



פרשת כי תשא

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Reproof, The Way of Life

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Part I. Moshe Criticizes

A Shocking Climax

I would like to speak about when Moshe Rabbeinu broke the *luchos* as he came down from Har Sinai. You have to understand what it was that Moshe Rabbeinu was bringing down from the top of the mountain. He was carrying in his arms a special gift from Hakadosh Baruch Hu for the Am Yisroel. It was a huge diamond, a tremendous diamond, and it was engraved by the Finger of Hashem. What that means exactly, I'm not the one to tell you - I'm not capable - but I guarantee you that whatever it was, it was much more than we can imagine.

The whole nation was waiting for that moment! They were looking up at the mountain - "When is Moshe our Teacher going to be coming down carrying the love-token from the Hand of Hashem!" It's like a *kallah* under the *chuppah* waiting for the *chosson* to put the *kiddushin* ring on her finger; that's what the *luchos* were. It was the wedding ring

from Hakadosh Baruch Hu: "הָרִי אֶת מִקְרָשְׁתִּי לִי - You, the Bnei Yisroel are hereby betrothed to Me with these *luchos*, to be My nation forever and ever."

What happened? Oy vey, what happened! As Moshe Rabbeinu is coming down the mountain he takes a look and he sees that the nation is doing something wrong; they're dancing around an *eigel*. Now, mind you, it wasn't such a terrible sin, the *eigel*. We'll talk about that one day; it wasn't what you think. But whatever it was, the nation wasn't living up to the expectations of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and more was expected of that great generation.

So what did Moshe Rabbeinu do? He gave the Am Yisroel the biggest slap in the face that he possibly could. He took the *luchos*, the wedding ring, and he smashed it to pieces! You know what that means? It means he was telling the people that they weren't the right people for the Toras Hashem. Wedding canceled! Forget the whole thing!

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The Worst Form of Criticism

And the people were stunned! There couldn't have been a worse criticism than what Moshe Rabbeinu did. I'm sure he said it too. The Torah doesn't record everything but you can be sure he told them why he broke the *luchos*. "You're an עַם וְלֹא הָקַם! נָבַל וְלֹא הָקַם! You just received the Torah and so quickly you turn your backs on Hashem?! A waste of a people!" He criticized them bitterly.

Now we, with our American heads, if we had been there I'm sure we would have thought it's a terrible way of reacting. Only because we don't think about it much, so it doesn't bother us. But if we had been there we would have taken exception to it. So much criticism! So many harangues! That's not the way to react. We would say, "That's not the way to talk to people if you want to get through to them."

After all, Moshe wasn't commanded by Hashem to break the *luchos*. He could have been softer, more understanding. He could have come down with the *luchos* and said, "People, look. I'm bringing the *luchos* now from Hashem. Is this the way to act at such a time? You should be ashamed of yourselves. You could be so much better. You should live up to this great occasion."

If Moshe Rabbeinu would have asked the therapists today what to do, that's what they would have told him: "There are ways to speak to people. You don't have to criticize like that." But Moshe didn't have the *toras ha'therapists*. For him, it was only *Toras Hashem* and therefore he gave it to them over the head. And he did it with force, with bitter words!

The Real Patriot

Now before we continue, I want you to first pay attention to a fact about Moshe Rabbeinu that is a very important preface to this subject of criticism. Moshe loved his people more than anyone else. He was the real patriot of the Am Yisroel. Don't you remember what made him great, how he began his career? He was in the palace of Pharaoh, a

darling prince being brought up by Pharaoh's daughter. He had all privileges, and outside there were people, the Hebrews, working with bricks and clay. He had no connection with them and if it was one of us that would have been the end of the story.

But what does the Torah say about Moshe? וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אָחָיו – He went out to his brothers, וַיִּרְא בְּסִבְלָתָם – and he looked into their troubles. His heart hurt for his brothers and he shed tears for them. He gave them a hand, he put his shoulder under their burdens; whatever he could do he did (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:27). And when he saw an Egyptian hitting an Ivri, he took his fist and he gave the Egyptian one blow and laid him low. That was the career of Moshe Rabbeinu. He loved his people. With his heart and his shoulder and his fist he loved them.

And when we study the entire story of the *eigel* we see that even now he was just as much a lover of the Am Yisroel. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu, "They made a golden calf?! Forget about them! I'm going to destroy all of them and I'll make you and your children into a great nation!", so what did Moshe Rabbeinu do? Did he agree? No. He threw himself down on the ground and he begged Hashem to change his mind. And he refused to hear no. He prayed so much that Hashem said, הֲרִף מִמֶּנִּי – Let go of Me!" It means Moshe Rabbeinu was holding Hashem tightly, not letting go of Him (*Brachos* 32a). He couldn't get up. He became sick, וַשָּׂחֲזָתוּ אֹחֲלֵלוֹ – a fever took hold of him (*ibid.*). He was trembling with a fever. And yet he continued! He wouldn't let go!

Superhuman Prayers

Do you know how long he prayed? He didn't pray for an hour. He didn't pray for a day. He prayed for forty days! Forty days?! Forty days he was begging and begging and begging. Now if you would ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu for something and after the first ten minutes he says, "No!" then you would stop. You'd give up. You love yourself very much but there's no use! How much will you ask already? But Moshe loved the Am Yisroel more than you love yourself and so he didn't give up.

Moshe Rabbeinu was a human being – how could a human being pray for so long? Only because he was an *ohev Yisroel*. Make no mistake about it; he loved his people! He was the *ohev Yisroel* par excellence!

Now, that seems to us to be a contradiction. If he was an *ohev Yisroel* so why was he so tough with the people? Why break the *luchos* and criticize and punish? And this wasn't an exception – it was the rule. When Moshe Rabbeinu is talking to us, all we hear is criticism. We don't hear praises – maybe one place or two places and very briefly, but in general it's bitter criticism. It's a remarkable thing. The lover of his people is constantly belittling them!

Tough Love

And now we come to a very important principle: When you love somebody, you're not going to praise him when he needs to be told the truth. When you love someone you want to make him better. And you make him better by criticizing him.

The breaking of the *luchos* was the best thing that ever happened to our people. You know what would have happened had Moshe Rabbeinu been polite to the people when he saw the *eigel*? You know what would have been had he said, "My children. You can do better than that; you're letting Hashem down"? The people would have wept. Oh, how they would have wept! *And the effect would have disappeared by the next day.*

But Moshe Rabbeinu wanted it to last. And that's why he scolded them and embarrassed them. When a person is scolded, it hurts; it goes into the soul and the effect is forever. Now that seems a queer thing to our ears but that's the truth – when you're put to shame, you'll remember.

Embarrassing the Gabbai

I remember when I was a *bochur*, a young man, I was a *gabbai* in the yeshivah where I *davened*. And it was *erev Purim*, Taanis Esther. It came at *minchah* time, so I opened up the *aron kodesh* to say Avinu Malkeinu like on every *taanis*. Only I forgot that

you don't say Avinu Malkeinu on Taanis Esther, *minchah* time. There was an old Rosh Yeshivah there. He said, "What's this?! You're opening the *aron kodesh* for nothing! It's disrespectful to the *tzibbur*, to the Torah."

That's one thing I never forgot. Almost sixty years have passed – fifty-eight years passed since then and every *erev Purim* I know that at *minchah* time, there's no Avinu Malkeinu. Avinu Malkeinu on Shivah Asar B'Tamuz at *minchah*, yes. Avinu Malkeinu on Asarah B'Teves at *minchah*, yes. But Taanis Esther at *minchah*, no Avinu Malkeinu. I never forgot that. It wasn't a terrible sin but it was something and this Rosh Yeshivah taught me a lesson I'll never forget.

And Moshe Rabbeinu, that was his job, to make a great nation forever, a nation that won't forget his lessons. And the stronger you hear it the more you'll remember it; you'll remember it so well that it'll be to your benefit forever and ever. You know, Flavius Josephus lived at the end of Bayis Sheini, a few thousand years after Moshe Rabbeinu lived. Now listen to what he wrote in the book Jewish Antiquities (Book III, 15:3) – it's a remarkable statement – he said: "There is still no one of us who does not act – even now – as if Moshe was present and ready to punish him if he should do anything that is indecent." Moshe criticized them constantly and they were better off because of that.

They DID Know

Do you know why the Generation of the Wilderness became the best generation in our history? Because they were the generation that was scolded most. I told you this previously – I heard this from my *rebbe*: Friday night when you start out full of enthusiasm in Kabolos Shabbos and you start saying *Lechu neranenah*, that beautiful *mizmor*, and everything is going well; you're in a good mood and suddenly you're hit in the belly by a statement. Hashem is speaking about the *dor hamidbar* and He says, אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה אָקוּט בְּדוֹר – "For forty years I quarreled with that generation, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי – and they did not know My ways."

But my *rebbe* said, “It means ‘They *did* know My ways.’” A *chiddush* from my *rebbe*, *zichrono livracha*, in Slabodka. Again, just so we shouldn’t make the mistake tomorrow night by Kabolos Shabbos. When it states אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה אָקוּט בְּדוֹר – Forty years I quarreled with them, וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ דְרָכַי – and they did not know My ways, it means, “They knew My ways.”

But the reason that “they knew My ways” is because I quarreled with them constantly by means of Moshe Rabbeinu and I said, “You don’t know My ways.” Again and again, they were told, “You don’t know” and that’s why they knew My ways.

The Critical Teacher

It’s like a boy in *cheder*. A boy is in the yeshivah and his *rebbe* says, “Do you know the Gemara?”

He says, “Yes,” and he says the Gemara for the *rebbe*.

The *rebbe* says, “You don’t know it!”

The boy goes back again and he sees that everything seems to be right. “Oh no. I overlooked this word. No, I don’t know it.”

So by constant criticism, he finally comes to perfection. And that was the way of Moshe Rabbeinu; that was how he created the perfect nation. We became a great nation because of the criticism. The best generation in history was the *dor hamidbar*; and it was just because of that.

Part II. The Navi Criticizes

No Fortune Tellers

Now, it’s important to know that it wasn’t only this one generation. It’s true the *dor hamidbar* was something extraordinary, but this was the way of the Am Yisroel always – as long as we had *nevi'im*, we became better.

You’ll be surprised to know that this was the primary purpose of the *nevi'im*. Don’t think that *nevi'im* were just fortune tellers, seers. No, that

wasn’t the purpose. The prophet came to tell you what was wrong with you, to make you better.

You’re hearing now a very important principle of our history – the *nevi'im* came primarily to criticize. Yes, they also foretold what was going to be – if we didn’t improve, but that wasn’t their purpose. Like the Rambam explains (Deios 6:8), Hashem appointed prophets *v'hayu machlimin oison*, and they got busy putting people to shame!

The Kind Surgeon

It’s like a surgeon who has to make an operation to take out something; something dangerous is growing and it has to be removed. So imagine he’ll say, “I’ll go easy. I won’t go too deep. I’ll just go in superficially and then I’ll close him up again. Or even better, why should I open him up? I’ll pat him and compliment him and send him home.”

That’s no way to heal anybody. Oh no. A good doctor, a merciful doctor, takes his scalpel and he cuts deep. He digs in and cuts out the cancer, every last bit he cuts out. And it hurt. In the olden days, sixty years ago, they didn’t have anesthesia. You had to grit your teeth and bear it because you knew it was good for you. He was saving your life. And that’s what the *nevi'im* did too – they were sent to save lives by means of wielding a sharp scalpel.

It hurt the *nevi'im* too, by the way. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent them, they tried to get out of it. They wept and cried out, “Aho, Hashem! Please, Hashem, send somebody else! We don’t want to be surgeons to cut open raw wounds in people’s bodies, to denounce our fellow Jews with the worst words.”

Little Big Sins

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, קְרֵא בְּגֵרוֹן אֶל – תְּחַשְׁבֵּהוּ – Call out with your throat and do not spare, בְּשׁוֹפָר הָרָם קוֹלְךָ – raise up your voice like a shofar. It means, “Say your criticisms aloud in the marketplace; put to shame those people that I am sending you to castigate.”

You know why? Because that's the best thing for people. Once a person comes to the Next World with even a very small sin, even a small sin in character or in Torah ideology, it becomes very big. In that world, it'll bother you to no end.

It's like that famous *mashal* of a man trying to go to sleep in a bed and everything is comfortable. But there's one bean lying beneath him. Under the sheet, there's a bean. It's only one bean but it ruins his night's sleep. It presses into his side. It pushes in this direction, and that direction. Unless he takes it out, he may not sleep at all that night. That's what you can look forward to from even the smallest *aveirah*. Like that small bean, it will make trouble for you to no end. Unless you pull it out by doing *teshuvah*. And the only way to do *teshuvah* is to know what's wrong, to be told what's really doing with you.

And therefore even good people were put to shame. Even the best people couldn't escape the sharp denunciation by the *nevi'im* because they were being judged by the critical Eye of Hashem. Everybody else applauded them; everybody else complimented them on their good deeds, but the *navi* bitterly criticized them as if they had done the worst sins, with exaggerated words of castigation. Of course, it's not exaggerated because whatever Hashem sees is true and to the Eyes of Hakadosh Baruch Hu even a very little sin is very big.

The End of Surgery

And the remarkable thing is that the people were willing to listen! They went to listen to the *navi* because they understood their purpose in the world. Just like a person goes to the surgeon because he wants to live in this world, they went to the *navi* because they wanted to live in the Next World.

Now, the question is why did it come to an end? Why did *nevuah* go away? If that's the way of living successfully shouldn't it continue forever?

And the answer is that there came a time when the enthusiasm began to wane and they no longer

were so eager to hear criticism. They weren't interested in surgery.

Here's a surgeon, an excellent surgeon. But he's out of work. Nobody takes him because there's a man who writes a column in the newspapers and he says, "Surgery is out of style. Natural is the way to go. Today you have to come to a certain place where there's a fellow with a turban. He sits cross-legged on a carpet and everybody gets down on their knees in front of this fellow with the turban and he makes a motion with his hands like this and he looks right into you with his eyes and he heals any sickness you have inside of you. You don't need surgery."

So people swarm to this guru. He gives you colorful gems, healing stones, and other garbage. And because they get their 'healing' from him – of course they all die from illnesses but they won't tell you that – so the surgeon doesn't have any more business. So people stop studying surgery. Who goes to medical school? You can't make a living anymore!

The New Order

It's true that criticism is the very best thing for a person, but it hurts to hear the truth. Compliments and flattery, we enjoy that much more: and so the people turned away from the *nevi'im*.

You know what happened? At that time there arose a new group of prophets, false prophets, who began saying compliments to the people. Because that's what the people wanted! They wanted surgeons who would pat them on the head and compliment them. The cancer is spreading in the body? No matter. You'll be fine.

Yirmiyah tells us that the false prophets were guilty of not telling the people the truth. נְבִיאֵיךָ הָזוּ לְךָ שְׂוֵא וְתַפֵּל – Your prophets said to you things that were empty and without taste. שְׂוֵא means things that are vain and useless, וְתַפֵּל, it lacked salt. What does that mean? וְלֹא גִלוּ עַל עֲוֹנֶיךָ – They did not reveal your sin. That's the heart of the problem. The false

prophets did not tell the people what was wrong with them!

Jewish Pride

Don't think it was merely the phenomenon of imposters deceiving the people with false prophecy. The false prophets all had good intentions. They wanted to urge the people to be proud of their nation, to be proud of themselves.

The false prophets didn't countenance doing sins. No false prophet would do such a thing. They were pious people. But they wanted to praise. "You will conquer. Nobody will be able to take Yerushalayim. Hashem promised that He's going to be with us forever. And never will any enemy be able to enter the gates of Yerushalayim."

That's the merchandise the people wanted. It's like today. We want only to be caressed. "You're doing well. You're a good bochur. You're a *masmid*. Very good! You're a good husband, a good wife." We're not interested in anything else.

The nation wanted a balsam, something to soothe them. They didn't want jeremiads. You know what a 'jeremiad' is? "He delivered a jeremiad" means he delivered a Yirmiyahu *drashah*. Because Yirmiyahu Hanavi, you have to know, was the biggest critic. He was one of the strictest, the most virulent of *navis*. He poured out fire on the heads of the people. That's why he's always used as an example of criticizing, of scolding. It's called a jeremiad in English.

Now, as long as people welcomed criticism in the good old days, we were given that gift. But when they started ignoring the *nevi'im* so Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "Goodbye. That's the end. You don't want *nevi'im*, I won't give it to you."

No More Jeremiads

Don't you remember what happened to Yirmiyahu? Yirmiyah Hanavi says וַיִּדְרוּ אֲבָנִים בִּי – they threw stones at me. They attempted to kill him too. He was put into a quagmire and he was sinking until a colored man came along and saved his life.

Interesting to know, a colored man saved the life of Yirmiyah Hanavi. The white Jews were afraid to save him because he had so many enemies, but came along Eved Melech Hakushi – Eved Melech that's his name, Hakushi, the black one – and he told the king, "Look, the *navi* is drowning in mud," so the king said, "Take thirty men and take a lot of rags and ropes and pull him out." And they pulled him out of the mud and saved his life. We owe a debt of gratitude to the black nation for that – they saved our *navi*!

But the king's officials had put him there to drown in mud; they wanted him out of the picture. And that's because Yirmiyah had a bitter tongue and the people wanted to hear instead kind words, compliments and praises.

And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "If that's the case, prophecy will come to an end. If you don't want the gift of prophecy, of knowing exactly what you have to fix in this world, you won't have it." And so, that great opportunity to hear the bitter truth, the great opportunity to change yourself in this world before time runs out, came to an end. And with the end of *nevuah*, a great period in our history came to an end.

There was Still Something

Now even after the *nevi'im* we had *mochichim*. The next generations, what do you think they were, flatterers? No, they also told the truth.

Let's say Yosi ben Yoezer Ish Tzreidah. He came soon after the *nevi'im*. He was a big *tzaddik*, Yosi Ish Tzreidah. Yosi ben Yochonon was also a big *tzaddik*. Hillel and Shammai and Antignos Ish Socho. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai and Rabbi Akiva came after the *nevi'im*. You mean to say they didn't criticize? They criticized plenty! They couldn't have kept a rabbinical position in America! They couldn't hold a *yeshivah* in America. Their *talmidim* would run away from them!

Yosi ben Yoezer would sit there and tell his *talmidim* what was wrong with them. "You come in late for *pesukei d'zimrah*! What's *pesukei d'zimrah*, a

joke by you? Why don't you come at the beginning, at least a few minutes before they start Boruch She'omar? You come in just before Yishtabach and put on *tefillin*, you *tzaddik*?" He criticized them!

Shammai and Hillel

Shammai said that! He criticized his *talmidim*. He said, "What does it help that you shake so much in Shmoneh Esrei. You're shaking. What about thinking a little bit in Shmoneh Esrei?"

Hillel? Don't think Hillel was a softie. If he was around today he'd rebuke his *talmidim*. "You're a big *masmid*? How is it that the first time you get a chance to run off to another city to a *chasunah*, you go and you waste four days? Three or four days, you waste in learning just for a *chasunah* in Cleveland? What kind of business is that?"

But try as they did, no longer did you have a nation that was willing to hear exactly what was wrong with them. They couldn't live up to their potential any longer. No question that in those days, even after the *nevi'im*, people became great. But they didn't become what they could have been. Even today, two thousand years later, there's a tremendous regret in the Next World about what could have been – had they only been willing to hear the plain truth.

Part III. More Criticism

Doctrine of Rebuke

Now, today surely it's a lost art, to be able to receive rebuke. It's a beautiful ideal. We're not accustomed to that because we live among gentiles, among the nations, and it's nothing but falsehood and flattery; but we're talking Torah now and the Torah says that *zeh haderech*, this is the way. Be willing to listen to rebuke.

And that brings us now to the *sefer* Mishlei. Mishlei, you know, is a valuable treasury, a repository of all precious things. It's a pity people don't study Mishlei. If you study it thoroughly – you

can study it with Rashi and better with Rashi and the Gra – you'll find that it's full of counsel on how to live successfully. It doesn't need any *haskamah* of mine but I'm just saying this as a preface to the following remarks.

Among the many teachings in Mishlei, there is one idea that occupies a major place among its teachings; it's reiterated constantly, so much so that we get the impression that it is an overriding doctrine, a doctrine that is an introduction to all of the good advice in Mishlei. And that is the importance of criticism, of rebuke.

Again and again Shlomo Hamelech reiterates how important it is to have somebody to criticize you. He knows you don't like it – nobody does – but Shlomo Hamelech is there not to feed us ice cream and lollipops; he's trying to help us. And he wants us to know that without criticism we're not going to succeed at the purpose we came into this world for.

Let That Sink In

Now listen to what he says. **כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה** – A *mitzvah* is a lamp; it makes a light to guide you, **וְתוֹרָה אוֹר** – and Torah is a light! Torah and *mitzvos*, very good; they'll guide you. But **וְדַרְךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכָחוֹת מוֹסֵר** – the way of life are the rebukes of *mussar*. The way to success in life is paved with the stones of *mussar* rebukes.

Now, it doesn't say **וְדַרְךְ חַיִּים מוֹסֵר**, the way of life is to learn *mussar*, to spend fifteen minutes or a half hour before *minchah* looking in the *Mesillas Yesharim*. Oh no; he said "rebukes of *mussar*." Rebukes? What does that mean? Well, try as you may you cannot escape it. It means you have to get somebody to rebuke you.

Now where you'll get it, I don't know. Those people who listen to these tapes – if you have nothing better – so that's my humble contribution to the cause. Listen to them again. And again and again. Let the criticisms sink in.

But the truth is that even I'm not saying it in the way I should be saying it. I don't know each and

every one of you so I can only speak in generalities. And so which pharmacy will fill that prescription of *tochachos mussar* for you, I don't know. It's not easy to find today. Find me a synagogue where the rabbi is going to criticize you. He can't, because the rabbi on the next block will welcome you. If your *rebbe* in the yeshivah will rebuke you, so you'll go to the other *shiur*.

No Excuses!

And like somebody said – he was complaining to me that I'm speaking about impractical things and he said, "What good is it if you'll give a prescription if the patient doesn't know where to go and get that medicine?"

Maybe it's an excuse; I don't know. I'm not sure if it's a good enough excuse because when we're talking about something so important, the *derech chaim*, no excuse is good enough.

And so if you're wise you'll seek it out; you'll find the right pharmacy that will be willing to dispense the prescription. I saw that once. Once in my life a boy came over to me – I was employed in a certain institution, a yeshivah – and he said to me, "I would like you to point out to me things that I'm doing wrong, things that I need to change. Any flaw that you see in me, let me know." And I could tell, he was serious. I was floored. I almost fainted and fell off the chair.

That's a man who wants to grow great. That's a man who knows that this world is a פְּרוּזְדוֹר לְפָנָי הַבָּא, merely a hallway before the Next World, and so he listens to the advice of Mishlei. You want to live in the Next World? So find somebody to tell you to your face what's wrong with you. Not what's wrong with your neighbor, what's wrong with your mother-in-law, what's wrong with your daughter-in-law. What's wrong with you! That's the *derech chaim*.

Seek the Treasure

Now, I know that this is falling on deaf ears. The concept is so foreign to modern minds that it

doesn't register. But at least we should understand the principle. You must go and seek! You must look for a place or look for a person who is going to tell you what's wrong with you.

Ahh, if some friend would tell us what's wrong with us, how lucky we would be. Where can you find such a friend? You have to go far and wide to find somebody who is interested enough in you to criticize you. Can you imagine such a thing, to have a friend, a partnership with someone and you'll criticize each other? That's a rare bird. It's so rare that if you can find it you've uncovered the greatest treasure.

But even if you won't seek it out, at least we should know what we're looking for so that when it comes our way we'll recognize it. And if it will happen that somebody will give you some criticism that you understand is sensible, you're not going to be angry at him. You'll grab it and pocket it. If somebody by accident happens to hurl a diamond at you, even though it hurts you'll thank him because you won't get so many opportunities in your life.

Otherwise, all you'll get in life is perfumed spit balls. Flattery and *shekarim* you'll get and you'll never discover the truth. You'll walk in darkness all your life. And so if once, for a moment, the heavens opened up and there's a flash of lightning – maybe your wife or your neighbor said something to you and you saw a little spark of truth, so you have to let those words enter your ears.

With Friends Like These...

Dovid Hamelech said the following: בְּקָמִים עָלַי מְרָעִים תִּשְׁמַעְנָה אָזְנִי – "When the wicked rise up against me, let my ears hear" (Tehillim 92:12). Now, it's usually understood to mean, "Let me hear of their downfall," but Rav Yisroel Salanter explained it a different way: "When those who want to say bad about me, when they stand up against me, let my ears hear their critique."

Not like people think today, that if someone criticizes you then he's already your enemy. No!

That's your best friend. That's the one to listen to because that's the person who's going to bring you to Olam Haba.

Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 2:11) says that anybody who comes along and criticizes you, he's a *malach* from Hashem. You hear that?! And here you thought that your neighbor criticizing you is your enemy, and Rabbeinu Yonah comes along and tells you that he's a *malach* from Hashem! What that means is that anybody who comes along in this world and says something to you of *mussar*, of rebuke, something that could be useful for you, he's called a *malach* – he's your best friend.

Your Best Friend

So if you come home and your wife criticizes you because of something you did, you didn't behave properly, don't huff and puff and make excuses. Lucky is that man whose wife has a big mouth and tells him what she sees. Don't say, "She's just a nag." She's a *malach Hashem*. She's your best friend.

Don't forget those words she said. Not like husbands do, they don't forget and it's gnawing at them, "How could she say such a thing?!" All day long he's in a crabby mood.

No, I don't mean that. I mean to review in your head that criticism again and again when you're walking down the street. "I can't get away from it. She's right. She's right and I should do something about it."

Same thing if your husband criticizes you because of something wrong that you did, that's your friend. "Chana, you shouldn't be speaking *lashon hora* on the telephone." Or "Leah, it's time we should get rid of that 'Jewish' magazine from the house. Who needs it?" "Maybe you should buy yourself a new dress? Something more *tznius*?"

The Lucky Boy

If you're a yeshivah boy living at home you should be happy if you have a mean father who's not afraid to tell you to your face, "What kind of

business is this? You think you're going to go out at night? Sit at home and review your Gemara." Oh, that's a lucky boy; that's a boy who will become something in life.

Even if you're married already. Isn't it good to have a father who says, "You're bringing a television into your house?! What are you, crazy? As long as I'm alive, that rotten box won't come into the house of my children!" He puts his foot down on everything.

In *derech eretz* too. We need to be told! A good father and mother will tell you. And sometimes it comes with *fire*. "Stop eating that cake! Stop eating that fat! Stop lying in bed all the time when you have a day off! Get out and walk. Exercise. Eat less candy. Eat less pastries."

A good *rebbe* will teach good manners. "Why don't you shine your shoes?" the *rebbe* says. "Is it nice for a yeshivah man to come with scuffed shoes?" Or he'll say, "Why is it that you don't use Listerine? You come and open your mouth to me and you give me a blow, a deadly blow."

Be Encouraging

Of course, everything must be said with a certain amount of perspicacity, a certain amount of judgement. Because we can never forget that there's the other side of the coin, the side of encouragement and praise. Parents should be lavish in their praise when their child behaves properly. We spoke about that once. There's a tape called "Career of Encouragement." A very important subject. Not only parents; neighbors too. Teachers, *rebbeim*. Anybody should praise people when they behave properly. And don't be stingy. People love praise and it's a stimulus for them to become even better. Today even when you rebuke you have to sugarcoat it a little bit.

But I'm talking now not to the ones who give rebuke. That's not our subject; we're talking about when you're on the other end of the stick, when you're hearing the rebuke.

I know; I know very well that people aren't interested in this subject. All they want is to be

caressed, to be told, “Yes. You’re nice. You’re right. You’re very good.” And so they go away just as bad as they were. But when you understand that you’re in this world for one purpose, to improve, to make something from yourself, so you become ambitious. And once you have an ambition to improve, so you’re waiting to hear something that might give you a clue, a hint about what you need to know.

And because it’s a question of the *derech chaim*, the path to living successfully, so as much as we possibly can we want to live up to the greatness of our ancestors who appreciated *tochachos mussar*. Of course we won’t ever come close to what they became but when it comes to the path that takes us to Olam Haba then even the smallest amount of rebuke is invaluable. Because every criticism is a diamond that gives us an opportunity to achieve perfection while we still have the chance.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET’S GET PRACTICAL

Accepting Rebuke

In the ancient days of our nation, our people appreciated rebuke. They recognized it as the most effective tool for improvement. When we were no longer willing to accept rebuke, we lost the great opportunity of prophecy and we no longer had Divine agents who were capable of pointing out our wrongs and showing us where to improve. This week as I *daven* Shmoneh Esrei, I will *bli neder* pause at the *brachah* of Hashivah Shofteinu and remember those glorious days of our nation when we had prophets who would show us where we went wrong. I will resolve to accept, or at least listen to, any criticism that I may receive on that day

This week’s booklet is based on tapes:

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Why did the second Beis Hamikdosh last ten years longer than the first one and it was also bigger than the first one?



And one answer is: What’s the reason for a building in general? A building in general is to impress the people they should learn about *emunah* in Hashem. The presence of Hashem is demonstrated by the Beis Hashem.

And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when he gave them a new chance, gave them a bigger building. He said, “Maybe this time, you’ll make a better job of it. But you’re not as great as the old generations who learned from a smaller building. You need a bigger impression to be made on you. He gave them a bigger building and he gave them ten more years of Beis Hamikdosh.

But even then, it didn’t achieve the desired result. But the purpose was, it’s like a physician who comes and gives you a dose and it doesn’t have the desired effect, so he increases the dose. And the dose in this case was a bigger Beis Hamikdosh with longer years. But finally, since it didn’t have the desired effect, so He discontinued the treatment.

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