּ יְרִידִים זְמִירוֹת. וְתַשְׁבְּחוּת – *His beloved ones sang Az Yashir to Him*. But he was accustomed

to what they learned in *cheder* as a child – that they made an *eigel*, they're no good. They listened to the *meraglim*. They complained about this and about that. "No good at all," he said.

And he liked to bring up that *possuk*, שְׁנֵה אָקוּט בְּדוֹר, – *forty years I quarreled with that nation*. Every Friday night, he heard that great lesson, עַם תַּעֲי לֵבָב הֵם – *they're people whose minds wander away from the truth*, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכֵי, – *they didn't know my ways*, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאָפִי – *therefore, I gave it to them*, אִם יָבוֹאוּ אֶל מִדְבָּרִי, – *they're not going to come to Eretz Yisroel, they'll have to die in the Midbar*. So to him it was settled!

Words of Washing

The answer is that the words in Tanach are intended to wash us. The *nevi'im* were washing us. I'll give you a *mashal*. Suppose you see a man walking in the street with a bucket, with soap, with long brushes. He's going to clean up someplace. Where is he headed to? Is he headed to the city dump? No. It's too much of a job. He won't try to clean up the dump. He's headed to some hall where people come together. He's going to wash out the hall.

Now, the hall doesn't have mud all over it. The hall doesn't have wild animals there and leaves on the floor, just a little dirt on the floor. So he comes to clean up that little bit of dirt to make it perfect. But where it's all dirt, like a dump, there he doesn't go because it's a hopeless case.

So the *umos ha'olam*, they're *osek* in *tumah* all their lives, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't send any *nevi'im* to criticize the *goyim*. It's a waste of time for a *navi* to go with soap and a pail of water to wash off the *goyim*. But on the Am Yisroel every little speck is a tragedy. And therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu says, "Gevald! Look! You have a speck on you!" And he makes a big fuss out of it. And we are reading it today and we are so impressed with the *gevald*. We think that they were very wicked people, *chas v'shalom* – לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכֵי!

That's a big mistake! The *nevi'im* didn't tell the gentiles, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכֵי – *they don't know My ways*, because they don't know *anything*! The *goyim* walk in darkness.

Criticizing the Excellent

And so the *umos ha'olam*, we give up on them. But the Am Yisroel is the nation that Hashem is trying to improve because it *pays* to improve

them. I always repeat a *kabalah* from my own *rebbe*, *zichrono livracha*, in Slabodka. Hashem said, “I quarreled with that nation, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי – and they didn’t know My ways,” it means, וְהֵם יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי – they *did* know My ways. That’s a *chiddush* my *rebbe* said. They *did* know My ways. You hear that big *chiddush*? וְהֵם יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי.

I’ll explain why he said that. Who *did* know the ways of Hashem? Was it the Norsemen? Was it the Africans? Was it the Mexicans? Was it the Greeks? Who knew Hashem? They didn’t know My ways; okay, so who *did* know? It’s so foolish to understand it superficially.

The Non-Cheit Ha’eigel

The sin of the *eigel*? What was the *eigel*? If we had time, I’d explain it to you, but you have to know it was almost nothing. You need a magnifying glass to recognize it as a sin. At the end, three thousand people were executed. But there were two million Jews there. What about them? And the whole Jewish nation is blamed for the *eigel*. And even the three thousand, who do you think they were? They were *ovdei avodah zarah*?

Don’t make any mistake about it. We have to learn not with a childish mind. We have to learn with the Rishonim. Look in the Ramban, look in the Kuzari, and they both explain that the *cheit ha’eigel* was almost invisible.

The Non-Cheit of Korach

Korach? Korach committed no crime. Korach was accusing Moshe Rabbeinu that he chose his brother. That wasn’t a crime of immorality. He didn’t commit any crime of murder. I want to tell you people that Korach and Dasan and Aviram were the nicest people. Never mind what your *rebbe* told you when you were six years old in Hebrew school and the *rebbe* wanted to make it interesting so he gritted his teeth when he was describing them. If Korach came in here, we’d have to get up for him; no question about it. Not because he comes out of the Chumash; because of *himself*! If Korach lived in Boro Park and he would lower himself to come into this place, we’d have to get up for him.

So you say, “Well, they were swallowed up. Look what happened to them.”



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They were swallowed up because they should have been better. If somebody is in a *kollel* where everybody learns twenty-three hours a day — imagine such a *kollel*, they're studying day and night — and one lazy fellow decides that he wants to sleep six hours every night. He breaks down the morale of the whole institution! It's a letdown. He's a rotten apple in a barrel that causes the whole barrel of apples to decay.

But if you take him out of that *kollel* and bring him to one of our *kollelim*, he'd be the star! He'd be the model. He sleeps six hours every night and all day long he labors in Torah. Only that because they were not good enough for the greatness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu demanded, He rejected them.

The Non-Cheit Hameraglim

The *meraglim*? They didn't kill anyone. We look back with embarrassment that this could have happened to the holy nation. Hakadosh Baruch Hu had foretold that they would successfully enter the land and conquer, and the *meraglim*, when they returned, discouraged the people because of fear that they would fail. And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu was so displeased that He sentenced them to be forty years in the Midbar. That's how we learned when we were children, and that's the most superficial *pashtus* of the *pesukim*.

Now, the *meraglim* came back and said it's impossible. And don't think that they weren't right. It *was* impossible. Only that Hakadosh Baruch Hu said it is possible. It was a very great test. From the viewpoint of the *meraglim*, to enter the land would have been just as logical as jumping out of the window of a ten-story building. Let's say you're standing by the open window and a *navi* is standing and telling you, "Do not fear! ה' אִתָּנוּ! There's a promise to us!" Isn't it easy to jump now? Imagine — what would you do? At least you'd hesitate a little bit before you jumped. You would need a tremendous amount of trust in Hashem. Even if Hashem is standing there and saying, "Chaim'l, jump," and you take a look down there... You just can't do it.

Big People, Big Sins

So now we begin to see it wasn't simple at all. And if they are blamed, it's like the Kuzari said in a different instance, their *cheit* was big because

they were big. They were very great personalities! And therefore greatness was expected of them.

If we had been there and we had refused to enter, there wouldn't be any claim against us. We're not big enough to overcome our nerves, our instincts of self-preservation. You think you would have jumped; you would have entered Eretz Canaan?

One of the kings of Eretz Canaan was the king of Chatzor. Just one of the thirty-one kings. So it's related in Sefer Shoftim (4:3) that he had nine hundred war chariots! Imagine a king of one small kingdom, nine hundred chariots! And the Bnei Yisroel didn't have *any* chariots! And now you want them to go ahead despite everything. Not only to fight against Chatzor; all the *malchei* Canaan! There were other, bigger kingdoms with even more chariots. So you have to know that what was expected of them was superhuman courage based on superhuman understanding that Hashem is in charge of the world! And therefore, we cannot blame them at all.

And so, it's time to put all of our childish interpretations aside. It's time now to grow up and realize that everything you read in the Tanach about our nation, all the criticism, it's all not true, it's all exaggerations! Moshe Rabbeinu's criticisms, the *neviim's* stinging rebuke, Hakadosh Baruch Hu's words of rebuke, it's all exaggerating the smallest of missteps!

Part III. The Truth-Teller

The Gentile Truth-Teller

You know who told the real truth? A *goy*! Bilam spoke up and praised us like nobody else ever did. If you look in the words of Bilam, it's one long song of enthusiastic praise for Am Yisroel. **מָה טוֹבוֹ אֱהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֶתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** – *How beautiful are your tents, your habitation, Yaakov* (Bamidbar 24:5). Take out a Chumash and read the words; a *nevuah*, *possuk* after *possuk* of the greatest praises of the Am Yisroel.

Woah! That's not what Moshe told us?! At the same time that Moshe is criticizing, Bilam is praising. What's going on here?

The answer is that Bilam was sent for one purpose only: to say the real truth, that we are a nation that's the most beautiful of all the peoples in the world. Now, Hashem didn't send Moshe Rabbeinu for that. No, Moshe kept on criticizing until the end of his days. It wasn't the whole truth but it was medicine; it's not the real *emes* but it's useful, it's beneficial. Because Moshe Rabbeinu was telling us what was most important for us to hear — our faults. When a person becomes aware of his flaws of character, his *chesronos*, what's wrong with him, that's the very greatest benefit you can do to him because Hakadosh Baruch Hu did not make the world merely for us to exist and to live peacefully. The world was made for one purpose for mankind: that they should exploit the potentialities within themselves to become as good as they can become. And so we need to hear our faults.

But in order that we shouldn't get snagged, Hashem did something. He sent Bilam. One man in history He sent to say the truth about the Am Yisroel.

Transcendental Tents

It was near the end of the forty years in the Midbar, after all the “sins” had been committed and all the criticism had been heaped upon the head of that generation, and now Bilam arrived on the scene to fulfill his mission. He raised up his eyes and *וַיֵּרָא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו* – *he saw Yisroel dwelling according to its tribes (ibid. 24:2)*. He saw their tents and he became so excited that he went into raptures.

What was he surprised at? The tents were made of silk? Of gold? Fur tents?

No; their tents were worn-out tents. They had used the same tents for forty years. What was there in the tent to be surprised at?

The answer is he saw that the tents were so situated, so positioned that no one tent had its doorway facing the doorway of the next tent; they shouldn't look into the neighbor's house. There were almost a million tents and yet Bilam looked and he was amazed and he couldn't see any instance where one tent had a doorway facing the doorway of another tent. Because people so positioned their tents that they shouldn't look into the neighbor's houses.

He saw more than that. He was a prophet; he saw what was inside the tents. He saw through the tents and he saw a very holy nation. And he became so excited, he said, **מִה טֹבוֹ אֹהֲלֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב**. Bilam exclaimed that every single tent is going to be a fountain of living waters that will inspire all the generations that will come out of them. **בְּנִחָלִים נָטְיוּ וְגו' בְּאֶרְצֵים עָלִי**. – He compared these tents that he saw there in the wilderness as if they were springs of fresh living water that would flow forever and ever (*ibid.* 24:6). The traditions from those families will continue to flow forever and ever.

The Lambasted Generation

Now, which generation was Bilam speaking about? He was looking at the generation that was blamed for “not knowing My ways.” And Bilam became so excited about them that the spirit of Hashem came upon him and he couldn't stop singing their praises. What's the *pshat*?

The answer is that Bilam isn't interested in our welfare. Moshe Rabbeinu and all the Jewish *nevi'im* were our good friends and they wanted to help us get better so they criticized us. But Bilam wasn't a good friend of ours. He wasn't interested in our becoming better – he wanted just the opposite – and therefore he was allowed to compliment us. And once he's telling the truth, so of course he'll compliment us to the skies.

And it's in the Torah because it's important to hear that. Otherwise you might make the error of listening to Moshe Rabbeinu's criticism and understanding it at face value. But it's a fatal error! It's impossible to love the Am Yisroel under such a misconception! And Hakadosh Baruch Hu is **אֹהֵב עוֹלָם אֶהְבֶּתִּיךָ**, **אֹהֵב עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל**, He loves us *with an eternal love* (Yirmiyah 31:2) and He wants us to love them, too.

The Yetzer's Biggest Catch

Now, that's a very important point, because the *yetzer hara* is very busy in this world with just the opposite. Everyone knows that there's a *malach* called the *yetzer hara*, a supernatural force whose job is to mislead people into all types of error. And he focuses on that: **מִיָּנִיחַ אֶת אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם וּמִתְנַגֵּה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל** – *The yetzer hara forsakes the nations of the world, and he attacks the Jews* (Sukkah 52a). He doesn't want to waste his time urging gentiles to do wicked things, because they do it anyhow. It's

like a car going downhill; there's no use stepping on the gas, it's a waste of gasoline. And therefore, he concentrates on Yisroel because with them it's an uphill battle. It's unnatural for Jews to sin. It goes against the grain of a Jew to believe in Christianity or to believe in evolution. It's unnatural for a Jew to sink to unnatural lusts. And so because of that, the *yetzer hara* puts additional efforts to entangle them — otherwise it would never happen.

The Yetzer's Big Function

But you'll be surprised to hear that one of his biggest functions, one of his biggest successes, is to cause Jews to think less of themselves than they should. And he's been busy with that always. Some people who are not cognizant of ancient history have the impression that antisemitism is a modern creation; they think it arose together with Christianity maybe. But it's not true. The campaign against the Jewish people has been going on from the earliest time. From the beginning, the *yetzer hara* has conducted a tremendous campaign against the Jewish people; to vilify, to belittle, to defame the Jewish people. And he has harnessed all the nations of the world for this task. It's being done on a tremendous scale. A tremendous press! Many books and articles!

And the most important of the effects is not that the nations of the world should be enemies of the Jews. No, that's not most important and it's not so difficult either. His main purpose is in order to make an impression on the weak Jews.

Now, to become a Christian, that's too much of an impression. Only a very weak-minded Jew, maybe something is wrong with him, with his head, so the *yetzer hara* can entangle him with such foolishness. But ordinarily, a virgin birth and Santa Claus, three-in-one, one-in-three, jingle bells, it's too stupid for a Jew. That's too much, too unnatural for a normal Jew.

The Ethnocentric Principle

But what the *yetzer hara* intends most with this torrent that's raining down constantly is to beat down on the Jew so that he shouldn't be able to see the greatness in his own people. And that's a very big accomplishment for the *yetzer hara*, to impose on us an inferiority complex by finding ways and means of us losing confidence in our

greatness. Even a little bit of an effect, it's a tragedy; and it's especially so when this propaganda finds its mark even among *bnei Torah*, even among *talmidei chachomim*. וְבִתְלִמְיָדִי חֲכָמִים יוֹתֵר מִכּוֹלָם – *If the yetzer can snare a talmid chacham, ooh, is that a good catch for him (ibid.).*

Because the first and most fundamental lesson the Jew has to learn about his people is that we were not chosen for nothing. אֲתָהּ בְּחִרְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – *You chose us from all the nations. Why? Because we were the choicest ones. There's no question at all about it. Nobody could compare to us.*

And to think otherwise, don't think it's a small thing. It's one of the biggest errors, one of the very worst iniquities that a Jew can accomplish if he doesn't think well of his people. A Jew must know his nation is the best nation, that nobody can ever compare remotely. מִי כְעַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֲחֵד בָּאָרֶץ – *Who is like the nation Yisroel, one people in the world (Divrei Hayamim I 17:21).* I'm talking about the *frum* Jews; the *frum* Jews who carry on the tradition, who study Hashem's Torah, are unequaled and never were equaled in the history of the world. Nobody can ever compare remotely.

Misunderstanding Tanach

And that's the danger of learning the Tanach *k'pshuto*. You hear the criticisms and you're influenced. The *yetzer hara* is very happy with that. He likes when you learn like that because it means you're easy pickings for him. And therefore, it's so important to be busy always studying the *emes* of the Torah, because if you don't understand who the Am Yisroel really is, then you're going to fall into that error sooner or later. You'll listen to Moshe Rabbeinu say that we are disobedient and rebellious and stiff-necked and everything else and you'll believe it.

And so we must always come back to the truth. We are the best! And how did we become the best? Just because of that! Just because Moshe Rabbeinu never complimented us. He always criticized us because דֶּרֶךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכָחוֹת מוֹסֵר – *the way of life is the rebuke of instruction (Mishlei 6:23);* that's the way to succeed, when people are rebuked.

Nowadays, don't try it. Nowadays, don't rebuke anybody because he'll run away and you'll never see him again. But in the good old days when people had some common sense and they knew the purpose of

life was to get better, people went *looking* for rebuke. They were looking for criticisms. And that's why in the ancient times there were *nevi'im*. *Nevi'im* were sent because people appreciated them and the *navi* gave it to them.

Moshe Fulfills His Role

And therefore, our greatest *navi*, he especially fulfilled that role. It says, ה' אֶשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת מֹשֶׁה – Hashem made Moshe (Shmuel I 12:6). What do you mean “made Moshe”? He created Moshe for that generation! He made a Moshe because that generation was capable of a Moshe!

“If only we had a Moshe Rabbeinu,” people say. “Why doesn’t He give us a Moshe?” they want to know.

You couldn’t handle Moshe! You would be a thousand times more insolent than Korach! Don’t you see what people say against the *gedolim*, against the *Agudas Harabbonim*, what they say against the *roshei yeshiva*? There are *chatzufim* who speak up against the *gedolei Yisroel* today in the newspapers. They ridicule them!

We couldn’t handle too much criticism today. What would we do if we didn’t have a soft-spoken Reb Moshe Feinstein? Reb Moshe Feinstein is soft-spoken, gentle. Suppose we had the Ridbaz, an old-time *rav*. The Ridbaz wasn’t soft-spoken! All the old *gedolim*, they told the truth! And they said it with fiery words! I don’t know what would happen! I’m afraid to think.

Moshe Rabbeinu’s Legacy

And Moshe Rabbeinu, a thousand times more! Hashem created a Moshe for that generation, a generation that understood דְּרֵךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכָחוֹת מוֹסֵר – the way of life is instructions of mussar. That was the way to get the most out of people. And therefore, that generation was given the harshest treatment of any generation in history. Not because, as we think, they deserved it; but because they were the ones who could produce the best wine if they were pressed most severely.

And they became our model forever! We try to live up to that model generation! Such an attitude changed us forever. We’re still running with that push that Moshe Rabbeinu gave us with his criticism. That’s how powerful was the influence of the one who said, “All my life you have been rebellious against Hashem!” That’s what Moshe Rabbeinu

accomplished; he implanted an attitude towards the Torah that lasted forever, a model for every generation. We know that we're the best in the world — no nation even comes close — but we know also that we're in the world to become even more perfect. And that requires sometimes to be told what's wrong with us under a magnifying glass, to be told **כִּי אָנֹכִי** **יִדְעָתִי אֶת מַרְיָד וְאֶת עֶרְפָּד הַקָּשָׁה**!

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This week, *bli neder*, when I say in Shemoneh Esrei, **יְהוָה יְהִלְלוּךָ סְלָה**, *and the holy ones praise you each day*, I will think of our glorious Torah Nation, Hashem's holiest and most beloved people.

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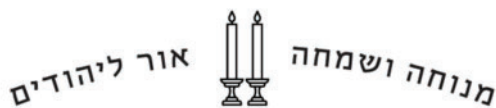

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Ra'ava DeRa'avin

In Torah sources we find that *seudah shelishis* is called the time of *ra'ava dera'avin*, the "will of wills." *Ra'ava* is Aramaic for *ratzon*, which means a person's will — i.e., what the person wants. What does "will of wills" mean?

The whole world expresses the will of Hashem. However, Hashem's will is not always the same. Here Hashem wants suffering, and there He wants joy. Here prosperity, and there poverty. All these are the wills of Hashem. In its practical expression, each will differs from the next. Thus we may ask: What is the one will that underlies and motivates all the various wills that exist? What is the "will of wills," the *ra'ava dera'avin*?

Chazal tell us, "Everything Hashem does, He does for the best." (*Berachos* 60b) This means that one will gives rise to all the wills: Hashem's will to bestow goodness! Because of Hashem's will to bestow goodness, He punishes here and enriches there. Because of Hashem's will to bestow goodness, one man becomes sick, and another man, healthy. This is the *ra'ava* behind all the *ra'avin*.

The *kedushah* of Friday night is not *ra'ava dera'avin*. It's not all-encompassing — it's just one aspect. Similarly, the *kedushah* of Shabbos morning is a certain *ra'ava*. It's more beautiful than that of Shabbos night, but it's still just one aspect. When we come to *seudah shelishis*, the great *ra'ava dera'avin* reveals itself: It is Hashem's one underlying will that unifies and encompasses all other wills. At this time we work on our own fundamental will, which is responsible for all the various states in our lives. This is the time to change everything, to straighten out our *middos*, correct our shortcomings, and solve all our other problems.

On Shabbos morning we don't say *Attah Echad*. We say *Yismach Moshe*, because it is the time of the *simchah* of the wedding celebration. But every wedding, no matter how wonderful, eventually comes to an end. On Shabbos afternoon we say *Attah Echad*, which expresses the absolute Oneness of Hashem. This Oneness exists at every time and in every situation, and it never, ever ends. For if it would, it wouldn't be Oneness. The concept of Oneness is that even tomorrow, and even a week from now, it will be the same.

This comes to the fore at the time of *Minchah* and *seudah shelishis*. This is the time to work on keeping Shabbos with us all week; the Oneness of Hashem which we recognized on Shabbos should accompany us during the weekdays. This means living with the underlying truth of Hashem's Oneness: *Hashem Echad u'Shemo Echad!*

לע"נ יצחק בן אדל ע"ה

The Yedid Family

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

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QUESTION

What is Selichos all about?

ANSWER

Selichos means that a man must make some time for *hisbonenus*, for thinking. That's what we say in Selichos every day, *נַחֲפֹשׁ וְנַחְקֶרָה* – *let us search out our ways and investigate*. All the *frum* Jews are saying that, but how many are doing it? How many *frum* Jews have stopped and given five minutes to think over the past year? Believe me, very few.

I read once about a gentile; a gentile, *l'havdil*, who every Saturday night told his family, "Don't bother me for two hours." He went into a room and he was alone for two hours. He talked things over, a spiritual inventory, and it did him a great deal of benefit.

It takes time. *נַחֲפֹשׁ* means to search out; not merely to take a superficial look at yourself, a general overview. No, you have to look into yourself with a magnifying glass. And *נַחְקֶרָה* means to dig in, like excavating for something that is buried.

Now, I'm not going to say you should be like that gentile — it's too much to demand — but five minutes' inventory at least. And not every Saturday night like he did, but at least this one, the first night of Selichos. Five minutes of bookkeeping is very little for a whole year of business. But still, it would be a great thing if somebody could boast, "I did it! I fulfilled *נַחֲפֹשׁ וְנַחְקֶרָה*. I spent five minutes thinking of the past full year." It's a very poor little boast, but *halevai v'halevai*.

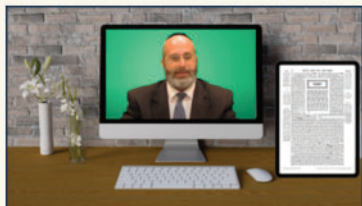
And it's so essential — unless you want to continue in your blindness until you fall over the precipice when it's all over and then it's too late. At the end you'll realize that your life has been wasted for lack of using your mind. The golden opportunity of life comes once in history — you won't come back again. And that's what Selichos is for; it's meant to wake you up. February 1977

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ח • ואמת

Keeping His word,
Hashem handsomely
rewards those who do
His will.⁶

ט • ניצר חסד לאלפים
Hashem preserves our
דסד to benefit our
descendants for 2,000
generations.⁷

י • נשא עון

Hashem forgives⁸
sins done intentionally.⁸

יא • זפשע

Sins done rebelliously,
to anger Hashem.⁹

יב • וחטאה

Sins done
unintentionally.⁹

יג • ונקה

With תשובה, Hashem
erases our sins as if
they never existed.⁵

כלל ישראל
SIN, THEY SHOULD
PERFORM THIS
ARRANGEMENT
BEFORE ME AND I WILL
FORGIVE THEM.”²

More than simply reciting
these מדות, Hashem wants us
to emulate His ways and
perform them as well.¹⁰

מקורות: 1. רא"ש פרק א' דר"ה סי' ה' 2. ר"ה
יו: 3. רש"י שמות ל"ג ונ"א שם 4. ספורנו
שם 5. רש"י ושפתי חכ' שם 6. רש"י ודעת
זמנים שם 7. רש"י וספורנו שם 8. ע"פ רש"י
שם כ"ה לה' 9. יומא לו: ורש"י שם 10. ספר
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לע"נ נחום צבי בן בנימין



מידות

COMPANION

א. ד'

Before we sin, Hashem's
רחמנות is unaffected by
the knowledge that we are
destined to sin.¹

ב. ד'

After we sin, Hashem still
רחמנות if we
תשובה.²

ג. קל

Aside from satisfying our
basic needs, Hashem
provides an abundance of
טובות too.³

ד. רחום

Hashem eases the
punishments of the guilty
when they call out to
Him.⁴

ה. וחנן

Hashem bestows good
upon those who ask, even
if they are unworthy.⁴

ו. ארך אפים

Hashem is slow
to punish sinners, hoping
they will do תשובה.⁵

ז. ודב חסד

Hashem tilts His
scales for those who lack
זכותים.⁵



A KABBALAH FOR THE NEW YEAR



Greatness is made within the walls of home

Chazal tell of Kimchis, whose quiet devotion within her own walls raised seven sons who became Kohanim Gedolim. True greatness, our Sages teach, is built *baseiser* — in the peaceful privacy of the home.

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- ◆ Run your Shabbos kitchen with calm and confidence
- ◆ Give your children a home where Shabbos truly shines

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