

## Sefer Devarim

### THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE MERON AND SURFSIDE TRAGEDIES,  
AND AS A ZECHUS FOR THE YESHUA OF KLAL YISROEL

## פרשת שופטים

WITH

## R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

### Learning The Lessons

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### Part I. Safety Lessons

#### Tragedy in The Woods

In this week's *sedrah* we read a story about a man who went into the forest to gather firewood (Shoftim 19: 4-8). I imagine it was the wintertime and he needed more wood for the fireplace; maybe his wife had sent him out to get wood for the stove so she could prepare supper. Whatever it was, this loyal father and husband was now hacking away at a tree in a forest.

And then something terrible occurred. As he was swinging the ax, וְנִשַּׁל הַבְּרָזָל מִן הָעֵץ, the iron head of the ax ricocheted off the tree and careened

off into the woods and *lo aleinu, nit gedacht* it struck and killed a fellow Jew who was standing nearby.

Now, our protagonist did this without any premeditation of course. "I didn't intend anything wrong," he says. "It went flying on its own. I didn't even know he was standing there behind the tree." And still, even though it was done unintentionally, the Torah calls him a *rotzeiach*, a murderer (ibid. 19:4,6).

"It's no excuse," Hakodosh Boruch Hu says. "Just like you came into the forest to chop wood, you should have considered that maybe other people were also there. You should have thought about that beforehand and secured the ax head to the handle before taking a swing. You should have looked around too, to check if anyone was standing nearby."

#### Looking For Directions

So what happens now? The Torah says about him, וְנָס אֶל אַחַת מִן הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה – He has to flee to one of the cities of refuge. He must run to one of the *arei miklat* in order to be safe from the vengeance of the *go'el hadom* who wishes to avenge the blood of his relative. And he'll live there – sometimes for many years – in order to achieve a *kaparah* for his sin.

So let's imagine the scene as the *gemara* (Makkos 10b) portrays it. The murderer is heading now to the *ir miklat*. And he's in a rush too because he has to steer clear of the *goel hadam* who might be pursuing him; he's making his way through the backroads and byways trying to find his way to the city of refuge. And then he comes to a fork in the road – which way should he go, to the left or to the right? There's no time to waste. Fortunately for

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him, there's a sign there at the fork, "Ir Miklat," with an arrow pointing him in the right direction.

That's what the Gemara (ibid.) tells us. Many of the roads were especially marked with signs posted, "Miklat, miklat," showing the *rotzeiach* which direction he should run. The Gemara there quotes a *possuk*: יוֹרֵה הַטְּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ - Hashem shows the sinners the road; He leads them on the path to salvation. At every fork in the road, in every place where the *rotzeiach* might get lost, there were guideposts helping him make his way to the safety of the *ir miklat*.

### Getting Directions

And what happened when he finally arrived there? The cities of refuge weren't ordinary places; they were *arei Levi'im*, they were Torah communities. It means that Hashem is guiding him into the city where he will live among Torah teachers. I imagine there were lectures in that place, places of *mussar*, and the purpose was that he should learn to be sorry for what he did. In that city he's going to learn the importance of constantly being sorry that he cut off the life of a Yisroel.

You know when people are ignorant, when they didn't learn Torah, so they don't have any feelings of *charata* for the wrong things they do, for the damage they cause. They say "Oops, I'm sorry. I didn't intend to do it," and that's all. They think they're scot-free now; they're off the hook. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "That's *amaratzus*. It's plain ignorance. Study Torah and you'll see what it means to be responsible." And that's one of the important lessons that the *rotzeiach* learns when he arrives at the *ir miklat*.

That's what is meant by the *possuk*: יוֹרֵה הַטְּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ - Hashem shows the sinners the road. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is constantly leading this sinner to salvation; first he's showing him the path to the city and once he gets there he's being guided by the *Levi'im* who will teach him the right way - that's also included in *yoreh chatoim baderech*.

Now, the Gemara tells us there that we shouldn't think this *din* is a one-off; an especial rule that applies only to someone who kills *b'shogeg*. "Oh, no!" say our sages. "Yoreh chatoim baderech is a fundamental principle of Hakodosh Boruch Hu in this world that applies to all of us." Not just someone who murdered unintentionally - in one way or another we're all *chatoim* and therefore we're being guided towards our salvation all the time by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Only that too often we don't notice.

### Tragedy in the Nightclub

Here's a man who has an institution; it's a Yeshiva or a Beis Yankev and he ridicules all the rules of safety that are done in other places. A fire drill is a joke to him, the exit sign over a door is a joke to him; it's all *goyishe* things. And his building becomes a firetrap.

What does Hakodosh Boruch Hu do? He's *yoreh chatoim baderech*. He causes a fire to come somewhere else and people who have to be taken out of this world anyhow are burned up. And He expects this *menahel* to see this sign on the road and take the right turn.

I remember many years ago, there was the Cocoanut Grove Fire in Boston. It was a great tragedy. The Cocoanut Grove was a big night club and it was jammed with people - mostly Jews, by the way. A big fire broke out and there was a pandemonium, a stampede, and hundreds were killed; burned and killed. I remember it well; I lived in Massachusetts then and the newspapers were full of it.

### Lessons From Tragedy

Now, a tragedy like that is not meant to be merely a curiosity, a news item that comes and goes. Hashem is trying to teach you something. He expects you to take a lesson from that tragedy.

Now, there were a number of lessons there. Of course one is that night clubs are not a place for Jews to be. It's a good lesson! Another lesson, it

was Friday night. Friday night, you're certainly not supposed to be in a nightclub. Another lesson is, Jews have to eat kosher. They don't serve kosher in that place. Many lessons Hashem was teaching.

But among the lessons, the most important one was that you have to watch out for fire precautions. *Yoreh*, Hashem is teaching, *chatoim baderech*, the sinners who don't think about what could happen because of their negligence. Hashem wants you to learn to be more careful with safety precautions. Not just when you're chopping wood in the forest; in modern times too! In that club there were exit doors that were locked and other hazards, and many changes were made because of this story, many new regulations. If the *goyim* in Boston can learn these lessons, surely we have to.

### **Frum Fires**

Now I must tell you, there are very many people who never learned that lesson. A woman lights the *neiros* Shabbos, and she hurries to put on the *bigdei* Shabbos and leaves little children playing around in the room where the *neiros* are burning. A terrible *chet*. There's a man who wants all his little children to be *m'kayem ner* Chanukah. Each person should have his own *ner*. So he takes his little boys and little girls and he gives them menorahs. "Here, a Chanukah menorah for you, for you, for you." And they're all standing and lighting the *chanukah menoros* and this big *tzadik* walks out of the room. He's a *rasha gamur*, he's a *rasha gamur*! He has to stand over them and watch them.

I remember a story – someone was building a *yeshiva* and a building inspector came, so he bribed him so that he shouldn't bother him too much with safety rules, with building codes. Yes, it's a bother, very expensive.

So it happens that there was an exit, a fire exit, and he didn't bother to put up a sign, fire exit. You know what happened? Some boys from out of town were at the dormitory at the time; they were newcomers to the dormitory and there was a fire.

They didn't know where to run and they were burned up.

Did anybody blame that *menahel*? Oh no, he's a *tzadik gamur*. Well, others might think so but the truth is he's a *choteh gamur*! Do you think only someone who goes into the woods to chop wood can be called a murderer by the Torah? I'm sorry to say this, but I think that *menahel* is even more guilty than the wood chopper. You were warned! You had an inspection but you chose to ignore it! Hashem was teaching you in Cocoon Grove; why didn't you see?!

### **Safety First!**

Of course, Hashem is teaching us many many things – we'll talk about some of them soon – but one of the most important lessons Hashem is teaching us is how careful we must be with the life of a Jew. We'll say it *b'laaz* (in the spoken tongue) so that there's no misunderstanding: Safety First! There's nothing more precious in the world than a Jew and it has to be guarded with the utmost care. וְנִשְׁמְרֶתֶם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם – to guard yourself, to guard your children, your friends, your fellow Jews.

People are careless with their lives and other people's lives because they think that nothing could happen. It only happens to other people. You know, that this is an instinct in human beings. Just as they lived until now and nothing happened, so they think it's going to continue. Just like you ran across the street or drove recklessly and nothing happened, so that's how it will always be. Oh no! *Chas v'shalom*, *chas v'shalom* suddenly it happens.

### **Learn From Experience**

So whenever we hear of an accident, we should never let that opportunity go by. If you see a *meshugener* who walks across the middle of the street and a car hits him – everybody runs to see – he's lying in the street and ambulances are coming with their sirens. One of the purposes is to teach the *frumme*, the *ovdei Hashem*, don't do that! Don't be careless! Don't be a *chotei*. We're expected

to utilize that lesson because it's sent *min haShomayim* for us to be more careful.

And therefore you have to keep your eyes open and make it a policy of yours to learn from experience. I say "experience" but really it's Hashem teaching you. And that's a very important principle. Whatever news you get, whatever you hear – and you're hearing all the time – it should enter your ears. Somebody crossing the street was hit by a car. A child drowned in a pool. A grandchild was visiting his grandparents and he fell out of the window because there were no safety guards. When you hear these things, it should enter your heart like an arrow. And make it a principle, "Hashem is trying to wake me up, to rescue me from my *chatoim*, my negligence. From now on, I'm going to watch out for that thing."

## Part II. Wartime Lessons

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### **Blessing of Peace**

Now, it's important to understand that this Torah principle of "Hashem guides the wicked on the path to salvation," is by no means limited to learning the lesson of *v'nishmartem*; of being careful when you go chop wood or when you build a yeshiva dormitory or cross a street. Chazal are teaching us that *יִוְרָה הַטָּאִים בְּדַרְדָּר* is a fundamental principle for how Hashem teaches us to live life successfully.

We say *שְׁלֹמִים* in our *tefillah*; we ask Hashem every day a few times, "Please give us *shalom*." What does *shalom* mean? Does it mean you're a millionaire? Does it mean you have ten servants in your house and a limousine with three chauffeurs? Does it mean you make airplane flights back and forth across the Atlantic to Eretz Yisroel for family *simchas* or you go on Caribbean cruises?

No! *Shalom* means that you're not in trouble. Everything is quiet. No ambulances came to your house this week. No fire engines. Your daughter is not calling you in the middle of the night to tell you

she's having trouble with her husband. That's *shalom*! There's no war. There's no invasion of foreign armies coming in, no airplanes dropping bombs on you. That's what *shalom* is.

### **Terror in Congo**

Now, because these words fall flat on the ears of most people, so in a certain sense we're *chatoim* – we're sinning against Hashem by ignoring our good fortune – and Hashem wants to be *yoreh chatoim baderech*; He wants to guide us on the right path.

So what does He do? He makes trouble, let's say, in Africa, in the Congo. In Africa entire tribes are massacring each other. In Bangladesh and Vietnam the brown people are trying to destroy each other. Or in China, the nationalists and the communists are fighting against each other.

All these phenomena shouldn't be lost upon us and one of the purposes is to make us think about our good fortune. Suppose we lived there, in the Congo, what suffering we would undergo. People are constantly in terror, in commotion. Their lives are ruined. How many of them have been destroyed, how many have been maimed, orphaned, widowed, made into refugees! And all the attendant ills of war; epidemics, famine. It's such a tragedy, a *rachmanus*.

### **For Our Sake**

And it's a tragedy that shouldn't be ignored by us. It's one of the ways that Hashem is *yoreh chatoim baderech* and He expects us to utilize these stories in order to be full of joy about the *shalom* we have; *בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הַמְבַרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם*. If we see that in a certain country there are wars, those wars are being waged only for our benefit. That's the way we have to read the newspaper. If you read them at all, that's the way to read them.

I'm telling you now a fundamental interpretation of current events. Whatever happens in the world, we know according to the teachings of the Torah, happens because of us; it's

for a purpose of chastising us and making us become better.

Now, some Jews are humble and self-effacing and it seems to them exaggerated to say that world history is only for them. They're willing to admit that it's *also* for them; if they're pious Jews, they'll admit that *some* of it is for them. But the Gemara (Yevamos 63a) tells us, אֵין פּוֹרְעָנוֹת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל – *there is no misfortune that occurs in the world unless for the sake of Yisroel*. It'll take a long time for this to percolate into our thick skulls, but that's what we're here for – even a skull, if you soak it for a long time in a liquid, it'll soak through.

### **Going Into Battle**

I want to tell you something that you might find surprising but I think it's true. Hakodosh Boruch Hu made this little war in Iraq now for the purpose that we should appreciate *shalom*. All kinds of excuses are given why this happened and I'm not the one to interpret it. I'm too small to give such a *peirush* on the *ma'asei yadov shel Hakodosh Boruch Hu* but one thing we can be certain about, those poor soldiers who got their orders and now they're boarding big military planes that are transporting them to the front, it's to teach us the blessings of peace.

The poor soldiers are in a tumult now. I saw headlines in the newspapers as I passed by the newsstand. American soldiers are writing their wills. They're very much frightened. A healthy eighteen year old who writes a will doesn't do it because he thinks he'll live till 120. He's frightened.

We can't blame them. Suppose one of us, *chas v'sholom*, had to go into battle against the enemy. We would be much more frightened. We would be hugging the rear helm hoping that the battle would be finished before we get to the front where the bullets are flying.

### **Nothing But Peace**

Don't think that it's 'good times' when bullets are whizzing overhead. Don't believe the

propaganda in the storybooks and magazines. They'll be creeping around in the desert and enemy forces will be shooting at them. There's no fun when bullets are flying. In the army, when bullets are flying, that's when a man begins to appreciate *shalom*.

Suppose that soldier could suddenly be transported to New York. It's humid and hot and there's no excitement. And he would be walking down the street sweating. He has no money in his pocket. He has no job.

But he'd be deliriously happy because he has *shalom*, it's peace. No constant buzzing of bullets all around him. No men screaming in pain, the constant fear of death without a let-up. Just plain *shalom*! Nothing else! That's his heart's desire.

The transfer from the battlefield to walking down that hot street without any money in his pocket would make him deliriously happy. "Ooh wah! *Shalom*!" And that's what we should feel at all times. That's how we should feel when we're walking down the street on a hot day with nothing going our way except for *shalom*.

### **Better Than Fun**

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "I want to teach My children to stop sinning and start being happy with your life." And how does He teach us? One way is by showing us the soldiers. They're trembling in their pants and just because of that we are enjoying! I don't say we're enjoying their situation – we sympathize with them – *but we're enjoying what we have!*

We're supposed to do that. We're expected to appreciate *shalom*! Right now there's quiet outside? You don't need anything better than that. Nobody is shooting bullets at you. No *pogroms*! That's *shalom*!

Now, try to go outside today and convince somebody that he should be happy with the regular routine of life – that's what *shalom* is after all – and he'll look at you like you fell off the moon. "No," he says. "I want some fun! I think I should get in my

car and travel someplace.” The happiness of *shalom* is not good enough for him. And that’s because he’s ignoring the path that Hashem is constantly showing him.

### ***Peaceful Sleep***

It’s a great pity that people don’t understand that. Do you know what a luxury it is to go to sleep in peace? In many places in the world, they cannot sleep in peace. They go to sleep worried that someone will be shooting a machine gun through the window in the middle of the night or that their refugee camp will be overrun by murderous mobs before the sun comes up. Anything can happen.

Even in Russia, you wouldn’t be machine gunned in your home, but in the middle of the night, 2:00 at night – that’s their favorite time – there’s a wild knocking on your door, “NKVD here. Open up!” And they wake you up and ask you for your passport.

I once saw it; it wasn’t NKVD; it was the Lithuanian police. Once, in the middle of the night, some yeshiva men were dorming together in an apartment, and they came pounding on the door with fists and shouting, “Open up.” You have got to get up in your underwear and pajamas and open up – police!

### ***Bandits, Bums and Babies***

And the police were standing there very angry. That’s how police are in Europe. It’s not like in America. In America, the police are terrified. I know a man who was walking on Church Avenue one night, coming home from the yeshiva, and when he saw two policemen walking, he said to them, “You know, when I see you I feel confident.” So they said, “We don’t.” That’s two of them!

But these Lithuanian police were cruel: “Where’s your passport?” You have to show your passport. You’re not permitted to be anywhere without it; even at home, you have to have a passport. And this was in Lithuania where there was justice. Lithuania was a decent country. You

couldn’t harm a Jew in Lithuania. But still you couldn’t sleep in peace. They had a right to barge into your home in the middle of the night and wake you up.

But tonight none of you here will have to worry about that. When you go to sleep in America, you know that nobody is going to wake you up. You can sleep in peace. Bands of soldiers are not roaming the streets. Drunken bums are not banging on your door. Nobody will bother you. Maybe, if you’re fortunate enough to be a mother of small children, you might get woken up, but pretty much, you’re sleeping in peace.

### ***Peaceful Happiness***

Maybe some people are worried, so you put an extra lock. Of course, today you *must* secure your windows at night because the liberals have wreaked havoc upon us. But let’s say you have enough bars on your windows and your doors are locked, then you go to sleep in peace. We’re not afraid that somebody will shoot bullets through our window, that they’ll burn down the house, that all of a sudden at night there’ll be an invasion.

To be able to put your head on your pillow without any fear and to fall asleep peacefully is a very great *bracha*. Sleeping peacefully is a precious commodity. If you just came here to learn that, it’s worthwhile. If we can lie down on our beds in peace and get up in the morning after a good night’s sleep, you know what a happiness that is? We don’t even think twice about it.

But for the one who pays attention to the signs that Hashem is showing him, the sign of what *chas v’shalom* could be, he thinks about it twice and three times and he never stops thinking about it – and he lives a life of happiness.

### Signs of Suffering

Now, we can't go away from the subject of *yoreh chatoim baderech*, of Hashem showing us the way back to Him, without talking about the troubles that Hashem sometimes sends upon us in our own personal lives. Of course, we would prefer that there should never be any trouble; we're not interested in mishaps and difficulties. We should always live in clover; we should be reclining in the grass under the fig trees eating ice cream all our lives. That's what we'd like most.

But then, when would we remember Hakodosh Boruch Hu? You would never think about Him! If everything went smoothly always, you can be sure that Hakodosh Boruch Hu would never be in your thoughts. And so, *yoreh chatoim baderech*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is kind enough to send *yissurim* once in a while as signposts to direct our thoughts towards him.

And that brings us to a Gemara in Mesichta Eirechin (16b). The question is raised there, עַד הַיְכֵן תִּכְלִית יִסּוּרִים – *How far is the limit of yissurim?* It means, what would be the minimum visitation from Heaven, the smallest possible form of *yissurim*, that Hashem sends upon a man to teach him lessons?

### Big Problems and Little Problems

Now of course, if a man is lying on the operating table, there's no question that he's getting a very big message from Heaven. When he's being strapped down and they're putting the ether cone over his face, he has to know that Hashem is telling him something. Even then, some people – even Orthodox Jews – aren't aware. "It just happened that way," they think. "It turned out that I have a weak heart." He doesn't connect it with Hakodosh Boruch Hu at all.

We're not talking about that. We're talking about intelligent servants of Hashem who know that "Hashem is *yoreh chatoim*, He shows us the

way in life," and they react to big signs. The question is how far is a man expected to go? How far should he go in interpreting the events of his life as messages from Hakodosh Boruch Hu?

And that's what the *gemara* in Eirechin is telling us. The sages are looking for the smallest possible thing that can be called a sign on the road so that we should know that when some small inconvenience happens in our life, we shouldn't let it go by. It's a golden opportunity, a *matanah min haShomayim* to help you out. And therefore it pays, the Gemara is saying, to know how far to take this.

### Tailor and Tea

Now, the *gemara* there has a lot of answers for that; different *chachomim* responded in different ways, and because they're all valuable to us, so we'll take them one at a time. First comes the great sage Rabi Elazar and he says like this: Let's say a man ordered a new jacket from a tailor and finally the day comes when it's ready. And so he puts it on for the first time and something bothers him. He's not sure what – it keeps him warm, it fits him, the color is right – but it doesn't satisfy him. That minimal dissatisfaction, says Rabbi Elazar, is already called *yissurim*; it's a message *mishomayim*.

Comes along a different *chochom*, Rava Ze'ira, and he asks a *kasha*: "Does it have to be such a big misfortune like that to be called *yissurim*? After all a garment, you don't make it every day; to get a new jacket is a special occasion and if it didn't please him, that can't be the smallest signpost that Hashem will show a person. *Anybody* would take that as a message! You hear that?! He says that anybody would notice that; even a dumbbell has to react to that.

Rava Ze'ira says a bigger *chiddush* – even smaller inconveniences are messages from Heaven. If a person wanted his wine mixed with warm water and by error they mixed it with cold water, that's called a misfortune. It's a more common occurrence – your tea is not exactly the way you expected.

That man has to know that he's being guided on a certain path by Hashem.

### **Hearing The Voice**

Mar brei d'Ravina gives another example. He says that sometimes a person is putting on his undershirt and he happens to put it on inside out; now he's going to have to go through the trouble of taking it off and putting it on again. Such an inconvenience should be considered a message from Hashem.

And then a *braisa* gives a different example. If he put his hand in his pocket to take out a quarter and out came a nickel, that's a misfortune. He has both in his pocket, he'll be able to reach in now again and get the right coin, but the wrong one came out the first time; that's suffering, it's a form of *yissurim*.

Now we must take this seriously because our sages are teaching us that even the most minimal disturbance in our lives is one of the ways Hashem speaks to a person. It's like Hashem has spoken with a voice into his ear, "I'm the One who made your tea a bit too hot. I'm the One who pulled a nickel out of your pocket instead of the quarter you wanted. And it's because I'm a *moreh derech*; I want to teach you which path to take in life." And He expects you to listen – He expects a response.

It's too extreme? It's too much to expect? *Nothing* is too much to expect if we accept the principle that Hashem desires to show people the way.

### **Fumbling Fingers**

Let's take a little incident that happens to us all the time. You picked up your keys from the table to put them in your pocket but you fumbled and they fell on the floor. Now, suppose you're past forty. When people are past forty, they try to avoid bending over as much as they can. But what can you do? You have to pick up the keys.

The first thing that should flash in your mind is, why did it happen? It didn't happen yesterday. It

didn't happen the day before yesterday. Every time I successfully held on to the keys and put them in my pocket. Today, I fumbled. **יְרַחֵם הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּרַחֲמָיו** – Hashem is teaching me something.

After you pick up your keys, think about that. "So many times, day after day after day, I was successful at picking up my keys!" Take a look at your hands and marvel at the arrangement of your joints on the fingers. "They're so arranged that picking up keys is a simple task! Thank You Hashem that my fingers function so effortlessly, so smoothly, that I never even noticed them."

**בְּמַה לָּא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרַגֵּשׁ גְּבֵרָא דְמִרְאָא סִיעֵיהּ** – How much a man doesn't feel that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is helping constantly. Every step in his life, things are being made easy and comfortable for him. And therefore, that one discomfort should be a reminder of the millions, not thousands – millions of occasions in his life when it did not take place.

### **Teshuva In The Kitchen**

Now isn't that a big *chiddush*? That's the first *teshuva* whenever Hakodosh Boruch Hu sends you a mishap: do *teshuva* for your ingratitude of not noticing it until today. Let's say you're washing dishes in the kitchen; now you're a careful *ba'alebuste* and you're a penny saver too but it happens you dropped a dish – a dish broke. Oy! A dish broke in my kitchen. And you start considering; the *gemara* says in *Eirechin*; you have to think about it.

A broken dish?! Maybe I broke somebody's happiness. Did I say something wrong to my husband? If you'll think in a *lomdishe* way you'll say that's why your dishes broke and you're accomplishing something like a scholar; you're thinking *middah kneged middah*. Why not? That's an *oived Hashem* – a person of *da'as*.

But even before that, the first thing you should think is, how is it that so many dishes I've been washing for months and months and I haven't broken a dish. Maybe it hasn't happened in years! Isn't that something to think about? Shouldn't I be

grateful to Hakodosh Boruch Hu for all those days I didn't fumble? For all those dishes I did not break?

### **Knotty Middos**

Another example. You want to untie your shoestrings and you're in a hurry and you find a knot in the laces; now you have to spend five minutes trying to untie it. Now, if you're a loyal Jew so you'll stop and say, "Such a thing doesn't happen to me every day. It's a lesson *min hashomayim!*" So you start thinking. Maybe I have a knot in my *middos* and *middah kneged middah*, that's why my shoes got knotted up. Now, if that's your conclusion from the knot in your shoestring, it's a very important conclusion. It's not silly at all, *chas v'shalom*.

But even before we go that far, the first thing to think is why is it that never before, let's say, in the last twenty days, in the last thirty days, did it ever happen that you had a knot in your shoestring? Why only today?

It's to remind you of the hundreds of times that you untied your shoes, easily, successfully. You hear that big *chiddush*? The one time that you have a knot was to tell you about hundreds of times you did not have a knot. Shouldn't you be grateful for all the times you didn't have knots in your shoestring?

Now you might think, that's a very small achievement. To look for an *aveirah*, that's the real thing you think. But you must realize that you're missing a very important point. Because the biggest of all our sins is not when we do something against the Torah. No. The biggest of all of our sins is the failure to recognize what Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing for us all the time – the daily success that he gives us. The biggest knot in your *middos* is when you fail to notice the good fortune that causes our lives to continue in the regular unbroken routine without accidents, without misfortunes.

### **Appreciate Your Eyes**

Sometimes a speck of dust gets stuck in your eye. What's that about? It's very uncomfortable! A little jolt like that means that Hashem is giving us guidance in life; that we should enjoy our eyes and we should thank Him every day from the bottom of our hearts.

The purpose was that you should say, **כְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הַעוֹלָם פּוֹקֵחַ עֵינַיִם** – I thank you Hakodosh Boruch Hu for opening up my eyes. It's such a blessing! Day after day, week after week, your eyes continue to function! The eye is such a delicate instrument, such a perfect camera. When you study the eye, you're amazed that it works at all, it's so complicated. Such a complicated mechanism could easily *chalilah* get into disorder. But rarely does it cause you any trouble.

And therefore, sometimes a little reminder flies into your eye to remind you. Don't think it's an accident! That's what the Gemara is telling us. It's the *Yoreh chatoim baderech*; it's Hakodosh Boruch Hu showing you the way, the path to perfection. That's how an intellectual servant of Hashem should react. When something, a small thing happens in life, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving a tiny little poke in the ribs, "Wake up!"

### **The First Teshuva**

And therefore, that's the whole *sugya* in *Eirechin*. You know the *chachamim*, these are great men, they had tremendous things to think about; their minds were elevated more than we can imagine and they wouldn't bother their minds with puny problems. A nickel instead of a quarter?! A tea that's not to my taste?! Such little things!

Oh no! Nothing is little when it's Hashem talking! These are very big things! And that's why they discussed it – this sage says this and this sage something else and a third sage and a fourth one. And Rav Ashi put it into the gemara! It's because our sages understood that Hashem is **יֹרֵה הַחַטָּאִים בְּיַדְךָ** – He's always trying to make us better; He's guiding us to perfection.

Now all this, if you'll get busy practicing this lesson, it's one of the best ways to go into a new year. To recognize all the good that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is supplying you always, that's *teshuva* number one. And so, when we see something happened, the first thing is to remember the lesson in our *parsha*, that Hashem is יְיָ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרַךְ. He's always showing us the path back to Him. And the first step on the path is when we use all of these little mishaps as a spur to look back and to appreciate all the days that nothing at all happened to us. That's our first *teshuva*!

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos

#### LET'S GET PRACTICAL

##### Reading the Signs

Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the Author of everything that happens in this world, big and small. He is constantly providing us with signs in order to guide us to perfection. This week I will *bli neder* keep my eyes open for these signs on the road. At least once every day I will make sure to pay close attention to a signpost that is guiding me in one of the three ways mentioned in this booklet:

1. Signs that are warning me to be more careful with my safety and the safety of those around me.
2. Signs that are teaching me to appreciate the gift of shalom in my life.
3. Little bumps on the road that are reminding me of the myriad amount of things that go smoothly on the road of life.

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך וזקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**Can a woman wear a custom made sheitel?**

A:

Let me explain something about this subject of *sheitelech*. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings; I want to make everybody happy and wearing a *sheitel* is certainly a good thing. But you should know that some *sheitels* look too natural.

And therefore long-haired *sheitels* I think should be avoided. I won't tell you exactly what to do, but you must know there is a responsibility on women to be able to come before the *bais din shel maaleh* when the time is up and she should be able to say, "I wasn't the cause of anybody who was looking at me too much."

A woman should never be in a position where she is liable to be blamed for causing men to look at her. It's not her fault that she is a woman, but she has to be careful not to misuse that privilege. Her husband is the one who has to look at her; others should not look.

And therefore if you are too careful with your appearance, it's looking for trouble. I don't say you shouldn't look good, but to make it your business to look attractive that's not right.

At home many people are slovenly, they're sloppy. The husband sees a sloppy wife at home but on the street she dresses to kill! It should be the opposite. At home you should dress up and make the best impression on your husband; on the street just be plain.

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