



פרשת כי תבא

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Repenting In Happiness

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Part I. Utilizing Misfortune

Ancient Jewish Attitudes

In the *sefer* Chovos Halevavos in the section on *teshuvah* (Chapter 6), he states that there are four different incentives that we are expected to make use of as a prod to do *teshuvah*; four *madreigos* of doing *teshuvah*. And although there is a hierarchy, each one is a more preferable method than the next, they all have to be utilized when the opportunity comes. Every person is capable of making use of all four incentives at various times throughout his life.

One of them, the Chovos Halevavos tells us, is when misfortunes come upon a person. When *tzaros* befall a person – whether it's something big or small – he is expected to use that as an opportunity to run back to Hashem; to do *teshuvah* for his sins, to do more *mitzvos*, to correct his character and his behavior, and everything else that is to be included in the word repentance.

In all generations that is how the people of Yisroel reacted: **מה זאת עשה אלקים לנו** – *What is this that Elokim did to us?* (Bereishis 42:28) Not 'What is it that Hitler did to us, or this enemy or that *rasha*.' Everything is **עשה אלקים**. And why did He do it? **לנו!** He did it *for us*. It means 'What do we have to learn from this?'

That's a standard Jewish attitude: **נחפשה דרכינו ונשובה ער השם** – *Let us search out our ways, and come back to Hashem* (Eichah 3:40). If something happens to us, we attribute it not to anything but our misdeeds. And if you're not sure – after all, what person doesn't think he's a *tzaddik*? – then **נחפשה**, *you have to search*. You have to think a long time and you have to discover the hidden reasons in your life, in your behavior, for why such a thing would happen.

Plead Guilty

That's the advice our Sages give us. **אם רואה אדם שיסורים באים עליו** – *When a man sees that misfortune comes upon him*, **יפטפש במעשיו** – *he shouldn't look to*

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blame others; instead he should look into his deeds (Mesichta Brachos 5a). And **יִפְשֵׁט בְּמַעֲשָׂיו** doesn't mean a superficial glance over his biography. He has to examine his ways. He has to try to think back to today, to last night, last week and even further back. Maybe there are things that he did wrong that he never did *teshuvah* for, or maybe not enough *teshuvah*. He should blame himself for the *yissurim* he's having.

And *yissurim* means everything; even things which we think to attribute to understandable causes. Even a toothache or a headache or if you lost some money in the street, whatever it is, no matter how small, it should not be a wasted opportunity because nothing happens by accident in this world. And the wise man therefore utilizes all the opportunities that come up; even the smallest thing becomes very important to him.

Shamed on the City Bus

How small? The Gemara in Eirechin (16b) asks that question. **עַד הֵיכַן תְּכַלִּית יִסּוּרִים** – How far is the limit of *yissurim*, of suffering? It means, how small of a thing can still be considered suffering to be utilized as a stimulus, a sign from Hashem, that we should mend our ways?

And the Gemara says like this: if you stick your hand in your pocket to take out a quarter and you pull out instead a half dollar, that's *yissurim*. All it means now is that you'll have to make a second trip to your pocket but that's already enough. You have to know that Hashem is telling you something.

Here you're standing in the bus and you know that you have the money. It's a quarter and a dime (in 1975 the bus fare in NYC was 35 cents). But each time you take something out, it's wrong; it's a half dollar, it's a nickel – it doesn't make the right change. And behind you people are pressing, "Mister, this is a city bus, not a lounge. Get out of the way." And you're embarrassed. It's not an accident. It's a message from heaven.

Weak Emunah

Now we don't think so – it seems too extreme – but that's because we are weak in our *emunah*. But if we are able to elevate our mind to the realization of the truth that nothing is an accident, then we would think, "Why didn't we hit the quarter the first time?" It is *yissurim* that Hashem is sending upon me.

Now the man who utilizes these things, even these seemingly small things, he can gain no end of profit. From such an attitude he can gain even the greatest *madreigos* of *shleimus* because he'll always be inspired to *teshuvah*. Only what? Most people are stubborn and they're not willing to listen to the messages being sent to them.

A Stubborn Cold

You know, Reb Yisoel Salanter, *zichrono l'vrachah*, once had a cold. And he was very much distressed. So somebody said to him, "Rebbe, it's nothing but a cold."

"It's not the cold that's the problem," he said, "It's me. Because Mishlei says **צָנִים פְּחִים בְּרִדָּה עֵקֶשׁ** – *A cold comes upon a man who makes himself stubborn* (22:5)."

That's why Rav Yisroel was worried. Because a cold means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is trying to get your attention. "It's something that is the result of my refusal to listen, my stubbornness, and He's sending me a message so that I should change my ways."

Now to us it seems like just an anecdote, but that's really what the *possuk* is telling us. **צָנִים פְּחִים עֵקֶשׁ בְּרִדָּה** – *Colds come upon somebody who is stubborn, and the one who is vigilant will keep away from them.*

Cold Remedies

How can you be vigilant against a cold? Two ways. First of all, when somebody has a cold, ask him to please sit someplace else; or you move away

from him. If he's coughing, either have him cover his mouth with his hands or move away from him.

Also, don't allow your resistance to be lowered. Go to bed on time and get a good night's rest. If you're going outside in the cold wear two pairs of socks. That's good advice, by the way. I'm giving it to you free of charge. Not one thick pair – two thinner pairs are better at protecting you against cold. So that's one way of *yirchak*. Take care of your health. Very important.

But there's another way, a more important way. And that is, don't be an *akshan!* Don't be stubborn. Start thinking that maybe – I say 'maybe'; there's no question about it, but start thinking that maybe, just maybe, there is something wrong in my program in life. Spend a little time thinking into that. Every time you cough or you sneeze you're being reminded, "Were you *mifashpeish b'maasav* enough? Did you come out with something clear?"

In the Dentist's Chair

And so when you sit in the dentist's chair and he is drilling way down and you feel that that drill is going down to your toenails, you shouldn't say, "It's because I didn't brush my teeth," or "because I ate candy." Yes, you should brush your teeth from now on, no question. And don't eat candy – or at least rinse your mouth out well afterwards; do whatever it is you're supposed to do.

But don't be stubborn and say that's all it is, that it's a *mikreh*, sugar and bacteria. No, don't be stubborn! Because וְאִם תִּלְכוּ עִמִּי קָרִי – if you'll go with me and say it's nothing but accident and it's not Hakadosh Baruch Hu, וְהִלַּכְתִּי אִף אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם בְּקָרִי – then the time will come He'll yank out all your teeth and there'll be nothing left to drill. You don't drill into false teeth, you know.

And so when the dentist says, "Open wide!" and you know he's not putting some ice-cream into your mouth; he's holding a drill! So don't think, "Well, teeth in the course of time tend to deteriorate." That's thinking like animals think! You

have to think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving you a tip, some insider information. You should be sitting there and thinking, "Why did he tell me that I have to open my mouth and get drilled? Maybe because I opened my mouth recently when I should have kept it closed. Maybe I opened my mouth in the wrong place and now I'm getting it back *middah k'neged middah*."

"Maybe I opened my mouth and scolded my wife. Maybe I said something fresh to my mother. Maybe I hurt somebody's feelings. And now the dentist was sent to me, a *malach miShomayim*, and he says, 'Open wide!' Because I opened it wide when I shouldn't have, now I have to open it for something I don't want, to admit the drill."

Thousands of Yissurim

Now, a trip to the dentist's office is only a small example. There are thousands of things like that, thousands of messages that Hashem might send a person.

If a man was put to shame in public, then he has to consider that he has done that to other people. Maybe it wasn't today but let him begin looking; he'll find. If his wife yelled at him, if he tripped on a crack on the sidewalk, let him examine his past. If he lost money – let's say he had a hold-up or even if ten dollars dropped out of a hole in his pocket – let him think that maybe that money should have gone to a good cause and now Hakadosh Baruch Hu is collecting from him. Anything that happens to us, it pays to investigate, "Why did this happen?" And if you look very hard, you're going to discover. If you want to find something, something is bound to turn up.

But let's say a person searched and he didn't find – now that's improbable; what it means is that he wasn't searching but let's say it happened, he didn't find. So יִתְלֶה בְּבִטּוּל תּוֹרָה – *he should blame it on neglect of Torah study*. Let him attribute it to insufficient study of Torah. That's something that

all of us are guilty of. You can always attribute it to that.

Discovering Gold

And some say a *peirush* – it's a *frum* joke, a play on words – if a man searches and he can't find any sins, *יְתֵלֶה בְּבִטּוּל תּוֹרָה* – it means he should say that he can't discover anything because he's such an *ignoramus* in Torah. "What's the reason I can't find any sins?" he should say. "Because I don't study enough so I think I'm pretty decent."

When you begin studying Torah suddenly your eyes open up – you become aware of responsibilities and obligations you never even dreamed of. "If I would study more Torah I would discover a lot." Because there's plenty to discover!

And so that's a big lesson, this first incentive that the Chovos Halevavos is teaching us: *yissurim* are golden opportunities for *teshuvah*. And a person who trains himself to think that way, every bump in the road becomes valuable. A toothache, a trip to the dentist is not just a dentist appointment; it's an opportunity for *teshuvah*. And there are thousands of more things like that; various opportunities to do *teshuvah* by means of the messages of *yissurim*, of troubles big and small.

Part II.

Utilizing Others' Misfortune

Skiping the Dentist Appointment

Now, as golden as it is, as valuable as it can be for a person who makes use of that path to *teshuvah*, the Chovos Halevavos says that there is still yet a better way, a higher level of *teshuvah*. Because better is when someone *else* goes to the dentist! You hear that? That's what the Chovos Halevavos says. Why should your teeth have to suffer in order to wake you up to *teshuvah* if you can learn the lesson from somebody else's teeth?

So you're walking down the avenue and you see someone going into the dentist office. And you know what's in store for that poor fellow. He'll be sitting in the waiting room imagining all types of things and then he'll finally go in and the dentist is looking at his teeth deciding how many teeth he should drill today and how many he should leave for the next appointment.

So instead of passing it by and ignoring the message, you stop for a moment on the avenue and you're thinking, "Look at how he is suffering. I had better do *teshuvah* before it comes to me. Because don't I also open my mouth when I shouldn't? Or maybe sometimes I keep it closed when I should open it more? Shouldn't I be opening my mouth to learn more Gemara or to encourage my children or to praise my wife's cooking more often?"

That's a better way of *teshuvah*, the Chovos Halevavos says. When misfortune comes upon you so surely you must get busy thinking about doing *teshuvah*. But there's a safer way, and that's *before misfortune* comes to you. When you see *yissurim* coming on somebody else and you're willing to take the hint even then, that's the wise person – the one who can learn those same lessons without any suffering.

The Wise Fool

Now, concerning this there's a statement in Mishlei (19:25) *לֹץ תִּפֶּה וּפְתֵי יַעֲרָם* – you smite the leitz and the fool becomes cunning. There are two categories here, one is a *leitz* and one is a *pesi*. The *leitz* is the kind that refuses to take hints; he chuckles at such an idea that a stranger going into the dentist's office should be an incentive to *teshuvah*. And because such things don't make any impression on him, the only way of piercing his shell is when suffering is inflicted upon him.

For that type of person, *נְכוֹנֵי לְלֻצִים שְׁפֹטִים* – blows are prepared for the leitz (ibid 19:29). Like the Mesilas Yesharim (ch. 5) says, "That's one thing he won't laugh off." And so when he himself is sitting

in the dentist chair or maybe he's lying on the operating table and he's about to inhale, perhaps then maybe some thought of repentance might enter his mind there.

That's the *leitz*; לֵץ תִּבְהַ – *the scoffer has to get hit over the head sooner or later*. But וּפְתֵי יַעֲרָם – *the pesi wisens up*. A *pesi* is someone who is *mispateh b'yitzro*; he's being persuaded by the *yetzer hora*. That's us! And if we're looking for a good way to do *teshuvah*, then יַעֲרָם – *we are supposed to become wise from this object lesson of the troubles that come to others*.

Cause of Misfortune

Now this is so important and at the same time so underutilized that I must dwell on it for a few minutes. The Gemara says in Yevamos (63a) אֵין אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרַעְנוֹת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם that *any misfortunes that come upon the world are sent only because of the Am Yisroel*.

Now, if you're a humble fellow it may be too much for you to swallow that you're important enough that the Congolies should kill themselves over you. Or that the brown ones in Indonesia should slaughter themselves for your sake. So stop being humble and begin to realize the place of our people in this world.

The whole world is the backdrop, is scenery for the Am Yisroel. Whether you can accept this idea easily or not, it makes no difference; that's the Torah. Torah tells us that whenever misfortunes are visited upon the nations of the world, it's for the sake of our becoming wiser. And Rashi says לִירָאָם – *to make the Am Yisroel afraid*, כִּי שִׁיחֲזֹרוּ בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה – *so that they should do teshuvah*.

Messages from Asia

And so when we read that in India the Ganges River overflowed and many were drowned, and many were rendered homeless and now epidemics and starvation are widespread; it shouldn't be merely a remote and meaningless news item to us.

Because then we are not viewing the world through the Torah eyes.

The Torah says that we're expected to understand that that's a message for us. *Chas v'shalom*, it could have happened here! You know what it means to be in a neighborhood of flood and famine and epidemics? It's an experience that shakes a man. That's לֵץ תִּבְהַ. It's a warning for us. Do *teshuvah*! That's the purpose.

If you're sitting home and eating breakfast and as your wife turns on the radio to hear what the weather will be today, you hear the latest about a famine somewhere in Tibet, you must understand that this is staged for your edification. Again, אֵין אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל – *no misfortune comes upon the world, that is not intended for you*. It's for that purpose that you should hear of it and utilize it and become better.

How are your Knees?

And of course, the closer it is to home, the more you're responsible to take the lesson. So if you're walking on the street and you see a Puerto Rican with one leg and he's hopping on crutches – one leg is cut off right above the knee – we must understand this as a vision from Above. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is speaking to us. It's לֵץ תִּבְהַ, but it's וּפְתֵי יַעֲרָם. He's the one who got it in the knee, but you have to wisen up. That sight is supposed to be a kick in the pants for you: wake up! And if as a result of this encounter you are none the wiser, then you lost the opportunity.

Now, what does it mean wiser, that's not our subject now. It could be many things. Are you using your legs to get to *shul* on time? Maybe you're using them for worse things. And even before that, did you thank Hashem today for your knees, how they've been bending back and forth all day without any friction or creaking? And even if you have some creaking, some arthritis, at least you have a knee unlike this poor fellow.

Disrespectful Neighbors

I learned this lesson from my *rebbeim* in Europe – they said it much better than I am, and I listened to them. And so when I came back to America I remembered what they said and I studied the people on my block.

Now these people, every single one is a *chacham*. They see a man with a beard and he's wearing rabbinic garb too, so they know that he's an ignoramus. That's me, you understand. Now these people, you should know, never read a hard-covered book in their lives. But every one of them knows that he is far superior to me in education.

One of them sometimes condescends and he comes over with a 'Forward' in order to explain to me the news of the day. And he explains it to me like you talk to a peasant. He won't listen to me when I ask him to come to the *shul*, to the *shiur*, but he comes to teach me about the world. So these poor blind fellows, when suffering comes upon them, because they're so ignorant of Torah teachings so they don't know what it means, what to do with it.

Ignoring the Rabbi

Once next door to me, there lived a young man, a *mechallel Shabbos*; but he was on the top of the world. He had a big business and things were going very well with him. He had an elderly father who tried at one time to prevent his son from breaking with the Shabbos, but the son said, "This is America, Papa. You're from Europe." He knew better and he saw he was succeeding. For some years, things were going very well and he was convinced that this was the right way. "You see, it's succeeding."

A dapper young fellow running off every Shabbos morning; no such thing as Shabbos, no such thing as Judaism. He gets in his car and he drives off to work and play. The rabbi is watching from his window but he doesn't even care to be ashamed. He's smoking a cigar; he looks up at me

and gives a puff and jumps into his car. He's off to good times; everything is *hefker*.

Ignoring Retribution

One summer night – his window was just across the driveway from my window; the windows were open one summer night – in the middle of the night, we were awakened by a terrible groaning. He began to groan from a great pain in his spine, a sudden pain. But this poor fellow, the *leitz takeh*, had no preparation. He never heard of these teachings, that you have to utilize the opportunity to get better and therefore in his blind suffering he didn't budge.

So he got up Shabbos morning with pain in his spine and he went off to his business. But not for long; he had to come back the same day. Not long afterwards his father told me that he was in the hospital with cancer in the spine.

One day they bring him home. And thenceforth, he never goes to work anymore. He sits on his porch and saliva drools down from his lips. He had a stroke and he's incapacitated for years. He has to have a Negro woman to help him get up and go to the bathroom. He's a wreck of a man.

But the poor fellow, just as he didn't have any sense before to understand and to have any incentive to get better, he now also doesn't. It's like beating a piece of wood. The wood doesn't get better; it just crumbles.

All for Us

So the question is: Why are they being beaten if they're not going to get better; and they don't know how to get better?

The answer is: It's to make this fellow Miller better. That's the purpose. לֵץ תִּכָּה – *They're being smitten*. וּפְתֵי יַעֲרָם – *And the pesi gets wise*. Now, I can't say I got wise but at least you see I'm bringing the example of the lesson here before this audience. There's some benefit. The purpose was for us to get better. That's what we're doing tonight. His life

was offered up so that we should learn, we should improve.

And so we must study these examples. This person had an operation; *boruch Hashem* I didn't. And I am going to do *teshuvah* now to make sure it stays that way. This person had to separate from his wife, ahh a tragedy; *Boruch Hashem* I don't have to. I'll do *teshuvah*. As long as I still have a happy married life, I will do *teshuvah*.

When you hear of someone who lost his business or someone who lost members of his family or someone who lost his own life, none of these opportunities should be allowed to pass by. They should be utilized as an impetus to become better.

The whole gamut of misfortunes that happen in this world must be utilized because that is a higher *madreigah* than waiting until it happens to you *cholilah*. And that's what they're there for. That's why it happened. It's not an accident; they were sent for that purpose, to serve as a message to us.

Part III. Utilizing Good Fortune

Suffering at Leining

However, the Chovos Halevavos goes on. He says that there are even higher *madreigos* of *teshuvah*; there are still better ways. Because who needs to suffer? Your own suffering, the suffering of others – even if it's far away, it's the people in the Congo – who needs it? We don't want anybody to suffer.

And so the Chovos Halevavos goes on and says that we shouldn't wait for those messages that come by means of suffering; instead we should listen to the messages that come by means of words.

Imagine you're sitting this week, Shabbos, in the synagogue and the *baal korei* is reading the *tochachah* and you hear how Hakadosh Baruch Hu

foretells what will happen when the Torah is transgressed. But instead of listening to the words just to be *yotzei krias haTorah*, you take the words to heart. It's talking to you; it's talking about you.

אַשְׁרֵי אִישׁ שִׁשְׁמַע לְמִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרַתִּי וְדָבַרְךָ יְשִׁים עַל לְבוֹ
- How fortunate is the man who puts the Torah on his heart! You know why he's so fortunate? Because he's choosing a higher path, a better path – he's listening to the words of rebuke and he does *teshuvah* just because of that.

I'm Talking to You!

אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם שִׁמַּע לִי - "How fortunate is the man who listens to Me," Hashem said (Mishlei 8:34).

"Oh," you say, "Certainly if Hashem spoke to me, I'd listen to Him."

No, that's not what it means. "I'm speaking all the time to you," Hashem says, "I speak to you from the *siddur* every day. I'm speaking to you from the Chumash and from Mishlei and from all the *seforim*."

"But not only from *seforim* I'm speaking to you," Hashem says. "I speak to you from the mouths of the *gedolim* too, the great men of the generation. I speak and speak constantly."

Words of Gedolim

So if you read in a Jewish newspaper that this-and-this *rosh yeshivah* made a statement, by no means should you make the fatal error of thinking it's too extreme. If you read this-and-this *chassidische rebbe* made a statement, beware of thinking that you know better. There are many fools who in their overweening arrogance and ignorance believe they understand more than these old rabbis from Europe. Anything that comes from Europe, they know, is nothing.

And so an old European rabbi, the Satmerer Rav, for years and years while he was still healthy, he warned – now he is *nebach* sick; Hashem should be *maarich yomim* him. He's sick now but when he was healthy he used to issue warnings, valuable words of *tochachah*. And oyy, there were so many

'wise' people who ridiculed what he said. He's against Medinas Yisroel? That already sentenced him to being canceled out.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zol zein gezunt*, is speaking. All the *roshei yeshivah*, they're speaking. The rov of your shul is speaking. Beware! Listen up! It's sent from Heaven for your benefit.

Messengers Galore

And even 'lesser' messengers who come to us should be heeded. Your *rebbe* in the *cheder* and mother and your father are excellent messengers. When your mother scolds you or when your father tells you off, pay attention. When your *rebbe* points out something to you or when some old person says, "Don't do that," they're all messengers from Heaven.

That's a much wiser person. He's not interested in *yissurim*. And so he makes himself interested in rebuke. If a person can get better from what his *rebbe* tells him, from what the *gedolei hador* and his mother and father and neighbor say; if he can get better from the *tochachah* when the *baal korei* reads it, that's a much better way.

And so he doesn't merely let it pass over his head; he tries to absorb it and it goes into his bones. Even if it's only one thing; even if one time he refrains from making a derogatory remark about a fellow Jew. One *leitzaanus* less or even one *maariv* that he *davens* better, one *brachah* that he says better, then it wasn't in vain. It has accomplished its purpose.

How fortunate is the one who learns how to do *teshuvah* by means of listening to Hashem because he has chosen the higher road, the better road to *teshuvah* than suffering.

The Higher Happier Road

But as high as it is, it's not yet the highest. Because now we come finally to the grand finale, to the highest and best incentive to do *teshuvah*. You know what it is? *שְׂמֵחָה וְטוֹב לִבָּב מְרַב כָּל* – Happiness

and a good heart because of all the good that he has (Ki Savo 28:47)! Because it's only *תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַרְתָּ* – it's only when you *don't* do *teshuvah* in the midst of your happiness, that's when the *tochachah* comes. But the best method of all is happiness!

It's the Chovos Halevavos but I will put it in my words instead of his words: The best type of *teshuvah* is *teshuvah* over watermelon. You are eating watermelon – isn't it good? It's delicious! It's red and sweet and refreshing and cold. You're enjoying it, aren't you? So you say, "Just because of that, just because You gave me this tasty watermelon I will do *teshuvah*."

I'm very serious right now. You can try it when you get home tonight. Go to the refrigerator and practice doing *teshuvah* on a slice of watermelon. "You're so good to me Hashem! How could I sin against you with *lashon hora* or by saying *brachos* without *kavanah*, or whatever it is."

Chicken Chiding

And so when a man is sitting at his table and his wife puts out a miniature banquet for him; he has good bread and he has salt and he has a piece of chicken and he has some more things to garnish the plate and as he sits there and he's ready to dive in, he should think, "Now is the time to repent."

That's the best repentance, to repent in the midst of a good meal! Of course if you repent on your deathbed when you're wracked by pain and you know the grave is only one day off, it's also repentance. But there's no comparison to the repentance that a man can accomplish when he's sitting down at the supper table!

Isn't that a good way to do *teshuvah*? Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sending messages but He's not sending suffering or even someone to criticize him; instead He's sending chicken. Sometimes He sends ice cream and chocolate cake too. Whatever good taste the messages have, they are all urging us to awake from our slumber, to stir ourselves from our

lethargy and to dedicate ourselves to the great task of our lives of getting better.

Teshuvah at the Bank

Isn't that a good *chiddush*? Isn't it worth coming to hear that? To repent when you're eating a good piece of meat! It tastes good! And your saliva is flowing and you have all your teeth and you're chewing and your stomach is still operating. Everything is working, purring smoothly. And then you think, "Now is the time."

Not only eating. When you're standing in line in the bank and you have a fat wad you're going to deposit, that's the time to think about rectifying your misdeeds.

When you're happy because everything is going well; you have no headaches and your business is making money – you're able to pay the rent – and your children are all good, you're marrying off your daughter to a big *talmid chochom*, making *simchahs*, that's the time to decide, "I am going to do *teshuvah* just because of that. Because Hashem is so good to me I am going to repent and improve my ways." That's the highest *teshuvah* there is.

Teshuvah on Ocean Parkway

Try that tomorrow. You're walking down Ocean Parkway and you have two feet. You're healthy. You have clothing. You even have in your pocket a few nickels – you're rich! And as you walk down the street and you breathe this wonderful Brooklyn air and you think, "Look what I'm getting! Look how lucky I am! Ay, *chasdei Hashem!*"

מָה אֶשְׂיב לַהֲשֵׁם - *What can I repay Hashem, כָּל תְּגִמּוּלוֹהֶי עָלַי* - *for all that He bestowed upon me?* "What can I do for you, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, after all You are doing for me?" And he does *teshuvah* on Ocean Parkway – *teshuvah* in happiness, *teshuvah* in pleasure. He decides to get better as a result.

That is the best *teshuvah* there is. We see the blue sky, the sun is shining and the weather is nice,

and you feel well, you do *teshuvah* just because of that, in gratitude to Hashem, that is the highest *madreigah* of *teshuva*.

Teshuvah in the Home

Try it out! Do it tomorrow. Even when you're sitting in your house and you consider that you have a roof over your house; it's not raining in or it's not raining in much – if it rains in only a little, still it's a great blessing. And it's warm inside; there's no snow on the carpets.

You look through the window, you see a homeless dog running through the snow sniffing at garbage cans, maybe he can find a stray morsel, and here you are snug in your home, with a full stomach. And you're going to sleep in a place with a roof. You're in Brooklyn. You're an American citizen. That's the time to think of repentance. That's the time to do *teshuvah*.

After a while you'll get into the habit of saying, "Hashem, I am so happy with what you are giving me, I am going to do *teshuvah* right way" and it becomes a stereotype, a form of living, that you learn to repeat again and again.

The Best Program

Now, of course this requires a certain level of *emunah*; besides for developing your *middah* of gratitude a person also has to know that everything he has is from Hashem. Because if a man thinks that his happiness is to be attributed to his own ability or to be attributed to some extraneous material cause, then he's not going to be spurred on to repent because of his happiness. It's only when he understands that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the *Gomel chassodim tovim* and whatever good fortune accrues to him is *only* the *yad Hashem*, then he'll understand it's a message. Only that instead of a message of suffering, instead of a message of vicissitude, of misfortune, exile, poverty, illness and rebuke, it's a message of happiness.

Because all the other messages – rebuke and suffering of others and *chas v'shalom* suffering himself, all those are substitutes; they're just *tachas*, they're instead. תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה – *Instead of not having served Hashem in happiness I have to bring the substitute, the tochachah.* And the substitute is never as good as the original article. The original and the best *teshuvah* is to repent when you're healthy and happy.

That's the best way! That's the genuine *teshuvah*! The one who wants to be the best *baal teshuvah* he makes use of this message of happiness and bestirs his mind and he becomes better. He uses that feeling of gratitude to spur him to make amends for what he has done wrong in the past and to serve Hashem with more zeal and purity of heart in the future. This is a *teshuvah* that is *מְגִיעַ עוֹד* *בְּסֵא הַכְּבוֹד*. That's called *teshuvah me'ahavah*. You repent out of love, out of gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And that's the best *teshuvah* program for everybody.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

A Minute of Happiness

In the two weeks that we have left before Rosh Hashanah I want to focus on doing *teshuvah* as much as possible and therefore in these two weeks I will make use of the best method of doing *teshuvah*: happiness. And therefore twice each day I will *bli neder* pause for thirty seconds to focus on a different happiness that Hashem is giving me and use that to do *teshuvah* out of a feeling of gratitude.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

17 - Repenting In Happiness | 520 - Messages From Hashem
606 - Torah Models For Eternity | E-160 - Repent in Happiness

Listen: 718.289.0899 Press 1 for English and 2 for Thursday Night Lectures



Should a twelve-year-old girl be forbidden from going to the library? And are there alternatives?



As far as the first question, today the library is off limits for anybody. Everybody knows that they have stocked *toevah* books and there are other books too like that; and they're in the children's section. So letting a child go by herself to a library and looking through the books means that the parent is either entirely ignorant or doesn't care.

Libraries used to be good places. When I was a boy, we could go with confidence to the library. There were shelves of books where you could read about poor boys who worked hard. Horatio Alger books; shelves filled with books about people who worked hard and were honest and they became successful. Inspiring books.

Today, all you read is books of criminals and wicked children. You read about a child who murdered his father or who brings a gun to school to shoot his teacher. And besides violence, today the books are filled with immoralities. Terrible things. Libraries are off limits today. They are foul places and I think that even adults shouldn't go to the library.

What's the alternative? If you must read English books, you can buy old-time books, old-time sets of Mark Twain. Now it's not that I'm recommending it. *Mesillas Yesharim* is better than that. But if you must read English books then read the old-time sets of O. Henry. Old-time sets of Dickens. If you like heavier stuff, old-time sets of Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* and other such books. There are plenty of books that won't poison the mind as virulently as today's books. There are plenty of books. There are alternatives.

And I want to tell you that it's a big error of the principals of the English Departments of the Yeshivos and Bais Yaakov schools, when they give children assignments to go to the library. It's irresponsible. Maybe twenty years ago, but not today. So the principals, the men and women principals of the English Departments of the Yeshivos and the Bais Yaakovs, should no longer send their pupils to the libraries.

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