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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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KI SEITZEI

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE HUMBLER GREAT

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Part I. Great Potential

A Sad Day

In this week's sedrah we read about the din of malkos; a Jew sinned and was found guilty in beis din and now he's getting his punishment. וְהָפִילוּ הַשּׁוֹפֵט וְהָכִהוּ לְפָנָיו ... אַרְבָּעִים יָכֵנוּ – And the judge should cast him down and strike him ... forty lashes he should strike him (Ki Seitzei 25:2-3). For certain misdeeds, the Torah prescribes thirty nine lashes and that's what this man is getting now.

Now, there's an interesting subject that our Sages discuss and that is the thoughts that we expect of those participating in this story. At the time that the shliach beis din is delivering the blows on behalf of the beis din, what should he be thinking? And what should the recipient think?

Now we know that nobody is happy about this. When it's necessary to hit a Jew, nobody is joyous. As the shliach beis din raises his brawny hand with that strap and he delivers a welt on the body of a kosher ben Yisroel—he's a kosher Jew, only he transgressed one thing—so you could be certain that it hurts everyone's heart. The beis din that found this man deserving of the malkos as well as the one carrying it out, commiserate with the one being hit. And he surely, as the blows are raining down on him, he's the last one to be happy. So it's a sad day; nobody is happy in that courtroom. And yet, we're going to study now a Gemara in Mesichta Makkos (22b) and see that we're misunderstanding the episode entirely.

Beaten By Friends

The Gemara there is telling a story, a mashal. We're walking down the street and we see a man coming our way who is all beaten up; we see his chest is open and it's red or black and blue and on his back also there are black and blue marks and open welts. So we ask him, “מָה הַמַּכּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה בֵּין יָדַיךָ” – What's the reason for these blows that you received between your arms?; it means here in the front on your chest and on your back.

So he says, “These are the makkos, the blows, אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיתִי בֵּית מֵאֵהָבִי, that I was beaten in the house of my friends.” My friends beat me up.

Now if he wasn't a frum Jew we could understand that. He went to his best friend's wedding and he had to leave in an ambulance. Somebody today gave me a news clipping about a Puerto Rican wedding that took place here in Brooklyn, in Bedford Stuyvesant. So ambulances were racing back and forth taking people to the hospitals from the wedding. What happened? All the cousins were finally meeting each other again after so long, and they were drinking—and they all carry knives of course—and so the old family feuds came to the surface. And there were a lot of stabbings.

Now at a Jewish wedding maybe sometimes there's a question, a quarrel even, about who gets a bracha; but at a gentile wedding it happens sometimes that you need ambulances. It happens. Much more than you think.

Judgmental Friends

So if this fellow we met in the street was coming from that wedding we'd understand when he tells us that it happened at the home of his friends. But here the Gemara is talking about a frum Jew; he wasn't at that wedding. And still when we ask him what happened he says “I was in the house of my friends and they beat me up good.”

Who are these friends that the Gemara refers to? The friends are the beis din that sentenced him to get malkos. What happened? This man was

caught shaving with a razor blade or doing something else that is chayav malkos and so they gave him lashes. And they beat him generously. The shliach beis din is makeh bechol kocho, he strikes with all his power.

And now the man came out beaten up and as he's walking down the street and people say, "מה המכות האלה – What's this that you're all black and blue?!" And he says "It happened בבית מאהבתי; my good friends did that to me." And he's saying it earnestly. "These blows were inflicted upon me in the house of those who love me. The shliach of beis din and the beis din who sentenced me they're all my good friends. The witnesses who testified against me too. Beis meahavai! A house of people who love me!"

Happy Medicine

Now we have to study that because I imagine that it wouldn't be easy today to find a man who would be happy if beis din whips him; even if he was a big tzaddik and had full confidence in beis din he'd say, "I earned it. It's my fault." But to say that 'my good friends beat me up', that wouldn't be heard from anybody.

But our Sages are teaching us that they are his good friends! They did him a great favor. Of course there's sadness all around; regret that it came to such a thing that we have to do this. But there is happiness too, because a benefit is being bestowed on a fellow Jew.

צדיק ה' בכל – All the ways of Hashem are kindness. חסד ורחמים – Hashem seeks to do kindness in all of His deeds; and even in the punishments which the Torah specifies for miscreants, for culprits who transgress, the rule still holds good. It's an administration of a medicine that will benefit him.

However, we won't be in a hurry to accept this. Let's understand it a little more carefully.

Introducing the Star

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu created man, He made a hakdamah, a preface that He didn't make when He created anything else: נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ. It was an announcement: "We're going to make man now." It means that now the most important act of creation is going to take place.

Nothing else that Hashem created had such an introduction. Even בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ; that was a very big accomplishment, it was briyas haolam yesh meiyain! The first act of creation was the most stupendous and astonishing act, something unequaled later in history. To create something out of nothing! It's the most surprising of all events in history; and yet it was not introduced by any statement.

And all the other creations that followed weren't introduced either. The sun and the moon and the trillions of star worlds. All the planets and oceans and animals and fish and birds and trees; nothing, no announcement. And then suddenly, before Hakadosh Baruch Hu made Adam He made a declaration. "We're going to make man."

Now, how He made that declaration, I can't tell you. To whom He made it I'm not going to be able to tell you either. But it's written in the Torah, "We're going to make man!"

And that's because the introduction is made for the main event, for the star of the show. And that's man!

More Than A Trillion Stars

One of the most important principles in the Torah is the vast and infinite greatness of mankind. But not only that man is the most important object in creation. That's understating it. Man is vastly greater, not than any object in creation; he's vastly greater than the entire creation. One human being is more important than this whole earth; more than a million earths, more than a million huge stars. Not a million; there are trillions of stars, billions of starworlds. And still one person outweighs all of them.

Let that sink in—otherwise you don't begin to understand the Torah. The truth is that this concept is a sine qua non, a condition without which it's impossible to appreciate Torah.

I'll give just one little example to illustrate why. In the Torah we are told of certain requirements that we are expected to fulfill. We're expected, for instance, to have a mezuzah on every door. Now suppose someone wrote a mezuzah, a perfect beautiful mezuzah and every letter was inscribed correctly except one letter; he forgot to put the foot in the hei. It looks like a daled.

Tiny Things

So what's so terrible? After all, most of the letters are there. All of them are there and even this one is mostly there; rubo kekulo. It's such a minor thing. Alright it's not a perfect mezuzah, but still it should be fine. But no, it's not a mezuzah at all! Such a minor imperfection can make it entirely pasul and it's considered like you have no mezuzah on the door.

Why is it that the Torah insists on such things which seem like trivialities? If a man has chametz in his house on Pesach, he transgresses big aveiros. But if he took the trouble before Pesach just to say kol chamira vechamia—"I am mevatel, nullifying all the chametz"—so he doesn't have any aveirah d'Oraisa anymore. Just by saying these words he is saved from the aveirah?

Or another case: If a man tells a woman, “Harei at mekudeshes li” and he gives her something, she’s his wife and if she consorts now with a stranger, they’re both put to death. It’s called adultery just because he said these words—he didn’t even live with her yet. It’s a matter of life and death if he said the words harei at mekudeshes li or didn’t say the words.

And so we see it again and again all throughout the Torah, the principle that every little act is of the utmost significance. Every little act of a man is of supreme importance. As you read the Torah you begin to see how vastly responsible a man is for the smallest misstep; there’s a tremendous retribution for little details, little transgressions.

Nothing Tiny Here

And that’s because there’s nothing little about him. Like a king, a monarch of a huge empire, when he signs a document, a decree, it affects millions of his subjects. It affects their entire lives. So you might say “Well, he only signed a paper. What’s the big deal?” No! It’s the biggest deal! If you’re a very big person then even the smallest act is a matter either of life or death or some other great misfortune.

And so this responsibility that the Torah gives us is in proportion to our greatness. Because every human being is of infinite greatness, everything he does is also infinitely great, and that’s why the Torah puts such stress on the smallest acts of man. We’ll never understand that unless we understand the greatness of man, the vastness of the personality of man.

Now this subject has to be spoken about at length and we won’t have time to deal with it properly, but that’s one of the fundamental foundations of Torah – gadlus ha’adam, the greatness of man.

And it’s not for nothing that man is declared so great. It’s because he actually is great. He has endless greatness inside of him. His soul is endlessly great. His potentialities are endlessly great. He could make out of himself almost anything because he has the materials and it’s been prepared by the Creator inside of him. He towers above everything!

Part II. Great Ambitions

We Are Dangerous

Now, because of that greatness, there comes another Torah corollary that’s also of the greatest importance, and that is as follows: Because man is so tremendous, so full of potential to accomplish great things, just because of

that, man is also the most arrogant of all creatures in the world. He's the biggest ba'al ga'avah.

Because man is so great therefore it's easy for him to fall into the error of being tempted to view himself in that light. Every person, no matter what status he may seem to be, is subject to the temptation to be conceited in such a way that makes him a peril to the world and surely to himself.

Arrogance is an extremely great pitfall. Of all human beings' tendencies and traits, the most dangerous is the tendency to feel his greatness. The seforim say: "Haga'avah rosh kol chatas", arrogance is the head, the top, of all sins. What does that mean, "the head"? Don't we know there are bigger sins than arrogance? The answer is that ga'avah is the source of all sins; that's what it means "rosh kol chatas." If you'll analyze every form of wickedness, it's due to a man's conceit. He thinks he deserves everything! He's always right! He can do! He's not wrong! He's important! He's capable! He thinks the world of himself!

And actually it's true; **יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצִלְמִנוּ** He actually has within him an endless greatness, almost infinite potential. It's so great, so powerful and tremendous, that it's capable of misleading him and ruining him.

Creating a Hitler

I'll give just one example. Everybody knows there was a madman in Europe who took into his head to destroy many millions of people. Now to us it seems entirely insane. How could such a thing enter a person's mind? Why should he kill millions of people? Even if he has a peeve, a grudge against somebody, he won't be satisfied until millions and millions and millions are destroyed?! It's meshugeh!

But the truth is that it's a sign of the greatness of mankind; because he's so great, his ideals and capabilities and she'ifos are correspondingly just as great. Because man is great, he imagines great things, tremendous plans. And just because of that, his wickedness can be endlessly great. Man's greatness and arrogance are capable of creating a Hitler.

But we're not interested in Hitler now; we're concerned about our own ga'avah because we are faced with that same pitfall. You know, there are people who are tyrants in their home; even in the yeshiva and kollel you find such things. Some people are tyrants in the workplace.

The Arrogant Storekeeper

I once went into a store many years ago to buy some little toys for my children. And there was a Syrian young man, a big fat fellow sitting behind the counter. I remember he was eating a candy bar. It was a very big store, a

whole department store, and he was sitting on his throne right next to the cash register. And all day long the music of the register was ringing in his ears; he was on top of the world!

Now, I had rundown heels in those days. I was a very poor man in those days. And so when I walked in he turned to his girl secretary, the cashier, and he said "Look at those heels." And he chuckled. He laughed at me.

Now, where does an attitude like that come from? From many things. But the foundation of it all is his greatness. He really is great and that becomes a pitfall. And it's an attitude that we all have – to a certain extent that's all of us.

Antidote to Arrogance

Now if that's the case this is going to give us the key to understanding many things that take place in history and in our lives; but we'll start with what we began this evening. Here is a Jew who is getting malkos for some sin and he's bending over a block; he's holding onto it and he's being whipped. What's the purpose?

The purpose is to counteract his arrogance! It's intended to humble him. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not venting His anger on him; He is helping him. It's a medicine that's being administered as an antidote to his conceit, to shame him into submission to Hashem; to shame him into submission to his purpose in the world.

The Torah says וְנִקְלָה אָחִיךָ לְעֵינֶיךָ – your brother will be put to shame before your eyes. Only shame? Doesn't it hurt too? Thirty nine lashes by a hefty shliach of beis din who is brandishing that whip with all his koach is only a matter of shame? No; absolutely it hurts but the embarrassment is the most important achievement. That whip is putting him down to size, making him think less of his arrogance. It makes him small.

The Strongest Medicine

Now if you study a little grammar with me for a minute, we'll understand it. The word makkah is hifil, to hit, from nun chaf hei, nachah; and nachah means to deduct. If you know Hebrew, nun chaf hei means to deduct, like nikui. And so makkah, to hit means to deduct. It's deducting something from you; just like the doctor who takes a patient who has a tumor and the doctor is deducting the tumor from his patient. It hurts, but he's saving that man's life. And so when the beis din is giving him makkos, they're deducting from him his arrogance. They're hitting him in order to make him humble. He's becoming an anav.

Now you might say why is it necessary to hit him so many times? Why hit him at all? They should talk to him; tough words. "Who do you think you are

that you can transgress a law of the Torah?! You think you're so important you can do what you want?!" Talk mean and loud words to him! That should be enough.

No, that won't do the job. Because you have to know who you're talking to. You're talking to a very great personality! You're talking to Man! And because of his greatness, you won't make him small merely by your words; you have to administer a strong medicine. Of course, words are also important, but the medicine must be given to him in such an extreme way that the words will make an effect.

Canceling Magic

Now, this explains a common phenomenon in this world, and that's the subject of sickness.

The Gemara (Brachos 10b) tells that there was a book of remedies and Chizkiyahu Hamelech was *ganaz sefer refuos*; he took this book out of circulation. He concealed it. And the Chachomim praised him for that.

Now, we don't understand that at all. Remedies for various illnesses? What's wrong with that?

There are two *peirushim* on this. One *peirush* is the Rambam's *peirush*. The Rambam says it was a *sefer talismaos*, it was a *sefer* of certain magic remedies. And because Chizkiyah didn't want the people to resort to magic remedies therefore he took that book and he concealed it. "Forget about magic," Chizkiyahu said.

Canceling Conceit

But others like Rashi say no, it wasn't magic remedies. It was a book of real effective remedies, real medicine. And yet, Chizkiyahu concealed it for a reason. What could be a good reason for that?

Now pay attention to Rashi's words. Rashi says illness is sent upon people in order to humble them. Not only Rashi; all of our great men say that. Rav Saadya Gaon in his *Emunos V'deios* says the same thing. The purpose of suffering is *lehachnia es halev*, to confer the great gift of humility. Suffering lowers pride. Suffering is an antibiotic for conceit and arrogance.

Because of the greatness of man, that explains the necessity for such things. A man is liable to great temptations in this world, to forget about other people, even to forget about Hashem, because he is so great. And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to remind him from time to time; He has to give him a little slap here and a little slap there to remind him, "Quiet down. I'm bigger than you are."

The Purpose of Illness

And that's why sickness comes, to humble you. A man is sick, he is on the operating table, and he sees a doctor taking out a whole boxful of various scissors and knives and soon they'll put him to sleep and start cutting him up and so he'll be thinking, "When I get out of this alive, I'm going to be a better fellow. I'll be better to my wife. I'll be a better neighbor. I'll be more pliable. I'll start listening to the rabbi in the synagogue when I get out of here."

But not merely to make you humble toward your fellow man. That's also a big achievement but the most important humility is to be humble to your Creator: "I'm going to listen to Hashem when I get out. If He lets me out of this place alive, I'm going to be humble before Hashem." That's the real purpose of the operation.

That's the purpose of all illness. That's the purpose of a cold. If a person chalah gets a cold it's for the intention to make him more humble. You know when you have sniffles and you're coughing and sneezing; you have a sore throat, sinus trouble – you shouldn't have it – but the purpose is to make you feel low. You're too high. It's to push you down a little bit. It's an effective medicine. Any illness, any pain, is for the purpose of making a person lose his arrogance. Our Sages tell us that again and again. Hakadosh Baruch Hu bestows a great benefit on mankind from time to time by humbling them.

Fainting and First-Aid

That's why a sick man in the language of Tanach is called a dal. **דַּל** – **מְשָׁכִיל אֶל דָּל** – Happy is the one who has interest in a sick man. The sick man is called a dal. Dal means he's low. Why is he dal? He's low because the illness makes him low. Sometimes he's so low that he can't get up. He has to lie down.

Why is he lying down? There are two reasons why a person lies down when he's ill. One is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants a man to get well and when he lies down it puts less stress on his heart. The blood, instead of being pumped up and down, it's pumped horizontally with less stress on the heart. When you lie down, there's less stress on your organs and you can recover more quickly.

That's why people faint. Fainting is a yeshuah. It's a salvation. It's first-aid when you faint. You shouldn't faint but it's first-aid, because then everything stops; everything quiets down and your body has a chance now to recuperate a little bit.

But there's another reason why people lie down when they're sick or when they faint. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to show you that you're not such a big shot. When you're lying in bed and your head hurts and your stomach

hurts and you're sniffing and coughing, you can't be a big shot – it's impossible.

The Real Great One

I once fainted on the street. I never dreamed I would faint. I used to see people faint on the street and ambulances came. But to me it would never happen. I'm a big shot. And then it happened. An ambulance came and they put me on the stretcher.

I said, "Take me home. I want to get out of here. I don't belong here."

"Nothing doing," they said. "You have to go to the hospital."

I wanted to get up and go home. "No, you can't get up!" I learned the lesson that I'm not a big shot. What do you think, Miller? Fainting is only for other people? That's a valuable lesson. I learned a valuable lesson that day. A man becomes humbled by means of sickness and that's what really makes him great because now Hashem is in his mind more; he's lower down and he recognizes the real Big Shot.

Part III. Great Humility

A Special Assistance

Now we can better understand what the Gemara (Shabbos 12b) says, **שְׁשִׁיבִינָה לְמַעַל מִרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו שֶׁל חוֹלֶה**, that the Shechina hovers over the head of a sick man. Our Sages tell us that when a man is lying ill, the presence of Hashem is there. Of course it's not the Shechina that was in the Beis Hamikdash or the Shechina that they saw in the midbar, but there is some form of His Presence when a man is sick.

Now, I suppose he has to be at least a maamin in the ikrei ha'emunah; I don't believe if a rasha, a kofer, is sick that any Shechina will come to him. But a kosher Jew, even though he's not a baal madreigah, at the time of his illness the Shechina hovers over his head.

ה' יִסְעֲדֵנוּ עַל עֶרְשׁ דָּוִד – Hashem is supporting him on his sickbed (Tehillim 41:4). Not merely Hashem's messengers, the forces of nature. Of course there are forces of nature that heal people. Fever is one of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's messengers. Fever heals; fever is a great healer, it burns and destroys. It's a sign that the infection is being combated. There are other processes of healing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has set up in the body. But there is a separate, special assistance that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives; **ה' יִסְעֲדֵנוּ** – Hashem supports him, **עַל עֶרְשׁ דָּוִד** – on his bed of pain. The Shechina is there.

Auto Improvement

That's why there's a certain din when you're visiting a sick person. It is a mitzvah to visit someone who is sick, to see what you can do for him. You can cheer him up with consolation, whatever it is. Maybe you can help him with things that he needs. If he is in a hospital, you can bring him kosher food.

But suppose he's lying on a pallet on the floor. It happens sometimes that he's lying on the floor on a pallet, on a stretcher. So the Gemara says that it's ossur to sit down on the chair because then you'll be sitting higher than he is. If you wish to sit, you must sit on the floor alongside him. Why is that? The Gemara says it's because the Shechina is right there over his head. So how could you sit higher than the Shechina?

Now, that's a remarkable statement. What did this man do that suddenly he should merit that the Shechina visits him when he becomes ill? What changed now?

The answer is, this man is being improved; the yissurim are making him better. Even if he is not going to study middah k'negged middah and he won't ask "מַה זֹאת עָשָׂה לְאֵלֵי קִיּוּמִי – What is this Hashem did to me? For what sin am I being punished? נִחַפְּשָׁה דְרַכֵּינוּ וְנִתְקַרְרָה – Let me search out my ways and investigate." He should say that but even if he doesn't, still the man is improving.

The Small Millionaire

And the biggest improvement is that he is now humbled; he is humiliated. You cannot be a ba'al ga'avah when you are sick. A sick man is a humble man. A millionaire, when he's in pain he's a humble fellow. And that is a tremendous achievement. To be an anav, already means you are coming closer to Hashem.

Now this is not an anav who chose the career of humility; it's not somebody whose seichel dictated to him the greatness of being humble. It's not a case where a man thinks, "I am standing lifnei Hashem, in the presence of Hashem, so certainly I must be humble." No, nothing like that. He is being clubbed over the head! He is humble because he is forced into it. But humility is such a sheleimus, it's such a perfection that even a man who is forced into it becomes more beloved by Hashem; so beloved that the Shechina is willing now to come down to him and rests above his head.

Now, don't think you have to wait for it to happen to you chas veshalom. You can learn the lesson anyhow. That's the best way. Next time you see an ambulance running in the street don't think there's no connection with you. Someone in that car is lying down; he's being humbled right now. Why should you be any different? Are you any better than him? Probably not. And so if you'll stop for thirty seconds and think about humbling yourself, you've

accomplished a great thing today. A little bit, you've been humbled. You've lived successfully!

Taking Small Doses

Now, once we understand that achievement, the perfection that even a little humility brings to a person, so we have to be mindful always of using even the little things, the small doses of tzaros, the small makkos, to humble ourselves. Because is there such a thing as a person who has everything goes his way? Never! Impossible!

Here's a man who made plans for something—whatever it is, a trip, a business deal, a shidduch—and it turns out not the way he planned, not the way he wanted. He was careful and he arranged this and that and he tied all the loose ends and then nothing – it all fell apart. What's that about?

Who's The Macher?

The Chovos Halevavos in Shaar Habitachon says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu sometimes does that to teach you a lesson. You thought that you are the author of your fate, that you're in charge here. So although you made a certain arrangement, and you planned, and you hoped that it would turn out a certain way, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says "I'm going to do you a favor and teach you a very valuable lesson; the lesson that I am in charge, not you."

So instead of being disappointed, you should say, "I thank You, Hashem, for that. It's worth money, that lesson. I really should have to pay for that lesson. Because otherwise, I was thinking that I'm the boss. I thought I was the whole macher here and now you reminded me that I'm not the macher at all. You're the Macher, with a capital M."

You're getting a valuable lesson—it's worth a lot of money—and Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not charging you for it, so be happy.

Take Advantage of Your Wife

Another opportunity to learn to be humble: You know, husbands call me up on the phone sometimes and they tell me that their wives are always criticizing them, always putting them down. Now, I'm not saying it's true—I imagine that if I would speak to her I would hear a different story altogether—but let's imagine it's true.

Now, the first thing to understand is that no matter what, a man has to learn to appreciate his wife. This is not the subject but a wise man understands that no matter what, his wife is a gift. She cooks for him. More or less she keeps the house clean. She gives him children. She raises the children and

fulfills her duties in the house as a mother and wife. Together they're bringing up a family and therefore the wise man always appreciates the great benefits of having a wife despite the criticism.

But even when a wife criticizes a husband, you should know that she is doing him a big favor. Outside the house, nobody tells him anything – it's uncomfortable. And after a while he begins to think, "Maybe I really am great." So he comes home and right away his wife deflates him. She puts a pin in his balloon and it bursts. That's a tremendous achievement, a perfection that he won't acquire outside the home. It's a shleimus to be put down to size once in a while.

Elkanah's Purpose

But let's imagine now that somebody has no trouble. His wife is an angel, a malach min haShamayim who never says a mean word to him. Also he never gets sick and everything he plans, it works out. Nothing ever happens to humble him. Of course it's impossible, but let's imagine so for a minute. So what's he going to do? How does he humble himself in front of Hakadosh Baruch Hu? Listen to this eitzah because everyone should use it.

Everyone knows there was a man named Elkanah, the father of Shmuel Hanavi. Elkanah used to go three times a year to Shilo where the Mishkan was. And it explains there what his purpose was. Why did he go to Shilo? He went to bring offerings? Yes, he did that; absolutely you have to bring offerings when you go to the Sanctuary. He also had to speak to the sons of Eli. It's important to consult with the Sages and therefore three times a year he went up to the central place of the Sages and he spoke to them and he got advice from them.

But one of the most important purposes, the Navi says, was lehishtachavos laHashem, to bow down to Hashem. You hear that? That's how important it is. He traveled to Shilo to bow down to Hashem, lehishtachavos.

Now listen to the word hishtachavos. In Hebrew you'll understand it better from the word shach. Shach means low, and hishtachaveh is called reflexive hispael; it's a form of grammar, "to make yourself low." In lashon kodesh you don't say bow – you say "to make yourself low to Hashem."

For that alone it was worth going to the Sanctuary. It was worth making a big journey just to fall down on the ground on his face; to feel that he is low before Hashem.

Take Advantage of Prayer

"Oh," you say, "it's superfluous. I don't have to bow down. I know already that Hashem is bigger than I am." But that's the human hypocrisy of self-

deception; all people are subject to the great temptation of ani v'afsi od, that there's nobody in the universe but me. And unless you take the trouble to work on yourself and to recognize there's Somebody bigger than you are, you're going to remain very arrogant.

That's one of the most important functions in our prayers that most people ignore and overlook. You're standing the amidah, you're beginning saying Shemoneh Esrei, so you give a peremptory bow. The bow, you think, that's not important. It's just an introduction; the words you're about to say, "Baruch Atah Hashem" that's what's important.

No, you're missing the whole point. The most important thing is the bowing down! The bowing down and acknowledging that there's Somebody higher than you, that's the most important part. So don't be in a hurry. While you're bowing, take your time and get the full benefit of that. It's a law in the Gemara. You must bow down at the beginning of Shemoneh Esrei because that's the first lesson. Gaavah is the beginning of all sin, and therefore the first thing is to uproot that arrogance.

And therefore bowing in Shemoneh Esrei, a few times in the beginning, and then by Modim too, is so valuable. It's so important to prepare beforehand and to make use of that. Because even though with your lips you may say words of pious hypocrisy, "I bow down to You Hashem," but in your heart you're bowing down only to yourself. man is so great that he doesn't even back down even before Hashem. That's human nature.

World of Understanding

The Gemara says when a man is arrogant what does Hakadosh Baruch Hu say? He says "אֵין אֲנִי וְהוּא יְכוּלִים לָגוֹר בְּעוֹלָם אֶחָד — This man and I cannot live together in one world." The universe is too small for both of us. He wants to crowd Me out of the world. If he could, he would swell himself up like a big balloon and fill up the whole space, the whole universe. That's human nature because he's so great, he's endlessly great. And that's why a man must work on himself to be humble to Hashem. It takes work, effort, for a man to learn to be humble towards Hashem.

And so when people will come to the Next World and they'll realize what a benefit it was for them the sufferings they had in this world they'll be sorry they didn't have more sufferings. They'll complain, "Why did other people get more opportunities than we did? Why did he have that cold that kept him laid up in bed for almost all winter and me, I was fine? Why did he have those bumps in life that humbled him into perfection, while for me everything was smooth sailing?"

And therefore the wise person learns to make use of all the opportunities that Hashem plans for him. All of the difficulties, he understands that he's being "hit in the house of his friend – his Best Friend." And even when the sailing is smooth he never forgets his obligation to lower himself in front of Hashem. He always bows before Hashem and he's always thinking, "As great as I am, as tremendous as my capabilities and potential are—actually just because of Gadlus Ha'Adam—that's why I'm always lowering myself in front of You."

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Let's Get Practical

Gaining Humility

Nobody is looking for bumps on the highway of life; nobody is looking for sickness and troubles. But when Hashem does send difficulties – even minor inconveniences – I'm going to take advantage of them. This week every time something goes wrong chas veshalom, I will bli neder stop for thirty seconds and remind myself about its purpose, to humble me.

And because we all hope that this week will be a perfect one with no bumps, I'm going to make sure to take advantage of the first bow in Shemonah Esrei as a way of humbling myself before Hashem so that inconveniences and troubles are not necessary.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

128 – The Humble Ones | 164 – Better With Difficulty

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Eating And The Blessings of Shabbos

The Zohar teaches us that someone who has *emunah* should be aware of Hashem when He is bestowing His plenty. And this is on *Shabbos Kodesh*, when Hashem grants the blessings for the whole week. We all understand that money doesn't come from the bank or from work. It comes from Hashem. Similarly, we should understand that our *parnasah* comes to us only through the plenty bestowed on *Shabbos Kodesh*!

The Zohar states: Each day has its sustenance due to the blessing it receives on the seventh day. Since this is so, someone who is on the level of *emunah* should set the table and prepare a meal on *Shabbos* night in order that his table be blessed all six days. For at this time the blessing is available for all six days, and a blessing doesn't come to rest on an empty table. Therefore, he should set his table on *Shabbos* night with bread and food. The question is: Why is it at mealtime that we receive the Heavenly flow of plenty on *Shabbos*?

There is something amazing about eating. When we eat, we feel connected to Hashem in an almost unparalleled way. Let's say a person recites a chapter of *Tehillim* and asks Hashem for *parnasah*. He doesn't see directly how the *Tehillim* brings him *parnasah*; in contrast, when he eats he feels directly how it brings him life. His vitality and life have been replenished without any further ado. Therefore, the best way to actually feel how we absorb life straight from Hashem is by eating! For this reason eating can be a unique time to feel a great *deveikus* with Hashem.

As we know, there are two sides to every coin. The rule is: "The holier something is, the more destruction there is." In other words, the more potentially beneficial something is, the more detrimental it can be as well. And so it is with eating: Nothing in the world can give us a greater feeling of connection to Hashem, and nothing can push us farther away from Him. It is written, "*Yeshurun became fat, and he kicked,*" (*Devarim* 32:15) i.e., he rejected Hashem.

On a simple level, we can understand this as human nature. Let's say a person receives a large gift but doesn't want to feel a debt of gratitude. What does he do? Instead of saying thank you, he kicks. It's the same thing with eating – because the gratitude we should feel for receiving food from Hashem is truly immense. That's why some people react by kicking. They want to escape the overwhelming feeling of gratitude and indebtedness.

And there is another reason. We generally tend to forget to properly thank Hashem for the food we eat. And nowadays we have an additional problem: We hardly even notice we're eating. Food is so abundant today that people take it for granted, having never experienced a food shortage or gone without food for an extended period of time. **But in truth, eating is the best way to allow our natural feelings to draw us close to Hashem.**

We should grab hold of Hashem, so to speak, at the moment He's bestowing all the blessings. When is this? At the *Shabbos* meal. This is when we have the golden opportunity to receive everything good from the Source of all blessings!

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

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Q&A

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QUESTION

When you study Gemara, you see there are so many conditions for a ben sorer u'moreh that a Sage declared that לא היה ולא נברא – it never happened (ibid. 71a). So the question is, according to him, why is it in the Torah if it couldn't happen?

ANSWER

And the answer is, it's written so it shouldn't happen. Little boys in the cheder when they read that parsha they acquire yiras Shamayim. Little boys are afraid. It's important! Everyone should read it and be afraid and know that bad character like stealing and then using the money to spend on nosherai is going to end up in disaster. And that parsha has helped so many Jewish boys be good that it has earned its place in the Torah.

The model itself is of extreme importance. That's why it's so important to learn. And Jewish boys who learn Chumash in the cheder are entirely different from anybody else. Besides the instruction they get in the house, which is important – parents should always teach children good things – but the Torah is a model for good behavior.

And so the ben sorer u'moreh, because it's written in the Chumash, has been a source of good middos throughout all history, for generations of children. And therefore, not only they didn't die zakai, they lived zakai. They continued to live like tzaddikim as a result of this parsha.

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