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CRUMBLING SKYSCRAPERS

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Part I. The Brothers' Hidden Mistake

The Dangerous Tattletale

When I was in Europe I was speaking once to an old *melamed* in the town where I was staying and he was telling me stories about the days of his youth. And among other things he was telling me about how the Jewish community dealt with *mosrim*, informers, in those days.

You have to know that the Russian government always was looking for ways and means of tormenting the Jews with unjust laws; and if somebody would be found transgressing one of the laws of the government, he could lose his life. And so the *moser* – the Jew who was willing to inform the government against his fellow Jews – was considered a danger, a serious peril to Jewish lives. That's what we say every day וְלִמְלָשִׁינִים אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה. It's a special *tefillah* against the *malshinim*, against government informers.

Drowning in the Mikveh

So this old *melamed* was telling me he remembers when he was still a young man how there was a *moser* in the nearby town of Verneh – that’s where the famous Warner brothers come from, from Verneh; they were from the same family as this *moser* – and the *moser* was judged and it was decided to get rid of him.

So this *moser* used to go to the *merchatz* on erev Shabbos, to the *mikvah*, and they drowned him in the *mikvah*. It was the *psak* of *rabbonim*. They pondered the situation; they weighed the options and it was decided that this was the best solution. What can you do? You have to save the Jewish nation. It was *pikuach nefesh*.

Now, you have to understand that this wasn’t just a European tradition from the medieval times; it was the common sense procedure of an ancient Jewish nation: a troublemaker, a loose cannon, can’t just be left to his own devices. If he’s a danger to the Jewish nation then he has to be taken care of. And an emergency situation requires an emergency solution.

Yosef: A Peril

And that brings us to Yosef Hatzaddik; that’s what happened with Yosef. Because it’s a question that bothers everyone. Why were Yosef’s brothers so opposed to him? It’s a puzzle to everyone. וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ – *They hated him!* (Bereishis 37:4). So much that they wanted to get rid of him, to kill him. How could they think of such a thing? They were *tzaddikim*, after all.

The answer is what we’re talking about now: they considered him a serious peril to the family. After all, it was something very strange – he was always coming to their father and giving bad reports; always discovering certain flaws in his brothers’ behavior which he constantly reported to their father.

Now, the house of our Avos was a house of humility – nobody in this family ever cared for glory or ever sought power. And now all of a sudden in this humble home the brothers saw a snake growing up. A younger brother willing to go to the father with reports in order to besmirch his siblings! And so the brothers began to suspect that Yosef was building up a case for himself that someday he should take over the leadership of the family.

And he had dreams of grandeur too, hallucinations of becoming great! “A vision came to me at night, that all of you were bowing down to me.” Now we know that very often a dream comes at night about certain

subjects that you think about in the daytime. If you think too much about it in the daytime, that dream comes at night to you. “So what’s he dreaming now,” the brothers said, “that we’ll bow down to him? It means he’s walking around all day long with these ideas, hopes, plans of subjecting us, of keeping us underfoot.”

Fulfilling the Dreams

And in addition, *he’s telling us his dreams!* Why is he telling us? Let him keep it to himself. Only that he’s imagining himself a prophet! He’s taking his ambitions and he’s portraying it in the form of prophecy. Otherwise, he wouldn’t tell them to us; it’s because he believes implicitly in his dreams.

It happened once: “You’re all going to bow down to me!” It happened again a second time. “You’re all going to serve me, and our father along with you!” So they saw he’s a false prophet, a man who’s going to pursue his ambitions.

Now how can a younger brother ever hope to gain control over his older brothers? There’s only one way – it’s the way of Roman elections. You know how the Romans elected a new emperor? By the stiletto.

It means he’ll have to slaughter his older brothers and he’ll grab everything. Absolutely, that’s what Yosef is planning. And so here, all of a sudden, there was growing up in their midst a viper, a peril to the future of this great holy nation. What’s going to happen to us? He’ll destroy the family for the sake of fulfilling his ‘dreams’, his grand ambitions! A prophet, you have to know, is obligated to do whatever he can to make his prophecy come true. And that means this self-declared prophet is a peril to the future of the family.

The Beis Din Rules

So they sat and they thought this over a long time. The Torah doesn’t tell us all details but they pondered and debated for a long time! What shall we do with him? And after weighing all the options they came to the sober conclusion that this wasn’t mere sibling rivalry; it was self-preservation, *pikuach nefesh*. And therefore, with heavy hearts, they decided that it was their duty, no matter how difficult it would be, to get rid of him. They had no alternative: either kill or be killed.

It was a Torah decision, a *psak halacha*: הִבָּא לְהַרְגֵהוּ הַשָּׂבִים לְהַרְגוֹ – If you know that someone is coming to kill you, you don’t wait till he’s already standing on top of you to begin defending yourself. You set your alarm for early in the morning, before he gets up, and you kill him first! (Sanhedrin

72a). And so they weren't about to sit back like *lemelach* and let this little schemer make his dreams come true – over their dead bodies.

The Righteous Brothers

And so when they concluded that it was a mitzvah to kill him they were a hundred percent certain that they had made a righteous decision. If you're in doubt, even a little bit, are you going to pass such a tremendous sentence on a brother? So you must say they were convinced that they were right.

Only that at the last moment, in their mercy, they didn't carry it out. They decided they could save their skin without killing him, by selling him in slavery. A slave in the ancient days wasn't a man who would have any grand ambition. There were no abolitionists in those days and so slavery was forever. Once he'd be sold and carried out of the country, he's finished; no more danger from him.

And so it's important to understand that Yosef's brothers had no regrets about what they had done. They were convinced that they were following the proper procedure. The truth is that they thought that executing him was what they really should have done; only that in a moment of weakness they yielded, or they had certain considerations to yield, and that's why they were willing he should be sold in slavery. But they were absolutely convinced that they were right. They had heavy hearts of course – Yosef was their own flesh and blood after all – but they had done their duty, no matter how difficult it was. They had no regrets.

Everything Crashes

Now our *sedrah*, Parshas Vayigash, is many years later. And the brothers came down to Egypt to buy grain and they're standing before the *mishneh lamelech* trying to persuade the Egyptian prince that they have no bad intentions, that they're innocent. They're bowing down to him and begging him for mercy.

And then, all of the sudden, he opens his mouth and says אָנִי יוֹסֵף – *I am Yosef* (*ibid.* 45:4).

Yosef?! What Yosef?! How?!

And now, all of a sudden it hit them like a lightning bolt between the eyes. This was *their* Yosef! And he's a prince and they are bowing down to him. They saw that he was a prophet, that what he had said had come true, and they were so overwhelmed that וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָדָמָיו לַעֲנוֹת – *they couldn't even*

speak (ibid. 45:3). When Yosef said two words, “אָנִי יוֹסֵף,” they were dumbstricken; they couldn’t answer.

Do you know why they couldn’t answer? Because they had nothing to answer! All of their *terutzim* and explanations, a big building of justifications, came crashing down.

Self Justification

You know, when you get in a fight with your wife so the first hour you feel bad about it. An hour later and she’s off to work, you feel you’re right. Two hours later, you’re *sure* you’re right. And the more the time passes, the more right you become. After a week you’ve already built a skyscraper of justifications. *Because a human being is always justifying himself.* That’s human nature.

But for Yosef’s brothers it wasn’t only one week. It wasn’t a month or even a year. This story is twenty two years later! It means that for more than twenty years the brothers had been justifying their decision, their opinion of themselves and of their brother, building up and reinforcing that building of self-righteousness. And so it was some edifice by this time! It was a skyscraper of righteousness! Absolutely they were right! Not just right; righteous! 100% righteous!

But when they heard those two words “אָנִי יוֹסֵף,” the whole thing came crashing down and collapsed into dust. They had a thousand answers! They could have written long Torah *maarachas* justifying themselves! But they realized in one moment that the answers were worthless; they weren’t justifications that would stand up under the light of the truth.

Because when Yosef suddenly opened his mouth and said “אָנִי יוֹסֵף,” that knocked them over. All of a sudden they discovered in a flash that he was a *navi*, chosen by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That they had bowed down to him twice like Yosef had prophesized once upon a time. And they had laughed at it. “Should we come and bow down to you?!” They were laughing at him and now they saw it came true. Now they saw the reason for the opposition was not the big edifice of righteous justification, of self defense to rescue themselves from his plan. No! It was something else, other more hidden motivations. And all of their deliberations – “What should we do with our brother, Yosef? How can we act *l’shem Shomayim* and protect ourselves?” – were a self-deception. The brothers had unwittingly duped themselves.

Part II. Mankind's Hidden Mistake

The Open Secret

Now here, with this story, we come to one of the great secrets of the Torah and of living successfully in this world.

You'll say if it's a great secret how do I know it? The answer is I was told – I had great *rebbis* in Slabodka and they told it to me. Not to me alone; they were saying it to everybody, and I was there listening. And I'm going to share the secret with you now so listen prayerfully.

They were quoting the Alter of Slabodka and he was talking about the movements that were taking the world by storm in his days. And he said that we think that all the movements that began in the world were started because of an idea, an inspired ideal. Somebody sat down and thought out a new idea and he thought the idea was so righteous and so correct – 'so righteous' means it was decent and *yashar* and 'so correct' means it was mathematically perfect – and he decided that's the way things should be and therefore he started a movement.

The Alter's Jest

So the Alter *zichrono l'vrachah* said no. "All the movements that were started in the world," he said, "were started because of *middos*, because of some character flaw." And just as a jest to bring out the point he said the one who started the vegetarian movement, to avoid eating any living things, was a man who owned a *milchige* restaurant. He had a dairy restaurant and in order to drum up business he started a movement that it's wicked to slaughter animals and eat their flesh.

But the *chiddush* of the Alter is more than that. What's even more is that the *milchige* man didn't even know that was his reason! He didn't know he was doing it for business, for money. He sincerely believed that he was doing it *l'shem Shomayim*, on principle.

Now, you should listen with great *derech erez* to that jest because it sums up one of the great secrets of history – not only the history of the world but the history of our private lives. *Nothing* is done with pure *seichel*. *Nothing* is done with pure rationale. There is always some motivation of character that is a catalyst. It's either anger or retaliation or it's envy or a desire for glory or a desire for power or laziness or some other inclination.

Character Catalysts

Now, among the *umos haolam* there's nothing to talk about. Even the biggest events, the biggest decisions, are made because of character flaws.

If there was a war to be free of England – I’m speaking, not the Alter; I’m adding to his words – if there was a war to be free of King George and his taxes, don’t believe it that was the only reason. That’s just something to tell the children, something to put in the history books after the fact. But actually entirely different motivations caused the war; traits of character, flaws in character.

When George Washington mustered his troops to cross the Delaware I don’t know if he spent hours studying his motivations. They were hotheads, people who were looking for glory and other things. Now, I’m not saying you have to tell this outside, to good American gentiles, but there’s no question the entire Revolutionary War was not caused by idealism.

Now I’m not blaming our country here for going into war because sometimes wars must be fought. I’m not saying pacifism is a principle – even pacifism you have to know is a result of character flaws. And it could be that there were very good motivations too to fight the Revolutionary War; mixed in among the hidden motivations and character flaws, could there were good motivations too. Why not? But that’s the great secret however – *everything* is done because of some submerged character motivation, some hidden character flaw.

Everyone Has Character Flaws

And what we’re learning from this week’s *parsha* is that this secret is such a truism, such an axiom of life, that no one is immune from this sickness. Not only Paul Revere and George Washington; everyone, even the best ones, are making errors because of character flaws. The *shivtei Kah* after all were *tzaddikim gemurim*; they were very great people. We, not so much. And so, this story is told by the Torah – it’s an interesting story too but there’s something more important than that – the Torah is teaching us this story as a model of how man thinks, the justifications that are always creeping into his mind.

Because even when it began to enter their mind that maybe something is wrong – this was before Yosef revealed himself but they saw that trouble was brewing; the *mishneh lamelech* was acting very harshly with them; they saw how he was making *chumros* on them, all kinds of demands on them and they began to suspect that Hashem was punishing them – and they said, הַאֱלֹקִים מְצָא אֶת עֵוֹן עַבְדֵיךָ – “Hashem has discovered our crime, מָה נַצְטַדֵּק – How can we justify ourselves?” (*ibid.* 44:16), even then they didn’t recognize the truth about themselves.

The Right Explanation

I'll tell you an interesting Gemara – now I don't know if my explanation is right or not but for thirty years I've been teaching this explanation so I'll keep on until someone tells me it's wrong.

They said, *מה נצטרך* – “How can we justify ourselves?” They were speaking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu in these words to Yosef and so it seems that they were now confessing that they were wrong: “We have no way of justifying what we did!” But here's what the Gemara in Mesichta Shabbos (105a) says about that. *נצטרך* is *notrikon*; it means that every letter stands for a word. The *nun* means *נכונים אנו* – *we are the right ones*. The *tzaddik* means *צדיקים אנו* – *we are righteous*. The *tes* means *טהורים אנו* – *we are pure*. The *daled* means *דלים אנו* – *we are innocent*. And *kuf* means *קדושים אנו* – *we are holy*.

Now what does that mean? If you're saying a *viduy*, if you're confessing, so where do all these things come in?

But the Gemara – I think – is telling us that even when they said, “Hashem, how can we justify ourselves before You?”, *they were justifying themselves!*

Pious Confession

It's like a Jew on Yom Kippur. He's a pious Jew and he's standing up to say the *Al Cheits*. So he begins with the whole list of sins. He admits he committed adultery and he worked on Shabbos and he killed people; all the things it said there. He knows he didn't do it. I'm sure he feels good about it too. He didn't do these things; a whole list of things that he's innocent of.

So they're saying, “We sinned, *v'nechonim anachnu*, and we're pretty good. We sinned and *u'tehorim anachnu*, we're pretty pure. After all, we did a mitzvah, we wanted to get rid of him. How can we justify what we did but *dakim anachnu*, we are innocent.”

So the Gemara is telling us, don't think that they made such a plain straightforward admission. Everything they said, they didn't really confess that they did something wrong. They went through the motions; a Jew has to blame himself, absolutely. So they did. But deep down in their heart, they still felt they were right. We're *nechonim*, *tzaddikim*, *tehorim*, *dakim*, *kedoshim*, everything.

Until finally the great moment came when the *mishneh lamelech* opened his mouth and said, “אני יוסף,” and then the whole thing exploded. All the justifications, in one second, crumbled into nothing.

A Model for Us

It's a model for the behavior of everybody in this world. If these great men deceived themselves then we surely are deceiving ourselves! And we should all be afraid, terrified, of the day when it'll be revealed to us like it was revealed to the brothers – only then, once we're in the Next World already, it will be *chas v'shalom* too late to make ourselves better.

That's what the Chachomim tells us, that the same thing is going to be with all of us. Because when the great *chochom*, Abba Cohen Bardala, read this *parshah* what was his reaction? **אוי לָנוּ מִיּוֹם הַדִּין אוֹי לָנוּ מִיּוֹם הַתּוֹכָהָה** – “Woe is to us on the Great Day of Judgment in the Next World! Alas to us on the Great Day of Rebuke!” (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10).

Abba Cohen is telling us that we're going to be much more surprised than the brothers. **לְכַשְׁיבּוֹא הַקְּרוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְיִוְכִיחַ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה** – *All the more so, much more than Yosef's brothers were, are we going to be dumbstruck, shocked into terrified silence, when Hashem comes to rebuke each one on the Day of Judgement.*

Because all our lives we're saying, “We're right, we're right and we're right” – in every area of life; our relationship with others, our *avodas Hashem*, our learning, our *mitzvos*, in business – and we're building up skyscrapers of justifications. And even when we say we're wrong and we're wrong and we're wrong, we're thinking we're right and we're right and we're right. But one day, after they put us into the back of the hearse and we'll hear those words, “Ani Hashem!”, the whole building will collapse into nothing.

Visualize the Shock

And that's why the whole story is written in our *parsha*. It's not only for itself – it's also a prelude to the Next World, a picture of the Yom Hadin that's waiting for all of us. When a man passes out of this world, there'll be a final accounting for the way he spent his life and when Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells you, “Chaim, or Dovid, you were this and this”, and you'll understand what He means, you'll be so overwhelmed, so shocked. All your life you have been deceiving yourself and patting yourself on the shoulder and blaming other people, not yourself. **אוי לָנוּ מִיּוֹם הַדִּין** – What will we answer?

And that's why the *seforim* say that it's good from time to time to visualize the picture of the *Maamad Hadin*, the moment that you'll come in before *Beis Din shel Maaleh*, before the great tribunal of judgment.

And so it won't help to not think about it now, to think about cleansing yourself of all the motivations. Because when you stand before Hashem, in the final judgment on the *Yom Hadin*, that dreaded moment when He will

show you straight from the bottom of your heart, “This is the truth that you were thinking about,” “It was because of this and that” you won’t be able to deny it. Those two words, “Ani Hashem” will collapse all of the edifices of righteousness that you built up in your mind for 120 years and in one moment you’ll see how you deceived yourself, how all your excuses are inexcusable, how all your justifications and answers are not justifications and not answers. But it will be too late then.

Part III. Your Hidden Mistakes

The Man is Always Right

Now, this *eitzah* that we find in the *seforim* – from time to time to visualize the picture of the moment that you’ll come in before *Beis Din shel Maaleh*, before Hakadosh Baruch Hu – as important as it is, it’s not enough. Because there’s a big problem that won’t go away: כָּל דֶּרֶךְ אִישׁ יִשָּׁר בְּעֵינָיו – *Every man’s way, every path that he takes, is right in his eyes* (Mishlei 21:2). The most difficult and elusive secret a person will ever have to discover is to discover the truth about himself. And even when he thinks he knows – he thinks he understands his motivations – actually he knows very little.

And that’s all due to one reason: *shochad*, bribery. You know, when a judge receives a gift from one of the two parties that come before him to judge them, he’s *possul* to be a *dayan*. Even a small gift disqualifies him because once he’s been bribed he can’t see the issues clearly. He imagines he’s thinking straight but it’s impossible.

Self-Bribery

But you know what the biggest bribery is? You know what bribe corrupts the mind more than anything else? Self-love. We all love ourselves more than anything else and so everyone is *meshuchad*; he’s bribed by himself. He just loves himself too much and he’s thinking, “I’m the one that’s right.” And no matter what he’ll say, in his heart that’s what he’s thinking.

So here’s a man now who knows all about the great *Yom Hadin*. He takes the advice of the *seforim* and he thinks about it once in a while; he reminds himself that one day he’ll be standing before the *Beis Din shel Maalah* where all the excuses crumble before the truth. And so he wants to judge himself now, in this world, in order to prepare himself. He wants to recognize his motivations and change himself before it’s too late, before he hears those words “Ani Hashem!” The only thing is he can’t do it! He can’t

do it because he's been bought off; he's bribed by his love of himself and therefore he's not capable of recognizing his true nature.

The Unbelievable Chiddush

Unless he starts out with the premise, "Maybe I am wrong." Ohh, that's a tremendous *chiddush!* To suspect yourself?! To suspect that maybe you're wrong, maybe you're full of faults. You may be right – it happens sometimes – but once you admit the possibility that you have motivations, *middos*, that are hidden away, so then a ray of light enters into your *neshamah* and you may discover something.

But it's a very difficult proposition because as much as you'll say it, you don't mean it enough. You don't believe it. And so the most practical solution, the emergency solution, is to hear from others. You need somebody to tell you, "You are wrong! And not just with this. You are wrong most of the time!"

"Oy gevald! I'm wrong most of the time?!" Some people when they hear they're wrong, they go into a frenzy. "Hooohoo. He says I'm wrong. What does he know?" I say 'some people'. Almost everybody. Nobody thinks he's wrong.

A Wife and a Rabbi

And that's why getting married is a good beginning. Marriage is important for many reasons but one of the most fortunate ones is that you have someone to tell you your faults all the time. You know when you get married, when you come to the *chuppah* so everything seems very nice. But you should know you're starting a career of hearing about your faults. She's a very nice wife and you're a very nice husband. Good, very good. But soon you'll start criticizing each other. She'll begin to see all the faults that you were hiding and she'll start criticizing. Of course, if she's diplomatic she'll do it with a politeness, with diplomacy, but whatever it is, she'll do it

And it's a very good experience! Because who else is going to tell you? In the shul nobody will say anything. Your friends in the shul don't care enough about you, and the rabbi, he does, but he's afraid to lose you. You go to a certain *shtiebel*, a little synagogue where the rabbi doesn't have too many *mispallelim* and he welcomes everybody that comes in; he's very happy to see you. So what is he going to say when he sees something wrong in you? Nothing at all, because he needs you. And so you'll hear no criticism.

Now, if you sit and talk the entire time, he doesn't like it and he may even say something about it, but he won't make a big fuss because you'll

run away. He needs you for his *minyán*. So what happens? After years of being in such a place, you become worse and worse.

Chasing Away Jews

There was a time, once I spoke in my *shul*, in my old *shul* many years ago about the necessity of learning. And I said that you should beware of becoming a *beheimah*, because you must learn to be a decent human being. If you don't come to the Gemara lectures, I told them, so you'll live all your lives like a dumb ox, a cow that just eats grass and wags its tail.

You know what happened? Some people left my synagogue and they went to a nearby yeshivah. There they were welcomed with open arms and there they heard no criticism because a yeshivah is not made for the purpose of training *baalei batim*. The yeshivah is a place where boys learn Torah and they need a lot of money. It's a place that must be supported and therefore they were happy when people came to pray in their synagogue and help them out. But never was a word said that could show them any of their faults, that would allow them the slightest suspicion that they weren't perfect in every respect.

Thank G-d For Wives

And so the best thing is a wife. A wife with a sharp tongue? Nothing better. I'm not saying it's fun – to give true criticism is a perfection. It's an art that died out; however, it's also an art to take criticism and that art also died out. But what can we do? We have to improve ourselves so we're willing to get amateurs to criticize us. And even though we're also very much amateurish in accepting criticism we have to do our best because without *tochachah*, without criticism how can a man ever get better? So fun or not fun, the criticism of a wife is the best thing if you're interested in preparing for the Next World. If you have a wife who criticizes you, you should feel it's a big break. You have somebody to tell you the truth.

And if you're not married yet, if you're still a boy or girl in the home, consider yourself lucky if you have a father and a mother who criticize you. You should feel that you're a lucky child indeed. And look forward to a wife who will take over that job. You'll be a fortunate person.

Everyone Needs a Rosie

I'll tell you a little story. I once knew a rich man – I'll call him Chaim; that's not his real name – and everybody in town was afraid of him. When Chaim opened up his mouth he didn't stop talking. He talked and talked because money talks. He owned the *chevra kadisha* and he gave a lot of money to charity. Not from his own – from the *chevra kadisha* money. He

was the boss of the town. He was the president of the big synagogue. He was everything. There wasn't a person in town who could tell him his faults. It was the worst thing. If you'd tell him a fault you were finished. You'd have to move out.

There was only one ray of light and that was Rosie. His wife, Rosie, was the only one who could tell him something. And Rosie did.

So once after Rosie had finished administering the needle a *meshulach* knocked on the door and was speaking to Chaim. And he spoke to him with honor and he listened as Chaim spoke. Chaim was giving advice to the *meshulach*, how to run Torah institutions, and the man listened respectfully.

After the man departed he turned to her. "Rosie," he said, "everybody respects me and asks advice of me. You're the only one who doesn't respect me."

He told me this story later. I couldn't say anything to him. I was thinking, "You're lucky that there's a Rosie around. You're lucky there's somebody to tell you the truth." And the truth is that everyone needs a Rosie.

Beyond the Wife

However, it's not enough. Because who says your wife is an expert? She might be imagining some faults which are not true. And you might be imagining faults in her which are not true. And even if they're not imagined, you believe they're imagined. So in the good old days of the *bayis rishon*, there was a remedy for that – they had *nevi'im*. The *nevi'im* told the truth straight from the shoulder. It was as bitter as gall, sharp like a knife when he told it to you. And people went to the *navi* to hear criticism. It was a wonderful era.

But what can you do today? A person must train himself or herself to be *nichna*, to lower themselves, to humble themselves and search out criticism. That's a statement of the Chovos Halevovos in the Shaar Hakniah: *הַנִּכְנָעַת* – A person who is humbled, *קָרוֹב לְהַשִּׁיג הַחֲכָמָה* – he is more likely to gain wisdom. You hear that? A humble person is more likely to gain wisdom, *בְּהִמְשָׁכוֹ אַחֲרֵי הַחֲכָמִים* – because he is drawn after the wise man. A man who is not arrogant, he's willing to listen, he is the one who is *קָרוֹב לְהַשִּׁיג הַחֲכָמָה*, close to getting *chochmah*. And among other things it means the *chochma* of knowing yourself.

That's what Shlomo Hamelech says, *אֵזֶן שֹׁמְעַת תּוֹכַחַת חַיִּים* – The ear that listens to the rebuke, to the criticism of life, *בְּקִרְבַּי חֲכָמִים תִּלְיִן* – will lodge among the wise (Mishlei 15:31). It means if a man will have an ear that

welcomes criticism, he welcomes the words of the wise, he goes to places where he's told his faults, his motivations, things that he never imagined existed in him.

Hearing the Truth

It happened to me. I wasn't a *nichna* and I didn't have an אָן שְׁמַעַת but I was in a yeshivah in Europe where that's how it was, that's what was expected. And so one day my *rebbe*, Reb Avraham [Grodzinsky], called me into his office and he told me something about myself. He saw right through me and he revealed to me a secret about myself. I'm not going to tell you what it was but he was on the money.

And that's one of the only ways to know the truth about yourself – when you hear it from others. That's the way towards improving yourself. That's the only way; otherwise you'll remain the same all your life,

In fact, you will deteriorate because a man *must* listen – שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל. That's the fundamental attitude of a Jew. A Jew must be a listener. Because the only way a man can ever become anything is by having somebody tell him what is wrong with him and by being interested in ways and means of improving himself. And that's only possible by listening to *da'as* Torah and listening all your life!

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Learning the Truth About Ourselves

In our *parshah*, the *shevatim* were confronted with the stunning truth about themselves, when all their self justifications came crashing down in one moment as they heard “Ani Yosef”. All of us will have a similar moment when we hear “Ani Hashem” and all our motivations in life will become apparent. We can protect ourselves by studying the Shaar Hakniah in Chovos Halvovos and becoming receptive to listening to criticism. This week I will *bli neder* dedicate at least five minutes per day to studying Shaar Hakniah in Chovos Halvovos.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

R-20 – I Am Joseph | **375** – Rebuke: The Way of Life | **740** – Holiness in Marriage | **E-196** – Recognizing Your Motivations | **E-204** – Searching the Soul



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QUESTION

Since it's a father's job to discipline his son, how can he discipline him and also give encouragement at the same time?

ANSWER

Now, this was mentioned here before briefly. Rather than continually knock the son and say, "You're no good," "You're rotten," "You good for nothing," it's better if you give him one smack if you see he's not doing his homework or he doesn't go to the yeshivah or if he was lazy to do his duty.

Whatever it is, but not to call him names. Leave that out! You can force him to do what he has to do. Forcing is not bad, but to give him names, to convince him that he is a failure, to convince him that he's a low character, that's one of the worst things you could do.

And when he does a little bit, make it better than it is; let him feel that there's an incentive to do good. He'll know that there's *kavod*. Sometimes it's worth giving little prizes. Sometimes by little prizes you can give great encouragement.

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