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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

CHODESH ELUL



PARSHAS SHOFTIM SIGNS ON THE ROAD

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WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

SIGNS ON THE ROAD

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Part I. Signs of Safety

Tragedy in the Woods

In this week's *sedrah* we read a story about a man who went into the forest to gather firewood (Devarim 19: 4-8). It might have been wintertime and he needed wood for the fireplace, or maybe his wife had sent him out to get wood for the stove so she could prepare supper. Whatever it was, this Jew was now hacking away at a tree in a forest.

And then something terrible occurred. As he was swinging the ax, וְנָשַׁל הַבְּרֹזֶל מִן הָעֵץ, the iron head of the ax ricocheted off the tree and careened off into the woods and *lo aleinu, nit gedacht*, it struck a fellow Jew who was standing nearby and it killed him.

Now, our protagonist did this without any premeditation of course. "I didn't intend anything wrong," he says. "It went flying on its own. I didn't even

know he was standing there behind the tree.” And still, even though it was done unintentionally, the Torah calls him a *rotzeiach*, a murderer (*ibid.* 19:4,6).

“It’s no excuse,” Hakadosh Baruch Hu says. “Just like you came into the forest to chop wood, you should have considered that maybe other people were also there. You should have thought about that beforehand and secured the ax head to the handle before taking a swing. You should have looked around too, to check if anyone was standing nearby.”

Looking For Directions

So what happens now? The Torah says about him, וְנָס אֶל אֶחָת מִן הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה – He has to flee to one of the cities of refuge. He has to quickly make his way to one of the *arei miklat* in order to be safe from the vengeance of the *go’el hadom* who wishes to avenge the blood of his relative.

So we’ll imagine the scene as the Gemara (Makkos 10b) portrays it. The murderer is making his way through the backroads and byways, steering clear of the *go’el hadam* and trying to find his way to the city of refuge. And then he comes to a fork in the road. Which way should he go, to the left or to the right? And he’s in a rush; the *go’el hadam* is pursuing him. He has no time to open maps or stop at a gas station for directions.

But fortunately for him, there’s a sign there, ‘*Ir Miklat*’ with an arrow pointing him in the right direction. That’s how it was in ancient Eretz Yisroel; the roads were especially marked with posted signs, “*Miklat, Miklat*,” showing the *rotzeiach* which direction he should run.

That’s a *din* in the Torah. תָּכִין לָךְ הַדֶּרֶךְ – Prepare for yourselves the road (*ibid.* 3). At every fork in the road, in every place where the *rotzeiach* might get lost, there had to be guideposts helping him make his way to the safety of the *ir miklat*. The Torah wants to help him.

Getting Directions

After all, he’ll become a better person in the *ir miklat*. First of all, just being there, in *golus*, away from his ordinary life, is already a *kapparah* for him. And the cities of refuge weren’t ordinary places; they were *arei Levi’im*, special Torah communities. It means that Hashem is guiding him into the city where he will live among Torah teachers.

I imagine there were lectures in that place, places of *mussar* where the *rotzeiach* learned to be sorry for what he did; where he learned how careful you have to be with your fellow Jew’s life.

And so what do you see? That Hakadosh Baruch Hu is guiding the sinner. First He shows him the path to the city and then once he gets there, there’s a system—the *Levi’im* are there to teach him the right way to *teshuva*.

A General Rule

Now, the Gemara tells us there that we shouldn't think this *din* is a one-off; an especial rule that applies only to someone who kills *b'shogeg*. "Oh, no!" say our Sages. "This is a *mashal* for the system of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in this world. He is יוֹרֵה הַטְּאִים בְּרִדְדָּה – Hashem shows the sinners the road." It's a fundamental principle of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in this world; טוֹב וְיָשָׁר ה' – Because Hashem is good and upright, עַל כֵּן – therefore, יוֹרֵה הַטְּאִים בְּרִדְדָּה – He sends messages to help those who are veering off the path of righteousness (Tehillim 25:8).

So here's a man who has an institution, a yeshiva, and he ridicules all the rules of safety that are done in other places. A fire drill is a joke to him. The exit sign over a door is a joke to him. It's all "goyishe things".

What does Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? He's *yoreh chatoim baderech*. First he sends a fire inspector. The inspector wants to teach him. But he's not interested. It's a bother and it's expensive too. So he bribes him so that he shouldn't bother him too much with safety rules, with building codes. A true story.

But Hashem doesn't give up. Because it's a Torah principle. So He causes a fire to come somewhere else and people who have to be taken out of this world anyhow are burned up. And He expects this *menahel* to see this sign on the road and take the right turn.

I remember many years ago, there was the Cocoanut Grove Fire in Boston. It was a great tragedy. The Cocoanut Grove was a big night club and it was jammed with people—mostly Jews, by the way. One Friday night a big fire broke out and there was a pandemonium, a stampede, and hundreds were killed; burned and killed. I remember it well; I lived in Massachusetts then and the newspapers were full of it.

Lessons From Tragedy

Now, a tragedy like that is not meant to be merely a curiosity, a news item that comes and goes. Hashem is trying to teach you something. He expects you to take a lesson from that tragedy.

Now, there were a number of lessons there. Of course one is that night clubs are not a place for Jews to be. It's a good lesson! Another lesson, it was Friday night. Friday night, you're certainly not supposed to be in a nightclub. Another lesson is, Jews have to eat kosher. They don't serve kosher in that place. Many lessons Hashem was teaching.

But among the lessons, the most important one was that you have to watch out for fire precautions. *Yoreh*, Hashem is teaching, *chatoim baderech*,

the sinners who don't think about what could happen because of their negligence.

Hashem wants you to learn to be more careful with safety precautions. Not just when you're chopping wood in the forest; in modern times too! In that club there were exit doors that were locked and other hazards, and many changes were made because of this story, many new regulations. If the *goyim* in Boston can learn these lessons, surely we have to.

Frum Fires

But this *menahel*, he never studied the lesson of יוֹרֵה הַטָּאִים בְּרֶדֶד. It's just a Gemara, he thought. It's not a principle for life. And so above the fire exit in the dormitory he didn't bother to put up a fire exit sign. What happened eventually? Some boys from out of town were at the dormitory; they were newcomers and when a fire broke out they didn't know where to run. And they were burned up.

He's a murderer, this *menahel*! You think only someone who goes into the woods to chop wood can be called a murderer by the Torah? I'm sorry to say this, but I think that *menahel* is even more guilty than the wood chopper. Because you were warned—more than once! You had an inspection but you chose to ignore it! That's bigger than just a signpost on the road with an arrow. And the fire in Cocoanut Grove? Even bigger! Hashem was teaching you when He made that story! Why didn't you see?!

Safety First!

Of course, Hashem is teaching us very many things—we'll talk about some of them soon—but this is one of the most important lessons that Hashem is constantly teaching us: *Be especially careful with the life of a Jew!* וְנִשְׁמְרֶתֶם מָאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם. We'll say it *b'laaz* so that there's no misunderstanding: Safety First! There's nothing more precious in the world than a Jew—whether it's you or a stranger—and he has to be guarded with the utmost care.

And we all should learn that lesson. A woman lights the *neiros* Shabbos, and she hurries to put on her *bigdei* Shabbos and leaves little children playing around in the room where the *neiros* are burning. A terrible *chet*. Or the man who wants all his little children to be *mekayem ner* Chanukah. So he takes his little boys and little girls and he gives them *menorahs*. “Here, a Chanukah menorah for you, for you, for you.” And they're all standing and lighting the Chanukah *menorahs* and this big *tzaddik* walks out of the room. He's a *rasha gamur*! He has to stand over them and watch them.

Keep Your Eyes on the Road

You know why people are careless with their lives and other people's lives? Because they think that nothing could happen. That's an instinct in human beings—just as they lived until now and nothing happened, that's how it will continue. Just like you ran across the street or drove recklessly and nothing happened, so that's how it will always be.

And so Hashem says, “Oh no! *Chas v'shalom*, *chas v'shalom* it happens! And I'll show you the results or I'll let you hear about it, so that you should learn.” And therefore, whenever we hear of an accident, we should never let that opportunity go by. If you see a *meshugener* who walked across the middle of the street and a car hits him—everybody runs to see how he's lying in the street. And now ambulances are coming with their sirens. One of the purposes is to teach the *frumme*, the *ovdei Hashem*, “Are you a *chotei*? You're careless sometimes when you're crossing the street? Well, I'm showing you something now to guide you on the right path. Don't do that! Don't be careless!”

So last week, when we heard about someone's grandchild who was visiting here in our neighborhood and he fell out of the window—*baruch Hashem* he survived—when you hear these things, it should enter your heart like an arrow! Safety guards! “I'm never going to allow children in my home unless the windows are bolted shut or there are window guards.”

Experience Life

And therefore, you have to keep your eyes open and make it a policy of yours to learn from experience. I say ‘experience’—it's Hashem teaching you. Only we have to listen! Once upon a time, a *yid* came to me and he told me a story. He said that a *meshulach* came from Eretz Yisroel to his house. So he put a hot glass of tea on the table for him and he went into the kitchen with the *meshulach* to give him something to eat. In the meantime his child, a little boy, came in and he knocked down the glass of hot tea and it spilled on his hands. They had to rush him to the hospital.

I was thinking then, “Oooh, Hashem sent this man to me as a teacher: ‘Miller! Be careful with hot water!’ Especially with children in the house!” Could be I was careless sometimes, yes. But now I was being reminded.

And that's a very important principle. Whatever news you get, whatever you hear—and you're hearing all the time—it should enter your ears. And make it a principle, “Hashem is trying to wake me up, to rescue me from my *chatoim*, my negligence. From now on, I'm going to be more careful”.

Part II. Signs of Peace

Blessing of Peace

Now, it's important to understand that this Torah principle of "Hashem guides the wicked on the path to salvation", is not limited to learning the lesson of *v'nishmartem*; of being careful when you go chop wood or when you build a yeshiva dormitory or cross a street. Chazal are teaching us that **יְרֵךְ הַיָּמִין בְּרֵךְ** is a fundamental principle for how Hashem teaches us to live life successfully. He's always showing us things, teaching lessons.

We say **שְׁלֹמִים** in our *tefillah*; we ask Hashem every day a few times, "Please give us *shalom*." What does *shalom* mean? Does it mean you're a millionaire? Does it mean you have ten servants in your house and a limousine with three chauffeurs?

No! *Shalom* means that you're not in trouble. Everything is quiet. No ambulances came to your house this week. No fire engines. Your daughter is not calling you in the middle of the night to tell you she's having trouble with her husband. That's *shalom*! There's no war. There's no invasion of foreign armies coming in, no airplanes dropping bombs on you. That's what *shalom* is.

Terror in Congo

Now, because these words fall flat on the ears of most people, so in a certain sense we're *chatoim* – we're sinning against Hashem by ignoring our good fortune – and Hashem wants to be *yoreh chatoim baderech*; He wants to guide us on the right path.

So what does He do? He makes trouble, let's say, in Africa, in the Congo. In Africa entire tribes are massacring each other. In Bangladesh and Vietnam the brown people are trying to destroy each other. Or in China, the nationalists and the communists are fighting against each other.

All these phenomena shouldn't be lost upon us, and one of the purposes is to make us think about our good fortune. Suppose we lived there, in the Congo, what suffering we would undergo. People are constantly in terror, in commotion. Their lives are ruined. How many of them have been destroyed, how many have been maimed, orphaned, widowed, made into refugees! And all the attendant ills of war; epidemics, famine. It's such a tragedy, a *rachmanus*.

For Our Sake

And it's a tragedy that shouldn't be ignored by us. It's one of the ways that Hashem is *yoreh chatoim baderech*, and He expects us to utilize these stories in order to be full of joy about the *shalom* we have; **בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הַמְּבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם**. If we see that in a certain country there are wars, those wars are

being waged only for our benefit. That's the way we have to read the newspaper. If you read them at all, that's the way to read them.

I'm telling you now a fundamental interpretation of current events. Whatever happens in the world, we know according to the teachings of the Torah, happens because of us; it's for a purpose of chastising us and making us become better.

Now, some Jews are humble and self-effacing and it seems to them exaggerated to say that world history is only for them. They're willing to admit that it's *also* for them; if they're pious Jews, they'll admit that *some* of it is for them. But the Gemara (Yevamos 63a) tells us, **אֵין פּוֹרְעָנוֹת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבְלִי יִשְׂרָאֵל** – *there is no misfortune that occurs in the world unless for the sake of Yisroel*. It'll take a long time for this to percolate into our thick skulls, but that's what we're here for—even a skull, if you soak it for a long time in a liquid, it'll soak through.

Going Into Battle

I want to tell you something that you might find surprising but I think it's true. Hakadosh Baruch Hu made this little war in Iraq now for the purpose that we should appreciate *shalom*. All kinds of excuses are given why this happened and I'm not the one to interpret it—I'm too small to give such a *peirush* on the actions of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But one thing we can be certain about, those poor soldiers who got their orders and now they're boarding big military planes that are transporting them to the front, it's to teach us the blessings of peace.

The poor soldiers are in a tumult now. I saw headlines in the newspapers as I passed by the newsstand. American soldiers are writing their wills. They're very much frightened. A healthy eighteen year old who writes a will doesn't do it because he thinks he'll live till 120. He's frightened. And we can't blame them. Suppose one of us, *chas v'shalom*, had to go into battle against the enemy. We would be much more frightened—we would be hugging the rear helm hoping that the battle would be finished before we get to the front where the bullets are flying.

Nothing But Peace

Don't think that it's 'good times' when bullets are whizzing overhead. Don't believe the propaganda in the storybooks and magazines. They'll be creeping around in the desert and enemy forces will be shooting at them. There's no fun when bullets are flying. In the army, when bullets are flying, that's when a man begins to appreciate *shalom*.

Suppose that soldier could suddenly be transported to New York. It's humid and hot and there's no excitement. And he would be walking down the street sweating. He has no money in his pocket. And he has no job either.

But he'd be deliriously happy because he has *shalom*, it's peace. No constant buzzing of bullets all around him. No men screaming in pain, the constant fear of death without a let-up. Just plain *shalom*! Nothing else! That's his heart's desire. The transfer from the battlefield to walking down that hot street without any money in his pocket would make him deliriously happy. "Ooh wah! *Shalom*!" And that's what we should feel at all times. That's how we should feel when we're walking down the street on a hot day with nothing going our way except for *shalom*.

Better Than Fun

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "I want to teach My children to stop sinning and start being happy with your life." And how does He teach us? One way is by showing us the soldiers. They're trembling in their pants and just because of that we are enjoying! I don't say we're enjoying their situation—we sympathize with them—but *we're enjoying what we have!*

We're supposed to do that. We're expected to appreciate *shalom*! Right now there's quiet outside? You don't need anything better than that. Nobody is shooting bullets at you. No pogroms! That's *shalom*!

Now, try to go outside today and convince somebody that he should be happy with the regular routine of life—that's what *shalom* is after all—and he'll look at you like you fell off the moon. "No," he says. "I want some fun! I think I should get in my car and travel someplace." The happiness of *shalom* is not good enough for him. And that's because he's ignoring the path that Hashem is constantly showing him.

Peaceful Sleep

It's a great pity that people don't understand that. Do you know what a luxury it is to go to sleep in peace? In many places in the world, they cannot sleep in peace. They go to sleep worried that someone will be shooting a machine gun through the window in the middle of the night or that their refugee camp will be overrun by murderous mobs before the sun comes up. Anything can happen.

Even in Russia, you wouldn't be machine gunned in your home, but in the middle of the night, 2:00 at night—that's their favorite time—there's a wild knocking on your door, "NKVD here. Open up!" And they wake you up and ask you for your passport.

I once saw it—it wasn't NKVD; it was the Lithuanian police. Once, in the middle of the night, some yeshiva men were dorming together in an apartment, and they came pounding on the door with fists and shouting, "Open up." They were checking papers. You have to get up in your underwear and pajamas and open up.

Bandits, Bums and Babies

And the police were standing there very angry. That's how police are in Europe. It's not like in America; in America the police are terrified. I was walking on Church Avenue one night, coming home from the yeshiva, and when I saw two policemen walking, I said to them, "You know, when I see you, I feel confident." So they said, "We don't." That's two of them!

But these Lithuanian police were cruel: "Where's your passport?" You have to show your passport. You're not permitted to be anywhere without it; even at home, you have to have a passport. And this was in Lithuania where there was justice. Lithuania was a decent country. You couldn't harm a Jew in Lithuania. But still you couldn't sleep in peace. They had a right to barge into your home in the middle of the night and wake you up.

But tonight, none of you here will have to worry about that. When you go to sleep in America, you know that nobody is going to wake you up. You can sleep in peace. Bands of soldiers are not roaming the streets. Drunken bums are not banging on your door. Not yet, at least. If you vote for Dinkins, maybe, but tonight at least nobody will bother you. Maybe, if you're fortunate enough to be a mother of small children, you might get woken up, but pretty much, you're sleeping in peace.

Peaceful Happiness

Maybe some people are worried, so you put an extra lock. Of course, today you *must* secure your windows at night because the liberals have wreaked havoc upon us. But let's say you have enough bars on your windows and your doors are locked, then you go to sleep in peace. We're not afraid that somebody will shoot bullets through our window, that they'll burn down the house, that all of a sudden at night there'll be an invasion.

To be able to put your head on your pillow without any fear and to fall asleep peacefully is a very great *bracha*. Sleeping peacefully is a precious commodity. Not only Lithuanian police and wars in the Congo are teaching us; Hashem sends all types of messages. A man called me up last week; in the middle of the night his heart started palpitating. Hatzalah and sirens, the hospital. That night there was no *shalom* for that man. And I was thinking, "I have to learn that lesson again. If I can lie down on my bed in peace and get up

in the morning after a good night's sleep, you know what a happiness that is?" We don't even think twice about it.

But for the one who pays attention to the signs that Hashem is showing him, the sign of what *chas v'shalom* could be, he thinks about it twice and three times and he never stops thinking about it—and he lives a life of happiness because he pays attention to the lessons of war and trouble that Hashem is showing him.

Part III. Signs of Success

Signs of Suffering

Now, we can't go away from the subject of *yoreh chatoim baderech*, of Hashem showing us the way back to Him, without talking about the troubles that Hashem sometimes sends upon us in our own lives. Of course, we would prefer that there should never be any trouble; we're not interested in mishaps and difficulties. We should always live in clover; we should be reclining in the grass under the fig trees eating ice cream all our lives. That's what we'd like most.

But then, when would we remember Hakadosh Baruch Hu? You would never think about Him! If everything went smoothly always, you can be sure that Hakadosh Baruch Hu would never be in your thoughts. And so, *yoreh chatoim baderech*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is kind enough to send *yissurim* once in a while as signposts to direct our thoughts towards Him.

And that brings us to a Gemara in Mesichta Eirechin (16b). The question is raised there, עַד הֵיכַן תִּכְלִית יִסּוּרִים – *How far is the limit of yissurim?* It means, what would be the minimum visitation from Heaven, the smallest possible form of *yissurim*, that Hashem sends upon a man to teach him lessons?

Big Problems and Little Problems

Now of course, if a man is lying on the operating table, there's no question that he's getting a very big message from Heaven. When he's being strapped down and they're putting the ether cone over his face, he has to know that Hashem is telling him something. Even then, some people—even Orthodox Jews—aren't aware. "It just happened that way," they think. "It turned out that I have a weak heart." He doesn't connect it with Hakadosh Baruch Hu at all.

We're not talking about that. We're talking about intelligent servants of Hashem who know that "Hashem is *yoreh chatoim*, He shows us the way in life," and they react to big signs. The question is how far is a man expected to

go? How far should he go in interpreting the events of his life as messages from Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

The Sages are looking for the smallest possible thing that can be called a sign on the road so that we should know that when some small inconvenience happens in our life, we shouldn't let it go by. It's a golden opportunity, a *matanah min haShamayim* to help you out. And therefore it pays, the Gemara is saying, to know how far to take this.

Tailor and Tea

Now, the Gemara there has a lot of answers for that; different *Chachomim* responded in different ways, and because they're all valuable to us, so we'll take them one at a time.

First comes the great sage Rabi Elazar and he says like this: Let's say a man ordered a new jacket from a tailor and finally the day comes when it's ready. And so he puts it on for the first time and something bothers him. He's not sure what—it keeps him warm, it fits him, the color is right—but it doesn't satisfy him. That minimal dissatisfaction, says Rabi Elazar, is already called *yissurim*; it's a message from *Shamayim*.

Comes along a different *chochom*, Rava Ze'ira, and he asks a *kasha*: "Does it have to be such a big misfortune like that to be called *yissurim*? After all, a garment, you don't make every day; to get a new jacket is a special occasion and if it didn't please him, that can't be the smallest signpost that Hashem will show a person. *Anybody* would take that as a message!" You hear that?! He says that anybody would notice that; even a dumbbell has to react to that.

Rava Ze'ira says a bigger *chiddush*—even smaller inconveniences are messages from Heaven. If a person wanted his wine mixed with warm water and by error they mixed it with cold water, that's called a misfortune. It's a more common occurrence—your tea is not exactly the way you expected. That man has to know that he's being guided on a certain path by Hashem.

Hearing the Voice

Mar brei d'Ravina gives another example. He says that sometimes a person is putting on his undershirt and he happens to put it on inside out; now he's going to have to go through the trouble of taking it off and putting it on again. Such an inconvenience should be considered a message from Hashem.

And then a *braisa* gives a different example. If he put his hand in his pocket to take out a quarter and out came a nickel, that's a misfortune. He has both in his pocket, he'll be able to reach in now again and get the right coin,

but the wrong one came out the first time; that's suffering, it's a form of *yissurim*.

Now we must take this seriously because our Sages are teaching us that even the most minimal disturbance in our lives is one of the ways Hashem speaks to a person. It's like Hashem has spoken with a voice into his ear, "I'm the One Who made your tea a bit too cold. I'm the One Who pulled a nickel out of your pocket instead of the quarter you wanted. And it's because I'm a *Moreh Derech*; I want to teach you which path to take in life." And He expects you to listen—He expects a response.

Fumbling Fingers

Let's take a little incident that happens to us all the time. You picked up your keys from the table to put them in your pocket but you fumbled and they fell on the floor. Now, suppose you're past forty. When people are past forty, they try to avoid bending over as much as they can. But what can you do? You have to pick up the keys.

The first thing that should flash in your mind is, why did it happen? It didn't happen yesterday. It didn't happen the day before yesterday. Every time I successfully held on to the keys and put them in my pocket. Today, I fumbled. *יְרָה חֲטָאִים בְּרִיךְ* – Hashem is teaching me something.

After you pick up your keys, think about that. "So many times, day after day after day, I was successful at picking up my keys!" Take a look at your hands and marvel at the arrangement of your joints on the fingers. "They're so arranged that picking up keys is a simple task! Thank You Hashem that my fingers function so effortlessly, so smoothly, that I never even noticed them."

Teshuva in the Kitchen

Now isn't that a big *chiddush*? That's the first *teshuva* whenever Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends you a mishap: do *teshuva* for your ingratitude of not noticing it until today. Let's say you're washing dishes in the kitchen; now you're a careful *baalebuste* and you're a penny saver too but it happens you dropped a dish—a dish broke. Oy! A dish broke in my kitchen. And you start considering what that means; the Gemara says in Eirechin you have to think about it.

A broken dish?! Maybe I broke somebody's happiness. Did I say something wrong to my husband? If you'll think in a *lomdishe* way you'll say that's why your dishes broke and you're accomplishing something like a scholar; you're thinking *middah kneged middah*. Why not? That's an *oived Hashem* – a person of *da'as*.

But even before that, the first thing you should think is, how is it that so many dishes I've been washing for months and months and I haven't broken a

dish. Maybe it hasn't happened in years! Isn't that something to think about? Shouldn't I be grateful to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for all those days I didn't fumble? For all those dishes I did not break?

Knotty Middos

Another example. You want to untie your shoestrings and you're in a hurry and you find a knot in the laces; now you have to spend five minutes trying to untie it. Now, if you're a loyal Jew so you'll stop and say, "Such a thing doesn't happen to me every day. It's a lesson *min haShamayim*!" So you start thinking. Maybe I have a knot in my *middos* and *middah kneged middah*, that's why my shoes got knotted up. Now, if that's your conclusion from the knot in your shoestring, it's a very important conclusion. It's not silly at all, *chas v'shalom*.

But even before we go that far, the first thing to think is why is it that never before, let's say, in the last twenty days, in the last thirty days, did it ever happen that you had a knot in your shoestring? Why only today?

It's to remind you of the hundreds of times that you untied your shoes, easily, successfully. You hear that big *chiddush*? The one time that you have a knot was to tell you about hundreds of times you did not have a knot. Shouldn't you be grateful for all the times you didn't have knots in your shoestring?

Appreciate Your Eyes

Sometimes a speck of dust gets stuck in your eye. What's that about? It's very uncomfortable! A little jolt like that means that Hashem is giving us guidance in life; that we should enjoy our eyes and we should thank Him every day from the bottom of our hearts.

The purpose was that you should say, בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם פּוֹקֵה עֵינַיִם – I thank You Hakadosh Baruch Hu for opening up my eyes. It's such a blessing! Day after day, week after week, your eyes continue to function! The eye is such a delicate instrument, such a perfect camera. When you study the eye, you're amazed that it works at all, it's so complicated. Such a complicated mechanism could easily get into disorder *chalilah*. But rarely does it cause you any trouble.

And therefore, sometimes a little reminder flies into your eye to remind you. Don't think it's an accident! That's what the Gemara is telling us. It's the *Yoreh chatoim baderech*; it's Hakadosh Baruch Hu showing you the way, the path to perfection. That's how an intellectual servant of Hashem should react. When something, a small thing happens in life, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving a tiny little poke in the ribs, "Wake up!"

The First Teshuva

And therefore, that's the whole *sugya* in Eirechin. You know the *Chachamim*, they were great men and they had tremendous things to think about. Their minds were elevated more than we can imagine and they wouldn't bother their minds with puny problems. A nickel instead of a quarter?! A tea that's not to my taste?! Such little things!

Oh no! Nothing is little when it's Hashem talking! These are very big things! And that's why they discussed it—this sage says this and this sage something else and a third sage and a fourth one. And Rav Ashi put it into the Gemara! It's because our Sages understood that Hashem is **יֹרֶה חַטָּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ** – He's always trying to make us better; He's guiding us to perfection.

Now all this, if you'll get busy practicing this lesson, it's one of the best ways to go into a new year. To recognize all the good that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is supplying you always, that's *teshuva* number one. And so, when we see something happened, the first thing is to remember the lesson in our *parsha*, that Hashem is **יֹרֶה חַטָּאִים בְּדֶרֶךְ**. He's always showing us the path back to Him. And the first step on the path is when we use all of these little mishaps as a spur to look back and to appreciate all the days that nothing at all happened to us. That's our first *teshuva*!

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Reading the Signs

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Author of everything that happens in this world, big and small, and He is constantly providing us with signs that guide us to perfection. This week I will *bli neder* keep my eyes open for these signs on the road. At least once every day I will make sure to pay close attention to a signpost that is guiding me in one of the three ways mentioned in this booklet:

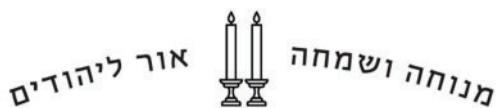
1. Signs that are warning me to be more careful with my safety and the safety of those around me. 2. Signs that are teaching me to appreciate the gift of *shalom* in my life. 3. Little bumps on the road that are reminding me of the myriad amount of things that go smoothly on the road of life.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

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Shabbos Is The Source

We greet Shabbos by calling it the source of all blessing: "*Likras Shabbos lechu v'nelcha, ki hi mekor ha-berachah.*" Shabbos is also called *ma'ayn ha-berachos*, the "fountain of blessings." In the sefer *Reishis Chochmah* there's a section called *Sha'ar HaKedushah*. It deals with various subjects connected with *kedushah*, such as the sanctity of one's eyes and thoughts, modesty in the home, etc. The author begins by stating that first, before everything else, comes the root and source of all the forms of *kedushah* — *Shabbos Kodesh*. The following parable from the Midrash expresses this point.

Once there was a king who had a dear friend. He told his friend, "Ask for a precious gift, and I will grant it to you." The friend was very clever. He said to himself, "If I ask him to make me a governor or a duke, that's all I'll have. Rather, I will ask for the thing that everything else comes along with." He said to the king, "My master, since you've granted me this opportunity to ask something special of you, I ask you to give me your daughter in marriage, and I will be your son-in-law." The king replied, "By your life, so will I do." (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim I, 17:3*)

The clever man in the above parable asks to become the king's son-in-law, because as soon as he becomes part of the family, he has everything! Shabbos is called a *bris*, a covenant: "*And the Children of Israel will keep Shabbos, making Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.*" (*Shemos 31:16*) **This *bris* of Shabbos kodesh is what connects us to Hashem.** Someone who knows how to use the power of Shabbos can acquire for himself all areas of the Torah, because Shabbos is the fountain and root of all blessings.

Shabbos is the seventh day of the week, and Tishrei is the seventh month of the year. The month of Tishrei begins with accepting Hashem's *Malchus* on Rosh Hashanah and ends with the tremendous blessings and *siyata di'Shemaya* of Shemini Atzeres. And so it is on Shabbos. When we accept Shabbos upon ourselves on Friday afternoon, we're really accepting Hashem's *Malchus*. For Shabbos is not just an individual mitzvah in a person's life — it is a *kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim* and leads a person to the tremendous outpouring of blessing described as, "Whoever delights in Shabbos is granted a heritage without limits." (*Shabbos 118a*)

One of our shortcomings in our times is that we don't properly appreciate the tremendous power of Shabbos. We attach great importance to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, to Pesach and Shavuot, but we don't give Shabbos the esteem it deserves. Yet it is the true source and root of all blessings both spiritual and physical! The fountain of all greatness and *siyata di'Shemaya* is open on Shabbos! Let's inspire our hearts and minds to revere this sacred day, so that we can tap into all the tremendous blessings of Shabbos!

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Adapted by R' Y. Levy from *Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh*, Rav Shimshon Pincus, Feldheim

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QUESTION

What should one do if an older child doesn't speak nicely at times and continues even when told not to?

ANSWER

It depends. You shouldn't wait too long. Don't wait until he's a big boy and you can't hit him anymore. A little child must be taught to speak nicely. So first, as I said before, give him a caress with your hand and say, "Chaim'l, you're a nice boy. If you'll speak these nice words then Hashem will like you and everybody will like you." Say it again and again. Little by little it enters his little head.

Sometimes however you can tell him like this, "Chaim, I must give you three *petch* but because you're a nice boy I'll give you only two *petch*." And give him two good *petch*. And he knows it's *al pi din*. He won't be angry at you. He knows it's justice. After all, he was supposed to get three. So use diplomacy.

Sometimes you must hit. Forget about the *meshugas* in the world, abuse of children. If you don't hit a child when he needs it, you're abusing the child.

March 11, 1999

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