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PARSHAS KI SAVO

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

HIDDEN GREATNESS

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Part I. Secret Sins

Covenant of Secrets

In this week's *sedrah* we learn about an especial procedure of *brachos* and *klalos* that would take place as soon as the Jewish nation would cross the Yarden into Eretz Canaan (Devarim 27:11-26). The whole Klal Yisroel would assemble together near two mountains, Har Grizim and Har Eival, and while facing these two mountains, certain blessings and certain curses would be proclaimed to the people.

Now, when we examine what was said on that occasion, we note that only certain details of Torah observance were mentioned. It wasn't a general covenant by which they accepted the entire Torah like they had done at Har Sinai; it was an enumeration of select

iniquities, certain things, and it was specifically for these that the *brachos* and *klalos* were said.

Now, when we study this list we see that the *tzad hasheveh sh'bahem*, the common denominator between them, is that they are all things that are done in secret. Like it states, “If someone will make an idol, וְשָׁם בְּסֵתֶר – and he'll hide it somewhere in his possession (*ibid.* 15). Or מִכָּה רָעָהוּ בְּסֵתֶר – accursed is the one who smites his fellowman in secret (*ibid.* 24); he does harm to a fellow Jew behind closed doors. Also mentioned there among the *brachos* and *klalos* are matters of incest that are committed in the secrecy of the home, and other sins of that nature.

That's what this list entails, various sins that a person would normally refrain from in public; but when concealed in the privacy of his home, or maybe in a dark alley somewhere, he might feel emboldened enough to do something wrong.

Sin and Shame

Now we know that there's a *bracha* and a *klalah* for everything in the Torah—anybody who upholds the Torah is *baruch* and he who transgresses is *arur*—and so, as an introduction to our subject for tonight, we must understand what is the necessity of a special *krisas b'ris* for *devarim sh'baseiser*, for secret things.

Actually, the reason is immediately apparent to us, because we know that when things are done openly, so the public reacts to prevent them or to inflict punishment and shame on the wrongdoer. A loyal nation stands in the breach to prevent wrongdoing against Hashem, and therefore, in public, it's not so easy to sin.

You know, today we're accustomed to seeing Jews sin in public. Irreligious Jews, they have no shame. But it was only seventy years ago [1905] that in all the small towns—even the big ones—nobody would dare sin in public. Let's say you lived in old Cracow and the Satan came over to you and tried to tempt you, “Take off your head covering.” You can be sure that you'd put up a very big fight, because to walk bareheaded in Cracow meant that you were liable to get a broken head! To be a Jew meant you had to act like a Jew—at least in public. There were no two ways about it.

But when it comes to things done in secret, it's not as simple. When you have the people in the *shtiebel* or the *beis medrash* looking over your shoulder, so that wonderful *middah* of *busha* makes you behave properly; it protects you. But in the privacy of your home you need something more than that. The only way to prevent trouble is by putting people in a frame of mind of fearing Hakadosh Baruch Hu, fearing His curse, or desiring His blessing.

The Secret Audience

How else could you prevent incest that's done in a house? How else could you prevent secret injury that people commit by writing poison letters? So many terrible things are done within the four walls of a person's home. A lot of sins can be done without anyone knowing about them. A man can close his window and curtains and say the most wicked things to his spouse in secret. I know about it because people are calling me up on the telephone all the time and telling me stories. But they're done because a person imagines, he hopes, that within the privacy of his four walls it's a secret.

And therefore, those things that are not revealed to the public eye require a bigger incentive; they require more instruction and more *yiras Shamayim* than anything else. Even stealing is something that could more readily be apprehended. Injuring somebody's property, striking a fellowman, many sins are overt acts that can have witnesses and accusers, so there's a natural impediment. But all those things that can be done secretly must be controlled by a man's conscience.

Imagine a Crowd

That's the great subject that the Chovos Halevavos tells us about in his Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh. He makes the following statement there: **מה שעושה בצנעא יהיה כמו בפרהסיא** – *What a man does in secret should be the same as if he was doing it in public.* I'll repeat that because it's a statement that we should memorize and repeat to ourselves as often as possible: "What a man does in secret should be done as if it was being done in the presence of a grandstand full of people."

You know, when you're in the *beis haknesses* and you're standing Shemoneh Esrei and you have people looking at you—or you suspect they are—and you have your *tallis* over your head and maybe you're wearing your *gartel* too, so even without too much thinking, without

too much incentive, you're interested in putting up a good show. But suppose you're home and there's no audience; you're sitting at your breakfast table and you're saying *birchas hamazon* after the meal. So who will know if you rush through it a little quicker than usual? Who will know if you are daydreaming, glancing at something, or flipping through pages of the magazine while you say the words?

And so the test of a loyal Jew is how he behaves when nobody is around. Are there things you do in the privacy of your home that you wouldn't do in front of an audience? When nobody is looking, how do you say *asher yatzar*? What kind of *shehakol* do you make when nobody is watching you? Of course when you have company, you make a *shehakol* like a patriarch. There's an audience!

Utilize Your Guests

By the way, you shouldn't disdain the opportunity of an audience. You should utilize it. You know, when I have guests at my table I thank them; I let them know that because of them I said the *birchas hamazon* so much slower. Why not? At least when you have an audience, you should make some accomplishment within yourself.

But the person who is able to live in secret as if there's an audience—and there is an audience; Hakadosh Baruch Hu is a great Audience—that man is fulfilling the true service that a Jew is expected to produce in his lifetime.

And that's why the Chovos Halevavos tells us, "Have in mind that you're surrounded with a congregation of Jews and they're witnessing the way you're thanking Hashem for your bread or the way you're speaking to your spouse."

The Nation Succeeds

Now it's not easy because after all it's in the privacy of your home—it takes training for a person to achieve that. And especially when we want an entire nation to raise themselves up to that level. After all, the Am Yisroel is not made up of only *tzadikim* and *chassidim*; it's a nation of regular people too, all types of people, and we want everyone to fulfill the Torah—all of it.

And therefore we understand the necessity for this great gathering where the whole Am Yisroel assembled and there were curses given against all those who do hidden sins and blessings for

those who refrain. It was most necessary and urgent to put *brachos* and *klalos* for these things because you cannot have a pious nation unless it's a nation that fears Hashem.

Ancient Krias HaTorah

Of course, if you read the Chumash superficially and you don't think about the words—if you don't take the time to make that picture in your mind of the entire nation listening prayerfully and fearfully to the *brachos v'klalos*, so it won't help you much; but that's the purpose.

You have to know, in the olden days when the Torah was read in the *beis haknesses*, everybody was duly impressed. It wasn't merely a formality, something that was said by rote by the *baal korei*. People listened and it entered their hearts. And even the simplest Jew, the most illiterate Jew, was impressed that sins committed in secret have a terrible curse attached to them. A curse was pronounced on two mountains where the whole Klal Yisroel was assembled! He couldn't forget that.

And it succeeded! We became a nation that serves Hashem in private just like in public. I always tell you the same story, but it's a good story to tell. There's a little boy who ate a *fleishige* meal and now he wants some ice cream. There's ice cream in the refrigerator. Nobody's home—he's all by himself. He looks at the clock. Not yet; he can't eat the ice cream yet. A little boy, he's waiting for the clock to turn until six hours and then he'll eat the ice cream. A little boy! That's how Am Yisroel is brought up—in the secrecy of the home we are just as loyal as out on the street.

A Pure Nation

It's like the gentile once said to a Jew; it's reported in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a). He said he doesn't believe that the Jews are sincere when they say they observe *taharas hamishpacha*. "Who is there to supervise that?" That's what the goy said – he didn't believe it's possible. How could you enforce that?

And so the Jew told him a *possuk* from Shir HaShirim, a phrase. סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים – *We are fenced in by flowers* (7:3). The *goyim*, they have to be fenced in with barbed wire maybe; but we're not fenced in by wire or by walls with guards. סוּגָה – *We are fenced in*, בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים – *by a hedge of roses*. What are the roses? The roses are the words of the

Torah that the Jewish nation loves; our devotion to the Torah, that's what fences us in.

Forged on Grizim and Eival

And this we know that the Klal Yisroel observed. It's not a question, did they observe? We know for certain that they observed. The whole Klal Yisroel! Not only the good ones. Everyone! The Gemara (Niddah 33b) tells that the Tzedukim, the Sadducees—they were wicked men by and large. They were enemies of the *Chachomim* and they committed big crimes against their fellowmen; they trampled on the people in their quest for power. But we know that the wives of the Tzedukim came to the *Chachomim* and asked them *shailos*; they asked for decisions in Hilchos Tahara. Which means that even the worst of our people observed these private laws.

Now that's hard for a gentile to understand because the only thing that'll prevent him from carrying out his desires is the police, a big Italian policeman with a baton. Because his conscience alone won't be much of a help in fending off temptation. It could be in individual cases, with some select people of noble character, it could happen. But to make a rule for a nation, for a *klal*, and to expect rank and file, that everybody should obey things that can't be enforced, that would be improbable or impossible.

But for the Am Yisroel, that's the way it had to be. And that was the reason for this special covenant on *devarim shebaseiser*, secret things, that was made on Har Grizim and Har Eival. It was necessary because secret things need more emphasis; they require more of a *bris* than overt things. And by means of fear of Hashem and knowing that wherever we are, we are under His watchful Eyes, that's how we became a nation.

Part II. Secret Greatness

The Ignorant Historian

Now, if we'll seek an illustration of how our people practiced this principle of fearing Hashem *baseiser*, we don't have to go far. We find an especial book of the Tanach devoted to that subject, an entire *sefer* called the Sefer Shoftim. It's a *sefer* that has been greatly misunderstood,

but if we study it properly we'll see that this book is a history of the innate loyalty of the Am Yisroel. About how the Am Yisroel served Hakadosh Baruch Hu out of their own conviction with true and genuine piety, even when not in the public eye.

When we study this *sefer* of Shoftim, we note a recurrent phrase and it's exactly this phrase that has misled people and has caused them to misunderstand the entire *sefer*. The phrase goes as follows: **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל** – *In those days there was no king in Yisroel, אִישׁ הָיָשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה* – *every man did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6).

And so here is one historian—I won't say his name—he wrote a thirteen volume Jewish history and he said like this: “The generation of the Shoftim was one of the lowest eras of our people; like it states openly, ‘Every man did what was right in his eyes.’”

This writer learned *pshat* like this: He said that in those days there was no king in Yisroel, no one to enforce the Torah laws, and therefore each man did whatever he wanted. “*Every man did what was right in his own eyes!*” So here you have it black and white, he says; they were a lawless people and the entire era is therefore stamped as a most disorderly era.

A Book of Righteousness

However, *daas Torah* is not so. Now when we say *daas Torah*, it doesn't necessarily mean the *daas* of the *lamdanim* because there aren't many Torah scholars today who are informed on the subject. Actually many are severely misinformed because they followed the simple meaning of a number of statements which they learned in their childhood and they came to the same conclusion as this no good historian who said that it was a very low generation.

And therefore instead of making our own opinions which could mislead us, we ought to listen to the words of the *Chachomim* about this statement **אִישׁ הָיָשָׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה**. After all, the Sages of the Talmud were much closer than the modern historians to these events. And besides, the *Chachomim* are the only ones who are truly capable of assessing, gauging and explaining these events. So let's see that era through *their eyes*.

There's a possuk in Shmuel Beis (1:18) that states, הָיָה כְּתוּבָה עַל סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר – It is written in Sefer HaYashar, The Book of Righteousness. Now we're not going to discuss what he's saying there, but what interests us is what exactly is this Book of Righteousness that Shmuel Hanavi is talking about? And the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a) says סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר זֶה סֵפֶר שׁוֹפְטִים – The Righteous Book is the book of Shoftim. And why is it called The Righteous Book? Because it says there אִישׁ כָּל הַיּוֹשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה – every man did what was righteous in his eyes.

So it's an upside-down world! Here is a verse that people cite as a proof of the lawlessness of that generation—"Each one did what is right in his own eyes"—and the Gemara tells us, "No! That exact verse is the one that tells us that it was the most righteous era because every man did what was right in his eyes!"

That changes everything. It's an eye-opener because now we have to read the possuk all over again. This time we read it the way the Sages read it: אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל – In those days the Jewish people did not need a king. They wouldn't stand for a king who would force them to do certain things because they didn't require it! אִישׁ כָּל הַיּוֹשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה – Every man was loyal to the real King, Hashem, and everyone did what he considered right!

Your Stomach's Eyes

The historian, when he read that verse he put in his own meaning. He thought it means like people say today, "I'll do what's right in my eyes;" even though he knows it's wrong but he wants to do it anyhow. But that's all wrong. The verse is saying "each man did what is right in his eyes" because he used his conscience. He didn't follow his passions, his desires, his inclination. No! That's not what's right in his eyes! That's right in his stomach. "Right in his eyes" means that each man did what his conscience told him is right. Each man did what in his eyes was right in the Eyes of Hashem.

That was the greatness of that era. It was 369 years, more or less the era of the Shoftim, and throughout that time אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, they didn't have a king *because they didn't need one*; not because they weren't developed enough to have a king. That's how some people, strangers to the Torah, try to explain the subject. "They were still a nomadic people or an agricultural people in the first stage of

development and therefore they hadn't yet arrived at the stage of monarchy."

But if you look at what the Torah tells us and what's written elsewhere in Tanach, we see that all around them, everybody had kings. Individual cities had kings. There were tens of kings in Canaan, every little town had a king. Monarchy was a firmly established institution and our people lived among them for four hundred years. So if the Am Yisroel was without a king it wasn't because they weren't developed enough. It was because they were so super-developed that they didn't want and didn't require a king.

Nation of Kings

Why did Sedom need a king? Why did Yericho need a king? Because *אֵלֶּמְלָא מוֹרָאָה שֶׁל מַלְכוּת* – *if not for the fear of a government*, *אִישׁ בָּלְעוּ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ חַיִּים* – *a man would devour his fellow man alive* (Avos 3:2). If there's no king, no strong authority, people go wild.

You know, in some countries in the olden days, when the king died they had to choose a new king—they didn't have a law that the children inherited—and sometimes it took months before a new king was chosen. That's how it used to be in Poland once upon a time. What happened? In the times of interregnum, it means the period between the kings, there was all kinds of disorder, all kinds of crime and *tzaros*. When the king was finally elected, *Baruch Hashem!* Finally! *Shalom!*

It's a blessing to have law and order. You see what happens today when the government is weak and the streets are frequented by criminals. That's why we like policemen who carry billy clubs. We like that they should build big jails. We like the electric chair. We want the electric chairs to be working day and night; there are so many customers that deserve it. That's the function of a king, of a government.

And therefore, since the function of a king was to maintain and to enforce the Torah, in the times of the Shoftim, the Bnei Yisroel didn't need it because everybody strove to do what he thought was right in the Eyes of Hashem. They were a great nation, capable of governing themselves. It would have been an insult to them to have a king. "I'm on the job!" That's what every individual was thinking—he was king of

his own behavior. He was a government who enforced Torah righteousness on himself.

Studying Law

The Torah was their Constitution; I say “Constitution” – *lehavdil elef havdalos*. The American Constitution is not a document that people study and obey. Did you ever see people getting together in America, *chaburos*, *shiurim* studying the Constitution *l’shem mitzvah*? Sometimes you must study it to pass a high school test perhaps, but to get together to study the Constitution in order to fulfill the Constitution? Such a thing is unheard of.

The Constitution is studied so that lawyers can find ways and means of getting around it. Wicked judges use the Constitution in order to take their own filthy ideas and find ways of twisting and stretching and finagling until they find things in there that nobody intended.

But our Constitution, *lehavdil*, the Torah, Jews get together and study it because that’s our life; *ki heim chayeinu*. The Torah, that’s our way of living—both outside and in our homes too.

Now, that era of the Shoftim was the time when the character of our nation was hammered out—a nation that would serve Hashem even when out of the public eye. Because eventually they would go out into exile and they’d have to live among gentiles where they’d be subject to every kind of temptation and blandishment and coercion. And in the privacy of your own home, hiding within your four walls, who’s going to know what you’re doing there?

The Emperor Has No Clout

We should never forget that illustration in the Gemara when a certain sage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, was speaking to the Emperor and he was praising the loyalty of the Jewish people to their G-d.

“Today is Shabbos,” he said. “Come up on the roof of the palace and we’ll view the Jewish quarter. You’ll see that no Jew is cooking in his home.” And from the palace roof they looked at the Jewish section of the city and they looked at all the roofs and all the chimneys and there wasn’t a single place where fire or smoke was issuing from a chimney in the Jewish quarter.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya told the king, “Make a decree that tomorrow nobody should light a fire in the city of Rome.” The emperor issued a decree and it was promulgated all throughout Rome by public criers that tomorrow there shouldn’t be a fire in any stove, in any furnace in all of Rome.

The next day when the decree was already in force the Emperor went up on the roof again with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya and they surveyed the rooftops, the chimneys, and they saw there were a few places in Rome where smoke was coming out of the chimney. They saw here and there, there were some chimneys smoking.

Now it became clear that the Jewish nation lives differently. In their homes they’re living according to the Torah. In the Jewish quarter in Rome on Shabbos there was no smoke because the Jewish people don’t need a government. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is their Government.

Living By His Word

That’s how it used to be. The Am Yisroel meticulously kept the Torah. Everybody did. We have to get it into our heads. It wasn’t so long ago. Up until a hundred and fifty years ago, all over Europe, wherever Jews dwelt, the Torah was observed punctiliously. I’m not talking about *shmiras haloshon* or *inyanim* of *bein adam l’chaveiro*, things of *middos*, character. Humans are humans – better people are more observant of these things. But we’re talking now about Torah technicalities, *dinim*. And when it came to that, the whole Klal Yisroel observed everything. Even those things that nobody would ever discover were observed, things that were done only in secrecy, the Am Yisroel observed to a T.

And that was because we lived according to that *bris* that our forefathers made on Har Grizim and Har Eival. We lived with that commitment that even the things that are done only in privacy and that no one else would ever discover, even these things will be kept and cherished by the Jewish people. That’s the secret of our nation, that even in the privacy of our homes, we do “what we know is right in our eyes.” And that’s how our nation became a nation.

Part III. Secret Homes

Denying Hashem

Now all of this explains why there's a special blessing for people who fear Hakadosh Baruch Hu *baseiser*. לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם יִרָא שְׁמַיִם בְּסֵתֶר. – A man should always fear Hashem in secret. Because that's the greatness of a man and the greatness of our nation. There's a special blessing for that!

But we know that it wasn't only a blessing that the Am Yisroel heard at that time on Har Grizim and Har Eival. There was a curse too. And that's a question. Why was a special curse delineated? A blessing we understand; you've chosen greatness. You've chosen to be a link in the glorious creation of an eternally loyal people. But why a special curse? A blessing should be enough to encourage the nation. A curse makes it seem like there's something especially wrong with a sin done in secret.

And so we understand that there's something more here. When a man commits a sin in secret it's not only that he's breaking this covenant of a people who "do what is right in their eyes," but he's demonstrating an attitude of very serious consequence. And that's the attitude that *nobody is looking*. And not only is he *demonstrating* that attitude but he is *creating* it and *encouraging* it in his mind. Every time you do something wrong in secret you're ruining your mind more and more because you're practicing up on that attitude that He's not here, that He's not watching *chas veshalom*.

Rashi (Kiddushin 31a) explains that when a man does something wrong in secret, בְּאִוְמֶר – it's as if he said, "אֵין הַשְׁכִּינָה בְּאֶרֶץ – There's no *Shechina* here." That's what he's thinking in his mind; that's why he does it *baseiser*. He wouldn't have done that sin if Hashem was looking. Impossible! The fact that he did it now is an expression of his feelings that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not around.

Pushing Hashem Away

But there's something else, something much worse. It's not merely that you're saying the Shechinah is not here. You're actually chasing away the Shechinah. Because: כָּל הָעוֹבֵר עַבְרָה בְּסֵתֶר בְּאֵלֵי דוֹחַק רַגְלֵי הַשְׁכִּינָה – Anyone who transgresses in secret it's as if he's shoving away the feet of the Shechinah (Kiddushin *ibid.*). We imagine the Shechinah is seated

on the throne; הָאָרֶץ הִיא רִגְלִי – The heavens are My throne, – and the earth is My footstool. And when this man does something wrong in secret, he is *kavyachol* pushing the feet of the Shechinah off the footstool. It means he's shoving the Shechinah away from this earth. So what's the result of him thinking אֵין הִשְׁכִּינָה בָּאֵן – “There's no Shechinah here”? The result is that He's not there, He's pushed away!

Of course, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is always there. He's מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ and He is everywhere. But the *kedushah* of the Shechinah is no longer close to him. Hakadosh Baruch Hu causes His presence to rest on those people that want His presence to be close to them. קְרוֹב הַשֵּׁם – Hashem is close to all those who call to Him and want Him to be close. But when there are sinners who disregard the Presence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, then the Shechinah goes further and further away from the Klal Yisroel.

That's why it's more than just a blessing. It's a terrible curse when people's hearts are devoid of this devotion to Hakadosh Baruch Hu within the privacy of the home because they're pushing Hashem away from their *daled amos*. They're pushing Him away from the Am Yisroel.

Angels of Wood and Stone

And that's why it's especially important to always be aware of Hashem, even in the privacy of your home. Now how to do it, how to work on it, that's the question. It's a big question, especially when we come close to Rosh Hashana. You know the Gemara says that when the Day of Judgment comes, all the *malachim* assemble to testify about Man. Every person gets his day in court and all the *malachim* say what they have to say.

Now there are all kinds of *malachim*. Some of the *malachim* are his mitzvos. הָעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה אֶחָת קוֹנֶה לוֹ פְּרָקְלִיט אֶחָד – If you do one mitzvah, you're going to get one advocate (Avos 4:11). Those are very important, but I want to talk now about a different group of witnesses who are preparing to speak about you. You'll be surprised who they are. You weren't thinking about these *malachim*. I'm talking about the walls of your house.

There's a verse in Chabakuk (2:11) כִּי אֶבֶן מִקִּיר תִּזְעַק – A stone from the wall will cry out from the wall, וְכַפֵּי יַעֲנֶנָּה – and a board of wood will reply. So the Gemara (Chagiga 16a) says like this: When a man is concealed from public view behind the four walls of his house, he may

feel that he's free to misbehave. Of course, when neighbors come in to visit, he's on his best behavior, but suppose all the windows are closed. That's a good thing by the way—in case you're in a bad temper and want to open your mouth on your wife or your wife wants to open her mouth on you, make sure to close the windows tight. Why should the neighbors get a bad impression? Pull down the shades too—they shouldn't see.

But the Sages tell us that it might help with the neighbors but it won't help on the Day of Judgement. On Rosh Hashana it won't help because the stones and the boards of your house will come in and testify against you. **מִי מְעִיד** – *Who testifies against a man on the Day of Judgment?* So the Gemara says **קוֹרוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֲבָנֵי בֵּיתוֹ** – *the beams of his house and the stones will testify* (Taanis 11a). That's what the *possuk* means, “A stone from the wall will call out from the wall and a board of wood, a beam, will open its mouth.” They're witnesses.

Now it's not merely a form of speech. The walls, the beams and the ceilings are going to speak up. The floor, the carpet; everything in your house, even the furniture. There are a lot of witnesses and they're all coming to testify against a man, or for a man. Nothing will keep quiet.

Use Your Walls

Now, actually it's a puzzle. Because who needs walls when Hashem sees everything anyhow? I need my walls to testify on the Day of Judgment for or against me? I need my furniture to testify? Doesn't Hakadosh Baruch Hu see and know everything Himself? Isn't He a good enough Witness? It's a good *kasha*.

And the answer is that it's not for Hakadosh Baruch Hu these witnesses. He doesn't need them. But *we* need them; because it's difficult for us to live with things that we don't see. We can talk about *malachim* and the Eyes of Hashem and we can believe it too, but it's more effective when you know that the walls are watching. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the real Witness, but if you know that the walls are going to testify, so for the sake of your walls you'll behave.

And we shouldn't belittle that! Don't think you're too smart for such things! Because it's not so easy to feel that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is looking. And therefore the more you make use of those walls, the

more effective it is. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

Kimchis' Secret

The Gemara (Yuma 47a) brings that there was a woman, her name was Kimchis, who had an especial privilege. She had seven sons, and all of her seven sons became *kohanim gedolim*. Now to have a son a high priest would make any woman proud. Even if you have a cousin who is a *kohen gadol*, a fifth cousin, you'll tell people about it. And she had seven sons and all of them served as *kohanim gedolim*. That was a record! It was a remarkable thing in our history. Kimchis was the wonder of the nation.

And everybody understood there was something here. It wasn't pull, *protektzia* that got her children so far. There had to be something there, some reason.

And because it was so unusual, the *Chachomim* interviewed her. It was an important question for them. They saw that this was not an accident and so they asked her, "What happened that you had this merit of having seven sons who were high priests?" They wanted to know the story, the backstory.

Well, this is the story. Kimchis said as follows: "מִיָּמִי לֹא רָאוּ קוֹרוֹת בֵּיתִי קְלָעֵי שַׁעֲרֵי – All my life my ceiling never saw my uncovered hair." Now in a woman's own room if she allows her hair to be exposed, there's no reason to criticize her, but Kimchis made it her business that even if she had to comb her hair, it was always underneath a headcloth. An extreme thing! The ceiling boards never saw her hair. "And because of that I merited such *nachas*." That's what Kimchis was saying.

More Than the Act

But that's not the end of the story. Listen to what the *Chachomim* said about that: "But there were many others who did that and it didn't help them."

We have to understand this exchange. The *Chachomim* didn't accept this? After all, it's a virtue. A woman who is alone in her home, nobody is present, what's wrong if she uncovers her hair? Isn't it an exceptional behavior of Kimchis, a high level of *tzniyus* that she never allowed her hair to be seen by her ceiling?

But the *Chachomim* weren't impressed. They testified there were many Jewish women who lived that way and they didn't merit such a reward. In the ancient times—not only ancient times; even a hundred years ago, even fifty years ago—there were a lot of women who were very pious, very observant, far beyond the line of duty. “So it can't be that,” they said.

“Kimchis,” the Sages said, “You were doing more than the mere act of keeping your hair covered. You were thinking too! You were imagining that the ceiling is looking at you.”

What the *Chachomim* were saying is that it's not the mere act that accomplishes such greatness. Of course, the act on its own is important but you become especially holy, especially great, when you invest thoughts in your acts. True greatness depends how much you invest of your mind.

Walls' Eyes Matter

As much as possible Kimchis was always thinking, “These beams, these boards in the ceiling will someday go testify before the Tribunal and they'll be talking about me, all my secrets.” And all her life she behaved as if the boards were eyes that were looking at her. She trained herself, day after day, to have *emunah chushis*, a physical actual belief that the ceiling was looking at her. That's how she accustomed herself to the truth that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in the home.

For years and years, Kimchis was not only practicing covering her hair always, but she was creating a mind of **לְעוֹלָם יְהִי אָדָם יָרֵא שְׁמַיִם** – *A man should always fear Hashem in secret.*

That's what the *Chachomim* meant. “Many people did what you do but it didn't help. But because you *lived* that way, that's what did it. You were creating for yourself a Torah mind and because of that great quality you deserved this great reward.”

And that's what we're talking about tonight. The more you use the walls of your home the greater you'll become. The more you remember that your ceiling will be a witness for or against you, the more you'll achieve. It takes hard work but those walls can become your biggest defenders.

And the walls are everything because it's within the walls of your house that men are made! It's within the walls of the house that women are made! It's within the walls of the house that boys and girls are made! Of course, outside in the shul, in the *kollel*, on the street, in the office and the yeshiva and Beis Yaakov, that's all very important. But it's in the secrecy of your home, *baseiser*, that man is tested, and therefore, that is the area that a man must consider the most vital thing: "What will be the opinion, the testimony of the walls of my house on the Yom Hadin?"

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Let's Get Practical

Talking to the Wall

This week I will endeavor to remember this great teaching that man becomes great within the secrecy of his four walls. Each morning I will *bli neder* spend one minute looking at the walls of my home and remind myself that they are witnesses. And if nobody is looking, in order to make it even more real in my mind, I'll approach the wall and speak to it as if it were an angel preparing to testify about me. "Dear wall, I know that you see everything and that you will carry a report before the heavenly tribunal. I will try to live with that knowledge today and ensure that you have only good reports to bring about me".

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

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The Three Foundations of The Jewish Home

When Yitzchak married Rivkah, he found her to resemble his mother, Sarah: "The Shabbos candles burned from one Shabbos to the next, the dough was blessed, and a cloud was positioned over their tent." (Rashi, *Bereishis* 24:76) What is the meaning of all this? On a simple level, it means that Rivkah was a great *tzadekes* and continued along the path of Sarah Imeinu, so she regularly enjoyed these same three miracles. But on a deeper level, these three things hint at the three foundations of the Jewish home. These things are not exclusively for Sarah and Rivkah — rather, every Jewish woman everywhere should make sure she has them in her home.

The first is the Shabbos candles, kindled for every Shabbos. Chazal explain that the reason for this mitzvah is *shalom bayis*. Without light in the home, people are prone to trip and bump, and this unpleasant situation can lead to irritability and friction. By obligating us to have light in the home, the halachah places special emphasis on having peace in the home on *Shabbos Kodesh*.

But in the homes of *tzaddikim*, the lights burn from one Shabbos to the next. There's *shalom bayis* not just on Shabbos when the family happily gets together and forgets the mundane troubles of the world, but all week, despite the difficulties and challenges that can come up! In the homes of the *tzaddikim*, **Shabbos's light of peace and harmony burns on, illuminating one day after another until the next Shabbos comes.**

The second is that the dough was blessed. Chazal say (*Beitzah* 16a) that aside from special expenditures such as for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and teaching children Torah, a person's yearly *parnasah* is fixed on Rosh Hashanah. Therefore, one needs a blessing that a small amount of "dough" will suffice for a long time. A person shouldn't spend his money on luxuries, lest debts pile up disturbing the peace of mind required for *avodas Hashem* and destroying the tranquility in the home. A person should limit his spending to what he really needs. This brings happiness to the home, and his "dough" will be blessed.

The third is that a cloud was positioned over the tent. This cloud of *kedushah* alludes to *tzeniyus*. It is as if a cloud were enveloping the home and covering it from sight. This applies in its simple sense, as it is written, "All the dignity of the king's daughter is found within." (*Tehillim* 45:14) This also includes not publicizing private matters. And a person should make a special effort that the voices in the home not be heard outside.

As we enter the *yemei selichos*, let us reignite our connection to these foundations - which bring with them great *siyata di'Shemaya*. The lights burning from one Shabbos to the next: May there always be peace and harmony in the home. The blessing of the dough: May there always be plenty of *parnasah*. And the cloud positioned over the tent: May there always be the holiness and purity of *tzeniyus*, and may the *Shechinah* fill the home!

In Honor of My Husband Jeffery Elbaum
May Hashem continue to bless him with strength,
health, happiness and long life
With love, Florence, the Children and Grandchildren

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

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QUESTION

What is Selichos all about?

ANSWER

Selichos means that a man must make some time for *hisbonenus*, for thinking. **שימו לבבכם על דרכיכם** – Put your minds on your path in life. Are you walking in the right way? When we say Selichos, so every day we're saying, **נחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה** – Let us search out our ways and investigate." All the *frum* Jews are saying that. But do you do it? How many *frum* Jews have stopped and given five minutes to think over the past year? Believe me, very few. Five minutes inventory, five minutes bookkeeping, is very little for a whole year of business and yet it would be a great thing if somebody could boast, "I'm the man! I fulfilled **נחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה**. I spent five minutes thinking of the past full year." It's a very poor little boast, but *halevai v'halevai*.

At least two minutes you should spend! Did you spend two minutes? Even on Yom Kippur, do you spend two minutes thinking about your past year? People are talking, but they don't even know what they're saying. They say, **נחפשה דרכינו** – "Let's search out our ways and make an inventory," and then they forget about actually doing it.

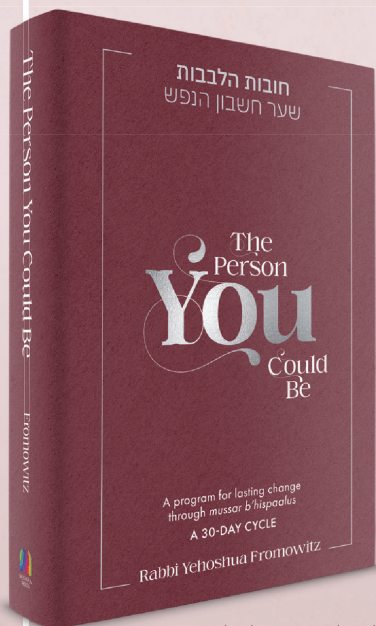
And it's so essential. It's imperative—you must have some time to think. Unless you want to continue in your blindness until you fall over the precipice when it's all over and then it's too late. At the end you'll realize that your life has been wasted for a lack of using your mind. The golden opportunity of life comes once in history—you won't come back again. And that's what Selichos is for; it's meant to wake you up.

February 1977

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ח • זמנה

Keeping His word,
Hashem handsomely
rewards those who do
His will.⁶

ט • נצר חסד לאלפים

Hashem preserves our
חסד to benefit our
descendants for 2,000
generations.⁷

י • נשא עון

Hashem forgives⁸
sins done intentionally.⁸

יא • ופשע

Sins done rebelliously,
to anger Hashem.⁹

יב • וחטאה

Sins done
unintentionally.⁹

יג • ונקה

With תשובה, Hashem
erases our sins as if
they never existed.⁵

**כלל ישראל
SIN, THEY SHOULD
PERFORM THIS
ARRANGEMENT
BEFORE ME AND I WILL
FORGIVE THEM."**²

More than simply reciting
these מדות, Hashem wants us
to emulate His ways and
perform them as well.¹⁰

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לע"נ נחום צבי בן בנימין



א · ד'

Before we sin, Hashem's
רחמנות is unaffected by
the knowledge that we are
destined to sin.¹

ב · ד'

After we sin, Hashem still
רחמנות if we
תשובה.²

ג · קל

Aside from satisfying our
basic needs, Hashem
provides an abundance of
טובות too.³

ד · רחום

Hashem eases the
punishments of the guilty
when they call out to
Him.⁴

ה · וחנן

Hashem bestows good
upon those who ask, even
if they are unworthy.⁴

ו · ארך אפים

Hashem is slow
to punish sinners, hoping
they will do תשובה.⁵

ז · זרב חסד

Hashem tilts His
scales for those who lack
זכותים.⁵



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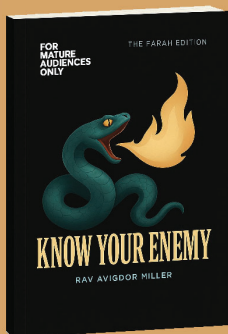
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