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IN MEMORY OF MRS. CLARA CHOPP A"H AND MENUCHA MARKOWITZ A"H

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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PARSHAS YISRO

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

YOUR FELLOWMAN

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Part I. Wronging a Fellow Man

Prologue to Yisro

In Parshas Yisro we read about Matan Torah — how the nation heard the *Aseres Hadibros* and how the Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai. A tremendous event, the greatest day in our history.

But before all that happened, there is an introduction, a minor Matan Torah, so to speak, and that's the story of Yisro. Yisro was an idealist, and even though he had been a *kohen*, a priest in Midyan, but as time went on, his mind developed and he became disgusted with that kind of idol worship, he threw it all away. He was ostracized by his people, but he continued to follow his idealism. And then, as a result,

Hakadosh Boruch Hu rewarded him that a refugee from Egypt came to his city – it ‘happened’ to be Moshe Rabbeinu – and he took him in. Yisro invited him into his home, gave him his daughter as a wife, and he became forever connected to Moshe. In the course of time Yisro became great. He became great!

And now Parshas Yisro begins with Yisro coming to Moshe Rabbeinu, to the encampment of the Bnei Yisroel, after they had gone out of Mitzrayim. He came to Moshe to visit him, and he saw that all day long questions were being put to Moshe Rabbeinu by the people. It says *וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת הָעָם* – *Moshe sat down in the morning to judge the people*, *וַיַּעֲמֹד הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד הָעֶרֶב* – *and the people stood around Moshe from the morning until evening* (Shemos 18:13).

Now you know what it means to be a judge between people? They’re arguing among themselves and you have to quiet this one and quiet that one and there’s always excitement, nervous irritation. After one hour, the judge is ready to retire. But here he did it all day long *מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד הָעֶרֶב*. All day long he was quieting them; he was patient with them and he was telling them what the judgment should be, teaching them the right way in dealing with their fellow man.

But when Yisro saw what was doing, he made a protest. “Moshe, my holy son-in-law, you shouldn’t do it this way. You cannot bear such a big burden all the time. The nation can only succeed if there is an established system of judges to clarify all the *dinim* of *bein adam l’chaveiro*.”

Prologue to Kabolas HaTorah

And Yisro told him the subject of *dayanim*, that he should institute judges. “Listen to my voice,” he said. “I’m going to counsel you. *וְאַתָּה תִּחְזֹז מִכָּל הָעָם אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִּל* – *You should find from among the people men of worth*, *וְרָאִי אֲלֵקִים* – *who fear Hashem*, *אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת* – *men of truth*, *שׂוֹנְאֵי בָצַע* – *who hate bribery, they hate gain, and you shall make them judges of the people.*”

After that story, the *sedrah* moves on right away to Matan Torah, but this is how it started out. That’s our introduction to Matan Torah – judgments between the people, how a man should deal with his fellow man, that’s the beginning of the Torah.

Now we think that such a plain subject is not the way to begin the Torah. We think that Shabbos maybe, that would be a good introduction to Matan Torah. No; Shabbos is very important but Shabbos has nothing to do with dealing with your neighbor. Kashrus is also very important, but *kashrus* usually has nothing to do with a bothersome neighbor. A lot of important things could have been our introduction to Kabbolas HaTorah, but now you see that it's not so. You see the Torah began with a preface of judging between people, making peace between people.

Later in the *sedrah*, it describes how Hashem came down on Har Sinai *b'kolos u'vrakim* and He gave a Torah; but the last thing before that was this subject of *bein adam l'chaveiro*. And it's not an accident that it happened this way. The Torah is teaching us something very important here.

The Quick Conversion

Now, we'll take it step by step and try to understand it better. In Mesichta Shabbos, the Gemara tells a story about a certain non-Jew who wanted to become a *ger*. But first of all, he made conditions. He wasn't patient to sit down and study the entire Torah, so he said, "גִּירְנִי עַל מְנַת שְׁתַּלְמִדְנִי כָּל הַתּוֹרָה בְּלֵא עַל רֶגֶל אֶחָת – Teach me the entire Torah while I'll stand on one foot and I'll be megayer." That's what the gentile said.

So Hillel said, "Alright, let's go." I don't know if he said, "Pick up your foot," but he said as follows: "וְעַלְךָ סָנִי לְחֵבְרֶךָ לֹא תַעֲבֹר – What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man, כָּל הַתּוֹרָה בְּלֵא – that's the entire Torah."

And if you'll ask a question, so what's all this business of *chamische chumshei Torah* and six *sidrei mishnah* and sixty *mesichtas* of Shas? The answer is that's only commentary. וְאִיֶּדֶךָ פְּרוּשָׁה – All of that is only a commentary. Shas is a commentary on this rule.

Of course, זֵיל גָּמֹר – go and learn the commentary because it's a very deep rule. It's not a simple rule, and without the commentary, you won't succeed. You have to go now and learn from Brachos till the end of Mesichta Niddah, but as you're studying, remember the rule that I taught you because that is the entire Torah.

A National Friend

Now the question is what is meant by the statement that dealing respectfully with your fellow man is the entire Torah? “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman”, what does that mean that it’s everything?

So to be fair, I’ll tell you that Rashi has two *peirushim*. But also to be honest, both *peirushim* are true. Rashi, when he says two *peirushim*, he doesn’t mean one excludes the other — both are equally true.

Now the first *peirush* — it’s not our subject, so I won’t dwell on it too much — but the first *peirush* is: who is your friend? And Rashi says that you have one Friend; a friend with a capital F. That’s Hakadosh Boruch Hu. He’s your best Friend. Of all your friends you will ever encounter in your life, including your father and your mother and your *rebbe* and your wife, the very best Friend is Hakadosh Boruch Hu!

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ – He’s an old Friend, a Friend of the family. He has proved himself loyal to our forefathers and He has stood by us always. The truth is, you see we’re still here. For many generations, they tried that we shouldn’t be here. In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, וְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם – and our best Friend saves us. We say with a cup in our hands, a cup of wine we make the declaration! *L’chayim!* He’s a Friend forever!

A Personal Friend

Now that Friend, besides for what He’s done for the nation on a whole, He has done everything for you too. He has equipped you with a body. He has given you a good pair of eyes and a nose and a mouth — everything! Hands and feet! All He asks of you is you shouldn’t do with them what’s wrong. You should do only what’s right. That’s all He wants of you.

Suppose you gave your fellow man an expensive machine, let’s say a computer machine. It costs maybe two thousand dollars. And you made one condition: “Don’t bang anybody over the head with the machine. It’s not good for the machine and it’s not good for your fellow man’s head. That’s all I require of you.”

So let’s say it happens that this friend is visiting and you’re busy, so you get frustrated and you take the machine and you give him a bump on the head with it.

Ohohohoh! “That’s why I gave you a machine?! To give me a bump?!”

So just like you would be very much put out if you were treated that way after you gave this man such a machine, so don’t put Hakadosh Baruch Hu out by mistreating Him when He gave you such a complicated perfect machine — that’s your body and your mind and everything else. And after all that He did for you, show some gratitude — a little bit at least — by fulfilling everything He tells you in the Torah. Every mitzvah is an expression of gratitude. You’re not doing Him a favor; you’re showing gratitude for all of His favors.

The Human Friend

That’s one *peirush* in Rashi and it deserves a great deal of explanation, but since it’s not the subject for now, we’ll go to the other *peirush*. The second *peirush* in Rashi is **הַכֹּרֵךְ מִמֶּשׁ**. ‘What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend’ means your friend, a fellow of flesh and blood. You shouldn’t hurt people; you shouldn’t rob people or step on people’s toes.

Most of the *mitzvos*, Rashi says, are laws of not wronging your fellow man. That’s why *bein adam lachaveiro* was not only the first thing before Matan Torah, it was the first thing after too. *Mishpatim*; a whole *parsha* of *bein adam lachaveiro*.

As soon as the glorious experience of Matan Torah concluded, the Am Yisroel was on such a high that they were ready to accept it all. **נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע** – We want to do everything! Just let us know what!

And what did Hashem say? “Here are the *mishpatim*, the laws of dealing with your fellow man; all forms of damages, and the monetary relationships with those around you.” Sit down next week to learn *Mishpatim* with *peirush* Rashi and you’re reading a law book! All the details of how to treat your fellow man’s property; his cows and his sheep, his shirt and his land. All the various payments for bodily injury, and the laws of torts and contractual agreements.

And that’s most of the Torah! Rashi says that the majority of the *mitzvos* are laws against wronging your fellow man, laws of getting along properly with your fellow man. That’s a majority of our Torah obligations. It’s the majority of our Torah study, the majority of our accomplishments in this world, and the majority of our reward in the

World to Come. *Bein adam l'chaveiro* is the *ikkar*, that's what Hillel told this *ger*.

A Sales Pitch?

Now Hillel wasn't merely trying to make a sale, trying to induce him to come in. We don't induce *geirim* to come; if they come, they come, but we're not going to put a table out on the campus and let anybody come and pick up brochures about the glories of Judaism and lure them in. If it's a Jew, yes. But non-Jews, that's not our job. We'd like them to be good *kosher* Bnei Noach. They have a lot of obligations. It's enough to be a *kosher* non-Jew. *Geirus* is not our objective.

So you must say Hillel was telling this goy straight from the shoulder the truth of the Torah. It wasn't a come-on, like people who want to make a Hillel House and they tell the students that to be kindly and compassionate, that's all you need. No, we don't say that! We say much more than that. We're not interested in giving anybody any bargains. You have to learn the entire Torah and keep the entire Torah!

But when you're coming in from the outside world into the world of Torah you must know that there's something very important and not easy for you to take upon your shoulders — treat your fellow with the utmost respect. *Kabolas HaTorah* means that your biggest obligation is toward your fellowman. You know, sometimes a person likes mysticism; he likes abstractions. He might even like learning, all the technicalities. And so we tell him, "Excellent! That's all good but you're coming now into a world where human beings are most important and where the greatest emphasis is put on your behavior to your fellow man."

Part II. Torah of a Fellow Man

Are You Okay?

Now, when we hear that, we lean back with relief. "Aah, *baruch Hashem*," you say, "I'm okay then. If the biggest part of Torah is between me and my fellow man, then I'm not so bad."

But actually you're not okay because that's the most difficult part of the Torah. I told you once this story. There was a man who was a *shochet* and when he met Reb Yisroel Salanter, *zichrono livrachah*, he told

Reb Yisroel that he's giving up *shechita*. "It's too much responsibility to be a *shochet*," he said, "to be responsible for *kashrus* for so many people."

You have to *shecht* so carefully — the knife must be especially sharp and you have to take care that your hand doesn't press down, and also you shouldn't stop for even a moment in your *shechting*. Then you have to be *bodek*; you have to examine the internal organs. All the requirements are so punctilious, and the smallest error makes it an *aveirah* and he was afraid to be a *shochet* — he might be responsible for feeding his fellow Jews *neveilos v'treifos*. And therefore this man decided to give up *shechita*.

Business Worries

So Reb Yisroel said, "What will you do for a living?"

"I'm going into business," he said.

"Business?!" said Reb Yisroel. "How can you go into business?! If you're a *shochet*, all you need to know is a small part of Yoreh Deah. But for business, you need Choshen Mishpat! And that's much more difficult to learn and to fulfill! You think being a businessman is easy?! To be a *koshere* businessman, you have to be a very big *lamdan*."

It's a *chiddush*, isn't it? What do you have to know to be a businessman? You have to hustle, that's all. Oh no! You're hustling on somebody's feet. You're stepping all over other people when you're hustling. You don't realize what it means to be a businessman. Because when you're dealing not with chickens but with your fellow man, it's a very big responsibility.

That's why we have Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia and Bava Basra. We have more than that. It's such a big subject to learn not to be injurious to your fellow man and his property, his money. It's such a complicated subject. Choshen Mishpat is much more difficult than Yoreh Deah and Orach Chaim. Yoreh Deah deals with *kashrus*. Orach Chaim will deal with Shabbos and things like that. But Choshen Mishpat deals with your fellow man's property, and that's more difficult and complicated than any part of the Torah.

Nezikin for Dummies

And that's why we begin with little children; we start teaching them these subjects right away. Once a man told me — sixty years ago he told me this — he said he doesn't understand. His little child goes to a yeshiva school and they're teaching him Bava Kamma, laws that a lawyer has to know. "My little child has to be a lawyer?" That was his *kashe*. Why teach them Bava Kamma? A little child of six years old!

And Reb Yisroel Salanter answered that *kashe*. He said if you don't start at the earliest age teaching him about somebody else's body, somebody else's property, somebody else's feelings, he'll grow up without any understanding how serious it is! That has to be the introduction to the Torah. Other people are important! You must start at the earliest age to know that if your cat wanders onto your neighbor's porch and makes some dirt there, you are responsible! If your dog scratches up some flowers from your neighbor's lawn, you are responsible!

You say, "I didn't tell my dog to do it." That has nothing to do with it. Once you have a dog, you're responsible!

Don't Say 'I'm Sorry'

If you walk in somebody's house, you're a guest and you lean against the window and your elbow goes through the pane and you say, "Oops, I'm so sorry," that's not enough. You're sorry? If you walk out, you're a *gazlan*. You have to pay for it!

Or if you're sitting at a *kiddush* and you want to hand a neighbor a glass of wine and while you're doing it, a drop falls on his pants, you have to pay for the cleaner. You can't say, "I'm sorry." That's **אַרְם הַמִּזִּיק בֵּין הַיָּד** **שׁוֹגֵג בֵּין הַיָּד**. Even though you didn't intend, you have to pay!

You have to learn these things because people are transgressing all the time! And these are sins for which there's no forgiveness unless you pay up! They're so serious! Yom Kippur will not help! And therefore we begin to understand the great obligation of *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

You must know that if you sit on somebody's chair, it's a chair that belongs to someone! And if instead of sitting on the four legs, you'd like to have a little ride so you tilt it back and forth on two legs — it's not made for that. It's not a rocking chair. So you're loosening the glue

in the joints. You're *mekatzer yamim* of that chair. You have to know you're *osid liten es hadin*.

It's not a joke! It's a serious matter! You're a *mazik*! The chair might not collapse immediately, but someday it will collapse before its time because the chair was not made to sit on two legs.

Torah Borrowing

You have to learn that anything that you borrow and you don't use it in the proper manner that it's intended to be used for, you're a *gazlan*. You're a thief. Suppose you borrow my screwdriver and you use it as a chisel to open boxes. He didn't tell you it's a chisel! A screwdriver is for a screwdriver, not a chisel, and if you use it incorrectly, you have no *reshus*. Anything you use incorrectly is a *sho'el b'lo reshus*. You're a *gazlan*. It's like stealing it.

You think you can just borrow my *sefer* without asking? Maybe not. Because a *sefer*, as you turn the pages, the pages tear. I have to give you permission to learn my *sefer*. That's the *halacha*. A *tallis*, if he's not finicky and he doesn't mind the perspiration from your neck on his *tallis* — in the olden days most people didn't mind, so you could borrow his *tallis*. Otherwise, you have to watch out! If he doesn't like it, you can't borrow his *tallis*! He doesn't like the idea of other people's sweat on his head.

So here's a *frum* Jew but he never learned how important it is to care about other people. So he's sitting and he sticks his foot out into the aisle. That's a public peril. Along comes a young lady tripping fancily on her high heels and she slips and she breaks her leg over your shoe. "Oh, I'm so sorry!" he says, "I didn't intend it!"

But if he had learned Bava Kamma, he would have learned about the principle of *bor birshus harabim*. You cannot dig a pit in a public thoroughfare or put any public encumbrance, anything that will cause people to stumble. You can't even stick your elbow out in the aisle. Are you doing it right now? Watch out! It's a sin! It's a sin to cause people to stumble! And when you walk up the stairs of your house, see if the children left skates or anything else on the steps because the visitors might go for a ride to the hospital.

Sticks, Stones and Words

And what about feelings? That's also forbidden by the Torah. **כְּשֶׁם שֶׁיֵּשׁ אֹנָאָה בַּמָּקוֹחַ וּבַמְכִיר** – *Just like there's a law of cheating people in buying and selling, overcharging, כִּךְ יֵשׁ אֹנָאָה בְּדְבָרִים* – *there's also a law of ona'ah of hurting people in words* (Bava Metzia 58b). Hurting by words is forbidden just like hurting with money.

Unfortunately, it happens many times, people give checks that bounce — that's plain robbery. A check has to be an honest check. But even if you pay the good check, it has to be paid without mean words. Hurtful words are worse than stealing. The Gemara says that: **גְּדוֹל אֹנָאָתַת דְּבָרִים מֵאֹנָאָתַת מָמוֹן** – *It's much worse when you vex people with words, you say a mean word, then when you vex them in money matters.* The Gemara there gives three reasons, three separate reasons. Take a look there — it's *daf nun ches amud beis* — you'll see there three reasons why it's worse.

You hear that? Saying a mean word to your wife is worse than if you cheated her. Let's say you have a grocery store and your wife comes in to buy something, would you cheat your poor wife? You wouldn't cheat your wife. You'd be happy to fill her basket with all kinds of good things. But if you said one mean word to her, it's worse than cheating her! Hurtful words are more painful than tripping on the steps.

Warning the Convert

And that's what Hillel said to this *ger*! “You have to realize the *chomer hamitzvos*. Do you understand what you're coming into? You're coming into a new world, a world where you have to be aware of your fellow man in a way that you never were before — his person, his money, his property, his feelings. *Everything* you have to be careful with.”

He should know beforehand it's not easy to be a Jew. The *goy* might think, “*Kashrus*, oh it's very hard to keep.” Or *Shabbos*. He thinks maybe that *Shabbos* is hard. No! That's nothing! Those are all easy things to do. You have to get up in the morning and go to the *beis haknesses* to *daven*. You have to put on *tefillin* every day. You have to be careful what kind of married life you live. You need many things. All that's not the difficulty; it's easy. You should know, *kol haTorah* is **לְחַבְרֵךְ סִנֵּי לְחַבְרֵךְ** **לֹא תַעֲבֹר**. That's the difficulty of being a Jew. You have to deal with your

fellow man properly. And that's not easy. Like Reb Yisroel said, "You have to learn and learn in order to know how to be yotzei with your fellow man."

That's what Hillel was telling him! **כָּל הַתּוֹרָה בְּלֶה** – *Bein adam l'chaveiro* is everything. You might think as a Jew you'll come into the synagogue and you'll just be by yourself, you'll have no business with anybody, you'll do *mitzvos* and just commune with Hakadosh Boruch Hu like a monk in his cell. Oh no! That's not Judaism! *Yehadus* means living with everybody else! And it means living with everyone properly! You have to react to people! You have to take in visitors, wayfarers! You have to pay money, *tzedakah*! You have to do *chessed*! You have to say kindly words always! You have to be careful what you say! When you pass somebody in the street you have to greet them! You have to always keep in mind the other person's desires and wishes!

That's how severe it is to be a Jew. Not only for a *ger*. That's everyone's introduction to Torah. It's a big responsibility! Like you say, "Siz shver tzu zein a Yid." It's a severe responsibility because a man was created for the purpose of serving Hashem by means of his fellow Jews. And that's going to be your most constant test because people are everywhere. All types of people! And they have feelings and bodies and property. And so it's *rov haTorah*; most of your opportunities for greatness will be with other people.

Part III. Holiness of a Fellow Man

Foundation of the Subject

Now, I want to introduce here an important point that you have to understand if you're going to fulfill this subject properly. And that is that it's not only a matter of laws, of the nitty-gritty details that the Torah demands of us in being careful with our fellow man. Because you have to understand why it's so; why is it so that our fellow man deserves such great care, such tremendous deference? And I'm going to make an attempt to explain that in the time we have left because it is a very important part of the subject.

So some people who think in a superficial way, they say because otherwise how could society survive? It's the best thing for everyone

if there are laws and rules and details. It's good if there are *batei dinim* and judges who make peace between people by applying the Torah laws. That's how society functions best.

Don't you see today what's doing outside when the wicked judges and politicians stopped enforcing the laws? Look; if you stand on the street today and a taxi passes by you, you'll notice there's a glass wall, a complete wall between the driver and the passenger. Now how long ago was that instituted? When I was a boy they didn't have a thing like that in a single taxi.

When I was a boy, none of the stores had metal grating to protect the windows of the stores. In those days, you could walk through the streets in a poor neighborhood at night. I was sitting on a bus recently and behind me were sitting two Italian laborers from Canarsie; laborers, tough guys. And one said, "You know Billie, there was once a time I used to go walking at night here with my wife. But I don't go out anymore on the streets at night." And he was a tough guy, not a little fellow. And so you see before your eyes the difference when there are *batei dinim* that make sure nobody wrongs a fellow. And so you might say that's why the Torah is so *makpid* on how careful you are with your fellow, because that's the best thing for society.

Honoring Hashem

And that's true, but it's not it — it's more than that, much more. There's a very strong foundation that is holding up this entire subject and we'll explain it now. The *mishna* in Avos (4:1) says like this: אִיִּזְהוּ מְכֻבָּד – Who is called a man who deserves honor? אֵת הַבְּרִיּוֹת – If he honors his fellow man. That's an honored man. You hear that? Who is called honored in the Torah? Someone who honors his fellow man.

Now, you can give different definitions of what it means to 'honor'. You're polite to people. You say thank you to people. You never say mean words. If they greet you, you answer them. You encourage them, you praise them. You help them when they need something. Very good. Excellent. But the minimum is that you're careful with him; you won't hurt him, you won't steal from him or cheat him or damage his property. That's the basics of honoring your fellow man.

So Hashem says, “If you do that you’re honored by Me. I’ll give you honor.” And the *mishna* brings a proof from a *possuk*: **וְשִׁנְאַמֹּר** – Like it says, **כִּי מְכַבְּרִי אֶכְבֹּד** – ‘Those who honor Me, I shall honor.’

Honoring Who?

But there’s a big question here because what proof is that from the *possuk*? ‘Those who honor Me’ we understand means that when you come to the *beis haknesses* you walk in politely. You don’t talk *divrei chol*. You behave respectfully, you don’t yawn, you don’t stretch your arms. Alright, that’s **מְכַבְּרִי** – that’s honoring Hashem. But here we’re trying to bring a proof that if you honor your fellow man, Hashem will honor you. And the *possuk* says “If you honor Me, I’ll honor you.” Is that called honoring Me?

Yes! The answer is that when you honor someone that’s called honoring Me. Only that we have to understand why that is so. And so we’ll go back to the beginning of the Torah. **כִּי בְּצַלְם אֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם** – Man is created in the image of Hashem. Man is so great that when the *malachim* first saw him, **בְּקִשּׁוֹ הַמַּלְאָכִים לֵאמֹר לִפְנֵי שִׁירָה** – they wanted to sing before him the same song that they sang before Hashem every day. They wanted to say, “Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!” They were so amazed by man’s greatness that they made a mistake and they thought, “That’s Hashem!”

And where does that greatness come from? **וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפִּי** – Hashem breathed into man’s nostrils, **נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים** – a *neshama* that would live forever. Because **מֵאֵן רָנַפַּח מִדִּילִיָּה נָפַח** – when you breath into somebody else, you breath from yourself. Hashem breathed of Himself, *kaviyochol*, into man and therefore in every person there’s an endless fountain of greatness.

Angelic Sight

Now when we see a man, we see nothing. There are ears sticking out from his head; it’s quite comical – two ears sticking out. He has two holes in his nose. We look down on man because his *chitzoniyus*, his exteriority deceives us. And therefore it’s easy to think “so what if you mistreat an *adam*?”. Of course, it’s not a nice thing, of course you won’t do such a thing on purpose, but after all he’s just 180 pounds of protoplasm.

But the *malachim*, they look beyond the exteriority and they see what's inside of *adam*. And they are amazed because they see something that resembles Hakadosh Boruch Hu; they see his innate greatness. So much so that they made that error; they wanted to say *shirah*.

Now we shouldn't take this error lightly because *malachim* are בָּלֵם אֱהוּבִים בָּלֵם בְּרוּרִים בָּלֵם גְּבוּרִים. They're the whole *aleph beis* of perfection and these gifted creatures, they recognized the immense greatness of man. And the story is said for us. It's repeated in order we should know we have to aim for that; we have to know what an *adam* really is.

Gadlus HaAdam

We're not talking about an *oived avodah zara*, a corrupt person of today, but the original man — he's without Torah, without *tefillah*, without *tefillin*, without Shabbos, without *kashrus*; he's not commanded in *mitzvos* — and this man, we have to understand that he stands all alone on the surface of the earth. He outweighs, he's more important than the vast remoteness of space and the stars beyond the Milky Way, a huge world much bigger than the sun and there's so many of them that when they're together in the distance it looks like a sea of light. And each drop is a huge world! There are galaxies there. And all that is less important than that one man.

Now that is something that we have to think about all our lives before it can sink in. And don't think that people didn't understand that. There are certain places where the subject was studied at length. In Slabodka, the Alter *zichrono livracha* of Slabodka spoke for forty years on the subject of *gadlus ha'adam*.

When the Alter was saying farewell to the *yeshivaleit* in Slabodka so he was sitting at the window of the train and the train began moving. He was talking to his *talmidim* and they were walking on the platform alongside the train while it was moving. Along came a big Lithuanian policeman and he was waving them away. So the Alter said like this: "Mir viln em grois machen uber er lozt nisht — we're trying to make him great but he won't let us." Slabodka was trying to make mankind great. In Slabodka you talked about *tzelem Elokim* all the time. "We're trying to make him great but he doesn't let us." They would rather imagine they're frogs, monkeys. They don't want to hear it. But we, at least we, should hear it. Man is infinitely great! Every man! Every woman! Every child!

The Stepping Stone

Now, I understand that these words don't find an echo in your minds immediately. Especially today, it takes a big wrench for us to divorce our minds from the world's attitudes. Of course today the world is full of *apikorsus*, but even before the *apikorsim* gained control of the press and the schools that they have today, it was impossible without labor, hard work to gain that concept of the greatness of *adam*.

But you must understand that it's part of the Torah—I say 'part'; it's all of the Torah — and so it has to be learned. It's expected of us to plant this seed in our minds and nurture it. And as the years go by, it'll take root and it'll produce branches and fruit because the result of this information is tremendous. It's a *yesod hayesodos* of Torah, the knowledge of the greatness of mankind.

But not only is it an important attitude in its own right, it's a stepping stone. That's the point here. This *yesod* is a foundation for all of the *dinim bein adam l'chaveiro*. It's not poetry. It's not theory and abstraction. It's not idealism. No! That's what it really is. A man is the image of Hashem *and we're expected to act towards a man as if he was a reflection of Hashem*, which he is. He's a magnificent creature, something infinitely great, and that's why we have an infinite responsibility towards him. Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself put upon that little man, that bundle of nerves and flesh and muscle, the seal of *tzelem Elokim* and we have to respect the man because of Him.

Holy Faces

You're going to mistreat a *tzelem Elokim*? You have to know you're mistreating Hashem. That's what the Gemara in Sanhedrin (58b) says. **בְּאֵלֹו סוֹטֵר לֹעֵזוֹ שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל** – *If you give somebody a slap in the face*, **לֹעֵזוֹ שֶׁל שְׁכִינָה** – *you're slapping Hashem in the face!* That's not poetry! It's real!

I was once as a boy on Simchas Torah in the synagogue. They were dancing around in a ring and then one man had an altercation with the man next to him — something happened between them — so he gave a slap while they're dancing Simchas Torah.

Now had he dropped the Torah, ooh! What a tragedy! He dropped the Torah! Everyone would come fast. They would ask *shailos* who should fast, when, what to do, how much *tzedaka* to give. But he gave

him a slap? Nothing. A slap is a thousand times worse than dropping a Sefer Torah! You're slapping Hakadosh Boruch Hu in the face. That's what the Torah means כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. That's how you have to respect a man's face.

A Tzaddik's Breath

But not only a slap. A slap is terrible of course. Only a *meshugene* would slap another Jew. A *meshugas*. But even if you mistreat someone in other ways. You walk on his grass. You overcharge him. You hurt him. You use his chair like it's a ride. You stick your foot out in the aisle where he might fall. You keep him up at night because of your talking, your laughing. There are thousands of things! It's most of the Torah living! One of our biggest functions in life is to make people great, to recognize the greatness of human beings so much that we *want* to be careful with them.

I'll tell you something, a story. You might think it's unimportant but I think it's very important. I knew a *tzaddik* whose head was in the heavens all the time; his mind was always occupied with great thoughts and yet I noticed that he never spoke to anybody unless he perfumed his mouth first.

You know if someone is careless and he's talking to somebody sometimes he lets loose a flow of polluted air from his mouth. Oh, is it difficult to bear that halitosis! Now, he's too polite to run away from you, but you're a *mazik*. You're annoying him. But this man, I watched him carefully and I saw that for years he carried a little packet of Listerine pellets in his pocket. He never came to speak to anybody unless first he perfumed his mouth.

Living Idealism

Why? I knew him very well and he was a man who lived with the ideals of *tzelem Elokim*. He knew that every *adam* is a *tzelem Elokim*, and he didn't want to do anything, the smallest thing even, to make his fellow man uncomfortable.

That's a man who understands the lesson of our *parsha*, of the foundation that came before Matan Torah — you have to treat your fellow man with respect because it's not a man; it's *tzelem Elokim*, that's how great he is. Once you understand that you'll treat him and his feelings and his property with the greatest deference!

And that's what the Torah requires of us. It's Torah! Not only it's Torah — it's *kol haTorah kulah* in a nutshell. And once you understand that rule you're ready for Kabolas HaTorah. Only that **אֵיךְ פִּירוּשָׁה** – there's a very big *peirush* on that rule, **אֵיל גִּמּוּר** – and so get busy learning the *peirush*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Seeing the Tzelem Elokim

In this week's parsha, we learn that the introduction to Matan Torah was not a mystical experience, but the obligation to deal properly with other people. The Torah teaches that *bein adam l'chaveiro* is not merely social responsibility or good character, but a recognition of the holiness of man — that every person is created *b'tzelem Elokim* and therefore deserves the greatest care, restraint, and respect.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once each day before speaking to another person, I will pause for about fifteen seconds and remind myself that the person standing in front of me is a *tzelem Elokim*. I will try to let that awareness shape my words and tone, so that even ordinary conversations become an expression of *kavod habriyos* and a preparation for accepting the Torah properly.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

406 – Derech Eretz | **455** – First Rung on the Ladder of Perfection | **611** – Your Fellowman | **E-16** – Preface to Chassidus | **E-75** – Live to Love Your Fellowman

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The "Seasoning" Called Shabbos

Chazal tell us that *Shabbos Kodesh* has a special flavor. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 11:4) recounts that Rabbi once invited his friend Antoninus, the Roman ruler, for a Shabbos meal. It was Shabbos afternoon, and the food was cold. The delicacies should have been less tasty, but Antoninus ate from them and found them especially delicious.

The next day, Sunday, Rabbi invited him for another meal in which he brought before him simmering dishes. Antoninus said to him, "I found those to be tastier than these." Rabbi told him why: "These are missing a certain seasoning." Antoninus was surprised: Were the storehouses of Rabbi — who was fabulously rich and influential — lacking?! Rabbi explained, "They are missing Shabbos. Do you have some Shabbos?" He was saying that we have a seasoning called "Shabbos," and only on Shabbos do we partake of it.

We all taste Shabbos every week. We love Shabbos and are attached to it, and we're even prepared to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* for it. Therefore, even if we don't know how to explain exactly what Shabbos is, it doesn't matter. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial if we could reveal the secret and explain a little bit of what Shabbos is. This would enable us to see greater beauty and depth in *Shabbos Kodesh*:

- It is written, "*You didn't see any image on the day Hashem spoke to you at Chorev from the fire.*" (*Devarim* 4:15) We are commanded not to express God by means of an image. Let us understand what underlies this command. An image, by nature, can express only a momentary state — it cannot reflect change. We are commanded not to ascribe an image — a static state — to Hashem.

- It is written, "*You shall not have other gods to My face.*" (*Shemos* 20:2) This verse communicates one difference between Hashem and idols. Idols are referred to as "אלהים אחרים," from the word "אחור, backside," whereas Hashem is described as having a "face," as it says, "to My face."

There is a *middah* called "face." We will describe it with an illustration from everyday life. Let's say a father comes home and discovers that little Yaakov, his two-year-old, has pulled out his drawer of important documents and dumped them on the floor. What's more, Yaakov is hard at work scribbling on them. The father is furious and his face turns red with anger. Yosef sees that his father is angry and doesn't know what to do. In the end, he takes his father's hat and puts it on his head. At that moment, the father simply bursts out laughing. From here we see that a face can change in an instant; it's not a static thing. But the back is static — it always looks the same.

Idols are אלהים אחרים, the back, because they don't have a face. They're static and unresponsive. But Hashem has a "face," and if we keep asking Him for something, we can elicit a different response, sometimes an unexpected one. When it comes to the *middah* called "face," the possibilities are endless. As Hashem is described as having a "face," we can never predict what trait He will express, since a face is unlimited in its capacity for change. A person cannot say, "That's it. Hashem is angry at me, and that's the way it is." This is nothing but nonsense and *apikorsus*. For the moment we cry before Hashem, He greets us with a smile.

This is the special flavor of Shabbos—when Hashem's "face" is revealed, and He is "smiling!" During the week, a person lives with sadness, worries, and troubles. Then Shabbos comes, and "*May Hashem shine His face upon you*" (*Bamidbar* 6:25) — Hashem shows His smiling face to him, so to speak. Everything changes in an instant!

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

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QUESTION

Does it matter what type of work a girl does?

ANSWER

It matters a great deal. A girl or a woman must try by all means to work in the right environment. It's a great pity when girls and women go into offices today where there's immorality, wicked men, and they're subjected to temptation. She should be among *chatzufim* and *reshaim*?! Sometimes they do very terrible things to pious women in the offices. They come over to them and do very fresh things.

And don't tell me that a *frum* woman will never yield. I can tell you stories that will make your hair stand on edge. Nobody is strong enough to risk temptation. And the fact that the pious woman doesn't succumb is not enough. Because there remains a stain on her soul.

There is wickedness everywhere, especially today. And therefore if it's possible to work in a place where only women are employed, that's also not so wonderful if they're mean women or wicked women who talk dirty language, but it's preferable to working in a place where there are men. And I would say, even in a *frum* place where there are men you should try to avoid.

I don't believe *kollet* women should support husbands at the expense of exposing themselves to all kinds of bad environments. It doesn't pay for a girl to ruin her soul for the sake of her *kollet* husband. Let them find some other smaller paying job in a *frum* environment. It makes a great deal of difference where a woman or a girl works.

November 1983