

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 האזינו

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Ten Tidbits of Advice

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Introduction. Life Advice

Adrift on the High Seas

It would be very beneficial for us if we could have the privilege of hearing some words of instruction as we enter another year – words that would help guide our lives during this coming year. And in Parshas Haazinu we have just that; if we

open our ears we can listen to a few select words from Hakodosh Boruch Hu that are intended as guidance for His beloved nation, words that should escort us for the rest of the year and the rest of our lives.

כִּי גֵי אֲבָר עֲצוֹת הֵמָּה – *They are a nation who have lost counsel,* **וְאֵין בְּהֵם תְּבוּנָה** – *and they don't understand* (Haazinu 32:28). "I'm trying My best to give direction to My people," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "but what more could I do? They don't listen to Me and therefore they are lacking in understanding."

It's like when your friend is setting out on a long road trip so you give him a good map so that he shouldn't get lost in his travels but he thinks he knows better and he doesn't bother with the instructions; he thinks he'll be just fine. That's what the Sifri on this possuk says: **אָבְדוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲצָה טוֹבָה** – *The Am Yisroel has strayed from the good advice that is being offered to them.* It means we're not listening to the guidance being offered to us and now we're like a boat adrift on the high seas without means of navigation.

That's what this world is; it's a tremendous ocean filled with strong waves and dangerous obstacles – and without direction we'll surely crash up on the rocks of life; we'll be damaged and spring leaks. Some people might even sink. But whatever happens, it won't be the successful voyage it could have been.

The Torah's Advice

And so it pays for us to discover this navigation system that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is offering us. We don't want to sink after all! And therefore it's a question that we have to answer: What is meant by that word *eitzos*, counsel? Where is this fountain of advice that we're ignoring?

And the answer given by the Sifri is as follows: **וְאֵין עֲצָה אֶלָּא תוֹרָה** – *The word eitzah only means Torah.*

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You want direction for succeeding in life? You want a system for navigating your way on the ocean of life? *Ein eitzah ela Torah!* All the advice you could ever need is in the Torah that Hashem gave us!

Eternal Life

Ein eitzah ela Torah is the introduction to the great subject of *ki heim chayeinu* – the words of the Torah are our lives – and it’s an introduction that many have never learned properly. Because when *frum* Jews hear these words they think they know all about it: “*Ki heim chayeinu!* Torah is our life! Ah! It’s *chayei olam*; it’s *Olam Habo* – it’s eternal life!”

And the truth is, they’re right. We’ll have *Olam Habo* because of the Torah; certainly. In the next world Torah is very very important. *Ashrei mi sheba l’kan v’talmudo b’yado* – You have to have something in your hand when you come there. When you come to the next world, they’ll say, “*Zug ibber epress* – Say something over for us.” “For seventy, eighty years you had so much opportunity to learn,” Hashem says, “Even if you were a working man, you had evenings. You had long Friday nights in the winter and long Shabbos afternoons in the summer. And Sundays and *yomtiv!* I gave you such a gift, such a Torah, and you’re coming back to Me with empty hands?!”

And that, everybody more or less understands. We know that the more our hands are loaded down with good things the more we’ll be welcomed there. And so, when we sing on *Simchas Torah* we know the *pshat*: *Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu* means in the next world, *u’mah na’im goraleinu*, in the next world, *u’mah yafah yerushaseinu*, in the next world. Torah means eternal life.

Not in The Heavens

But along comes the *Chovos Halevavos* in his *Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh* (30), and he tells us something that we might be surprised to hear. And not only does he want us to know it but he says it’s important enough that we should take time out of our lives to meditate on it. He says that *ki heim chayeinu* means that the Torah is our life in this world!

Of course there’s the next world too. That day will come, no question about it, and the Torah will be

our *hatzalah* in that world too. But meanwhile we’re not in any rush to get there and the *chosid gadol* – that’s what they all call the *Chovos Halevavos* – wants us to know the Torah will save you right now in this world. The Torah is our success by rescuing us from all types of trouble in *Olam Hazehe!*

And that, the *Sifri* says, is what our *possuk* is telling us. *Ein eitzah ela Torah*; included in the gift of the Torah is that it’s a storehouse of good advice; it’s full of wise counsel for how to succeed in *Olam Hazehe!*

Self-Help Books

That’s the truth! The advice is not in the self-help books. It’s not in the advice columns or by the psychiatrists. It’s in one place. *Ein eitzah ela Torah*. Not that it’s also in the Torah; it’s *ela Torah* – it’s only in the Torah.

The Torah is full of advice for succeeding in this world. It teaches you how to deal with your parents and your children; how to handle a wife or a husband and in-laws too. From the Torah you learn how to deal with your Italian neighbor. It teaches you how to be *matzliach* in business and how to succeed in your own inner life.

Not only in your private life. How to react to public issues, how to make public policy – how to deal with the mayor and the governor. It’s full of advice on how to deal with the gentile nations. Even health! The *Gemara* is full of advice on how to take care of your health. The truth is the number of people who have lost their lives for lack of taking counsel from the Torah has yet to be counted.

Even the stickiest problems can be resolved by listening to the Torah’s advice. Many times it seems like there’s no way out, that there’s no solution to a problem, but when you hear the counsel of the Torah immediately the problem can be solved. In every phase of life, the Torah stands by a man’s side and offers him practical advice for how to live successfully.

Study Correctly

Now, you might say, “Well, I know plenty of people who learn Torah but they’re not living successfully.” It’s true – there are people who learn Torah and they’re divorcing their wives or their wives

are divorcing them. There are people who learn Torah and they get involved in big *machlokes*; people who learn Torah and they ruin their *parnasah* and they ruin their health. There are people who learn Torah all the time and they are unhappy and dissatisfied, yes.

And here we come to the painful subject of גוי אֶבֶר עֵצוֹת – a nation bereft of Torah counsel. You have to understand what's meant by learning Torah; it means you study Torah because you're listening to the words of Hashem who's teaching you how to live. That's the *chiddush* we're talking about now; it's the preface to our subject: When you learn Torah you have to know beforehand that you are seeking models of successful living – you should think that the Torah is talking to you.

What good is the best advice if nobody knows it's there? If you think the Torah is just *pesukim*; *mitzvos* and stories, and the *Gemara* is only theoretical exercises and details of *dinim*, so you won't keep your eyes open for all good advice. And that's why we find the phenomenon of people who learn but they are *oivad eitzos*; they don't know how to live. If your eyes aren't looking for the *eitzos*, so Hashem says, "It could be you study the Torah but if you don't seek the counsel, so you're a גוי אֶבֶר עֵצוֹת, and אֵין בָּהֶם תְּבוּנָה, you become a nation without understanding."

Derech Hayeshivos

Now, the *roshei yeshivah* will have to forgive me for stepping on some toes – I'm asking *mechila* from them – but *Torah* doesn't mean learning the first six *blatt* of the *mesichta* with all the *rishonim* and *achronim*. And the whole winter *zman* goes away on six *blatt*. That's not the way to learn *Torah*.

I'm not going to give people lessons about how to teach *Gemara* in the *yeshivos* but that's not how it was done until now. Until now they didn't learn six *blatt* in a winter *zman*. They learned much more because they knew that the *Torah* has a lot of information. And you need to assimilate that information – the first six *blatt* is not enough; there's a lot of advice for successful living on *daf ches* too.

The *Gemara* is full of wisdom on how to live – only you have to learn it. I remember one *rebbe* –

there are a lot of *rebbeis* like that today – whenever it came in the *gemara* to words of wisdom, *chochma u'mussar*, advice, *yiras shamayim*, he always skipped it. He wanted something that was *gezaltzen un gefeffert*, something *mifulpal* so he could say something on it. But when it came to something of *derech eretz*, *middos tovos*, good advice, he skipped it. He had nothing to say. "It's *poshut*," he said. It's not *poshut* at all!

Finding Excuses

I had a *rebbe*, *zichrono livracha*, who learned in *Volozhin*. *Volozhin*; the mother of the *yeshivos*! He knew how to learn! And I remember; he didn't skip anything. And not only did he never skip but he looked to find advice; when he used to say a *shiur* in the *gemara* and he came to something that gave him an excuse to talk *divrei derech eretz*, and *middos tovos* and *emunah*, he always stopped and spoke about it.

I remember how he taught a *mishna* in *Mesichta Nedarim*. At first glance the *mishna* doesn't appear to be giving any advice. It says "Derech talmidei chachomim..." – the way of *talmidei chachomim* is if they want to find out if their wives or daughters have *nedarim* on them so they have a way of investigating; they have a scheme to find out if they have *nedarim*.

So my *rebbe* said like this – I remember his shining face till this day; Ahh! *Zolzain a lichtiger Gan Eden* – he said: "Derech talmidei chachomim, it's the way of *talmidei chachomim*... – Oh! So we see that *talmidei chachomim* have a different *derech* in life!" That's how he learned the *mishna*. It was telling him that you have to have a *derech* in life.

Derech Talmidei Chachomim

He gave a whole talk about a *derech* of *talmidei chachomim*. He spoke to us about a way of thinking differently, a way of acting differently. And it wasn't the *sugya*; it was 'only' *agav urcha*. The *mishna* was talking about something else entirely, about the technicalities of *nedarim*. But he uncovered a gem of advice in the words of the *Torah* because he knew that *ein eitzah ela Torah*. That was a *rebbe* who understood that all the advice you need is in the *Torah*.

The trouble is people become hardened; they become habituated by reading the Torah constantly in a superficial way and they're not seeking any advice. And when you don't know what you're looking for, you probably won't find it. But suppose we are forewarned; suppose we listen prayerfully to the criticism of Hakodosh Boruch Hu in *Parshas Haazinu*: "Don't be a nation that ignores the *eitzos* of the Torah." So we know beforehand that the Torah is crammed with good advice on all matters of practical living; and once we know this guideline we can keep our eyes open to the truth that the Torah is a storehouse of good counsel.

The Great Criticism

And that's why one of the great criticisms of our nation is when we don't make use of this gift as much as we could. Hashem says, "The gentile nations are living unsuccessfully? They're unhappy and they're fighting with each other all the time? They're divorcing left and right? They're committing suicide and dying of venereal diseases? Alright; they have an excuse – they have no Torah, no *eitzos*. But you, *Am Yisroel*, why are you falling into unhappiness? Why aren't you successful? There's only one reason. You're a *goy oivad*, a nation that is lost, because you're ignoring all of the *eitzos* of the Torah that you need to succeed in this world!"

And once we get into our heads that the Torah – whether it's the *Torah sheb'ksav* or *Torah sheba'al peh* – is a storehouse of good counsel for life, that it's crammed with good advice on all matters of practical living, then it's possible for us now to begin looking at the Torah with different eyes and seek the counsel. And once we do that we'll find. *Yagata matzasah* – if you labor in search of it, you'll surely find it. Actually we'll begin to see that it's so obvious that we wonder how we ignored it all the years that we read the Torah and repeated its words.

So now we're ready to begin; we're ready to begin living successfully by mining the Torah for Hashem's advice. Now, we're not going to spread ourselves out over the whole panorama of Torah; even if we would be able – and we're not able – we couldn't do it because we would be here forever. But in order to train ourselves to see advice in the Torah

we'll pick some examples at random. We'll discuss ten tidbits of advice that will be helpful for us as we set sail on our cruise ship journeying through life.

#1 *Get To Work*

Everyone Should Be Ready

And so, we'll start now *eitzah* number one. In a few weeks we'll be reading these words in the *shul* but this time around we'll listen as if it's talking to us: **בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם** – *You should eat bread by the sweat of your brow* (Bereishis 3:19). Now, some people who learn *chumash* think it was just Hakodosh Boruch Hu telling Adam something, some vague statement about the sweat of the brow. But tonight we're learning that it's talking to us. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is talking to all of Adam's descendants: "You want to eat bread?" He says, "You'd better work for it."

Which means, everyone should be ready for work in this world. Whether he's a businessman or a baker; whatever it is, he has to work for his bread. It could be you work with your head. A *melamed* is also working; it's not easy work – the boys don't always listen. A *kollel* man must also work hard. In the *kollel* you have to work by the sweat of your brow. Whatever it is, wherever you are, the *eitzah* of the Torah is **בְּזַעַת אֶפְיֶיךָ**; it means you have to be busy working.

The Torah Hustle

From the beginning the Torah is constantly reiterating that: **אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת** – *Elokim made this a world of doing*. **הַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם** – *It's a doing world*. So you'll tell me that "to do" means *mitzvos*. No question; absolutely you have to do *mitzvos*. And one of the *mitzvos*, one of the first *eitzos*, is **שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד**, *six days a week you should be doing*. It's not giving you 'permission' to work. It's not six days you're *allowed* to work. It means, six days you *should* work – you have to hustle to make a living.

It doesn't mean you have to stay overtime. It doesn't mean you have to take extra jobs. It doesn't mean you have to stay up until late at night and get an ulcer *chalilah* and risk your life. But you have to

work! And it's not supposed to be easy – *by the sweat of your brow will you make a living.*

Health Advice

Now, don't think that it's merely a *gezeirah min hashamayim*, a punishment. Oh no! It's advice for healthy living! The human being is so constructed that he must be a busy person. For your mind to be healthy, you have to be busy – *something* you must be accomplishing. It's like breathing air. You have to breathe air in order to live. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu put in our *teva*, into our nature, that just like we need air, we need work. In order to be healthy, in order to live long, you must be a working person.

People call me up on the telephone always; constantly they're telling me they're depressed. I said, "You want to get out of the depression? Don't go to psychologists, it's a waste of money. Start doing something; anything."

"I don't feel like it," she says or he says. "How can I do anything? I don't have the spirit to do." "Do it anyhow," I tell them. It's the same as saying, "I'm so weak! I don't feel like pulling myself out of the water when I'm drowning!" Well, you'd better muster energy and start swimming with strong strokes or floating." Do something before you go down! And once you'll start doing something you'll see that your mind begins to put itself into place again.

Broken People

Now, I know that some people think they'll get by without following this Torah advice, but trust me there will always be side effects. You ignore Torah advice at your own peril. It could be that you'll be able to loaf all your life but one day you're going to look back and see how much distress and how many troubles it caused.

The *gemara* (Kesubos 59b) says, *Habatalah meviah liyedei shiamum* – Idleness brings to insanity. Now, not always do you go raving mad. You don't become a maniac – not always – but it brings to a depression, a sickness of the mind.

Here's a man sitting in the *kollel* year after year, but he's not *working* in the *kollel*. His wife goes to work every morning – she jumps into a car at six o'clock in the morning to go to work in New York

from Lakewood and meanwhile he gets up late; he goes to the second *minyan* in the *shtiebel*. He comes at 9:30 to the *minyan*. He comes home and he reads the newspaper while he eats breakfast. Finally, he ambles very slowly to the place where he has to sit and learn. He learns a little bit; he talks a little with *chaveirim*. That's not a *kollel* man. He's not working hard in the *kollel*; he's not busy with his learning so he becomes discouraged. He's a broken person because he's ignoring the advice of the Torah.

The Apple of Our Eye

Now, the ones who are acclimated to it and spend their days toiling in the Torah, they're the apple of our eye. That's why we support *kollel* people. From this *shul* we support entire families in Yerushalayim that sit and learn Torah. I have a list of blue ribbon families – they're acclimated to toiling in Torah and they're succeeding. If you're able to do it, good! But if you'll be idle then you're looking for trouble because you're ignoring the *eitzah* of the Torah: *שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד* – Six days you should work. You should work! *בְּזַעַת אַפֵּיךָ תֹאכַל לֶחֶם* – By the sweat of your brow you should make a living.

Now, it could be that when you learned *chumash* you didn't see that – you never learned that *pshat* before. But now you know *eitzah zu Torah* and a new vista of understanding is opened before you. And therefore, those people who wish to listen to *eitzos*, *שָׂמְעוּ לְעֵצָה הַחַיִּים* – they're wise people (Mishlei 12:15). And those who are *chachamim b'eineihem*, they think they know everything in life, so they won't listen to this. "Eitzos from the Torah?! Meh!" they think. And that's included in the words, *גֹּי אֲבָר עֲצוֹת הַמָּה*.

#2 Safety First!

Forever On Guard

Another *eitzah*; number two on our list: *וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם* – And you should guard your life exceedingly; the *gemara* (Berachos 32b) takes it to mean you should guard your safety.

It means Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving us a big *eitzah* here for succeeding in this world. "I'm giving you good advice," He says. "Don't do things without

thinking! Be careful! Always be on guard!" We'll say it *b'laaz*: "Safety First!"

Fire Safety

Everybody knows those words, but who's practicing it?! All the time we're hearing reports, we're hearing bad news from people who didn't take this advice. Here's a man who wants all his little children to be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* of *ner Chanukah* – each person should have his own *ner*. So he takes his little boys and his little girls and he gives them Chanukah *menorahs*; "Here's for you and for you and for you." And they're all standing and lighting the *chanukah menoros*. That's *Torah* too! Beautiful! But then this big *tzadik* forgets the advice of the *Torah* and he walks out of the room.

Or 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. It's a terrible *chet*!

Thou Shalt Not Murder

The Rambam has a section in his *sefer* on *halacha* and the name of it is *Hilchos Rotzei'ach U'shmiras Hanefesh* – The Laws of a Murderer and of Guarding Life. You hear that? Murder and safety – what's the connection?

The answer is the Rambam was a *lamdan*; so he studied the advice of the *Torah* and he understood what Hashem is telling us: If you're not careful with the safety of people, you're a *rotzei'ach*! And even though actually nothing happened, nevertheless, the sin was done. We shouldn't look at what actually did not happen, but look at what could have happened. *Hilchos Rotzei'ach U'shmiras Hanefesh* says you are responsible for what could have happened. And when things happen surely you're responsible.

Yeshiva Safety

Here's a man who's building a *yeshiva* and when the building inspector comes he bribes him so he shouldn't bother him too much with safety rules. Some things are very expensive to fix. Also it's a big bother because he wants to open up the *yeshiva* already; otherwise it will be *bitul Torah*. So he finagles his way out of it. A true story.

Now, it happened that there was a fire exit, but he didn't bother to put up a sign, 'Fire Exit.' And some boys from out of town were at the dormitory at the time. They were newcomers to the dormitory and when a fire started they didn't know where to run and they were burned up.

Another story. Once in the *yeshiva* there was a boy who would sit on a windowsill on the fifth floor. On the fifth floor sitting on a window sill with the window open! How can a boy be so foolish to sit on the window sill near an open window? And how can the people around be so foolish as to let it happen? A couple of weeks later, I passed by this *yeshiva* one morning and a big group of people were assembled around the building. What happened? The boys were jostling around near the window and one boy sitting on the ledge fell out. Five stories he fell!

And therefore, when *talmidim* are playing ball in front of the *yeshiva* on the street, the *menahel* should go outside and chase them onto the sidewalk: "Get off the street! It's a *sakanah*! Don't play ball on the street." If boys are on the roof of the *yeshiva*, "Get off the roof!" The *menahalim* have to go and watch constantly because the boys don't have *seichel* to take care of themselves; they're not attuned yet to listening to Hashem's advice and therefore you have to be on top of them – it's a big *achrayus*.

Innocent Hiking Trip?

The girls schools too. There was a girls group going out for an outing in the country with a leader who is seventeen years old. A big *chachama*. She takes girls up to the top of a mountain and one girl falls down and she has to have twelve operations before she gets well again. Did anybody criticize the *menahel* of that girl's school who made such a young girl a leader for girls?

Did anybody blame that *menahel* who didn't shoo the boys off the window sill? Did anybody blame the person who had authority who paid off the inspector? Nobody blamed anybody. But Hakodosh Baruch Hu blames. He blames you for ignoring the advice of the *Torah*.

The Most Important Derasha

There was a man. I used to see him on Avenue J always. A block away I'd see him and I would try to hide from him because he used to come over to me to tell me his *toiros*. He would catch me and tell me his *drashos*. Each time *drashos*, *drashos* and more *drashos*. It would take a half hour before I could get rid of him. I never told him my *drashos* but he told me his.

One day I hear that an *einikel* fell out of a window in his house. "Ooh Wah!," I was thinking, "where are your *drashos*? You're an *am ha'aretz gamur*. How could she fall out of a window in your house? וְעִשִּׂיתָ מַעֲקֵה לְגִגְדֵךָ – You have to make a fence around your roof, כִּי יִפֹּל הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ – people might fall off. A window is like a roof. That's a good *drasha* he should have learned – a window is like a roof. You didn't know that when an *einikel* comes to visit, the first thing is to run and close all the windows? That's the advice of the Torah, after all!

The Mitzvah Man is Punished

Don't say it's the *ratzon Hashem*! Don't blame Hashem when you ignore His advice. Once upon a time, a *yid* came to me and he told me a story. He said that a *meshulach* came from Eretz Yisroel to his house. So he put a hot glass of tea on the table for him and he went into the kitchen with the *meshulach* to give him something to eat. In the meantime his child, a little boy, came in and he knocked down the glass of hot tea and it spilled on his hands. They had to rush him to the hospital.

So this *yid* came to me; he's *frum* Jew so he said, "I know Hashem does everything *midah k'neged midah* – what's the reason that Hakodosh Boruch punished me in such a way that my son was scalded and rushed to the hospital? What's the *chet*? Maybe *shmiras halashon* or *bitul Torah*?"

The Biggest Sin

I said, "Don't look for other reasons. Don't blame Hashem; blame yourself." It's a *possuk* (Mishlei 19:3) that you should repeat to yourself over and over again. אִנְלֵת אָרֶם תַּסְלִף הָרָבוּ – A man's foolishness causes trouble to his way in life, וְעַל הַשָּׂם יִזְעַף לְבוּ – but he's angry at Hashem; he blames Hashem. He came to ask

so I had to tell him the truth. "You should have remained there and watched that glass of hot water that you put on the table. How could you leave a little boy there with a glass of hot water?!"

And that's why Hakodosh Boruch Hu says וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם – It's up to you to watch yourselves in this world. "That's My advice to you," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu. "And if you're going to ignore Me, if you want to be a *גוי אבד עצות*, then you're walking through this world at your own peril."

#3 Keep Quiet

For Your Physical Health

Another tidbit of advice; we're up to number three now. The Torah is always teaching you how to maintain your health but it's not always the way you imagined. Listen to what a *Tanna* said about this subject (Avos 1:17).

כָּל יְמֵי גִדְלֹתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים וְלֹא מְצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב מִשְׁתִּיקָה – I grew up all my days among wise men and I found nothing better for my health than silence. He didn't say for the *neshama*; there's no question that silence is good for the *neshama* too but the *chiddush* of the Torah is that keeping quiet is good for your health!

Some people take vitamins; other people do exercises or maybe they'll buy a treadmill. I don't know; maybe it's good – I can't tell you about that. But one thing I do know – there's nothing better for your health than keeping quiet. It's amazing to hear such advice from a *Tanna*. He's telling us if you keep your mouth closed, you'll live longer.

The Golden Tidbit

And it's not only the *Tanna* telling us this. Dovid Hamelech too! מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֲפִץ חַיִּים – If want to live long, נִצֹר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ מֵרָע – guard your tongue against evil (Tehillim 34:14). You don't want diabetes? You don't want to have a heart attack? Make sure to guard your tongue against evil. Not just *lashon hara* – any evil. So you say, "Oh, against evil? Alright, that I could do." But how can you guard your tongue against evil? If you open your mouth you'll say anything; you'll say evil too. So *netzor l'shoncha* – guard your tongue and keep quiet; and if you guard your tongue you'll save

yourself *mei'ra*, from a lot of bad and you'll live longer too. שָׁמֵר פִּי וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ – Someone who guards his mouth and his tongue, שָׁמֵר מִצָּרוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ – he guards himself from trouble (Mishlei 21:23).

Now, this *eitzah* you should know is a golden *eitzah* and it deserves to be discussed at length. It's not merely an *eitzah tovah* of somebody who tells you something he saw somewhere. It's Torah advice; it's in *Tanach* and in the *Mishna*. It's in the *Gemara* in many places. It's Torah advice that's constantly repeated.

At the Wedding

So imagine now, you wanted to start a career of following Torah advice. You're going to a *chasunah* tonight, to a *simcha*, and you're moving around among the guests, and you're thinking, "I want to fulfill that *eitzah* so I'm going to practice silence as much as possible tonight."

So you say, "Mazel tov." That's a good thing to say; it's a *mitzvah* to bless your fellow Jews! But nothing more. You walk around and you're smiling but you won't say a word except *mazel tov*. "Mazel tov," "mazel tov," "mazel tov." Otherwise don't say a word. The whole evening you keep quiet. It's a good start to a longer life; try it out.

Don't Play With Fire

Now, at the *chasunah*, that's good practice, but you should try it at home too. The home is more important than anywhere else. At home, don't talk. You know the *mishna* says אַל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה – Don't talk too much with women (Avos 1:5). Now, we understand with somebody else's wife, *chas v'sholom*, don't talk much. If you're talking to somebody else's wife, that's playing with fire. Of course, you have to be polite; if a woman stops you on the street, "Oh, Mr. So-and-so, *vuss macht men bei eich* – How are things doing?" So you say, "Boruch Hashem, things are fine. *Brocha v'hatzlocha*," and you keep on going.

Even if you're a professional and it's business, you should know that גּוֹרֵם רָע לְעַצְמוֹ – you're causing harm to yourself (*ibid.*). I know stories! Terrible stories! You're going to find yourself in a lot of hot water in this world. And that's just the beginning of your trouble. וְסוֹפוֹ יִרְשׁ גִּיהֵנוֹם – You won't escape the

fire of *gehinom* either. It doesn't mean that you'll be there forever, but you'll have to take a visit to *gehinom* if you talk to somebody else's wife. And therefore be careful – don't talk to anybody much, but surely don't talk to women much. Be polite, be friendly, but don't make conversation, that's all.

Communication Problems

But the *eitzah* of the Torah goes further than that. It's a *Mishnah*, and the *Mishnah* was said by very wise men; listen to what they said: בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶמְרֵרִי – Even with your own wife you shouldn't talk too much. If she talks to you a lot, let her talk. But you don't talk too much to her. And the *meforshim* say why. Listen to this; you'll be surprised but these men were wiser than we are and one day you'll find out how good a reason it is. The *meforshim* say that whatever you say will be held against you. She might criticize you for it. She might belittle you too. Whatever you'll say in the presence of your wife she'll use as a means to disagree with you – and you'll be foolish enough to open your big mouth and say something back.

And therefore, whatever it is, don't get into long conversations because, sooner or later, in most cases, it's going to be an argument, and an argument is the beginning of trouble. Wives think "communication" is everything. "We must have communication," they tell me. They call me up from all over, "There's a communication problem; he doesn't communicate enough." The trouble is they communicate too much! That's the problem! The *mishna* says there's nothing better for your body and for your wife's body too – keep quiet! And do it because of the *mishna*. Keep quiet!

How to Talk

Of course, if she tells you something, you have to learn how to answer, to console her and encourage her. It doesn't mean that they don't speak at all; he comes in and he says, "Vi geit es, Sarah, vi geit es?" He puts a smile on his face – even though his boss just yelled at him and he's uptight, he puts on a smile and he says, "Chana, how are things today?" You ask and she complains about how much work she had and how the children were running wild and fighting, and you listen, that's all.

It's important between husbands and wives and between everyone else too. *L'olam yarbeh adam b'shesikah* – A man should try to produce a lot of silence (Rambam *Deios* 2:4). And even if he has to speak, he should speak *b'loshon ketzarah*, in the brief way. אֶשְׁמְרָה לְפִי מִחֶסֶם – I'll guard my mouth as if I had muzzle on (Tehillim 39:2).

Keep it Muzzled

Imagine there's a lock that locks your two lips together. Don't unlock it. You want to unlock it? Take the key out of your pocket first. Before you talk, take the key out of your pocket and think: "Should I answer? Maybe I don't have to answer?" And after thinking it over, if you decide you must answer, so you unlock it and then talk.

There's a man who used to come here and he doesn't talk unless first he takes the keys out of his pocket. He learned that lesson! He talks a lot anyhow but it's better than nothing. So don't unlock your lips and you'll live a much happier and healthier life. That's an *eitzah gedolah* of the Torah.

#4 Seek Peace

Don't Fall Into the Pit

Eitzah number four in our list for tonight is connected to the previous one about keeping the mouth closed. Everyone remembers the story of *Korach va'adaso*. Now, when we hear the story of *Korach* we should understand why it's written in the Torah. It's teaching us something; it's giving us an *eitzah* for our own lives.

You have to know that *Korach* wasn't a foolish man; he was a *talmid chochom*, a holy man. But a holy man has to be careful too! It's so easy to fall into the pit of *machlokes* and therefore even the best people have to be on guard against yielding to the *yetzer* of jealousy and other bad *middos*.

And therefore, *Korach* is our model. "I'm giving you good advice now," Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to us: לֹא יִהְיֶה כְּקֹרַח וְכַעֲרָתוֹ – "My children; don't be like *Korach*." (Bamidbar 17:5). It's written in the Torah that way – "You should not be ..." so that you should take

this *eitzah tovah* out of the *chumash* and put it into your head.

There Are Many Tzaddikim

If you see *machlokes*, stay out of it. You're only going to bring trouble upon yourself. It's a tragic mistake to mix in. It's fire! Worse than fire! It's the fire of *Gehenim* to get involved.

Of course, the first lesson from *Korach* is not to speak against *talmidei chachomim*, *gedolei Yisroel*. When *Korach* started up with *Moshe Rabbeinu* he chose the very worst man to start up with because שְׂנְאֵי צְדִיק יֵאָשְׁמוּ – If you hate a *tzaddik*, you'll be held very very guilty (Tehillim 34:22). But we understand that וְעַמּוֹד בְּלֶם צְדִיקִים – all *frum* Jews are *tzaddikim*. *Frum* Jews are sacrificing for Torah. It costs them a lot of *schar limud* for their children. They could send them to public schools but they're laboring to pay huge amounts of money for tuition and just for that they deserve tremendous credit. וְעַמּוֹד בְּלֶם צְדִיקִים – The *frum* Jewish nation are all *tzadikim* and therefore run away from *machlokes* with *frum* Jews.

The World is a Hubbub

Not only the big *machlokesim* in the newspapers. In the homes too. I'm sorry to say that this is a Torah *eitzah* that people are frequently ignoring. They look for opportunities to make fights. Mothers-in-law are trying to fight with their daughters-in-law and vice versa. And the world is a hubbub! It's boiling; *s'koch* *zich*. The world is a pot on the fire. It's cooking with *machlokes* in families. What's taking place is terrible. You are all innocent young people, you don't know. I know. My telephone is ringing all day long. I know all about it. Fights! With whom? With everybody.

Here's a man fighting with his wife; instead of looking for *shalom* he's fighting. His wife is a nice young woman. She's loyal and she fulfills all of her duties but he fights anyway. He has bad *middos* so he finds what to fight about. And if he fights, she fights too. So they're busy fighting now.

A Constant Part of Life

Now, if they're fighting, it brings in the father-in-law. She tells her father. So he joins the fight too! He's a *chacham* too, a big *chacham*. And his mother,

of course; she had complaints as soon as she saw her daughter-in-law. She started fighting right away without even having what to fight about. And so, it's all over. It's terrible what's taking place! Fighting in the families!

There are people fighting with neighbors. People tell me that neighbors are ruining their lives *l'hachis*. There are all kinds of spiteful things. I've been a *mispallel* and a Rav in about seven, eight *kehillos* and I've seen *machlokes* all the time. That's one of the most outstanding features of a *kehilla*. Just like *tefilah b'tzibur* constantly, *machlokes* also constantly. Within the *kehilla*, between the *kehilla* and its neighbors, between *kehillos*; *machlokes* wherever you go.

Dangers of Fighting

Of course, among the gentiles it's a thousand times worse. Because when a *goy* makes *machlokes*, he pulls out his stiletto, his knife. That's a very quick way to settle disagreements.

Now, among Jews it doesn't go so far but like it says in Mishlei sometimes words are worse than swords. **הֵם יָרְדוּ תְּחִילָה בְּטֶן** – *Words go down into the chambers of the belly* (Mishlei 18:8). People get sick from *machlokes*. I can tell you stories upon stories. People who became diabetic because of *machlokes*. I know men who died of heart failure because of their wives; they died in the middle of an argument with their wives. All over the world people are losing their jobs because of *machlokes*; they're losing customers and friends too.

So, *bakesh shalom* – make it a principle in life to seek out peace. That's why we'll call this *eitzah* “*bakesh shalom*” – seek peace with everyone.

Don't Be Vinegar

Somebody once said, “A thousand friends is too few; and one enemy is too many.” You hear that *chochma*? It means, get busy making friends. Even a gentile. I was once walking in the street, a young Puerto Rican, seventeen years old, approached me and started saying *divrei chirufim*. So I put my arm around his shoulder; “Oh, I didn't see you for a long time,” I said. We started walking down the street like that; he kept quiet. At the corner I said, “It was good

seeing you again,” and I walked away. That's the way to deal with your enemies.

The world says a drop of honey can catch more flies than a gallon of vinegar. It means if you want to catch flies, it means friends, be a honey. Don't be vinegar because you're not going to get any benefit except you're going to be bitten on all sides.

That's one of the principles of the Torah (Mishlei 3:17): **הֲרַכִּיךָ הֲרַכִּי נָעִים וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם**. That's how Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to live; He wants us to live happily, peacefully. You're following the advice of the Torah when you get along with your brothers. **יְהִי יָחַד הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וַיְמַה נְעִים שָׁבַת אֲחִים גַּם יָחַד** (Tehillim 133:1). Train yourself to be friendly to the people of your family. And in case they insult you, just forget about it. Don't pay any attention. In case they wronged you, overlook it.

Pleasant Surprises

That's why it says not only that you should seek peace but *v'rodfeihu*. *Rodfeihu* means run after it. No matter what they did! “I'm going to keep quiet when they did *that* to me?!” Yes, it's for your benefit to keep quiet. You'll be surprised. You'll be surprised at what the results will be.

In my first *kehila* I was once standing in the hall Shabbos afternoon before I gave my *drasha*. A man came in and he passed by. The next day this man brought a claim against me to the board of directors that I didn't say *gut Shabbos* to him. In front of the whole board of directors he complained: “The Rav didn't say *gut Shabbos* to me.” I was just a new Rav too. The President came and asked me, “Is it true?” I said, “I think I did say *gut Shabbos* to him.” I was surprised. I was thinking, “Such a *chutzpa* to accuse me for nothing.” Before the board of directors too. I didn't say anything however.

Three months later this man gets up at the board of directors meeting and makes a motion to raise the Rav's salary. Nobody thought of raising my salary; he was the first one. A year later he raised the salary again, the same man. And so, it pays to listen to the advice in the Torah; it pays to make friends not enemies. It's a very important *eitzah*: **בְּקֶשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרִפְּהוּ**.

#5 Smile!

Don't Ignore Others

Another *eitzah tovah*. We're up to number five now. In *Pirkei Avos* (3:12) it says, הָיִי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּשִׂמְחָה – You should greet everyone with happiness. It's a *mishna*; you say it, you learn it, but are you doing it? It's advice from the Torah but did you do it once? Try that one time. You see somebody coming towards you, so you you remind yourself of the *possuk* in our *parsha*: “Don't be a person who turns away from the Torah *eitzos*.” and you think, “*Hineni muchan umezuman*, I am preparing now to be *mekayem* the *mishna*.”

There's a man in the *yeshivah* who passes by me almost every day. I greet him but he never even looks at me. He's not trying to ignore me – he's just not aware. He's not *mechunach*. He never trained himself and he's not a young man anymore. Maybe he looks at me. Could be he nodded but I would need a magnifying glass to see it because he's nodding all the time as he's walking, like this. So as he passes by me I have to imagine he nodded a little more. It needs a lot of imagination. Every day I notice how his behavior is. The man has no *derech erez*. He wasn't trained – if somebody greets you, you have to acknowledge the greeting.

Three Details

At least that. That's the minimum; it's just a general *eitzah*. There are more details to this advice. A different *mishna* adds the details: הָיִי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסָבֵר פְּנִים יְפוּת – You must greet all men with a pleasant cast of countenance (*Avos* 1:15). Now, we should study these words very well – it's a *mishnah* after all; it's not just a piece of *mussar* that somebody wrote in the last generation.

Now, what does it say there? It says three things: *seiver* and *panim* and *yafos*. And each one of those words is a lesson on its own.

First of all, *panim*. You have to greet your fellowman with your face. If you pass by somebody you know, *show him your face*. That's number one. So when you come into your house tonight after the lecture, and your mother is in the kitchen standing

over the stove, show her your face. Don't show her the back of your haircut or your ear. And when your father walks in at night, after working all day for you – for you! – do him that benefit, that little favor of turning around and showing him your face. Not your profile; the front of your face! At least one word from the *mishna* you should fulfill! *Panim*!

It's All in the Expression

And the second detail is *seiver*. The word *seiver*, from the word *svara*, means thinking. *Seiver* means that you have an expression on your face, an expression of interest. If you merely show a face, a deadpan face, that's not enough. Let's say you pick up a pan as someone goes by and you show him the bottom of the pan. Sometimes your face is not any more than the bottom of a pan. You have to show that you're thinking about him, that you have some interest in that person.

And the third thing is *yafos*. The expression you show should be a pleasant expression. It should show caring concern. What's more pleasant than a warm smile that shows you're thinking about me?!

Now, if you're not sure if you're doing it right, I'll give you a *heter* to stand in front of a mirror and practice it. You don't want to look in the mirror? So practice on your poor wife or your poor mother. It's no great happiness to be living in the same house with a grouch. Believe me, they could take a little bit of happiness from you once in a while.

What We All Really Want

And you're going to make people happy that way. Don't underestimate what a smile, what a pleasant face, can do for others. You're giving them a lift because a smile goes into the *neshama* of a person. It gives the recipient of the smile *chiyus*; it gives him life *mamish* because when you look at somebody with a pleasant face, that is the biggest compliment. It shows that you take him seriously, that he means something to you. You're showing an interest in him, some concern and caring, and that's the deepest desire of your fellowman. And he's not going to be *bodek* your motives. All he wants is happiness, and you're giving it to him. And he loves you for it. He loves you.

So flash a smile on somebody as you pass by; especially if he greets you, no question about it. And once you see how easy it is to make people happy, and how you can light up a person's face, you'll start and never stop. A friendly smile, a face of *simcha* is often the greatest gift you can bestow on someone else. And it's so easy to do.

Hashem Will Smile on You

And it's a piece of advice that will redound to your benefit. Because you know what you get from that? It says *bemidah sheadam moded modedin lo*. The way a man behaves to others, that's the way Hashem behaves to him. It means that if you cause your countenance to shine on others, if you turn on the sunshine by smiling at other people, you have to know that above, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to turn on the sunshine on you as well.

He's going to smile on you, because you're doing exactly what He wants to be done in this world. You're making Hashem's children happy. And so, when you activate that *middah* of smiling at people down below, you're going to be rewarded in the same measure. Only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu's measure is much bigger than ours. And so, there's no easier and more productive career; there's no better *eitzah* than smiling at everyone.

#6 Pray Constantly

Before The Fix

Eitzah number six: Pay attention to these four words of advice because they'll be of great benefit to you in both worlds. You remember when Iyov was in trouble, when he was already in *gehakte tzoros*, so his friends said to him like this: (36:19): *הֲיִעָרְךָ שׁוֹעֵר לֹא בְצָר* – *Did you arrange your prayers when you were not yet in distress? You hear that accusation they made against Iyov? "Did you remember to cry out to Hashem when things were still well?"* It means that we're expected to pray to Hakodosh Boruch Hu before misfortune comes.

In *Masechta Sanhedrin* (44b) the same advice is given: *L'olam yakdim adam tefillah l'tzarah* – *A man should always make sure to say his prayers before the*

trouble comes upon him. And it could very well be that had you done so, then everything would have been different.

This trouble that you're dealing with, and that trouble, this need and that need – who knows what would have been had you only followed this Torah advice that the best time to pray is *before* you find yourself in a fix. Because if a person waits until *chas v'sholom* something happens and then he cries out, it helps but it doesn't have the efficacy of crying out when things are going well.

Always, Always, Always!

We'll study this with some detail in order that we should understand it in a practical way. In *Mesichta Shabbos* (32a), the Gemara is talking to a healthy person and it tells him: *L'olam yevakesh adam rachamim shelo yechleh* – *A man should always be praying to Hashem that he should not become sick.* It's good advice by the way, and you should do it.

L'olam means always. Always, always, always, even when you're in the best of health, you should pray to Hashem to remain well. Not only in the *shemoneh esrei*. Even when you're in your place of business, in your office; nobody is listening, walk into a telephone booth, pick up the telephone, and make a long distance call to Hashem. "Hashem, please keep me well." He's listening. *כִּי אָתָּה שׁוֹמֵעַ* – *You are listening!* Hashem listens! Hashem loves people who pray because it shows you understand that Hashem is in charge of the world. And it'll help too! Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "Look at this man! He's well and he still cries out to Me, so I'll see that he remains well."

The More Effective Method

Of course, when you're old and all your bones are aching already and your eyes are dim and your stomach doesn't act properly; a lot of things are troubling you now and you cry out to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, that's also good. It's a very good thing! But how much better it would have been when you were full of juice and your joints were lubricated and everything was working well, and you cried out to Hakodosh Boruch Hu then. *L'olam!* Always! You

would have become great as a result and you would have been healthier too.

That's what Iyov's friends are telling us! הִיָּעַרְךָ שׁוֹעֲבֵךְ – Did you arrange your prayers, your outcries, לֹא בְּצָר – when you're not yet in distress. Here you are walking down Ocean Parkway, striding down the street in good health, with healthy legs and a healthy liver and heart, and you remind yourself of what we heard tonight: *L'olam yevakesh adam rachamim shelo yechleh* – It's always good to pray not to get sick. So you say to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam, please keep me well!" And that's thousand times better, a thousand times more effective than when somebody is *chas vesholom* sick and he sends out telegrams to the *yeshivos* in Eretz Yisroel, "Please pray for me at the *Kosel Hamaaravi* and the graves of *tzadikim*," and so on.

The Best Time

The best time to pray is best when you don't need it; that's when Hakodosh Boruch Hu prizes it most. The most effective prayers for a healthy heart is when you don't even know you have a heart – when it's functioning so perfectly that you're not even aware that it's there, that's the time to stipulate, "Oh Ribono Shel Olam! Please keep my heart pumping! Please, please, no clogged arteries!" If you do that, that's the best heart medicine.

Pray that the kidneys should *chas ve'sholom* never shut down, because then it's too late – most likely the prayers wouldn't help. But to pray while the kidneys are functioning so smoothly – so smoothly that all you know about the kidneys is what you read or see pictures in the drug store windows – that's the best *tefillah*.

The Worst Disease

Now, as you're walking down the street you see the cars driving by and that reminds you to pray for *shalom*. Traffic by the way is the worst enemy. Of all diseases, the worst is traffic. It's something you have to pray about and you'll never get through praying for that because it's an ever present and a ready danger. You know, people think that praying for *shalom* is only a formality – we're keeping it in reserve, when there will be a war, *chas v'sholom*, or

riots in the streets, that's when we'll take out our *shalom* prayers and dust them off and get busy. Oh no! We have to ask Hashem for help always; every day and many times during the day. Walking in the street, say, "Ribono Shel Olam help me cross the street." You need *siyata dishmaya* to cross the street. And the best time to ask is before you cross the street, before you get into danger.

In your car even more so. I'm not talking now about *tefillas haderech*. Don't wait to go *chutz la'ir*, to travel over a bridge or between cities. That's when you have to say a *brocha* with *Shem umalchus*. But even when you're sitting in the car and you're traveling only a few blocks, you should *daven*. You know what could happen in those two blocks, *chas v'sholom*? Ask Hakodosh Boruch Hu He should give you *hatzlocho*. Ask Hakodosh Boruch Hu He should give the driver *hatzlocho*. When I ride in the car with somebody, I'm thinking all the time, "Ribono Shel Olam save us! Save us, save us!" The driver doesn't know I'm thinking that – he'll get nervous if he'll hear me say that. I'm not the nervous type by the way, but I heard this Torah advice and so I fulfill it.

It's a wonderful piece of advice; I really should charge you admission tonight, because if I ever told you anything that was worthwhile, this is it – the great system of asking Hakodosh Boruch Hu for something before the need actually arises. Pray to Hakodosh Boruch Hu for good health, for peace, for *parnasa*, for everything, while you have it.

#7 Recognize Your Good Fortune

Well is Wealth

Now, you're only going to be able pray for what you already have if you recognize the treasure that you're sitting on. And that brings us to *eitzah* number seven: It says in *Tehillim*, אֲשֶׁרִי מְשֻׁבֵּיל אֶל דָּל – How good it is to think about a *dal* (41:2). The word *dal* means a poor man. The *possuk* here is giving you an *eitzah* – if you want to be happy, think about the poor. Think about the poor and you'll begin to realize how rich you are.

Now, don't be fooled by the word "poor." There are many forms of poverty. The *gemara* says, *Ein dal ela choleh* – you're a poor man if you're sick; it means if you're not sick, you're not poor. You hear that? If you're well, you're wealthy. "Gezunt iz reich" they used to say in Yiddish.

Now, the *gemara* said this for a purpose; you're expected to hear this advice and get busy following it. And if that's the case, one of our most important functions in life is to realize how many good things Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing for us – to be a *samayach b'chelcho*, to rejoice in what you have by means of being *maskil el dal*.

From Rags to Riches

If you're sitting here right now and you feel well, you should know that you're a billionaire – not a millionaire; a billionaire! That's how you have to feel. There's nothing like being well. You need ten thousand things, a hundred thousand things, to make you well, and you have them all. It means you're rich; only that you haven't yet realized it.

Now, that needs effort. You can't get rich without working for it; it means you can't be a *samayach b'chelcho* unless you begin studying how lucky you are. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants you to constantly be aware of how lucky you are – it's one of the *yesodos ha'emuna* – and one of *eitzos* of how to accomplish this is by means of "How good it is to think about the *dal*."

You walk in the street you and you see a broken woman bent over, dressed in rags and she's pushing a shopping wagon. In the shopping wagon are all her worldly possessions. Everything she owns is in her shopping wagon. She's an insane woman; she sleeps on the railroad tracks. She doesn't sleep. The bums come and bother her. She has no *menucha*. By day she sits in a park and tries to sleep. She can't fall asleep; she might fall off the bench. It's a *rachmanus*! It's a tragedy. Where does she take a bath? No baths; forget about it. Where does she go to the toilet? She has to find special places. It's a *rachmanus*; it breaks the heart to see such a thing. She has nothing at all.

One of the Yesodos

But you? You have a house; you have a home, a roof over your head. When you walk in it's warm in the winter time. And you can lock the door with a lock; you're safe. For the time being we're safe in our homes. You should appreciate that while it lasts. You have a bed. Not only a bed – you have a mattress and a pillow! You have water from the faucet; even hot water if you want. You have a toilet and a refrigerator. You have everything. Think about this poor woman who has nothing at all.

Think of the people who are so sick that they cannot even sleep all night. They're going crazy; they have pains. There are people who have to go through dangerous operations. People who are on respirators. Boruch Hashem you can walk around. You can breathe. You're a free man. You're well. Boruch Hashem, how much you have to thank Hashem!

You Have Everything

Once you begin to be *maskil el dal*, you'll realize how rich you really are. Don't say, "I'm not a millionaire." "I'm not a *mefursam*. I'm not this, I'm not that." You are a millionaire! You have everything. You have two good eyes, two good ears. You see a man coming down the street with a sleeve hanging down; there's no arm in his sleeve. That's something to think about! אֲשֶׁרִי מְשֻׁבֵּל אֶל דָּל! You have two arms!

You have clothing. You have pants, you have a coat, you even have a belt with holes in it. One hole before lunch, one hole after lunch. You have shoes and the shoes have rubber heels, not wooden heels. You have buttons and buttonholes and pockets. Baruch Hashem you're a millionaire. You have a stomach. You have kidneys. You have intestines. You have lungs; you have a heart; you have a liver. And it's all working perfectly. It's working well enough that you're not in the hospital right now. Boruch Hashem you're a millionaire!

All you have to do is open your eyes; open your head and be *maskil el dal* and you'll become wealthy. How good is this advice if you want to be a happy person your whole life. If you'll practice this program of being *maskil el dal*, you'll begin to realize how fortunate you are. There's no better *eitzah* than that to become a happy person all your life.

#8 Choose Your Neighbors

Good Beginnings

Number eight is an *eitzah tovah* that is repeated over and over again in the Torah – it's in the *chumash* and in *Mishlei* and *Tehillim* too but we'll sum it up with three words from the *mishna*: *Harchek mishachen ra* – Keep away from bad company. Now, that's an *eitzah tovah* for succeeding in both worlds! It's the beginning of all good things.

You know, if you look at the opening words of *Tehillim* you'll be surprised: אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הֵלֵךְ – בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְרִדְהָ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לִצִּים לֹא יָשָׁב – “Praiseworthy is the man who did not walk after the advice of the wicked, and on the path of the sinners he did not stand, and in the company of scoffers he did not sit” (*Tehillim* 1:1). Now, *Tehillim* is full of the great ideals of life. It speaks a great deal about our relationship with Hakodosh Boruch Hu; it's full of *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem* and *bitachon* and *emunah*. And therefore to begin with such words – don't sit in the company of scoffers – it seems out of place in such a *sefer*. We want to hear about getting close to Hashem and instead Dovid is telling us to keep away from bums.

But Dovid is teaching us something now. He chose this *eitzah* as the introduction to his *magnum opus* because that's the introduction to all of these great achievements. It all starts with keeping away from bad influence. You can never really say *Tehillim*, you can never love Hashem and sing to Him, if you're associating with *reshaim* and filling your mind with their ideas.

Environment Matters

Because that's what it's all about; what matters most is your mind. And if you're in the company of fools and *leitzim*, you become one of them. You don't mean any harm? It won't help; you become a partner in their thoughts.

If you're standing among fools, ignorant people, people who aren't idealistic, then you have to know that you're becoming like them. Whatever they are thinking, whatever attitudes and feelings they have, is shared by you to some extent. You can't help it;

you are what your environment is. Remember what I'm telling you now – you are what your environment is! Wickedness, even the most faint forms, is contagious.

Even to walk down the block with them causes you to be a partner in their thoughts, their attitudes, and their emotions. That's why Dovid is not praising the man who just doesn't follow the advice of the wicked. “He doesn't walk with them!” It means he won't even pace the streets together with them. Because if you walk their streets, if you are in their company, then to a certain extent, you are in “the counsel of the wicked.”

The Unthinkable May Happen

Now sometimes you can't help yourself. You need to make a living; it can't be helped – men must make a living and of course when you're looking for a job you can't always be so choosy. But as much as possible always look to be with good people. It's so important because you're going to be what your environment is. You must know if you're a public school teacher, when you're mingling with many others of low character, men and women, and you're exposed to adverse influences.

I know a case of an orthodox Jew, a *ben Torah* who was a school teacher and he was lured away from his wife by a gentile teacher in the same school; he forsook his family for the sake of a gentile girl. It was unthinkable that this should ever happen, but that's the result of wandering in strange fields and straying from Torah advice. And that's why we should listen to the advice: *Harchek*, as much as possible keep far away.

Bad company includes, by the way, not to invite a *goy* into your house every evening. In many Jewish homes a *goy* comes into the house in the evening through a hole in the roof from the antenna and he talks to your family. A Jewish family sitting around the table listening to this *goy*. They're *meshuga'im*! To bring into your home a *shafel shebishfalim*, the lowest of the lows! A sick immoral fellow is speaking his heart out and the family is sitting there listening to him! You're a *rotzeiach* – you're murdering your family.

Social Distancing in Shul

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that when you choose your food you have to be very careful that it should be clean and sanitary. But when you choose a friend, he says, you have to be a hundred times more careful. A hundred times more careful than when you choose your food! Now, that's very important advice. You understand already why the *Mesillas Yescharim* gives such *eitzos* – it's because when he learned Torah he knew how to learn; he understood that it's *kulo eitzos*. And he understood that part of *harcheik mishachein ra* is to choose only the best to associate with.

Even when you sit in the *beis hamedrash* or the *beis haknesses*, choose a seat near the best people; yes. You have to know that even in the best *shul*, if you sit down next to a person of bad character he can ruin you *chalilah*. I've seen it again and again.

Once a man came into our *shul*. He was a *baal teshuva* and full of enthusiasm. And he sat down next to an old man who I knew was a *leitz*. And the old man kept on talking to him during *davening*. He was speaking all the time against everybody in the *shul* – including me. Finally this *baal teshuva* became so ruined, so spoiled, that he became my enemy and he left the *shul*. I wanted to make something out of him but a *shachein ra* ruined him. It happened twice in my history. Twice I had such an experience.

Yeshiva and School

In the *yeshiva* too, you must be careful. I love to see the *yeshiva* boys in the street. I say, "A *brocha* on their heads. They should all live long." But you should know every *yeshiva* has an underworld. You hear that? There's an *untervelt*; there are some low grade boys in every *yeshiva*. Of course the low grade boys in *yeshiva* are hundred times better than the best boys in the public schools. But still, they're low grade boys; so watch out. Make sure your son doesn't associate with anybody but the best. See who your sons associate with. Who are his *chaveirim*? Even in *Bais Yaakov*, watch out! All kinds of girls go there. Even if their homes have no TV, still some girls have ideas in their heads that you don't want your daughter to catch from them.

And therefore, it's so important to avoid people who might spoil you. Even if it will only spoil you a little, the *eitzah* of the Torah is you must beware! "*Harcheik*," the Torah warns us, "because your life in both worlds depends on it."

#9 Do Teshuva

There's No Forgiveness

Now, I want to speak about an *eitzah* that's important for Yom Kippur. It's important all year long but we should especially think about it before Yom Kippur. There is a statement in *Mesichta Bava Kama* (50a): *Kol ha'omer Hakadosh Boruch Hu vatran – Anybody who says that Hashem is forgiving, he's playing with his life*. It means that if a person thinks that Hashem will overlook a man's sins and not punish him, he's in for a big surprise. If a man did a wrong, then even though fifty years have passed by, and in between this man became a *tzadik*; he became a big Rosh Yeshiva with a long white beard, still Hakodosh Boruch Hu won't forgive him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is not *mivater* on anything

Now, a statement like that should make us tremble. "He won't be *mivater*!" It means that Hakodosh Boruch Hu will face him in the Next World in a way that the person never imagined – a face that he didn't recognize in this world. Rav Yisroel Salanter says that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has two faces – one face is in this world and one face in the next world. In this world His face is the face of *chesed*; He's forgiving and kindly – He's *maarich af*; it means He waits for you to do *teshuva*. But once a person dies, it's all over. In the Next World, Hashem shows the stern face of a judge and it's too late for *slichu u'mechila*. Of course, if you're still alive and you do *teshuva* and you ask Him forgiveness that's something else. But otherwise there's no forgiving! When a man dies with sins it's going to be very bad for him.

Speak Up!

And therefore, what's the advice of the Torah? "And they shall confess their sin which they did" (*Bamidbar* 5:7) The Rambam says: "*Vidui zeh mitzvas*

eseh”. If you sinned, even the smallest sin, you’re commanded to speak up and declare your guilt.

Now, advice like that you ignore at your own risk because without *teshuva* no sin is small. Like the *Chovos Halevavos* says: “There is no *aveirah* that is small without *teshuva*!” Every sin is a catastrophe if a person doesn’t regret it. And because Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn’t like catastrophes He says, “Confess!”

If you speak up to Hashem you’re already facing the direction of *teshuva*. Of course, the best thing is to get busy repairing the harm that you did and to change your ways. But at least when a man knows that he is guilty and he has *charata*; he is worried and so he declares his guilt to Hashem, that’s already a form of *kaparah*. It’s not a full *selicha u’mechila*, but it is certainly important.

Insincerity Is Something Too

This brings us to the very great subject that we’ll call *miktzas teshuva*. It’s important to understand that any degree of *teshuva* is desirable to Hakodosh Boruch Hu – even *insincere teshuva* is extremely *valuable*. This we learn from the story of Achan. You remember when the Jews conquered Yericho, someone stole from the spoils which Yehoshua had prohibited. And in order to determine the guilty party they made a *goral* and it fell out on Achan.

But Achan was having none of it; he denied it. “It wasn’t me!” So what did Yehoshua do? He told Achan וְתָן לוֹ תוֹרָה – “Make a confession and you’ll be exonerated.” The Gemara (Sanhedrin 43b) says *Yehoshua bribed Achan with words*. He misled Achan into thinking that if he would confess, he wouldn’t be killed. All Yehoshua meant was that he would be exonerated in the Next World but he tricked Achan into confessing.

The Easy Path to Olam Habo

Now, listen to what the Gemara says. It tells us that Achan earned *Olam Habo* because of that *vidui* he said. It’s a *moiredige gemara*! Yehoshua tricked Achan into *Olam Habo*! You can trick someone into a confession and that person thereby gains *Olam Habo*. So we’re learning now how important *vidui* is. It can earn you *Olam Habo*! And any trick is worthwhile if it

will make a man finally open his mouth and confess that he was wrong because it’s the best gift you can give him.

Opening your mouth to say you’re sorry to Hashem is so powerful because when someone confesses with his mouth and he says he is guilty and he is sorry, it affects him to some small degree. And although he is confessing to his guilt *only* in order to save his life – and in reality he is not so sorry, he’s still far away from real *teshuva* – but it still has some effect. Maybe Achan felt sorry to one thousandth of the guilt; I can’t judge that, but even that small amount of *teshuva* was beneficial to him.

Start Tricking Yourself

And so it’s *kidai* to get busy tricking yourself. You’re far away from real *teshuva*? Say I’m sorry anyway. Because when you confess with your mouth, when you say, “I’m guilty and I’m sorry,” it’s already a *mitzvah*. You’re already digging yourself out of the hole.

And therefore the best *eitzah* in the world is to do *teshuva* right away. *Don’t delay!* You can save himself from troubles in this world and from *Gehenom* in the Next World. Don’t wait till Yom Kippur! Who knows what’s going to be till then? Who knows where you’ll be? And *chas v’shalom* you might even forget you did something wrong.

Daily Opportunities

That’s why when you say every day *Selach lanu* you shouldn’t just gallop through it – you’re doing *teshuva* now! Think about your sins. Don’t be *yotzei* just by saying words. Think of certain specific thing that you did. We’ve committed very serious sins in our lives.

And that’s why every *frum* Jew should accustom themselves to performing *miktzas teshuva*. Much punishment will be removed and you will be surprised at the results. By using your mouth for this purpose; by saying, “Ribono Shel Olam, I’m sorry and I regret what I did,” you’re cleansing your *neshama*.

It’s wonderful advice. Don’t procrastinate! Open your mouth and say, “Ribono Shel Olam, I’m sorry.” Every time you do that – not only during the *aseres yimei teshuva*; all year long, on a regular Tuesday

morning, on a Monday afternoon – every time you say, “I’m so sorry that I did so and so,” you’re fulfilling a *mitzvas aseï d’oraisah*. You’re tipping the scales in your favor. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu will see that you’re trying and maybe He will put into your heart to perform a full *teshuva*.

#10 Seek Counsel

The All-Inclusive Tidbit

Now, it takes time to mine the *eitzos* from the Torah. In life there are thousands and thousands of problems coming up all the time and although the Torah has thousands and thousands of *eitzos* to deal with them, most of us don’t have enough experience to uncover all of the *eitzos*; sometimes we might even know the *eitzah* but we don’t know how to best apply it.

And therefore for the final *eitzah* we’ll take something that includes all the *eitzos* of the Torah: *Asei lecha Rav* – make for yourself a rebbe. *Asei lecha Rav*; choose a good *rebbe* and he’ll tell you all the *eitzos*.

Ask For Directions

Now, many people think it means that you should make a teacher for yourself to learn Torah; if you want to learn let’s say *lomdus*, so you find a rebbe in *lomdus*. You want a *rebbe* in *mussar*? So you find a rebbe in *mussar*. You want a *rebbe* in *halacha*, a *posek*? Go to a *posek*, a rebbe in *halacha*. Torah has many different subjects; in one subject you could have one *rebbe*, in a different subject, someone else.

But “make for yourself a *rebbe*” means more than that. Because the most important subject is yourself. You have to have an advisor in life. Men and women, everybody; boys and girls too – should make for themselves a *rebbe*; look for somebody and tie yourself up to that person and live by his advice.

Every person, a boy or a girl should have *eitzos*. Now, a girl can’t ask *eitzos* of the *Rav* but she could have her mother or her father ask *eitzos* of the *Rav*, yes. A *shidduch*? Ask *eitzos*. Sometimes the *Rav* will tell you, “Watch out, it’s the wrong one.” Ask for directions on life’s highway. *Az men fregt blundjet*

men nit – If you ask questions, you won’t get lost. I’ll say that again, *az men fregt blundjet men nit* – If you ask questions, you won’t get lost!

You Need to Find Someone

Think; when is the last time you asked for advice? When was the last time you had a conference with a *talmid chochom*? Could be you have nobody; it’s a great error – find somebody!

Many times women call me up; they’re having trouble with their husbands. I say, “Can you send him to me?”

“He won’t come.”

“Does he have a *Rav*?”

“No.”

“Where does he *daven*?”

“He *davens* in fifteen different places.”

It’s a big error that many Orthodox Jews today commit. On Shabbos they travel around. They load their *tallis* underneath their coat and they’re off for adventures in a new synagogue. Friday night he *davens* in one place, Shabbos morning someplace else; every week in another *shul*.

Don’t Follow Your Heart

And therefore you always gain if you attach yourself to somebody – even if you go to a little *shtiebel* and there’s a little *rebbe* in the *shtiebel*, even that is a tremendous benefit for you – a benefit in both worlds. At least *somebody* is your mentor, your guide. Don’t make decisions until you speak to him first. Many problems are solved so easily if you get advice from somebody. **שָׁמַעַתְּ לְעֵצָה חָכָם** – A *chacham* is one who listens to *eitzos* (Mishlei 12:15). Shlomo Hamelech was not talking to little boys. He’s talking to adult men. Yes, even you. You must make for yourself a teacher.

Everybody needs a mentor. Everyone needs a *mashgiach*. You need a supervisor in life. You don’t want it? Too bad; you need it because everything in life is subject to whims and many times great errors are committed mainly by a whim – whim means a very small emotion – decisions are made on the basis of whims instead of on Torah *eitzos*, on good advice.

The Barefoot Shoemaker

Good advice does not mean a marriage counselor. It doesn't mean a psychologist. Unless it's a very *frum* Jew, a learned man, keep away from them like you keep away from a rattlesnake.

You're shy, you overeat, you're nervous, so you think "I'll go to them." The psychologists are not capable. I happen to know; I have a long experience with people, people who are *shlemazolos*, people who themselves are shy, they have an inferiority complex and they overeat, and what do they do? They became psychologists. Now they have a certificate on the wall and they sit in an office and they give advice to people.

The world says *ah shuster geit buhrfus*. You know what it means? A shoemaker goes barefoot; a tailor wears rags. It means people who give advice to others many times don't know what to do with themselves.

Finding The Right One

It's not so easy to find proper counselors, but the people who have diplomas as counselors, the diploma says this fellow is poison. That's what the diploma says – "We, the State of New York, hereby certify that what this fellow will tell you is a bum steer and he'll lead you to perdition; he'll lead you to the brink. Stay clear of him!" That's what all the certificates mean.

Find a learned man. Someone who learned a lot of *gemara* for instance. In the *gemara* there are hundreds and hundreds of stories and it tells you what to do. Mishlei is full of *eitzos*. If he learned Mishlei he knows so many *eitzos* how to get out of difficult situations, how to solve problems. Sometimes they seem impossible to solve and you come to this person who is experienced, he shows you it's so easy to overcome the problem. It's remarkable. Sometimes people are stymied by small things and a person who has experience can tell you. And therefore *Asei lecha Rav v'histalek min hasafek* – and then you won't have any doubts what to do. Of course, you think that you know already. You have no doubts. No, you should know there are doubts. There are doubts all the time.

In general we sum it up like this: **שִׁמְעֵ לְעֵצָה חָכָם** – A person who listens to good advice is a wise man. Now if we would listen just to this piece of advice alone, it would be a tremendous *eitzah*. Because listening to someone who knows the *eitzos* will save you a considerable amount of *tzaros*.

Afterword

There Are Diamonds All Over

Now, these ten *eitzos* from Hakodosh Boruch Hu that we spoke about tonight are all vital for successful living and if you review them whenever you have a chance they'll be wonderful tools for life. But the truth is that if we had the time I could add maybe another thousand. And there are very many that I myself haven't noticed so I cannot point them out to you – but once your mind is aimed at this target, they will constantly pop up here and there; you'll begin to discover them on your own. There are many gems buried beneath the surface and you'll begin to recognize the ways of happy and successful living; of contending with the problems of life, of knowing which path to take at every fork in the road.

וְכָל דְרָכֵי יְרֵכֵי נְעָם וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם, *all the ways of the Torah lead to success*. *Shalom* means perfection in everything. That's what we're learning here – that there is an *eitzah* for almost every contingency in life, only we have to open our ears and listen. **תְּשׁוּעָה בְּרַב יוֹעֵץ** – *there's a salvation in much counsel*; it means if you'll seek advice from the Torah there is salvation in that system. The Torah is called *eitzah vetushiyah*, because counsel that brings successful results is one of the great elements in Torah.

The Place for Advice

And therefore, to take the advice is supremely important, *no less important than doing the mitzvos of the Torah*. And that is the criticism on the nation: "They're a nation that has lost counsel." It means *k'pshuto*; they are lacking in the ability to cope with life because they have forgotten that the Torah is the place to come to for advice. And that's why those words are part of the eternal *Haazinu shira*, the song

that we're expected to sing to ourselves throughout history to remind us of where we've gone wrong.

And that's why you'll remember that I said in the beginning of the lecture that the *possuk* in our *parsha*, **בִּי גוֹי אֲבָר עֲצוֹת הַיָּמָה**, is not only a criticism – it's an *eitzah* like everything else. Because there's nothing more that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants than for His children to be successful. And the great happiness of living in this world successfully, of knowing how to navigate all the bumps of life as you make yourself into an *ish shaleim*, is available only to the Torah nation. We look into the Torah – the *Torah sheb'ksav* and the *Torah sheba'al peh* – and we find all the models for successful living.

That's what it means to be a Torah nation – we listen to the advice of Hakodosh Boruch Hu and we become the *goy malei eitzos*, the nation that finds everything it needs in the storehouse of good counsel, the Torah that Hashem gave us.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגידך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**Why did Hashem create sleep
if it's such a waste of time?**

A:

Why did He create hunger? It's a waste of time to eat! Why did He create the necessity to go to the bathroom? It's also a waste of time!

It's a good question – I'll tell you why. Hakodosh Boruch Hu made this world for the purpose of recognizing Him. Now, how can people recognize Hashem when they're so busy in this world? You're thinking only of your own affairs and you forget about Hashem. So Hashem says, "I'm going to remind you of Me." And so, you get hungry. You have to eat; you need food and then when you get a piece of bread: "Oh, I thank You Hashem, what would I do without the bread?! I can't live without bread." And the bread causes you to be grateful and to love Hashem; now you're fulfilling your purpose in the world.

Let's say, a person is tired; he's very tired and his body gets worn out. And now he needs sleep to feel rested. Are you going to just sleep like a cat sleeps? So Hashem says, no. If you're able to go to sleep, you have to thank Hashem for that. Some people can't sleep; some people are sick and they can't sleep. Sleep is a blessing and you have to thank Hashem for the sleep. That's why He makes you tired. Say it with your mouth: "*Ah geshmakeh pleasant night's sleep!*" It's better than eating the most delicious things! In the morning you get up, and you're refreshed, you're a new person. **מזורה אני לפניך** – "I thank You, Hashem." So the sleep is the for purpose of causing people to be more grateful to Hashem.

That's only one of the benefits of sleep. There are other benefits too, but this is one of the benefits of sleep that is included in the great program of making people more perfect in this world.

TAPE # 598