

# תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on Parshas Vayigash

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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## Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

### פרשת ויגש

#### A NATION WITH NO KING

Anyone who has even a superficial knowledge of the history of our people, will know that up until the times of שאול המלך there were no kings that ruled over the Jewish nation. We didn't have any kings in our history.

Should I tell you why? Now, don't pay any attention to the חכמים בעיניהם, who claim that it is because we were a backwards people, a primitive tribal family. That's שקר וכזב! We were always the most advanced people of all the nations around us, and we could have easily appointed a king. Only that nobody was willing to accept the crown. Nobody wanted the job. When it was offered to them, it was always refused. Nobody ran for office. It was a principle of the Jewish nation! You shouldn't be a man who seeks glory.

"To lord over my fellow Jews as a leader?!" It was unheard of. The lust for power was always considered a most despicable trait of character. The nation as a whole, as well as each

individual, despised anyone who would even show a faint thirst for power.

You remember when the people came to גדעון? Now, גדעון was a great war hero who saved the עם ישראל from their enemies, and when the people came to him and said “Be our king,” he said, “How could I be your king? Why would I raise myself above you? Hashem is your King!” That's how it used to be.

#### OUR FIRST KING IS DRAGGED TO THE PALACE

And even when the nation, in a moment of weakness and fear of the nations around them, finally demanded a king, there were no candidates. When שאול was chosen, nobody could find him. הנה הוא נחבא אל הכלים - “And he was hiding among the barrels” (Shmuel 1 10:22). They went searching for him and found his legs sticking out from among barrels where he had hidden himself to escape the glory of kingship. They had to drag him out from behind the barrels by his legs to become the king. That's our first king! That's how it used to be. And we see that again and again.

#### THE HUMBLE FAMILY

And this was the foundation of this great family from its inception. Avraham Avinu said אנכי עפר ואפר - “I am dust and ashes” (Bereishis 18:27). “I am nothing,” said Avraham. And he wasn't just saying it, like the man who says אני הקטן בעניות דעתי, and really he's thinking אני הגדול בעשירות דעתי. No, Avraham meant it when he said it. He really felt it.

And Yitzchok was always a man of humility. And Yaakov too was humble all the time. We know this from all of the stories of our Avos. And the sons of Yaakov, the twelve sh'vatim, were raised on this principle of humility. It was fed to them in their mother's milk. That was always the principle of this noble family. And they abhorred any man who entertained ambitions of being a king, a leader over others.

## YOSEF THE VIPER

And all of a sudden, in this atmosphere of עניוּוֹת, in the humble environment of this great family, the brothers saw a danger developing. Here is Yosef, little Yosseleh, the youngest of them, and he's dreaming grand dreams. He's dreaming of greatness, of wielding total control over the family.

Their little brother was having hallucinations of being the one in charge. And to the righteous brothers, Yosef's desires were a terrible and fateful step in the wrong direction. He was veering from the straight path of simplicity and humility that the Avos had set down for them. Under their noses was developing a peril to the future of this great and holy nation. A viper was lurking among them.

## YOSEF'S DAYDREAMS

We know that a dream comes at night from one's thoughts during the day. אמר רבי יונתן אין מראין לו לאדם אלא מהרהורי לבו. - "In a man's dreams, he is shown only that which his heart thinks about" (Brachos 55b). If you think about something too much during the day, then that's the dream that will come to you at night. And so the brothers understood that Yosef's dreams were the result of his constant thoughts of seizing power. "So what's he dreaming that we should all bow down to him?" they said. "It means he's walking around all day with ideas, with dreams, of grandeur."

And he wasn't just dreaming. Here he is calling the whole family together to tell them his dreams. Yosef wasn't playing around. He wasn't calling his brothers together just to waste time. He meant business. He was letting everyone know what was going to be.

ויוסיפו עוד שנוא אותו על חלומותיו ועל דבריו - "And they hated him more because of his dreams and because of his words" (ibid. 37:8). They hated him not only "because of his dreams" but also "because of his words." "What's he telling us his dreams for?! Because he believes them! Otherwise he wouldn't tell them to us.

He's letting us know what's going to be. Little Yosseleh is taking his daytime fantasies, his ambitions of grandeur, and portraying them as some sort of prophecy. It's bad enough that his ambitions for power are so ingrained in his psyche that they're causing such dreams, but he's actually imagining himself to be a prophet."

And then the brothers saw Yosef relating his dreams to their father. And they rightly took umbrage at the audacity of their little brother. They understood his plans of relating his dreams to his father, as a way of influencing Yaakov to grant him even more authority. "He's imagining himself a prophet, and even scheming to make it come true."

So it happened once. And it happened a second time. They saw that Yosef meant business. He was a determined young man; determined to pursue his own ambitions, with no qualms about the peril to the future of the family, the future of this great nation.

#### THE ROMAN ELECTIONS IN CANAAN

Now, how could a younger brother ever hope to gain control over his older brothers? There was only one way, and that was the way of the Roman elections. You know how they elected a new emperor in Rome, don't you? By the stiletto. And that was the only option available for this ambitious upstart. He would have to slaughter his older brothers, and that way he'd wrest control and rule. In ancient times, among the nations, whenever a younger brother gained power, his first business was to get rid of the older siblings. It still happens that way in some countries to this day.

#### GETTING RID OF YOSEF

And so, the brothers were well aware of what was brewing here. This wasn't mere sibling rivalry; this was self-preservation. "What's going to happen to us? So before he does away with us, our only option is get rid of him. We have to nip this threat in the bud." **הבא להרגך השכם להורגו** (Sanhedrin 72a). If someone is

coming to kill you, you don't wait till he's already standing on top of you to begin defending yourself - you kill him first! They weren't about to help let this little schemer make his dreams come true.

Now, the brothers didn't take this decision of theirs lightly. No, no, not at all. They sat and thought about it for a long time. The Torah doesn't tell us all the details, all the conversations and discussions they had. They sat and pondered and debated for many months. And they saw that there was no alternative but to take action against him, to do away with him. It wasn't distaste; it was **פיקוח נפש**, self-preservation. And therefore, with heavy hearts, they soberly decided that it was their duty, no matter how difficult it may be, to get rid of him.

Only that finally, in the last moments, they weakened slightly in their resolve, and they didn't carry out his deserved punishment. It's not easy to rid the world of a **רשע** when that **רשע** is your own flesh and blood. And therefore, despite their absolute conviction that Yosef was a dangerous megalomaniac who would do whatever possible to gain power, they decided that they could avert the danger they faced by selling him as a slave instead of killing him. In the ancient times a slave wasn't somebody who could harbor any grand ambitions. And therefore, once he would be sold into slavery and carried out of the country, it's finished. That would forever end his grand plans. There were no abolitionist in those days to stir up trouble, and therefore slavery would forever end the danger that Yosef posed to his family.

#### NO REGRETS

Now we have to know that Yosef's brothers felt no regret about what they had done. No regret at all. They were convinced that what they had done was the proper procedure. They were more sure of themselves than we could ever be. In fact they thought that executing Yosef was what really they should have done. Only that in a moment of weakness they yielded, or they had certain considerations to yield, and that's why they were willing to have him sold off into slavery. But they were absolutely

convinced that this is what had to be done. And they had no regrets at all.

And our parsha takes us twenty-two years later, and we stand in fear with the brothers as they bow in submission before the viceroy in the Egyptian palace. And then they heard those shocking words, **אני יוסף**, which would reverberate throughout history: "I am Yosef!" Even if I would sit here talking for an hour, I wouldn't be able to describe the shock the brothers felt. It was their little brother Yosef, and now he was sitting on the throne of the king. It had come true!

And they stood terrified and dumbfounded. **ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו**. They were stunned, and filled with regret that they had never even imagined possible. And not only because they now realized that the little Yosseleh that they had sold into slavery was now the leader of Egypt, but even more so, because now it was revealed to them that they had been so wrong, for so long.

There had not even been a trace of doubt in their minds in their dealing with the danger of Yosef. They felt completely justified. And this was not just a weak justification of a deed done long ago. It was twenty-two years of justifications! Twenty-two years of building edifice upon edifice, story upon story, of justifications. For years they had reinforced their already pure arguments. They purified them more and more. He was a **נביא שקר**, a false prophet, and he constantly spoke to his father about them, telling him whatever wicked things he could imagine. He had dreams of overthrowing the family, and he expected, even demanded, that his parents and older brothers, should fall on their faces in subservience before him.

Not that their decision of how to deal with the danger of Yosef needed any reinforcing, but that's the way of a person. He's always justifying himself. You know that when you get into a fight with your wife, so the first hour you might feel bad about it. Something at least; a tinge of regret. An hour later, as you go off to work, you feel that you're right. Two hours later, you're surely

right! The more time passes, the more right you become. And the wife is doing the same thing at home. Because a human being is always justifying himself. It's human nature.

And so Yosef's brothers were human as well. And they were building up, and reinforcing themselves since the last time they had seen Yosef, as they were lowering him into the pit. And it was some building by this time! It was a skyscraper of righteousness. And suddenly, at the moment when they heard this man sitting on the throne say the words **אני יוסף**, they stood terrified and dumbfounded. They couldn't speak. And the secret that we knew from reading the words of the Torah, **ויקנאו בו אחיו** - "and they were envious of him," was now, in this single moment of clarity, revealed to them as well. At that moment, overwhelmed with shock and regret, they were suddenly left naked of all of their justifications of so many years. It all collapsed into dust. Like a bolt of lightning, it hit them. The brothers realized that all of their judgements and all of their decisions were colored not with righteous indignation, but with simple jealousy.

Now if you would understand the Torah properly, you would know that this verse, **ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף** is perhaps the most fearful statement in the entire Torah. The words **אני יוסף**, should fill every thinking man with great apprehension. They are truly terrifying words, only that we don't think. We read them with our thick heads, and we don't absorb the intended lesson. We're completely oblivious.

So what did Chazal say when they came to this posuk? They tell us the following: **אמר אבא כהן ברדלא: אוי לנו מיום הדין** - "Abba Cohen Bardala said: Woe is to us on the Great Day of Judgment in the Next World! Alas to us on the Great Day of Rebuke!" (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10) Abba Cohen Bardala thought about this encounter in the palace between Yosef and his brothers and he internalized a great fear of the **יום הדין** that will come after death. From our story here, from the few words that Yosef said to his brothers. **אני יוסף**, "I am Yosef!", Abba Cohen Bardala became a new person.

And the medrash continues: ומה יוסף הצדיק שהיה בשר ודם שהוכיח את אחיו לא יכלו לעמוד בתוכחתו, הקדוש ברוך הוא שהוא דיין ובעל דין ויושב על כסא דין ודן כל אחד ואחד על אחת כמה וכמה שאין כל בשר ודם יכולים לעמוד לפניו. When Yosef, who was merely flesh and blood, rebuked his brothers, they couldn't withstand his rebuke. They were overwhelmed with fear. So can you even begin to imagine the terror that will overcome you on that day when you will have to stand before the real King?! One shudders when he thinks about it.

When Yosef rebuked his brothers with the words **אני יוסף**, they were stricken dumb. They couldn't answer. You know why they couldn't answer? Because in a flash they saw how wrong they had been. In a flash of understanding, all the buildings that they had erected, strong buildings of justification overlaid with further justification, justifying themselves and condemning Yosef, collapsed into nothing.

Yosef was the littlest of the clan, said Abba Cohen Bardala (ibid. 93-11), the small little Yosseleh who they left at home when they went out to do the man's work of pasturing. And now, the brothers couldn't speak in front of him. They had nothing to say. "His brothers couldn't answer him, nothing came out of their mouths, because they stood in total shock and terror before him." **לכשיבוא הקדוש ברוך הוא** - "And on that day when Hashem comes to rebuke each one of us for a lifetime of errors and failings, all the more so will we stand before Him dumbstruck with terror."

The medrash is talking to us. Me and you. Not the one sitting next to you. Not your neighbor, not your wife. You, you! The perfect you! All your life you are saying, "I am right. I am right and I am right!" And even if you don't say it, you're thinking it. But that terrible day of dread is coming, when suddenly you will have to appear before the throne of not just a nothing king of Egypt, but before the the Great Judge Himself, Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And He will say two words to us, just two words: **אני השם**! And when we hear those terrifying words, all of our buildings

that we constructed all our lives, our life-long justifications, will collapse into nothing. Nothing! And the Great Day of Rebuke will become the Great Day of Regret.

You know that the sh'vatim were great men. בני יעקב, the sons of Yaakov, were Hashem's chosen ones. But even the greatest men can make errors about themselves. Because no matter how great you are, you will always be blind to your own faults. It's impossible to know your own faults, to really know how wrong you are. And this tremendous lesson, that even the most righteous of men must suspect their actions and their motives all the time, stands out as one of the great teachings of Hashem's Torah. Just for this lesson alone, for what we will speak about now, the entire episode of Yosef and his brothers deserved to take place.

And that's because if the בני בחיריו, the choicest of men, could make errors about themselves, and then find themselves standing dumbfounded and terrified before the throne of a king - a king of flesh and blood - then we surely should be terrified about what is awaiting us. And that's what Rav Abba Cohen Bardala is telling us; that one day - and no matter how much we avoid thinking about it, it won't help - one day it will happen to us too. On that great day of judgment, we will discover that we have deceived ourselves all our lives. And I'm not talking about specific sins, or things that you didn't pay attention to, things that you forgot or ignored. I'm talking about something much more serious. I'm talking about your whole דרך חיים, your whole way in life. Your attitudes, your ideals, your mind, your thoughts, your dealings with everyone, and most important, your dealings with Hashem.

And it's so important for you to understand this: כל הנגעים - אדם רואה חוץ מנגעי עצמו - "A man can see all the blemishes, except his own" (Medrash Shmuel 1:7, Nega'im 2:5). Here's a man who is an expert in seeing faults in other people. It's a career of his. He's tells people what's wrong with them! But still, his own faults he doesn't see. Because a man is blind to his own faults. חוץ מנגעי עצמו. Like myself; I'll teach people mussar, but what about

me? What about my own faults? Am I concentrating on my own נגעים, my own faults? "Oh yes," I'll say, "I do, I do." A nechtigeh tug! If one can't see his own faults, how could he concentrate on them?! He might sense something vague. A little something, a tiny little crack in his perfect self, but it's so small. It's almost nothing at all.

And even when I tell you these words, so you're thinking about him and about him. You're thinking about Miller and about someone else. "Oh yes, I know many people who doesn't see their own faults," you're thinking. But I'm talking about you now. You!

And even though on Yom Kippur you'll come and you'll say "I sinned and I sinned," I'll tell you what's really going on. The same thing happened by Yosef's brothers. The brothers said מה נצטדק - "With what could we justify ourselves?! We have no justification for what we did." They were beating their chests, saying מה נצטדק, "How could we justify ourselves?" And the Gemara says (Shabbos 106a) that from here we learn לשון נוטריקון, that's ראשי תיבות. You look at the each letter on its own and you can see what was really doing in the minds of the brothers. The נ means נקיים אנחנו, we are righteous innocent people. They said מה נצטדק but they were thinking נקיים אנחנו. And the צ means צדיקים אנחנו. They said "Ay ya yay, אשמנו" but they were thinking צדיקים אנחנו. The ד means דקים אנחנו, we are pure. All the letters of נצטדק, instead of a וידוי for sins, are actually self-glorification.

Now, they weren't thinking these words. No, they meant the וידוי sincerely. "Hashem has found our sin," they said. "We did something wrong when we sold our brother!" מה נצטדק - "We can't justify ourselves." But that was with their mouths, and even the surface of their hearts. But underneath the surface, even among the greatest, is נקיים אנחנו צדיקים אנחנו טהורים אנחנו דקים. אנחנו קדושים אנחנו. נצטדק. That's what lays behind the וידוי.

And that's what happens on Yom Kippur. You're going to get up, and you'll say **אשמנו בגדנו גולנו**, and you'll feel better and better each time you hit your heart. "This doesn't apply to me, and I never did this and I never did that. And even if I did, it was a faint sin, nothing really wrong. And now I'm volunteering to do teshuva." You have a heart of gold, but you're doing it anyhow. You're volunteering to blame yourself, you think. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu should recognize your righteousness! That's what you're thinking.

### IS ALL LOST?

So it appears that all is lost. If we can never trust ourselves at all, then what are we left with? Are we going to walk in darkness, fooling ourselves until it is too late to rectify our errors? What then is the **דרך חיים**, the path of life that leads towards perfection of ourselves, and towards life in the Next World?

And for that we turn to the valuable treasury that we call **משלי**. Now, **שלמה המלך** doesn't need any haskamah from me, but it's important for you to know that **משלי** is a repository for all precious things. All good advice, all of the wise counsel for living successfully is found in **משלי**.

And among the main teachings in **משלי**, there is one idea that is reiterated constantly. It occupies a major place among the doctrines of **משלי**. And that is the teaching of criticism, the teaching of rebuke. Again and again, **שלמה המלך** reiterates how important it is to have someone who criticizes you.

### NOT MUSSAR - STINGING MUSSAR

Listen to these words from the wisest of all men: **דרך חיים** **מוסר**, the way of life is the rebukes of instruction. It doesn't say **דרך חיים מוסר**, the way of life is mussar. Mussar means, you open up a mussar sefer, and you learn it, and of course you take it in the sense that's most pleasing to you. You see in it a reflection of all your good things. Sometimes you come across something that seems to be in contradiction to your behavior, so you don't spend too much time on it, and you go on

further. But frequently you find that you agree with him. "That's right, that's right," you're thinking, because that's you.

You've justified your behavior, your attitudes, and your thinking, so much, and so many times, that you actually think that there is nothing wrong - everything is fine with you. And therefore, you'd better get busy unjustifying yourself while you're still breathing in this world, before it's too late.

And that's why mussar is not sufficient. שלמה didn't say מוסר; he said תוכחות מוסר! "The way of life is rebukes of mussar." Rebukes? What does that mean? It means you have to get somebody to rebuke you. If you want to succeed in this world, then the דרך חיים is to have somebody who is going to criticize you, and criticize you sharply.

That's why you need a living teacher. Somebody who will watch you with eyes like a hawk, and bite you with stinging rebuke. A rebbi who will watch your every move. He's looking at you all the time. And he'll criticize you bitterly. You'll get scolded - all the time. Of course you don't want it. Nobody likes to be told they are wrong. But that's דרך חיים תוכחות מוסר. A rebbi who chisels you, who sandpapers you; that's perfection of character.

#### VUS IZ DUS MILLER?!

You won't be a fool, you won't do wrong things in front of a rebbi. He'll bite you with rebuke. I still remember when my rebbi said, "Vuz iz dus, Miller?!" "What's this Miller," he said. "Do you even know what you're talking about? Are you asleep? Are you talking from your sleep?" That gave me a jolt. Next time, I was careful before I opened my mouth.

#### MY REBBI IS A SNAKE

And that's why the Gemara says (Shabbos 63a) that when you look for a rebbi, don't look for somebody who is gentle, who is kindhearted and polite. If you find a תלמיד חכם שנוקם ונוטר, a talmid chochom who bites like a serpent, then that's your כנחש,

man. Like a serpent?! Did you ever see a serpent? Everybody runs away from a serpent!

So what does the Gemara recommend if you find a serpent for a rebbi, a rebbi who bites like a serpent? חגריהו על מתני - "Gird him on your loins" (ibid.) Make a belt out of him! A serpent for a belt? That's a very uncomfortable belt to have. That's not comfortable at all. But that's the kind of belt to have. A belt that's going to bite you for the slightest wrong move that you make.

And that's what משלי is telling you. The only way to success, the only דרך חיים available to man, is תוכחות מוסר, the stinging rebuke of someone who knows your deepest faults. You need a rebbi who's going to tell you to your face what's wrong with you. And trust me, there's a lot to say. It hurts, but that's the path to life in the Next World.

#### LOOKING FOR A MEAN RABBI

So you'll ask me, "Rabbi Miller, what's the use of telling us we need mean rabbis, somebody who will tell us the truth, if they're impossible to find anyways?" Like somebody said once, "What good is it if you'll give a prescription, if the patient doesn't know where to go and get that medicine?"

It's true, I don't know where you can go today. It's hard to find somebody who will criticise you and lambast you, and tell you what's rotten about yourself. Because all the rabbis are kind-hearted. Where can someone find a good mean rabbi already? If he's going to tell you the truth about yourself, then you'll make sure not to see him again. And the rabbi on the next block will welcome you with open arms.

#### THE DANGER OF SELF-ESTEEM

And therefore, everyone is telling you how good you are. Everyone is worried about self-esteem. Self-esteem! Now there's nothing wrong with self-esteem, but who needs self-esteem if it will cause you to continue living your life in error?! If nobody is

going to tell you what they really think about you, you'll live in darkness until your dying breath.

So it's true, I don't know what to tell you. But at least you can come here and you can hear it somewhat, in general terms, general ideas. We can listen to Abba Cohen Bardala as he warns us about the great day of judgment that we all have to prepare for.

#### YOU'RE ALL SICK

You don't have to obey me. You can wait until that great day of judgment to hear the truth, if you wish. But if you're here already, I'll tell you anyhow. I think I'm the oldest one here, so I'll take the privilege of saying the following. When people come in here, I consider it a sort of dispensary, a pharmacy clinic. Everyone comes in here sick. Of course you're sick; you're coming in from the gentile street. And there are no exceptions. It doesn't matter how much you learn mussar, it doesn't matter how long your beard is, you're all sick as could be. Everybody!

So when you come here to hear these lectures, you should come with humility. You should say, "My head is a mish-mash, a confusion. In my head I have all kinds of ideas, all kinds of שקר, from all kinds of places." And here is one man who is not afraid to tell you the truth. And that's because I don't care what you think about me. It doesn't bother me in the least.

And therefore, you have to expect to hear things here that will be a rebuke to your way in life. You shouldn't expect to hear things that are merely an echo of the thoughts that you hear on the radio and that you see in the newspapers. It won't even be an echo of things that you hear in many other shuls. Because I know that we all need תוכחות מוסר.

So I walk around the room administering the medicine, the rebuke, that you need. A few drops here, something here. A prescription here and some vitamin pills here.

#### AND I'M SICK AS WELL

And I know that I'm sick too. I need somebody to cure me too. But I was fortunate. I was fortunate enough to spend years in

Slobodka with the best doctors. And I stayed close to them and they told me the truth. They didn't hold back, and that helped to cure me a little bit.

And I'm still sick today. So I go to the medicine books of the best doctors. The Mesillas Yesharim, the Chovos Halevavos, Shaarei Teshuva. And I don't just read. I don't just peruse these seforim reading interesting ideas about perfection in עבודת השם. No! I read the words as words of rebuke directed at myself. Because the only cure for this sickness of the soul is תוכחות מוסר, hearing rebuke. And that's how you'll begin unjustifying all of your justifications.

### FINDING REBUKE IN THE SEFORIM

And that's one of the most important ways of recognizing and rectifying your faults. If nobody is going to rebuke you, you have no choice but to find the rebuke on your own. And the seforim are full of rebuke. But if you merely learn the seforim, then very little actually seeps into the recesses of your mind, into your neshama. The only solution is to approach these words of mussar with a completely new attitude.

And what is that attitude? Listen carefully to the words of the Ramban in his famous אגרת, the letter he wrote to his son. וכאשר תקום מן הספר תחפש באשר למדת אם יש בו דבר אשר תוכל לקיימו - "And when you rise from your study, think, "How can I apply this to my own life?" And it doesn't have to be only when you get up. You can be sitting down as well, and still learning, but after reading a paragraph, a line, or even a phrase, think about yourself; your own behavior. "Don't I do this all the time?! I'm the guilty party here! I'd better get busy."

Every time you hear words of Torah, they can't remain merely a good vort, something nice to say over. That's almost worthless! You have to apply it to your own life. You have to hear the words as תוכחות מוסר, rebuke directed at you, and begin applying it to your behavior. Whether you're a young man of

sixteen, or a young man of sixty, there's still hope for you. But that hope is dependent solely on תוכחות מוסר.

### THE WAY OF OUR CHACHOMIM

And that was always the policy of our great ones. They lived the words they learned, and were able to bring up the most precious pearls from the depths of the Torah. The Gemara in Chagiga (4b) says that when Rabbi Elazar was learning chumash and he would get to the posuk in this week's parsha, ולא יכלו אחיו - לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו - “And the brothers were not able to answer him, for they stood in terror before him,” he would cry profusely. He would cry like a baby. Now, Rabbi Elazar wasn't a weak fellow. He wasn't an extra sensitive man, who cried for no reason. He cried because he read the words as speaking to him. “How am I going to feel when standing before Hashem?!”

And if you look in the Gemara there, you'll see that all the chachomim learned that way. They learned every מאמר, every story, every posuk, as directed at their own lives, their own faults. They looked for rebuke and instruction wherever they could.

### REBUKING YOURSELF

And I must tell you, that even that is not enough. There's another vital method of finding rebuke where there is nobody to tell you the truth. And that is the great opportunity of self-rebuke! Criticizing yourself! And if you are willing to make use of rebuking yourself, you can begin to see through the facade and justifications that you have built up.

Here you are eating a piece of cake. You're enjoying yourself. But you don't even remember making a bracha. Of course you made a bracha, but you mumbled it so quickly that you don't even remember it. That's gratitude?! That's thanking Hashem?! And instead of merely feeling a slight tinge of regret, open your mouth and give yourself rebuke. “Chaim'll! That's how you say thank you?! That's called a bracha?! What's going to be with you already?!”

And when you say a sharp word to your wife, or to a friend, don't spend your time justifying yourself. Spend the time rebuking yourself! "Chaim'll, is that how you speak to a wife?! You think Hashem is not watching and laughing at your justifications?! Do you really think that when you stand before Hashem, you'll be able to answer for this? You're going to melt away in terror on that day of fear."

#### TALKING TO YOURSELF

And there's no end to the opportunities to rebuke yourself during the day. Trust me, there's enough to criticize there. If you pay attention to yourself carefully, you will find much to criticize. Now, don't do this in front of your wife. Don't talk to yourself in front of your wife, because she'll think the worst. And the same for a wife in the presence of a husband. But if you want to, you'll find more than enough time, and more than enough opportunity to give yourself תוכחות מוסר.

#### PREPARING TO MEET THE KING

And the harsh sound of rebuke in this world, will prepare you infinitesimally for the sweetness of the Next World. The more rebuke you hear while your heart is still beating in this world - whether it's rebuke from a rebbi, a sefer or from your own self - the more you'll be capable of tearing down the tall skyscraper of justifications that you have erected. And as you do that, you'll become more and more perfect in the eyes of Hashem. And every little step forward that you make in this world, means that you will be less terrified when you finally, after a long life, enter into palace of the King of all Kings, and hear those terrifying words, אני השם.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

# תורת אביגדור

"שאל אביד ויגדד זקניך ויאמרו לך"



## Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

**Q: How are we to determine which talmid chochom has the right Torah attitudes in order to attach ourselves to the right person? And if he has wrong Torah attitudes what should we do about it?**

A: How are we to determine which Torah teacher has the right Torah attitudes? So the question is - how are we to determine which physician is competent? Let's say you move into a new neighborhood and you want to find a competent doctor. So first you will have to consult the New York State Board of Licensing. If the doctor has a genuine certificate that allows him to practice medicine, that proves that he passed the Board of Licensing tests. In that case, he probably knows something about medicine. Probably he can prescribe medicine, let's say for a headache or something like that.

If you want more competence than that, then you'll have to ask your old family physician to investigate among his peers in your new neighborhood and he'll be able to tell you. If you need to know about a good specialist, you'll have to investigate even further. You'll ask your family doctor and others who know the specialists. You don't just go to a specialist on your own. You have to make sure to have someone recommend a good doctor.

Finding a talmid chochom with the right attitudes is at least as important as finding a good doctor. And therefore if you want to know if a talmid chochom is competent you should go to the Yeshivas and speak to the Roshei Yeshiva. Speak to them and ask them. Don't be lazy about it. There are Roshei Yeshiva in almost every big place today. You have Roshei Yeshiva in Cleveland. There are Roshei Yeshiva in Chicago, in Toronto, in Montreal, in Baltimore. So you ask them and they'll tell you.

Now, you ask - if you determine that a talmid chochom has wrong Torah attitudes what do you do about it? Number one is to have no contact with him. That's most important. And probably you can't do any more than that.

TAPE #119

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