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פרשת כי תבא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Greatness Within

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Part I. Secret Sins

Covenant of Secrets

In this week's *sedrah* we learn about an especial procedure of *brachos* and *klalos* that would take place as soon as the Jewish nation would cross the Yarden into Eretz Canaan (Ki Savo 27:11-26). The whole Klal Yisroel would assemble together near two mountains, Har Grizim and Har Eival, and while facing these two mountains, certain blessings and certain curses would be proclaimed to the people.

Now, when we examine what was said on that occasion we note that only certain details of Torah observance were mentioned. It wasn't a general covenant by which they accepted the entire Torah like they had done at Har Sinai; it was an enumeration of only select iniquities, certain things, and it was specifically for these that the *brachos* and *klalos* were said.

Now, when we study this list we see that the *tzad hasheveh shebahem*, the common denominator between them, is that they are all things that are done in secret. Like it states, “If someone will make an idol, וְשָׁם בְּסֵתֶר – and he’ll hide it somewhere in his possession. Or מִכָּה יַעֲדֵהוּ בְּסֵתֶר – accursed is the one who smites his fellowman in secret; he does harm to a fellow Jew behind closed doors. Also mentioned there among the *brachos* and *klalos* are matters of incest that are committed in the secrecy of the home, and other sins of that nature.

That’s what this list entails, various sins that a person would normally refrain from in public, but when concealed in the privacy of his home, or maybe in a dark alley somewhere, he might feel emboldened enough to do something wrong.

Sin and Shame

Now we know that there’s a *bracha* and a *klalah* for everything in the Torah – anybody who upholds the Torah is *baruch* and he who transgresses is *arur* – and so as an introduction to our subject for tonight we must understand what is the necessity of a special *krisas bris* for *devarim sheb’sseiser*, secret things.

Actually, the reason is immediately apparent to us; because we know that when things are done openly, so the public reacts to prevent them or to inflict punishment and shame on the wrongdoer. A loyal nation stands in the breach to prevent wrongdoing against Hashem and therefore in public it’s not so easy to sin.

You know, today we’re accustomed to seeing Jews sin in public. Irreligious Jews, they have no shame. But it was only seventy years ago [1905] that in all the small towns—even the big ones—nobody would dare sin in public. Let’s say you lived in old Cracow and the Satan came over to you and tried to tempt you, “Take off your head covering.” You can be sure that you’d put up a very big fight because to walk bareheaded in Cracow meant that you were liable to get a broken head! To be a Jew meant you had to act like a Jew — at least in public. There were no two ways about it.

But when it comes to things done in secret, it’s not as simple. When you have the people in the *shtiebel* or the *beis medrash* looking over your shoulder, so that wonderful *middah* of *busha* makes you behave properly; it protects you. But in the privacy of your home you need something more than that. The only way to prevent trouble is by putting people in a frame of mind of fearing Hakodosh Boruch Hu; fearing His curse or desiring His blessing.

The Secret Audience

How else could you prevent incest that's done in a house? How else could you prevent secret injury that people commit by writing poison letters? So many terrible things are done within the four walls of a person's home. A lot of sins can be done without anyone knowing about them. A man can close his window and curtains and say the most wicked things to his spouse in secret. I know about it because people are calling me up on the telephone all the time and telling me stories. But they're done because a person imagines, he hopes, that within the privacy of his four walls it's a secret.

And therefore, those things that are not revealed to the public eye require a bigger incentive; they require more instruction and more *yiras Shamayim* than anything else. Even stealing is something that could more readily be apprehended. Injuring somebody's property, striking a fellowman – many sins are overt acts which can have witnesses and accusers, so there's a natural impediment. But all those things that can be done secretly must be controlled by a man's conscience.

That's the great subject that the Chovos Halevavos tells us about in his Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh. He makes the following statement there: **מה שיעשה בצנעא יהיה כמו בפרהסיא** – *What a man does in secret should be the same as if he was doing it in public.* I'll repeat that because it's a statement that we should memorize and repeat to ourselves as often as possible: "What a man does in secret should be done as if it was being done in the presence of a grandstand full of people."

Use Your Audience

You know, when you're in the *beis haknesses* and you're standing *shmoneh esrei* and you have people looking at you – or you suspect they are – and you have your *tallis* over your head and maybe you're wearing your *gartel* too, so even without too much thinking, without too much incentive, you're interested in putting up a good show. But suppose you're home and there's no audience; you're sitting at your breakfast table and you're saying *birchas hamazon* after the meal. So who will know if you rush through it a little quicker than usual? Who will know if you are daydreaming; glancing at something or flipping through pages of the magazine while you say the words?

And so the test of a loyal Jew is how he behaves when nobody is around. Are there things you do in the privacy of your home that you wouldn't do in front of an audience? When nobody is looking, how do you make *asher yatzar*? What kind of *shehakol* do you make when nobody is

watching you? Of course when you have company, you make a *shehakol* like a patriarch. There's an audience!

By the way, you shouldn't disdain the opportunity of an audience. You should utilize it. You know, when I have guests at my table I thank them; I let them know that because of them I said the *birchas hamazon* so much slower. Why not? At least when you have an audience, you should make some accomplishment within yourself. But the person who is able to live in secret as if there's an audience – and there is an audience; Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a great audience – that man is fulfilling the true service that a Jew is expected to produce in his lifetime.

And that's why the Chovos Halevavos tells us, "Have in mind that you're surrounded with a congregation of Jews and they're witnessing the way you're thanking Hashem for your bread or the way you're speaking to your spouse."

The Nation Succeeds

Now it's not easy because after all it's in the privacy of your home – it takes training for a person to achieve that. And especially when we want an entire nation to raise themselves up to that level. After all, the Am Yisroel is not made up of only *tzadikim* and *chassidim*; it's a nation of regular people too, all types of people, and we want everyone to fulfill the Torah – all of it.

And therefore we understand the necessity for this great gathering where the whole Am Yisroel assembled and there were curses given against all those who do hidden sins and blessings for those who refrain. It was most necessary and urgent to put *brachos* and *klalos* for these things because you cannot have a pious nation unless it's a nation that fears Hashem.

Of course, if you read the Chumash superficially and you don't think about the words – if you don't take the time to make that picture in your mind of the entire nation listening prayerfully and fearfully to the *brachos* v'*klalos*, so it won't help you much; but that's the purpose.

You have to know, in the olden days when the Torah was read in the *beis haknesses*, everybody was duly impressed. It wasn't merely a formality, something that was said by rote by the *baal korei*. People listened and it entered their hearts and even the simplest kind of Jew, the most illiterate Jew, was impressed that the sins that are committed in secret have a terrible curse attached to them! A curse was pronounced on two mountains where the whole Klal Yisroel was assembled! He couldn't forget that.

And it succeeded! We became a nation that serves Hashem in private just like in public. I always tell you the same story, but it's a good story to tell. There's a little boy who ate a *fleishige* meal and he wants some ice cream. There's ice cream in the refrigerator. Nobody's home – he's all by himself. He looks at the clock. Not yet; he can't eat the ice cream yet. A little boy, he's waiting for the clock to turn until six hours and then he'll eat the ice cream. A little boy! That's how Am Yisroel is brought up – in the secrecy of the home we are just as loyal as out on the street.

A Pure Nation

It's like the gentile once said to a Jew; it's reported in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a). He said he doesn't believe that the Jews are sincere when they say they observe *taharas hamishpacha*. "Who is there to supervise that?" That's what the goy said – he didn't believe it's possible. How could you enforce that?

And so the Jew told him a *possuk* from Shir HaShirim, a phrase. סִנְיָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים – *We are fenced in by flowers*. The *goyim*, they have to be fenced in with barb wire maybe; but we're not fenced in by wire or by walls with guards; סִנְיָה – *We are fenced in*, בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים – *by a hedge of roses*. What are the roses? The roses are the words of the Torah that the Jewish nation loves; our devotion to the Torah, that's what fences us in.

Actually the Torah says וְסָפְרָה לָּהּ – *she counts*. The woman counts the days before she becomes pure and permissible to her husband. And the *Chachomim* (Kesubos 72a) say what does it mean וְסָפְרָה לָּהּ, that she counts *for her*? The word לָּהּ is superfluous. It should say, "She counts," and that's all. "She counts *for her*" means וְסָפְרָה לָּהּ לְעַצְמָהּ – *she counts alone*. Her husband doesn't have to count. He relies entirely on her integrity. So every Jewish woman was the guardian of the *kashrus* of the home in every respect.

Forged on Grizim and Eival

And this we know that the Klal Yisroel observed. It's not a question, did they observe? We know for certain that they observed. The whole Klal Yisroel! Not only the good ones. Everyone! The Gemara (Niddah 33b) tells that the Tzedukim, the Sadducees – they were wicked men by and large. They were enemies of the *Chachomim* and they committed big crimes against their fellowmen; they trampled on the people in their quest for power. But we know that the wives of the Tzedukim came to the *Chachomim* and asked them *shailos*; they asked for decisions in Hilchos Tahara. Which means that even the worst of our people observed these private laws.

Now that's hard for a gentile to understand because the only thing that'll prevent him from carrying out his desires is the police, a big Italian policeman with a baton. Because his conscience alone won't be much of a help in fending off temptation. It could be in individual cases, with some select people of noble character it could happen. But to make a rule for a nation, for a *klal*, and to expect rank and file, that everybody should obey things that can't be enforced, that would be improbable or impossible.

But for the Am Yisroel, that's the way it had to be. And that was the reason for this special covenant on *devarim sheb'seiser*, secret things, that was made on Har Grizim and Har Eival. It was necessary because secret things need more emphasis; they require more of a *bris* than overt things. And by means of fear of Hashem and knowing that we are under His watchful eyes wherever we are, that's how we became a nation.

Part II. Secret Greatness

The Ignorant Historian

Now, if we'll seek an illustration of how our people practiced this principle of fearing Hashem *baseiser*, we don't have to go far. We find an especial book of the Tanach devoted to that subject, an entire *sefer* called the Sefer Shoftim. It's a *sefer* that has been greatly misunderstood, but if we study it properly we'll see that this book is a history of the innate loyalty of the Am Yisroel. About how the Am Yisroel served Hakodosh Boruch Hu out of their own conviction with true and genuine piety, even when not in the public eye.

When we study this *sefer* of Shoftim, we note a recurrent phrase and it's exactly this phrase that has misled people and has caused them to misunderstand the entire *sefer*. The phrase goes as follows: **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל** – *In those days there was no king in Yisroel*; **אִישׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל בַּעֲיֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה** – *every man did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6).

And so here is one historian – I won't say his name – he wrote a thirteen volume Jewish history and he said like this: "The generation of the Shoftim was one of the lowest eras of our people; like it states openly, 'Every man did what was right in his eyes.'"

This writer learned *pshat* like this: he said that in those days there was no king in Yisroel, no one to enforce the Torah laws, and therefore each man did whatever he wanted. "Every man did what was right in his own eyes!" So here you have it black and white, he says; they were a lawless people and the entire era is therefore stamped as a most disorderly era.

A Book of Righteousness

However, *daas Torah* is not so. Now when we say *daas Torah*, it doesn't necessarily mean the *daas* of the *lamdanim* because there aren't many Torah scholars today who are informed on the subject. Actually many are severely misinformed because they followed the simple meaning of a number of statements which they learned in their childhood and they came to the same conclusion as this no good historian who said that it was a very low generation.

And therefore instead of making our own opinions which could mislead us, we ought to listen to the words of the *Chachomim* about this statement **אִישׁ הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה**. After all, the Sages of the Talmud were much closer than the modern historians to these events. And besides, the *Chachomim* are the only ones who are truly capable of assessing, gauging and explaining these events. So let's see that era through *their* eyes.

There's a *possuk* in Shmuel Beis (1:18) that states, **הִנֵּה כְּתוּבָה עַל יֶסֶפֶר** הַיֵּשֶׁר – It is written in *Sefer HaYashar*, *The Book of Righteousness*. Now we're not going to discuss what he's saying there, but what interests us is what exactly is this Book of Righteousness that Shmuel Hanavi is talking about? And the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a) says **סֵפֶר הַיֵּשֶׁר זֶה סֵפֶר שׁוֹפְטִים** – *The Righteous Book is the book of Shoftim*. And why is it called The Righteous Book? Because it says there **אִישׁ כָּל הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה** – every man did what was righteous in his eyes.

So it's an upside down world! Here is a verse that people cite as a proof of the lawlessness of that generation – “Each one did what is right in his own eyes” – and the Gemara tells us, “No! That exact verse is the one that tells us that it was the most righteous era because every man did what was right in his eyes!”

That changes everything. It's an eye opener because now we have to read the *possuk* all over again. This time we read it the way the Sages read it: **אֵל מֶלֶךְ בִּישְׂרָאֵל** – In those days the Jewish people did not need a king. They wouldn't stand for a king who would force them to do certain things because they didn't require it! **אִישׁ כָּל הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה** – Every man was loyal to the real King, Hashem, and everyone did what he considered right!

Your Stomach's Eyes

The historian, when he read that verse he put in his own meaning. He thought it means like people say today, “I'll do what's right in my eyes;” even though he knows it's wrong but he wants to do it anyhow. But that's all wrong. The verse is saying “each man did what is right in his eyes”

because he used his conscience. He didn't follow his passions, his desires, his inclination. No! That's not what's right in his eyes! That's right in his stomach. "Right in his eyes" means that each man did what his conscience told him is right. Each man did what in his eyes was right in the Eyes of Hashem.

That was the greatness of that era. It was 369 years, more or less the era of the Shoftim, and throughout that time **אין מלך בישראל**, they didn't have a king *because they didn't need one*. Not because they weren't developed enough to have a king. That's how some people, strangers to the Torah, try to explain the subject. "They were still a nomad people or an agricultural people in the first stage of development and therefore they hadn't yet arrived at the stage of monarchy."

But if you look at what the Torah tells us and what's written elsewhere in Tanach, we see that all around them everybody had kings. Individual cities had kings. There were tens of kings in Canaan, every little town had a king. Monarchy was a firmly established institution and our people lived among them for four hundred years. So if the Am Yisroel was without a king it wasn't because they weren't developed enough. It was because they were so super-developed that they didn't want and didn't require a king.

Nation of Kings

Why did Sedom need a king? Why did Yericho need a king? Because **איש את רעהו חיים** – *if not for the fear of a government, אֶלְמֶלֶךְ מוֹרָאָה שֶׁל מַלְכוּת – *a man would devour his fellow man alive* (Avos 3:2). If there's no king, no strong authority, people go wild.*

You know, in some countries in the olden days, when the king died they had to choose a new king – they didn't have a law that the children inherited – and sometimes it took months before a new king was chosen. That's how it used to be in Poland once upon a time. What happened? In the times of interregnum, it means the period between the kings, there was all kinds of disorder, all kinds of crime and tzaros. When the king was finally elected, *boruch Hashem!* It began *shalom u'brachos*.

It's a blessing to have law and order. You see what happens today when the government is weak and the streets are frequented by criminals. That's why we like policemen who carry billy clubs. We like that they should build big jails. We like the electric chair. We want the electric chairs should be working day and night; there are so many customers that deserve it. That's the function of a king, of a government.

And therefore, since the function of a king was to maintain and to enforce the Torah, in the times of the Shoftim the Bnei Yisroel didn't need it because everybody strove to do what he thought was right in the Eyes of Hashem. They were a great nation, capable of governing themselves. It would have been an insult to them to have a king. "I'm on the job!" That's what every individual was thinking – he was king of his own behavior. He was a government who enforced Torah righteousness on himself.

Studying Law

The Torah was their Constitution; I say "Constitution" *lehavdil elef havdalos*. The American Constitution is not a document that people study and obey. Did you ever see people getting together in America, *chabuross*, *shiurim* studying the Constitution *l'shem mitzvah*? Sometimes you must study it to pass a high school test perhaps, but to get together to study the Constitution in order to fulfill the Constitution, such a thing is unheard of.

The Constitution is studied so that lawyers can find ways and means of getting around it. Wicked judges use the Constitution in order to take their own filthy ideas and find ways of twisting and stretching and finagling until they find things in there that nobody intended.

But our Constitution, *lehavdil*, the Torah, Jews get together and study it because that's our life; *ki heim chayeinu*. The Torah, that's our way of living – both outside and in our homes too.

Now, that era of the Shoftim was the time when the character of our nation was hammered out – a nation that would serve Hashem even when out of the public eye. Because eventually they would go out into exile and they'd have to live among gentiles where they'd be subject to every kind of temptation and blandishment and coercion. And in the privacy of your own home, hiding within your four walls, who's going to know what you're doing there?

The Emperor Has No Clout

We should never forget that illustration in the Gemara when a certain sage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, was speaking to the Emperor and he was praising the loyalty of the Jewish people to their G-d.

"Today is Shabbos," he said. "Come up on the roof of the palace and we'll view the Jewish quarter. You'll see that no Jew is cooking in his home." And from the palace roof they looked at the Jewish section of the city and they looked at all the roofs and all the chimneys and there wasn't a single place where fire or smoke was issuing from a chimney in the Jewish quarter.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya told the king, “Make a decree that tomorrow nobody should light a fire in the city of Rome.” The emperor issued a decree and it was promulgated all throughout Rome by public criers that tomorrow there shouldn't be a fire in any stove, in any furnace in all of Rome.

The next day when the decree was already in force the Emperor went up on the roof again with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya and they surveyed the rooftops, the chimneys, and they saw there were a few places in Rome where smoke was coming out of the chimney. They saw here and there, there were some chimneys smoking.

Now it became clear that the Jewish nation lives differently. In their homes they're living according to the Torah. In the Jewish quarter in Rome on Shabbos there was no smoke because the Jewish people don't need a government. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is their government.

Living By His Word

That's how it used to be. The Am Yisroel meticulously kept the Torah. Everybody did. We have to get it into our head. It wasn't so long ago. Up until a hundred and fifty years ago, all over Europe wherever Jews dwelt, the Torah was observed punctiliously. I'm not talking about *shmiras haloshon* or *inyanim* of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, things of *middos*, character. Humans are humans – better people are more observant of these things. But we're talking now about Torah technicalities, *dinim*. And when it came to that, the whole Klal Yisroel observed everything. Even those things that nobody would ever discover were observed, things that were done only in secrecy, the Am Yisroel observed to a “t”.

And that was because we lived according to that *bris* that our forefathers made on Har Grizim and Har Eival. We lived with that commitment that even the things that are done only in privacy and that no one else would ever discover, even these things will be kept and cherished by the Jewish people. That's the secret of our nation, that even in the privacy of our homes, we do “what we know is right in our eyes.” And that's how our nation became a nation.

Part III. Secret Homes

Denying Hashem

Now all of this explains why there's a special blessing for people who fear Hakodosh Boruch Hu *baseiser*. **לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם יָרֵא שְׁמַיִם בְּסֵתֶר** – A man

should always fear Hashem in secret. Because that's the greatness of a man and the greatness of our nation. There's a special blessing for that!

But we know that it wasn't only a blessing that the Am Yisroel heard at that time on Har Grizim and Har Eival. There was a curse too. And that's a question. Why was a special curse delineated? A blessing we understand; you've chosen greatness; you've chosen to be a link in the glorious creation of an eternally loyal people. But why a special curse? A blessing should be enough to encourage the nation. A curse makes it seem like there's something especially wrong with a sin done in secret.

And so we understand that there's something more here. When a man commits a sin in secret it's not only that he's breaking this covenant of a people who "do what is right in their eyes," but he's demonstrating an attitude of very serious consequence. And that's the attitude that *nobody* is looking. And not only is he *demonstrating* that attitude but he is *creating* it and *encouraging* it in his mind. Every time you do something wrong in secret you're ruining your mind more and more because you're practicing up on that attitude that He's not here, that He's not watching *chas veshalom*.

Rashi (Kiddushin 31a) explains that when a man does something wrong in secret, it's בְּאֵמֶר – it's as if he said, "אֵין הַשְׁכִּינָה בָּאֵן – there's no Shechina here." That's what he's thinking in his mind; that's why he does it *baseiser*. He wouldn't have done that sin if Hashem was looking. Impossible! The fact that he did it now is an expression of his feelings that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is not around.

Pushing Hashem Away

But there's something else, something much worse. It's not merely that you're saying the Shechina is not here. You're actually chasing away the Shechina. Because (Kiddushin *ibid.*): כָּל הַעֹוֵבֵר עֲבִירָהּ בְּסִתֵּר בְּאֵלוֹ דִּחַק רַגְלֵי הַשְׁכִּינָה – Anyone who transgresses in secret it's as if he's shoving away the feet of the Shechina. We imagine the Shechina is seated on the throne; הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּסֵאֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם – The heavens are My throne, וְהָאָרֶץ הִרְם רַגְלֵי – and the earth is My footstool. And when this man does something wrong in secret he is *kavyachol* pushing the feet of the Shechina off the footstool. It means he's shoving the Shechina away from this earth. So what's the result of him thinking אֵין הַשְׁכִּינָה בָּאֵן – "There's no Shechinah here"? The result is that He's not there, He's pushed away!

Of course, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is always there. He's מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ and He is everywhere. But the *kedushah* of the Shechinah is no longer close to him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu causes His presence to rest on those people that want His presence to be close to them. קְרוֹב הַשֵּׁם לְכָל קוֹרְאָיו –

Hashem is close to all those who call to Him and want Him to be close. But when there are sinners who disregard the Presence of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, then the Shechinah goes further and further away from the Klal Yisroel.

That's why it's more than just a blessing. It's a terrible curse when people's hearts are devoid of this devotion to Hakodosh Boruch Hu within the privacy of the home because you're pushing Hashem away from your *daled amos*. You're pushing Him away from the Am Yisroel.

Angels of Wood and Stone

And that's why it's especially important to always be aware of Hashem, even in the privacy of your home. Now how to do it, how to work on it, that's the question. It's a big question especially when we come close to Rosh Hashana. You know the Gemara says that when the Day of Judgment comes, all the *malachim* assemble to testify about Man. Every person gets his day in court and all the *malachim* say what they have to say.

Now there are all kinds of *malachim*. Some of the *malachim* are his *mitzvos*. **אָחַד מִצְוָה אֶחָת קוֹנֶה לוֹ פֶּרָקְלִיט אֶחָד** - if you do one *mitzvah*, you're going to get one advocate (Avos 4:11). Those are very important but I want to talk now about a different group of witnesses who are preparing now to speak about you. You'll be surprised who they are. You weren't thinking about these *malachim*. I'm talking about the walls of your house.

There's a verse in Chabakuk (2:11) **כִּי אֶבֶן מִקִּיר תִּזְעַק** - A stone from the wall will cry out from the wall, **וְכַפֵּי יָעֲנֶנָּה** - and a board of wood will reply. So the Gemara (Chagiga 16a) says like this: When a man is concealed from public view behind the four walls of his house, he may think, he may feel that he's free to misbehave. Of course, when neighbors come in to visit he's on his best behavior, but suppose all the windows are closed. That's a good thing by the way - in case you're in a bad temper and want to open your mouth on your wife or your wife wants to open her mouth on you, make sure to close tight the windows. Why should the neighbors get a bad impression? Pull down the shades too - they shouldn't see.

But the Sages tell us that it might help with the neighbors but it won't help on the Day of Judgement. On Rosh Hashana it won't help because the stones and the boards of your house will come in and testify against you. *Mi mei'id*, who testifies against a man on the Day of Judgment? So the Gemara (Taanis 11a) says "*Koros beiso v'avnei beiso*, the beams of his house and the stones will testify." That's what the *possuk* means, "A stone from the wall will call out from the wall and a board of wood, a beam, will open its mouth." They're witnesses.

Now it's not merely a form of speech. The walls, the beams and the ceiling, the ceilings are going to speak up. The floor, the carpet; everything in your house, even the furniture. There are a lot of witnesses and they're all coming to testify against a man or for a man. Nothing will keep quiet.

Use Your Walls

Now, actually it's a puzzle. Because who needs walls when Hashem sees everything anyhow? I need my walls to testify on the Day of Judgment for or against me? I need my furniture to testify? Doesn't Hakodosh Boruch Hu see and know everything Himself? Isn't He a good enough Witness? It's a good *kasha*.

And the answer is that it's not for Hakodosh Boruch Hu these witnesses. He doesn't need them. But *we* need them; because it's difficult for us to live with things that we don't see. We can talk about *malachim* and the Eyes of Hashem and we can believe it too but it's more effective when you know that the walls are watching. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the real Witness, but if you know that the walls are going to testify, so for the sake of your walls you'll behave.

And we shouldn't belittle that! Don't think you're too smart for such things! Because it's not so easy to feel that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking. And therefore the more you make use of those walls, the more effective it is. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

Kimchis' Secret

The Gemara (Yuma 47a) brings that there was a woman, her name was Kimchis, who had an especial privilege. She had seven sons, and all of her seven sons became *kohanim gedolim*. Now to have a son a high priest would make any woman proud. Even if you have a cousin who is a *kohen gadol*, a fifth cousin, you'll tell people about it. And she had seven sons and all of them served as *kohanim gedolim*. That was a record! It was a remarkable thing in our history. Kimchis was the wonder of the nation.

And everybody understood there was something here. It wasn't pull, *protektzia* that got her children so far. There had to be something there, some reason.

And because it was so unusual, the *Chachomim* interviewed her. It was an important question for them. They saw that this was not an accident and so they asked her, "What happened that you had this merit of having seven sons who were high priests?" They wanted to know the story, the backstory.

Well, this is the story. Kimchis said as follows: "מִיָּמִי לֹא רָאוּ קוֹרוֹת בֵּיתִי" – קִלְעִי שְׁעָרִי – All my life my ceiling never saw my uncovered hair." Now in a

woman's own room if she allows her hair to be exposed there's no reason to criticize her, but Kimchis made it her business that even if she had to comb her hair it was always underneath a head cloth. An extreme thing! The ceiling boards never saw her hair. "And because of that I merited such *nachas*." That's what Kimchis was saying.

More Than The Act

But that's not the end of the story. Listen to what the *Chachomim* said about that: "But there were many others who did that and it didn't help them."

We have to understand this exchange. The *Chachomim* didn't accept this? After all, it's a virtue. A woman who is alone in her home, nobody is present, what's wrong if she uncovers her hair? Isn't it an exceptional behavior of Kimchis, a high level of *tznius* that she never allowed her hair to be seen by her ceiling?

But the *Chachomim* weren't impressed. They testified there were many Jewish women who lived that way and they didn't merit such a reward. In the ancient times – not only ancient times; even a hundred years ago, even fifty years ago – there were a lot of women who were very pious, very observant, far beyond the line of duty. "So it can't be that," they said.

"Kimchis," the Sages said, "You were doing more than the mere act of keeping your hair covered. You were thinking too! You were imagining that the ceiling is looking at you."

What the *Chachomim* were saying is that it's not the mere *act* that accomplishes such greatness. Of course, the act on its own is important but you become especially holy, especially great, when you invest thoughts in your acts. True greatness depends how much you invest of your mind.

Walls' Eyes Matter

As much as possible Kimchis was always thinking, "These beams, these boards in the ceiling will someday go testify before the tribunal and they'll be talking about me, all my secrets." And all her life she behaved as if the boards were eyes that were looking at her. She trained herself, day after day, to have *emunah chushis*, a physical actual belief that the ceiling was looking at her. That's how she accustomed herself to the truth that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in the home.

For years and years, Kimchis was not only practicing covering her hair always, but she was creating a mind of **לְעוֹלָם יְהִיא אָדָם יִרָא שְׁמַיִם בְּסֵתֶר** – A man should always fear Hashem in secret.

That's what the *chachomim* meant. "Many people did what you do but it didn't help. But because you *lived* that way, that's what did it. You were creating for yourself a Torah mind and because of that great quality you deserved this great reward."

And that's what we're talking about tonight. The more you use the walls of your home the greater you'll become. The more you remember that your ceiling will be a witness for or against you, the more you'll achieve. It takes hard work but those walls can become your biggest defenders.

And the walls are everything because it's within the walls of your house that men are made! It's within the walls of the house that women are made! It's within the walls of the house that boys and girls are made! Of course, outside in the shul, in the *kollel*, on the street, in the office and the yeshiva and Beis Yaakov, that's all very important. But it's in the secrecy of your home, *baseiser*, that man is tested, and therefore, that is the area that a man must consider the most vital thing: "What will be the opinion, the testimony of the walls of my house on the Yom Hadin?"

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Talk to The Walls

This week I will endeavor to remember this great teaching that man becomes great within the secrecy of his four walls. Each morning I will *bli neder* spend one minute looking at the walls of my home and reminding myself that they are witnesses. And if nobody is looking, in order to make it even more real in my mind, I'll approach the wall and speak to it as if it were an angel preparing to testify about me. "Dear wall, I know that you see everything and that you will carry a report before the heavenly tribunal. I will try to live with that knowledge today and ensure that you have only good reports to bring about me".

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Q:

Is there anything wrong with smoking only one cigarette a day?

A:

If you'll give me a contract that it won't be more than one cigarette, I'll agree. But since you cannot give such a contract, you have to know it's the beginning of a career of chain smoking. Eventually that's what happens.

You have to know that in all things there's a principle: The first step is what's most important. Someday I'll talk about that *bli neder*. The first step! Be careful with that first step!

Let's say you're going somewhere on the street and somebody starts walking with you and he says, "Come into this place with me," and so you walk in with him. You have to know that the first step you just took is the beginning of a career either upward to Hakodosh Boruch Hu or down to Gehinom. It depends where he's taking you. Just one step!

If you look back, you'll see in your career that somebody persuaded you to take one step in the right direction. One step! And therefore the first cigarette is the beginning of the end.

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