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חודש אלול

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Elul Made Easy

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Part I. Difficult Teshuvah

A New Teshuvah

When Chodesh Elul approaches, everyone is talking about *teshuvah*, about repentance, and so just by walking in the Jewish street – I'm talking about the good Jewish street, where there are *yeshivah* men – so we already understand that this is the time to get busy. Just because of the atmosphere, by means of osmosis, we feel that it

can't be pushed off any longer! And therefore, now is the best time to study that subject of returning to Hashem.

The first thing we must make clear when we talk about repenting is that we shouldn't make the common error that *teshuvah* is talking merely about righting some wrongs that you did. No, no; *teshuvah* in that sense is too limited, too hollow. I'm not saying it's nothing; it's very important, but when we talk about real *teshuvah*, we're talking about *shuvu el Hashem*, about returning to Hashem; "*el Hashem*" means that we're trying to begin walking on the road toward Hashem.

It means that we're not merely repenting for things that were done incorrectly; what it really means is to come to Hashem by gaining certain qualities, certain attitudes and practices that were never done before in your life. It means to get better! That's what *teshuvah* actually means — to get better. You're not just traveling through life, doing *mitzvos*, learning Torah — *teshuvah* means you're actively traveling toward Hashem. It's an entirely different type of life.

A Big Job

Now, when you hear something like that, it could be that it already puts a damper on things. Here you thought you were just going to have to say you're sorry and make some amends, or a few changes, and now you're hearing about changing the direction you're going in life. Instead of just being a better Orthodox Jew, we're talking about *shuvu el Hashem* — about getting on the road and starting to travel toward Hashem. That's already a big job; it's a sobering thought.

But along comes the Torah and says it's not so. When the Torah talks about the subject of *teshuvah*, it says: “כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת – This commandment of *teshuvah* that I'm commanding you today is not something that's difficult. לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא – It's not in the sky that you should say, 'How can we go up and get it?' וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא – And it's not across the sea that you have to travel a long distance. כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַיִךְ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ – This thing is very near to you. It's in your mouth and in your heart, which means in your mind, to do it” (*Devarim* 30:12).

So what are we hearing? Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling us that the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* is extremely easy. True, there's a certain new orientation you'll need to take, a new path in life, but don't worry, כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַיִךְ הַדָּבָר, מְאֹד, it's very close to you. It's only a matter of בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ – it's in your mouth, something you should say, and something you should think, and that is sufficient for the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*.

Escaping Danger

Now, we must understand that actually it's not always so. When you're dealing, let's say, with the public like today, you will have many things that people have to be told that *do* require a drastic change in their lifestyle. Sometimes a man must sacrifice his ambitions, his career, for *teshuvah*. He might have to give up his *parnassah*, his profession, and become a pauper. Sometimes you have to move to a different country to save your soul. And why not? Don't people move to save their health? If a man is told that for his health he has to

leave a certain climate and settle elsewhere, even though it means giving up all his friends and family, and giving up his professional practice — what doesn't a man do to save his life? He moves, even if it's across the world, and he understands that it's worth it.

I knew of a case where there was a couple that had a sickly child. And a physician for some reason told them that the child needed the climate of Southern Italy. That was very many years ago, about sixty years ago. I remember that. He needed the climate of Southern Italy. So what did they do? They moved to Southern Italy, that's all. They only had one child. They couldn't let his life be lost, so they moved to Southern Italy. That's some change! They had to find a home. They had to find a new livelihood. But they moved to save their child's life!

Now, a sin is a thousand times worse than sickness. **הָיָה בּוֹרֵחַ מִן הַטֵּבִירָה כְּבוֹרֵחַ מִן הָאֵשׁ**. Just like you flee from fire, so you flee from something that smacks of sin. A sin is extremely perilous, and when it comes to peril, you run away. And so, let's say you live way out near Bangor, in some country place in Maine, and you see your child is losing his religion. There's only one thing to do. Drop everything and come back to Brooklyn. You have no option! You can't put your child in *sakanah* of losing his life! People have only one life to live! And you see people are being lost constantly! Constantly people are going lost because they don't run away from sin.

Saving Your Life

A man called me up long distance, a *frum* man, married, who is working in a certain place. He says

there's a young lady there that took a fancy to him. And he's somewhat perturbed. What should he do?

So I said, "Drop that job immediately! Don't report for duty anymore!"

He's hemming and hawing. "It took me three years to find this job, and it's a good salary."

"It makes no difference," I told him. "You're in great peril! You can't afford to flirt with something worse than death!"

I had a case once where a woman told me in confidence that the Italian bachelor next door speaks to her every day, and she's friendly with him. So I said, "Drop everything and take the first plane to Florida, and don't come back anymore. Let your husband stay here to arrange all your affairs, and when he's finished let him follow you to Florida. You're in great danger if you don't do that!"

Let's say a mafia man called you up and said, "I'm coming to your house tonight because you didn't pay up, and I'm going to take care of you. I'll bring along the cement. I'll see that you have a kimono made of cement."

Are you going to wait for him to knock on your door? You'll take the first plane to Mexico, even if you'll never be able to come back again. And an *aveirah*, you have to know, is much worse than a mafia man!

Save Your Soul

And so we see that sometimes the most drastic changes are required. And if it's required, we do it! Loyal Jews will take the most extreme steps to save themselves,

even if it means becoming a refugee. A refugee drops everything. He leaves all his clothing in the house. He runs out of the house in the middle of the night, and he runs down the street as far as he can to get away from his home where peril threatens. And he makes up his mind, "I'll never come back again to that dangerous place. I don't want to encounter the mafia man in my house! If I come back there, my life is over!"

You must do everything in your power to save yourself! And so, too, sometimes for certain *aveiros* it's necessary to make drastic changes in one's life. And certainly, he should do it. He shouldn't hesitate because if a man can save his life, if he can still salvage and achieve something in this world, he must do it. Everything is worth the sacrifice to rescue the rest of your days, the remaining years that you have. Even elderly people move to other countries in order to gain a few more years; surely they should do so to save their souls.

Part II. Easy Teshuvah

Teshuvah for the Righteous

But we're not going to talk now about such drastic changes, about people who are drowning in big sins and need to make that type of *teshuvah*. After all, when Moshe Rabbeinu was telling the Am Yisrael about the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*, cajoling them and warning them about returning to Hashem, you have to picture the circumstances. It was in the Midbar, and the people

were all *shomrei Shabbos*. Everybody ate kosher, and everybody kept *taharas hamishpachah*. There was no question about anyone doing a sin in the Midbar that others could notice. That was out of the question.

Even a hundred years ago, in a small Jewish town or a big Jewish city — in Vilna, let's say — it was impossible for a Jew to walk through the street without a hat. He wouldn't survive. Every Jew went to the *beis haknesses*; there wasn't a Jew who didn't put on *tefillin*. It was the national practice for the Jewish people to keep *kol haTorah kulah*. And in the Midbar, certainly everybody kept everything! And so the question arises, what talk of *teshuvah* is there when everybody is perfect?

And the answer is that *absolutely* there is talk of *teshuvah*. There's a lot of talk! Because *teshuvah* means something entirely different than you imagined. Doing *mitzvos* is the minimum that's required of a Jew. It doesn't make you special; it's not your great achievement in life.

More Than the Minimum

It's like a man who walks in the street naked, and another person is clothed in shorts, or in nothing but undergarments. Now, the man who is wearing shorts looks over at the naked fellow and he might feel extremely dignified. "Look how important I am! I'm dressed in *bigdei yom tov*, *bigdei malchus*." This fellow is only wearing shorts, but he looks at his naked friend and he imagines himself to be dignified.

When comparing yourself to Jews who do nothing, certainly you might deceive yourself into thinking that

you're good, that everything is fine. But in those days, everybody was clothed in *mitzvos*. That was the bare minimum. Everybody did everything. And still, Moshe Rabbeinu was telling them that there was so much *teshuvah* to be done. Because just doing *mitzvos* is not everything. Actually, it's just the beginning. You still need a big *teshuvah*.

And therefore, right now we are addressing an audience of Orthodox Jews, and everybody keeps everything. All of you are *tzaddikim* who should be נְכֻתֵּינִי וְנִחַתְמִין לְאַתֵּר לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְלִשְׁלוֹם. You're all good Orthodox Jews and so we're not going to talk about sins that you hear about in the camp outside of the Orthodox. We won't talk about anything that's severe in the eyes of the *hamon am*, that even the multitude will agree is a sin, things that require the most drastic changes. No, we'll talk about things that even the most Orthodox can do to come closer to Hashem, opportunities to fulfill *v'shuvu el Hashem*, to start walking on that path of greatness, of coming closer to Hashem.

A Great Punishment

Now, in the Torah it states that this type of *teshuvah* is not difficult. הוּא רְחוּקָה וְלֹא נִפְלְאוֹת הִיא מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא נִפְלְאוֹת הִיא מִמֶּנִּי — It's not far away from you. הוּא לֹא מֵעַבְרָ לִי — You won't have to travel to Italy. You won't have to give up your career. כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַי הַדָּבָר מְאֹד — This thing is very close to you. The *teshuvah* we're going to talk about is the easy road to *teshuvah*.

But before we talk about some details, it pays to make the following point about easy opportunities.

When you consider how simple it is to take advantage of easy opportunities, you'll begin to understand how guilty you really are. And I must take the time now to explain about this subject so you'll understand how severe it really is to ignore the opportunities we're going to discuss here — how guilty we are *just because* it is *karov eilecha*.

You know, *tzitzis* have two kinds of threads. There are threads of blue wool, which are expensive. In the days of old, when they wore *tzitzis* they had blue *techeiles* on their *tzitzis*. But it was very expensive. They also had threads of white wool, which were not as expensive.

Now, the Gemara in *masichta Menachos* (43b) says like this: Suppose a man neglected to put blue threads in his *tzitzis*. So naturally, he's guilty; in the days when *techeiles* was available, it was a sin to neglect it. But let's say he neglected to put in white threads; that, the Gemara says, is a much bigger sin, much more severe. גְּדוֹל עֲנָשׁוֹ שֶׁל לָבָן יוֹתֵר מֵעֲנָשׁוֹ שֶׁל תְּכֵלֶת — The punishment for neglecting the white threads is bigger than the punishment for neglecting the blue threads.

Ignorance Is Not Bliss

Why is it much worse? Because white threads are easier to find and cheaper to purchase. *And the punishment for neglecting something that's easy to do is bigger than the punishment for neglecting something more difficult.* Whatever is *easier* is a *bigger* obligation. So now we begin to understand how serious are the *easy* opportunities to become better. Those things that are

easier to begin working on entail a much greater responsibility.

And that means that what we're going to learn tonight will create big responsibilities. And it won't help to walk out now, to decide not to listen. Oh, no! You'll be held responsible for not learning what you must do! You'll be considered very guilty! I'll prove it to you.

You remember when Avraham Avinu came to Gerar? So the Torah relates that Avimelech asked him, "Who is this woman with you?" He saw a beautiful woman with Avraham and that was his first question. So Avraham said (Bereishis 20:2), אָחֻתִּי הִוא, She's my sister. And Avimelech didn't hesitate; he took her and brought her to his palace. And that night he had a dream that he was going to be put to death for taking away a married woman.

In the morning he summoned Avraham and said, "Why did you deceive me?" And Avraham said, "Because when a stranger comes to town, people are supposed to be asking about one thing: "Do you have a place to eat? A place to sleep?" But you didn't ask me any of these questions. You asked me, 'Who is this woman with you? Is she your sister or your wife?' Oh, if that's your question, then I know I have what to be careful from. And so immediately I said, "There's no *yiras Elokim bamakom hazeh*, no fear of G-d in this place, and I have to protect myself." It was necessary for Avraham to deceive Avimelech for his own self-defense. Avraham couldn't have answered, "She's my wife," because he was afraid that Avimelech would kill him in order to take Sarah.

Responsibility to Learn

Now, the question arises, why should Avimelech have been sentenced to death? After all, he was deceived by Avraham. It's true that he didn't ask the proper questions, but at the end of the day he was innocent. He thought he was taking an unmarried woman.

And the Gemara (*Bava Kama* 92a) answers that Avimelech is considered the guilty one because he never learned how to behave. Because he never took the time and energy to train himself in good manners, he forced Avraham to deceive him. And so, he was going to be killed *shehayah lo lilmod v'lo lamad* – because he should have learned correct behavior and he didn't.

From here we learn, the Gemara says, that a *ben Noach* is put to death, *וְשִׁדְיָהּ לוֹ לְלָמוֹד וְלֹא לָמַד*, because he should have learned and he didn't. Had he gone to listen to Avraham – Avraham was speaking all the time, and he had thousands of *talmidim* – he would have learned how to behave when wayfarers pass through, how to put the right questions to them. And since Avimelech didn't bother to learn and asked the wrong questions, he was guilty. He was sentenced to death because he should have learned.

So we're learning here a big principle about all these easy things that a person could have fulfilled without any effort. He cannot say "I claim exemption because of ignorance." Because it's easy to learn! We're not requiring him to study *sugyos chamuros* with Gemara and Tosfos. No, we're talking about fundamentals of proper living, proper behavior, that are easy to learn. And because

there are so many opportunities to learn the fundamentals, those who neglect these opportunities are held entirely guilty. If there are lectures such as these where you could learn, and if there are *sefarim* you could study, then you will be held responsible. And so, let's not waste the opportunity — we're sitting here together and it's almost Rosh Chodesh Elul, so let's get busy learning and studying a few of the easy opportunities that will help us start traveling on the road of returning to Hashem.

Part III.

Week #1 — Keeping Quiet

Silence is Praise

Now, the first easy opportunity for *teshuvah* we'll talk about is to keep your mouth closed. *Shesikah!* Silence! Not only is being quiet easy — we're not being asked to *do* anything, after all — but it's a great accomplishment, too, because you're producing something important. That's what the Rambam (*Hilchos Dei'os*) says: **לְעוֹלָם יִרְבֶּה אָדָם בְּשִׁתִּיקָה** — A person should always be producing a great deal of silence. You hear that? It's not just that you're not talking — you're manufacturing something important.

Imagine you have a factory where you make toothbrushes; or maybe you're a tailor and you sew suits. Whatever it is, every day you're producing. So you have to keep *cheshbon*, “How many goods did I produce today?” “Did I do better today than yesterday?” “What

could I do different tomorrow in the factory to produce more toothbrushes?” And it’s the same with silence; you have to think about that. “How much silence did I produce today?” “What can I change, what can I adjust in my day tomorrow, in order to make it even more successful?”

And it’s a big step forward on the path of *shuvu el Hashem* because silence is considered a service of Hashem. That’s what Dovid Hamelech teaches us: “לְךָ יְהוָה – To You, Hashem, silence is praise” (*Tehillim* 65:2). It means the quieter I am, the more I’m praising You. Now, that’s an interesting idea because we always thought that the Hallelukahs and the *brachos* are praise. Ashrei, Hodu, and Modim – *that’s* how we praise Hashem. And now we’re being told that keeping quiet is the way; that the real career of praising Hashem is manufacturing silence. And something like that needs a good explanation.

Elokim Is Here

Now, who better to turn to for explanations than the *chacham mikol adam*? Shlomo Hamelech tells us in *Koheles* (5:1): “אַל תְּבִיֵּהל עַל פִּיךָ – Don’t be in a hurry to express yourself, וְלִבְךָ אֵל יִמְהַר לְהוֹצִיא דְבָר לִפְנֵי ה’ – and your heart, your mind, shouldn’t be in a hurry to say something in the Presence of Hashem.”

Now, those last words, *lifnei Hashem*, are very important; it’s the explanation we’re looking for: “Why should you not be hasty to open your mouth? Because you’re standing *lifnei Hashem*, in front of Hashem.

Where does that mean? In the Beis Hamikdash? In the *beis haknesses*? In the *beis haknesses*, you surely shouldn't speak, but here "*lifnei Hashem*" doesn't mean the *beis haknesses*. It means anyplace. What does that mean, that you're standing in front of Hashem? It means that wherever you are, "בֵּי הָאֱלֹקִים בְּשָׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל" – Elokim is in the heaven, and you're down below on this earth" (Koheles 5:1). And He's watching; He's looking at you.

Oh, now something else comes into the picture – Elokim is in the picture! Elokim is in Shamayim, above you, looking at you. And you're down on this earth. "עַל כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרְךָ מְעַטִּים" – Therefore, your words should be few." That's why you shouldn't talk so much.

In Someone's Presence

Let's understand that. When you're sitting at the table with your family, or if you're talking to your friends in the street, Hashem is present. You hear that? Whenever you open your mouth, you have to be aware that you're speaking in the presence of Hashem. And the rule is: "חָכָם אֵינוֹ מְדַבֵּר בְּפָנַי מִי שֶׁהוּא גָדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ" – A *chacham* doesn't talk in the presence of somebody bigger" (Avos 5:7). Some people don't know that rule. If you're in the presence of an important person, keep quiet! There's somebody else here, somebody very important, so keep quiet! If a man opens his mouth and words flow out without restraint, it means he doesn't feel like he's in anybody's presence!

Let's say you were standing in the presence of the President of the United States. He's not such an

important person today, but still you wouldn't talk much in his presence. You certainly wouldn't be shooting off your mouth. Now, *l'havdil elef havdalos*, if you are talking with the *gadol* hador, with, let's say, Rav Shach, or Rav Moshe Feinstein, would you talk a lot? If you have any sense, you won't say a word!

Let's say you meet the Sigheter Rav, or you're standing in front of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; when you're standing there you don't open your mouth. Don't ask somebody else, "What's the time?" And even if somebody comes over to you and asks you a question, you keep quiet. Don't answer the question. Keep quiet! Not only because you might miss some precious words the *gadol* might say; even if he's not saying anything, you don't talk in the presence of somebody bigger than you.

Gaining Awareness

And that's what Shlomo Hamelech is telling us. Every person, no matter how *frum* he is, has to have a *hargashah*, a sensory perception, that he's standing in front of Hashem — a perception that's so real that it motivates him not to talk.

Of course, it's not something that comes overnight — it takes practice — but it's not difficult. Suppose you're an ordinary Jew who never worked on these concepts; you don't really feel the Presence of Hashem. But you'd like to do it; you aspire to become a *ma'amin*. Of course, you won't admit that you're not a *ma'amin*, but at least you'll admit that you don't feel the Presence of Hashem all the time. And so, each time you wish to open your mouth, you remind yourself: "בִּי אֱלֹקִים בְּשָׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל"

הָאֶרֶץ עַל כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרֶיךָ מְעֻטִּים — Hashem is listening, and therefore my words should be few.” Little by little, you instill in your *neshamah* an awareness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And it’s *karov eilecha*! Does it cost any money for a person to just keep his mouth shut? בִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד — How near, how close, how easy that thing is. Now, if you had to go outside in the cold weather, in the storm, in order to buy something to fulfill a *mitzvah* — well, if you didn’t, so it’s wrong; but still you have some excuse for yourself. It might not be the best excuse, but it’s something at least. But here we’re talking about where no effort is entailed so there’s no excuse; it involves no cost to keep the mouth closed.

Don’t Be a Faucet

And so, let’s start practicing it. Elul is here — four weeks to make use of the easy opportunities to do real *teshuvah*, to return all the way to Hashem. So let’s take the first week and use it for this: “The first week of Elul, I’m going to practice not speaking because I’m *lifnei Elokim*.”

When someone approaches you and makes a remark, don’t rush to respond. You’d like to talk; you have a wisecrack or a rejoinder; you want to say something. Instead, you should say to yourself, “No, I won’t say it because I’m standing before Hashem.” You don’t always need to answer. If someone says something to you, you have to say something back? Let’s say a cow says moo — do you have to moo back? A dog barks as you pass by — you have to bark back? So if someone speaks

to you, unless it's necessary, don't say anything. Just listen. Who says you always have to answer?

And suppose you must answer; sometimes you must say something. So then make sure to count your words. You know, some people are like a faucet; they start pouring out everything they have inside. Everything comes gushing out. You know what that means? It means they're being *meisiach da'as* from Hashem.

A person must always keep in mind that Hashem is listening. Keeping your mouth closed and keeping your words few when you do have to speak shows that you have *emunah* that Hashem is always listening. If you open your mouth and talk without restraint, it means you think you're a free bird. It means that you have no *emunah* because belief in Hashem requires that we keep quiet. He's standing right here, after all, and He's listening.

The Great Light

Now you can understand what the Gra said. The Gra said as follows — and this should be a motto to all of us. **על כל רגע ורגע שאתם חוסים פיו** — For every moment that you muzzle your mouth ... — You hear that? *Every moment!* One moment, or two moments, or three moments; whatever it is, for every moment that you muzzle your mouth — **זוכה לאור הגנוז** — you'll be rewarded by the concealed light, **שאין כל מלאך ובריה יכולים לשער** — whose greatness no *malach* and no creature can possibly measure. That's how great the light is!

So you're sitting here tonight and you kept quiet for a while. I was doing the talking so you had to keep quiet.

Do you realize what a big benefit it was for you? For every second that you keep your mouth closed, you're being rewarded with an eternal light of happiness in the World to Come! Besides in this world! That's how great your reward of silence is.

"How could that be?" you'll say. "All I did was keep my mouth closed?" The answer is what you're thinking, why you're silent. You're doing it because you're standing in the Presence of Hashem! It's a demonstration that you're aware of Hashem! Hashem is not just a word in the *siddur*; He's right here in front of me, so I won't prattle; I won't shoot my mouth off in His presence.

Oh, that's already a greatness! You're much greater than the angels! And you're fulfilling our great motto of tonight's lecture; you're fulfilling *v'shuvu el Hashem*.

Part IV. Week #2 — Smiling

Another Easy Path

Now, once you practiced this up for a full week — let's say from Shabbos to Shabbos you've been keeping your mouth closed at every opportunity that comes your way. Every time you felt the urge to say something, you thought beforehand: "Is it really needed? I'm standing in front of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, after all; should I really open my mouth?" So now you're ready for week number two — week number two of *shuvu el Hashem*.

We're looking for another easy opportunity, something that is *karov eilecha me'od*. Now, once you've

established yourself as a quiet fellow, you'll see that there's still so much good you can accomplish even with your mouth closed. And so we'll take another path to *teshuvah* that doesn't require any talking at all. You'll be able to continue with your first week's *avodah*, and at the same time you'll add something else.

Smiling and Milking

The Gemara (*Kesubos* 111b) tells us in one place how great is the mitzvah of smiling to a fellow Jew. There's a *passuk* in the Chumash, “וּלְבָן שָׁנִים מִחֶלֶב — The whiteness of your teeth is better than milk” (*Bereishis* 49:12). What does that mean? So, our Sages make a play on words and tell us a *yesod* for life: טוֹב הַמִּלְבֵּין שָׁנִים לַחֲבֵירוֹ יוֹתֵר מִמַּשְׁקָהוּ — הָלֶב — It's better to show your fellow man a smile with your white teeth than give him a drink of milk. A smile is better for his health than a cup of milk.

In Slabodka, the Alter used to explain it like this: “Suppose a man is sitting on the sidewalk with a big can of milk, and for every passerby he ladles out a cup.” Imagine such a thing; a man is standing outside of the *beis hamedrash* in the morning with a can of milk and Dixie cups. And everyone who passes by, he ladles out a Dixie cup of milk. “Here, take a free drink of milk.” So everybody would agree that he's a public benefactor. A drink of milk to every passerby?! Milk gives a person energy. It gives him nourishment. Milk has calcium in it. It has vitamins. It makes you healthy. Milk goes into you — it changes you.

“But here,” says the Alter, “is a man who does better than that. To every passerby, he offers a friendly smile.

That helps a person physically even more than the drink of milk. *Tov hamalbin shinayim l'chaveiro yoser mimashkeihu chalav*, it's better than giving him a glass of milk to drink. It's healthier for that person to see you smile than to get a drink of milk. It builds him up physically more than vitamins because it makes him happy, too.

Smiling Instructions

Now, is it so hard to smile at others? Not really. It could be that your face is already frozen into a scowl from so many years of not practicing this Gemara. But even so, it's not that difficult to change.

And to make it even easier, our Sages guided us. I told you before that even the easy things require some study; just to talk in general terms, it's not enough. And so we're fortunate that our Sages spoke about this subject.

Shammai says, “הוֹי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסֶכֶר פָּנִים יְפוֹת - You should receive all people with a pleasant cast of countenance” (Avos 1:15). Shammai said only a few words, less than ten words, but it's full of information. Now, I'm not capable of understanding the depths of a *mishnah*, but my regular customers know that this maxim has at least four parts to it.

First of all, it says, “*kol ha'adam* — all people.” It means not only the person you like, who smiles at you. *Kol ha'adam* means even a *nudnick*, even someone you don't like. Some people are not so pleasant. Sometimes a fellow likes to talk a lot, and you're in a hurry to get rid of him. But still, a smile you can afford to give him. That's

the command of the Torah — you should greet *every man* with a pleasant cast of countenance. And so, that's number one to think about this week: *Kol ha'adam*. Every person deserves from you a *seiver panim yafos*.

Show Your Face

Now, *seiver panim yafos* is three things. It says *seiver* and *panim* and *yafos*. It means three different things. I'll explain that.

First of all, it includes *panim*. You must show your *face* to a person, not your ear. *Panim* means you show him the front of your face, not your profile.

Let's say you walk into the house tonight and your mother says, "Hello, Chaim. Were there many people at the lecture tonight?" You're passing by, going to your room, so without turning your head you say, "Yes, Ma. It was crowded." That's wrong. It says *panim*. It means, turn your face around.

When you come home from the Bais Yankev, and your mother is standing in the kitchen, are you going to walk by the kitchen and just show your mother your ear? Show your *face* to your mother, not the back of your head. You have neck muscles. That's what they're for, so you should show your mother your face.

Not only in the house. When you're passing by a *frum* Jew on the street or someone in the hall of the *yeshivah*, in the hall of the Bais Yankev and the person greets you, don't greet that person with your profile. Turn your face. That's number one — *panim*. Greet people with your face.

Friendly and Pleasant

The second thing is, it says *seiver*. *Seiver* is from the word *sevara*. *Sevara* means thought, intention. Showing your face sometimes can be as full of expression as turning the bottom of a pan toward them. You might turn your face to your mother, your sibling, your fellow Jew, but your face is deadpan. Oh, no; the face is only part of the story. There must be some expression, some interest in your face. Show you're interested.

There must be some *seiver*, some thought in the face. Show that you're thinking of that person when you look at him, that you're interested in him. Not merely a look, a stare, a meaningless expression — put some *sevara* into it. Think about what you're about to do when you smile at him. You want to make his day, his life, more pleasant by looking at him in a friendly way.

And the third part of your smile is *yafos* — a pleasant face! You show your face, and it's a thoughtful face, but there's a scowl? No. No! **יָאִיר פָּנָיו**! Shine your smile on him. Show him a thoughtful smile.

Selichos Smiles

Now, the Gemara says you should show white teeth. Of course, if you brush your teeth every day and you're able to flash a white smile, that's the best thing; but any kind of teeth are good. Even a yellow smile, a brown smile. It's still a very great thing because any type of smile gives another person life. The warmth of friendship gives your fellow man such energy, such happiness. It makes him feel that he's somebody. You give him a

friendly smile, and the whole world becomes illuminated with sunlight. You have no idea what you have done.

And there are no excuses. It doesn't matter if you have your own thoughts on your head, your own worries. Your face is a *reshus harabbim*; it's affecting other people, so it's your responsibility. Rav Yisrael Salanter related when he was a boy in the town of Salant, he once met a man on *Selichos* morning. *Selichos* in the olden days was serious business. So this man was coming from *Selichos*, and his face was still wet with tears. And so, when Rav Yisrael greeted him, the man barely noticed him; he was intent on his own *teshuvah* thoughts. He had just finished weeping through his *tefillos* and he barely noticed Rav Yisrael.

Many years later, Rav Yisrael wrote in his writings like this: Is it my fault that you're a *y'rei Shamayim*? That means, do I have to suffer because you're a *y'rei Shamayim*? You hear that? It means that whatever you have in your heart should remain there. Could be that it's *evlo b'libo*, that there are worries on your mind, but as far as your fellow Jew, it should be *tzahalaso b'fanav* – on your face you must show interest, and happiness.

More Than a Minhag

I've seen this. I've been in the company of very great men who practice this. I remember one of my *rebbeim*; he was an old man and in his heart he was mourning because he felt that his time was coming to an end and he hadn't accomplished enough. He looked back, and he saw his misdeeds. He was considering that soon would be the day of judgement, and he was thinking about how

to make amends. It was *evlo b'libo*, in his mind there was mourning. But even if you barged in on him while he was busy with his own thoughts, his own *cheshbon hanefesh*, he didn't show it! He was an *oved Hashem*, and therefore, to those around him he always displayed a happy face.

And so, make it a principle of yours this week that *ya'ir panav*, your face should shine on people. It's an obligation! It's not merely some *minhag* that you'll find in *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* or a bit of *mussar* that somebody wrote in the last generation. It's a *mishnah* said by the *roshei Tanna'im*: Greet people with a pleasant cast of countenance.

When you meet people on the street, don't pass them by with your head down, with a hangdog look, with just the corner of your eye. You must make it your business to raise up your face and shine your countenance upon them. Practice it tonight when you get home. Practice it on your wife, or on somebody you'll meet here in the hall outside. Practice it all week long.

Part V. Week #3 — Think

The Silent Fence

Now we come to week number three of our Elul program. We practiced being quiet, and then we added to that the *seiver panim yafos*. And now that you're quiet and happy, your mind is available to accomplish even more. That's how the Rambam understands the words of our Sages, "סִיג לַחֲכָמָה שְׁתִּיקָה" — Silence is a fence for wisdom" (*Avos* 3:13). When a person is prattling, words

and words and more words, so his mind can't function well. But now we can begin applying our minds even more to *teshuvah*.

But remember, we're looking for the *teshuvah* that is *karov eilecha*, something that's close to us, easy to do. And so, we'll talk now about transforming our ordinary deeds; not about adding more deeds, but about taking our regular deeds and using them to fulfill this *passuk* of *shuvu el Hashem*.

What Set Them Apart

We're going to quote the *Mesillas Yesharim* at the end of chapter sixteen. He talks there about the great men of our past who were chosen by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. "Now, it really is worthwhile to study the following subject," he says, "the subject of why Hakadosh Baruch Hu favored these great personalities."

It's a subject we should investigate. What was the reason Hakadosh Baruch Hu loved Avraham so greatly? Why did He love Moshe Rabbeinu so greatly? We think we know. We know that Avraham had ten trials, *asarah nisyonos*, and he passed them all successfully, and so on. Moshe Rabbeinu was devoted to his people, and he was a servant of Hashem with all his heart; an *eved ne'eman*. So we think we know what made them great. But we're making a big error. We don't understand *at all* the greatness of our great men.

Now listen to what the *Mesillas Yesharim* says. I'll read it in English: He says, "This, in truth, is the test that the servants of Hashem were tested with, and this is what set apart each one according to his degree of

greatness. What was the test? It was a test of who was capable of purifying his heart more — he was the one who was closer to Hashem and more beloved to Him.” What does that mean? So, he explains: “When they did *their ordinary deeds* — not the great deeds that are written about in the Torah, the heroic deeds of self-sacrifice that we always speak about — but even their daily deeds, they were done with the intention of serving Hakadosh Baruch Hu.”

Elevated Thoughts

When Avraham Avinu was busy managing his sheep and his cattle — that was his business: raising livestock — he was thinking always about serving Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When Avraham was in his tent with Sarah, or Sarah was in the tent with Avraham, each one was thinking about how to talk in a way that would serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When they sat down to eat, they ate with the thought, “How can I please Hakadosh Baruch Hu with my eating?”

Now, anybody who would have been present wouldn’t have heard anything. You might have heard great things, too; no question that whatever words were exchanged were noble words, but what was doing in their minds no reporter could have noted. No tape recorder would have recorded what was doing. They were just thoughts in their minds. And the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that it was *these* thoughts that made them great. “The true nobility of these great people,” he says, “was the way they lived in their inner lives, the way they thought.” They lived *l’sheim Shamayim*.

Constant Service

And our Sages say that this attitude, this way of life, applies to every single one of us. The *mishnah* is talking to *all* of us when it says, “וְכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ יִהְיוּ לַשָּׁם שָׂמִים” – All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven” (Avos 2:12).

Now, when the Rambam quotes that *mishnah*, he says it’s a remarkable statement. When we learn it, we don’t see anything remarkable. Certainly, everything should be done *l’sheim Shamayim*; why not? But the Rambam is *nispa’el* from this statement! He’s excited over this statement because those words are the heart of our lives. It means that we can live our lives – our *ordinary* lives – as *ovdei Hashem*. We can try as much as we can that with every physical, material act that we do, as much as possible we can do them for Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And it’s a greatness that’s so easily available to all of us. Because people spend a lot of time and effort doing things; you spend effort on your home, on preparing meals, on cleaning the house; you spend effort on taking care of your clothing, on slaving away in the office or the factory. Who doesn’t spend hours during the week for material things in his home and his business?!

Emulating Hashem

And all those hours, all those materialistic parts of our lives, can be easily transformed by means of our thoughts. It costs no money; no physical effort is involved. *Ki karov eilecha hadavar me’od*, how close this thing is to you, *b’ficha*, just with your mouth, *uvilvavcha*, and with your heart, with your mind, *la’asoso*, to do it.

When a mother feeds her child, if she does it like the lady next door does it — Mrs. Dominick also feeds her child; Mrs. Jones also feeds her child with compassion — so if Mrs. Levine and Mrs. Cohen merely do the same, what a missed opportunity that is! Because if a Jewish woman will feed her child and think that she's an emissary of the One Who is **פֹּתַח אֶת יָדוֹ וּמַשְׂבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי רֶצֶן**, He opens His hand and satiates all the living — this Jewish mother is thinking, "I'm opening up my hand, but I feel like my hand is the hand of Hashem, *kaveyachol*" — you know what that means?! She has taken a simple act that everybody does, and she has elevated it into one of the greatest forms of service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu!

Imagine a butcher standing behind the counter, serving meat to his customers. He's wasting such an easy opportunity to acquire greatness. Instead, all he's acquiring is money. If only he would think while he's standing behind the counter, "Ah, let these Jews enjoy life. Let this big Jewish family enjoy a good piece of meat." Just by means of those easy thoughts he would transform himself.

Creating Children

Ordinary married life becomes transformed by thinking *l'sheim Shamayim* thoughts. When a man and woman get married, instead of merely marrying because he wants a wife and she wants a husband, if they would add the thoughts of building the Am Yisrael, you know what a big reward they would have?! Imagine! A *chassan* is standing under the *chuppah* must think, "I'm marrying my *kallah* because I want to raise up a generation of

avdei Hashem.” Of course, he couldn’t tell that to this young girl because she’ll feel that she’s being robbed of romance, but the truth is, that’s what they both should be thinking. And it’s what they can and should always be thinking, all the time, even many years after the *chasunah*. It’s going to transform all the humdrum days of marriage into *avodas Hashem* of the highest level.

Why shouldn’t each child be the result of a noble intent? The children will come naturally — they’re Orthodox people; they’ll have a lot of children. But why should they come as accidents? Isn’t that a tragedy? We’re not talking now about the number of children — let’s say you’ll have a lot of children anyhow, but why should they be conceived and born and raised in the same way as gentile babies?

After all, the gentiles are working, too; all over the world people are working and living and supporting children and marrying off children. Italians also want *nachas* from their children. Puerto Ricans also want *nachas*. But when Jews want *nachas* from children not because of selfish motives, that’s an entirely new way of living. Now, you can’t help being selfish, but if in addition to the selfish motive, you’re able to add one more thought of “I’m doing it for Hashem,” that’s the biggest *teshuvah* you can do.

Eating Right

Now, this is a subject that’s so important that we should go on for hours quoting examples how this should be applied. Because everything in life becomes different; everything becomes noble. Even eating becomes

teshuvah. You know, if you ate something before you came here with the intent of coming here to the lecture, so that means you ate in order to come a little closer to Hashem.

You didn't do it? It's okay, because you'll be eating again, I'm sure. Tonight, when you get home, if you didn't eat yet and you're going to have supper, as you sit down at the table, it wouldn't be a bad idea not to rely just on your thoughts, but say with your mouth, "I'm going to eat now in order to make my body healthy so I should be able to serve Hashem."

Your wife shouldn't hear you because she'll say you're a big hypocrite. She'll say, "Chaim! Who are you kidding? You're eating because you have a big appetite." And she's right — you are a hypocrite. But you're training yourself, and after a while the idea will grow on you. So don't tell anybody the secret. Between you and Hashem, say, "Hashem, I'm doing it for You." הִנְנִי אוֹכֵל בְּרִי לְהַבְרִיא אֶת — הגוף בְּרִי שְׂאוּכָל לְעֹבֵד אֶת הָשֵׁם — "I'm eating it to serve Hashem, in order to have power, to have strength to serve Hashem." If you'll do that, you're already a head taller than everyone else.

Isn't it a tragedy if you go into the Yom Hadin and you never thought once that you're eating *l'sheim Shamayim*?! You never went to sleep *l'sheim Shamayim*? You never went into your office to work *l'sheim Shamayim*?

And the greater tragedy is that it costs no money; no physical effort is involved. *Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od*, how close this thing is to you, *b'ficha*, just with

your mouth, *uvilvavcha*, and with your heart, with your mind, *la'asoso*, to do it. And it's because this road to *teshuvah* is so immensely easy that the responsibility for it is so immensely vast.

Part VI. Week #4 — Fear

Fear is Obligatory

And now we come to week number four, the last week before Rosh Hashanah. It means that the Day of Judgement is coming, and that means that it's time to become afraid, to learn some *yiras Shamayim*. Now, I understand that today the *rabbanim* don't want to talk too much about fear of Hashem — it's all love and happiness; nothing to fear at all — but here we like to talk truth, and the truth is that it's a *mitzvah* of the Torah to learn to be afraid of Hashem constantly.

And it's not just *any mitzvah* — it's the pinnacle of success! You remember when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to praise Avraham Avinu after the tenth test that He gave him, the Akeidah, and Avraham passed the test successfully — what did Hakadosh Baruch Hu say about him? What words, what title did He give him? He said, “עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי יִירָא אֱלֹקִים אֶתָּה” — Now I know that you are a man who fears Elokim” (*Bereishis* 22:12). To fear Hashem, that's the paramount achievement.

So how can a person live his life without being afraid of Hashem? He loves Judaism, very good. He loves *mitzvos*; he's enthusiastic about them — excellent. He

may even learn a lot of Torah. All very good. But where is the fear? What about being afraid of Hashem?

It's a *mitzvah* in the Torah, a very great obligation, to learn to be afraid of Hashem constantly. Not just awe, or respect — *real fear*, to actually be *afraid* of Hashem. Afraid of everything that could happen, *chas v'shalom*; afraid of what Hashem could do, what He could inscribe for the coming year, or the coming years.

The More, the Better

And so, at least this one week before Rosh Hashanah there's no question that we can try a little bit to become *yarei Shamayim*. To learn, to train ourselves constantly to have that in our hearts, is an important form of *teshuvah*. Everyone after all must have at least some fear of Hashem as he comes before Him at the Great Tribunal, and therefore, even if everything is going smoothly, even when you're doing things that are proper, you're fulfilling everything, still you must bring into your heart a fear of Hashem.

Now, just to say, "Be afraid of Hashem" — that won't mean much. We're looking for a way that's *karov eilecha*; something we can grab onto and make part of our lives; something we can do without adding any new obligations and yet it should still be a big *teshuvah*.

So let's take a few examples. And it would be a good idea to make use of them as much as you can during this last week before Rosh Hashanah. Of course, once you get used to them, so you'll continue with them next year, too; why not? After all, the more *yiras Hashem* the better. So let's begin.

Don't Let It Go to Waste

You read the newspapers; of course it's a waste of time, but sometimes you pass by a garbage can and pick up a newspaper and you see that in Rwanda, some place in Africa, thousands of children are dying of starvation and disease. Thousands upon thousands! And they're busy all the time fighting against each other. Many of them have been killed by other native tribes who wanted to have dominion over them.

Now, who thinks about such things? Somewhere in Africa the natives are killing each other — that's my business? Yes, it's most definitely your business. You know how I know that? It's a Gemara in Yevamos (63a): “אֵין פְּרָעָנוֹת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — Troubles come on the world only because of the Am Yisrael.” And Rashi says, “בְּרִי שְׂיִחְזְרוּ בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה, לִיִּרְאָה — so that they should do *teshuvah*.” That's one of the big reasons that things happen in this world.

And therefore, if you think it's none of your business, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “What do you mean?! I'm telling you it's your business, and you're saying no?! I'm wasting My resources because of you! I'm killing those people so that you should learn from them, and you say it's not your business?!” And therefore, Hashem has a big claim against us, “מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי טוֹבָעִים — Look what I am doing! I'm killing people, human beings with families, and you are wasting the opportunity that I'm giving you?! You're not using it to become more and more afraid of Me?! What a waste!”

Reasons for Death

It means that when you read that there is a famine in India and people are dying of starvation, you're supposed to become much more *frum* because of that! "Ooh, if I were there, how terrible it would be! And if Hashem wants to, *chalilah*, He can make the same thing happen right here in New York." Don't think it's not so! That's why they're dying, to make us afraid of Hashem's power.

It's a *passuk* that everybody knows: "הֵיטֵר גּוֹיִם הֵלֵא יוֹכִיחַ - If He sends suffering on the nations, isn't He showing something? הַמְלִמֵּךְ אֶרֶם דַּעַת - He is teaching people *da'as*; He's teaching us to be afraid" (*Tehillim* 94:10).

Hashem has His plans and His intentions, and whatever He does to the nations is certainly just, but Hashem's main intention is to teach us to fear Him. And so, whenever you hear something happen in the world, don't say, "It has nothing to do with me. It's interesting, but what's it my business?" It's your business especially.

Crashes Happen

Here's a Pan Am airplane with 300 people on it, and it crashed into the Pacific Ocean. So what does the fool say? "Well, in most of the cases airplanes don't crash, so I don't have to think about that." Or, "I don't do those things anyhow; I don't travel on airplanes. I travel on buses and trains, not airplanes." And if you hear it happened on a bus; "Oh, that bus is someplace else, far away. I don't go in that neighborhood at all." There's no

end to the *teirutzim* you can use to dodge the opportunity to learn.

Now, that's a terrible mistake. You're misusing the airplane crash. That tragedy was for you, to remind you to learn *yiras Hashem*. Nobody knows when he's going to be sentenced, *chas v'shalom*. A person may be packing his valise, full of joy for a happy trip. He doesn't know that he is going now to his final execution. And therefore, a man must always be prepared with *yiras Hashem*. At all times a person should think, "Who knows what could happen to me because of my *aveiros*?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu has ways and means of carrying out His retribution. *Chas v'shalom*, crossing a street — cars are coming from all directions. Suddenly a car turns, and it's going too fast to stop. Sometimes it jumps the curb, and there's nothing you can do about it. It's too late. You have to be afraid!

So this week, as you're walking down the sidewalk, say, "Ribono Shel Olam! Please let me get home safely! I'm afraid. I promise You that when I get home I won't talk to my wife the way I spoke to her this morning. I won't speak back to my mother like I did last night. I'll be a good boy from now on."

Illness for a Purpose

Because these things happen suddenly, and constantly. Every day there are accidents in the home. And therefore, people should learn to be afraid of Hashem — not to live in fear of things that might happen, *but to live in fear of Hashem*, Who can make anything happen.

Don't we constantly hear about people who contracted serious illnesses? Rashi explains the purpose of illness in this world. The statement Rashi makes is as follows: Illness is for the purpose of making us afraid, לְהַכְנִיעַ אֶת הָלֵב, so that we should do *teshuvah*. Suddenly a cell in a man's body goes wild; it begins to misbehave. Nobody can be certain that, *chas v'shalom*, something like that won't suddenly happen to him. Illness should make you afraid of Hashem.

Not only, *chalilah*, our own illness; somebody else's illness, too. You see, on all sides, things happening to people who never expected it. There could be a boy fourteen years old who's perfectly well, getting ready to enjoy a long happy life. And suddenly he gets a certain pain in his neck, and he's taken to the hospital and they discover he has leukemia. Leukemia! "Ay yah yay!" he says. "Why did it happen to me?"

When you hear a story like that, be afraid! Why didn't it, *chalilah*, happen to you? It's a scary thought, the thought of death, and it should make you afraid of Hashem. "לִפְנֵינוּ יִכְרְעוּ כָּל יוֹרְדֵי עֶפֶר" — Before Hashem should kneel all those who go down in the dirt" (*Tehillim* 22:30). Everybody knows that someday he will die and be buried, and that's why he should be afraid of Hashem. The *eimas hamavess*, the prospect of eventual death, must make everybody afraid.

Fun to Be Outside

As you pass by a cemetery, don't merely say, "Baruch Hashem, I'm on this side of the fence." That's a good idea, by the way. Or when you pass a funeral parlor, say,

“Baruch Hashem, it’s fun to be on the outside.” But at the same time utilize it to think, “I have to be afraid of Hashem.

When you pass a medical center, you see signs outside. Here is a specialist in sicknesses of the jaw muscles. Did you know you need a specialist for that? Yes, when the muscles in the jaw go wrong, it is a painful existence for that person. He needs a specialist.

There are specialists for stomach ailments, and specialists for heart disease. There’s a whole list there. You should read that whole list and gain *yiras Shamayim* from it.

Remain Outside

Think about all the things people are suffering from; there are plenty of customers there, oh yes! When you pass a hospital, in addition to saying a *tefillah* for all the *cholei Yisrael* in the hospital, don’t forget to gain more *yiras Shamayim*. That sick person in the hospital also once walked outside of the hospital and never thought he would be inside. So be afraid!

And if you make it your business to utilize the hospital to learn *yiras Shamayim*, and you keep on doing that, then you won’t have to be inside. You’ll be able to remain outside because you’re learning the lessons before they come closer to home.

That’s the best way to conclude your Elul, with *yiras Shamayim*. “רֵאשִׁית הַכְּמָה יִרְאַת הָשֵׁם — The first thing you have to learn is to be afraid of Hashem!” (*Tehillim* 111:10) That’s the first thing, the best thing, to take with you

into the new year. You want to live? You want to be well? You want to have a happy new year filled with happiness and success and good health? Be afraid of Hashem!

Conclusion

You Need a Plan

And so, we come back now to that statement in the Torah. **כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת**, this commandment that I am commanding you today to do *teshuvah*, **לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא**, is not in the sky. Will you have to go up into the sky to bring it down? No, it's not that difficult. **וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא**, it's not overseas. You don't have to travel to Eretz Yisrael, to the Kosel, to do *teshuvah*. You don't have to go anywhere. It's right here. Where is it? It's right inside of you. **בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ**, **כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד**, it's in your heart, **לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ**.

All you have to do is make up your mind that you're willing to serve Hashem in these ways. Nothing of great effort is required of you; no big expense, no *mesiras nefesh*.

But you must have at least a few specific things that you're going to work on changing. It has to be a **דָּבָר שָׁשִׁי**, **בוֹ מָמוֹשׁ**, a clear-cut plan; something you can sink your teeth into.

Grab Hold of Something

To say in general, "I'm going to be good this year," is better than nothing, but not much better. To talk in general means almost nothing at all because **תַּפְסוּת מְרֻבָּה**

לֹא תִפְסְדָּהּ — If you try to grab too much at one time, you're going to grab nothing at all. It's all going to fall out of your hand. But when you specify something clear-cut, then you'll be able to carry it out. תִּפְסְדָּהּ מִזֵּעַט תִּפְסְדָּהּ — If you grab a little bit at a time, you'll be able to hold on to it.

But תִּפְסְדָּהּ means that you're grabbing onto it. You're holding on to that little bit very tightly. And that's what we talked about here tonight — four easy paths of *shuvu el Hashem* that we can hold onto without letting go. And if you take these ideas that you heard here tonight, and you get busy doing them, that's the *teshuvah* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants most. It's *v'shuvu el Hashem* — you're coming back to Hashem.

And even though there may be many more things that you should be doing that you're not, but at least there are a few things you *are* doing. Hashem will see that you're headed in the right direction. And if you're headed in the right direction, then הִבָּא לְטִהַר מִסַּעֲיָן אוֹתוֹ — If you're trying to get better, He'll help you go further and further (*Menachos 29b*). You'll get *siyata d'Shmaya* to do more and more, and you'll live many more years of happiness and accomplishment in *avodas Hashem*.

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך



What is Selichos all about?



Selichos means that a man must make some time for *hisbonenus*, for thinking. **שִׁמּוּ לְבַבְכֶּם עַל דְּרֹכֵיכֶם** — Put your minds on your path in life. Are you walking in the right way? When we say *Selichos* in the month of Elul, we're saying every day, **נַחֲפָשָׁה דְרֹכֵינוּ וְנַחֲקָה** — Let us search out our ways and investigate. All *frum* Jews have stopped and given five minutes to think over the past year? Believe me, very few. Five minutes of inventory, of bookkeeping, is very little for a whole year of business. It would be a great thing if somebody could boast, "I'm a man! I fulfilled **נַחֲפָשָׁה דְרֹכֵינוּ וְנַחֲקָה**. I spent five minutes thinking of the past full year." It's a very poor little boast, but *halevai v'halevai*!

At least two minutes you should spend! Did you spend two minutes? Even on Yom Kippur, do you spend two minutes thinking about your past year? People are talking, but they don't even know what they're saying. They say **נַחֲפָשָׁה דְרֹכֵינוּ**, and then they forget about doing it.

It's imperative. You must spend some time to think. Unless you want to continue in your blindness until you fall over the precipice — then it's all over and it's too late. At the end of your life, you'll realize your life was wasted because you failed to use your mind. The golden opportunity of life in this world comes only once in history — you won't come back again. And that's what *Selichos* is for — it's meant to wake you up.

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