

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת יתרו

Hearing Hashem's Messages

YISRO LEARNS SOMETHING NEW

Our *parshah* this week begins with the story of Yisro leaving the comfort of his hometown to travel out into the dangerous wilderness to visit the encampment of the *Am Yisroel*. And for what reason did he undertake such a journey? Why would a man like Yisro, a man of nobility in Midian, forsake his home to go to the *midbar*? So the Torah tells us, וישמע יתרו - Because he heard something that stirred his mind. When Yisro was informed of what had happened in *Mitzrayim* and at the *Yam Suf*, there was some great ideal that was triggered in his mind. And it was that ideal that caused him to make that fateful decision to come out to the wilderness to join his son-in-law and the *Am Yisroel* in their happiness.

Now when he arrived we know that he made a *brachah* on the *neis* that happened to the people of Hashem: ברוך השם אשר - “Hashem should be blessed for having rescued you from the hands of Pharaoh and the Egyptians” (Yisro 18:10). And in the climax of his praises of Hashem, Yisro added a *peirush*, some details about the *neis* of *Kriyas Yam Suf* that we should consider carefully. עתה ידעתי - “Now I know,” said Yisro, כי גדול השם מכל האלהים, “that Hashem

is greater than all gods." "I recognized Him in the past," explains Rashi, "but now I know Him even more." And that's a remarkable statement because Yisro had already known of *Hashem Elokei Yisroel* through his own reasoning, as well by the traditions of his own family of Midian, who was the son of Avraham (Bereishis 25:2), and he had surely heard from Moshe Rabeinu as well. He knew very much about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, more than many of us sitting here. "But now," said Yisro, "Now I know Hashem even more, with an Awareness, an understanding, that I didn't have before." And so we should be very interested in this - what exactly was it that Yisro saw; what was it that led him to say, עתה ידעתי, "Now I know." Because that's something that we should be striving for all the time; more and more *da'as Hashem*; greater heights in knowing Hashem. If we could say, "Now I know," like Yisro did, then we've already accomplished something great with our lives.

WHY DIDN'T PHARAOH GET ALZHEIMER'S?

And so we look to Yisro's own words for an explanation: זרו עליהם - "I now know about Hashem...because in the thing in which זרו, in which the Egyptians have dealt wickedly, עליהם, it came upon them" (Yisro 18:10). Yisro had watched from the sidelines for many years as the Egyptians tried to wreak havoc on the *Am Yisroel*; and now it was many years later and Yisro was studying the great catastrophe that had befallen the *Mitzri'im*. And Yisro thought about what he saw - he didn't just let it go by. "Why were they drowned in water?" he thought. "What was the purpose of such a great destruction? Did Hashem drown the Egyptians *just to save the Am Hashem*?" If that was true, Hashem could have saved His people in a much simpler fashion. Pharaoh could have just made up his mind that he had enough. The ten *makkos* should have been the end of his futile escapades with the children of Hashem. What does he need more *tzaros* for; to start up again with *Hashem Elokei Yisroel*? And so, once he let them out of his land he should have said *baruch shepatrani*, "I'm glad I got rid of them and now I'm done!"

And even if he lost his head and wanted to chase after the *Bnei Yisroel*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have saved us in a much less complicated way. He should have made Pharaoh catch the flu

or maybe He could have made him get Alzheimer's disease. Everything could have happened in a natural way, and Pharaoh wouldn't have pursued the *Am Yisroel* altogether. But instead, Pharaoh changed his mind - and actually we'll say more correctly that it was *Hashem who changed Pharaoh's mind* - and he pursued them. He didn't have enough; he was looking for more. And he got it!

HASHEM DOES THINGS FOR A PURPOSE!

And if you'll say - and you're right to say so - that Hashem wanted to show His might to the *Am Yisroel*, to give them the gift of more *emunah*, and that's why this whole charade had to play out; OK, but what's this whole business with the water? Why didn't some conflagration come upon them like it came, let's say, on the camp of *Sancheriv*? A terrible fire could have come upon them when they set out to pursue the *Am Yisroel* and the Egyptian army would have become ash. Or a pestilence could have destroyed them, like it came upon other enemies of the *Am Hashem*. All this was going through the mind of Yisro. Why did it happen in this case that they were drowned?

"It just happened that way," you'll say. But for people like Yisro that's *not* the way to think. Because he understood that there's a principle in the dealings of Hashem, the principle that Hakodosh Baruch Hu does everything with a purpose. "And as much as I can," reasoned Yisro, "I should aim to study events and their purposes as much as possible." That's how Yisro was thinking: "Hakadosh Baruch Hu always does things for a purpose."

So Yisro looked back at what had happened in *Mitzrayim*. The decree, *היאורה תשליכוהו כל הבן היולד*, that every newborn son should be cast into the water to drown, had happened a very long time ago; it was eighty years already. But Yisro, when he saw the the final chapter of the career of Pharaoh and his Egyptians, he began to think. When he considered the fate of the *Mitzri'im* who were drowned in the water, he was wise enough to think that Hashem does everything with a purpose, and he looked back to discover for what crime the Egyptians were being punished. And he came to the conclusion that it was for the crime of casting Jewish children into the Nile that they themselves were now being drowned. Yisro said, "I see something here that I'm not going to

ignore. I see a remarkable poetic justice here. Pharaoh and the Egyptians who had drowned little Jewish boys in water, are now themselves laying dead at the bottom of the Yam Suf because that's what they did to the children of the *Am Yisroel*."

THE PRIMITIVE ANCIENTS KNEW BETTER THAN THE SCIENTISTS

Now, we would be wise to think along with Yisro, and to achieve some of the perfection that he achieved on that day in the *midbar*, but first we must understand the principle which underlies Yisro's words. And that is the *emunah* that there are no accidents in the world. The very first lesson that a Jew has to learn is that *Hashem Echad*, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge of everything. *Hashem Echad* means He is the only One who controls all the affairs of the universe; whatever happens comes directly from Him. And if that's the case, everything has a purpose.

Now what that means for us is that when a person attributes some happening merely to natural causes, what it really is is a sublimated form of atheism. Of course Hakadosh Baruch Hu acts through causes, absolutely. You know, the textbooks try to ridicule the old generations; they deride the ancient ideas of attributing epidemics to acts of G-d. The scientists think that they're smarter because they know that there are bacteria; because they have the tools today to see microorganisms so they think they know much more. But that's because they don't understand how the ancients thought. Everybody in the ancient world understood just fine that Hakadosh Baruch Hu acts through agents. What the agents are, that's a different story. But they believed in agents then too. Only that because the scientist today can see the agents better, he can study them, analyze them, and write scholarly papers about them, so what happens? This educated fool begins to believe in the agents themselves, that's all. But all that is just a wicked mix of education, hubris and ignorance that leads him on the path toward foolishness; because there's no question that you can be an up-to-date scientist and still understand that all the natural causes are agents of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And therefore, the wise person, the one who lives with *emunah* in Hashem, is prepared to look at all the events in this world, *even the small and seemingly unimportant mishaps in his own life*, as messages from Hashem.

TAKE THE DIRECTIONS!

This however requires some explanation if we expect to apply it to our lives in its most practical form. And those of you who come here know that this is our goal, to break things down to its most simplest form so that we can best apply it in our lives. So we'll start the explanation with the *gemara* in Makkos (10b). The *gemara* comments on the possuk **יורה חטאים בדרך** - "Hashem shows the sinners the way; He teaches the sinners the way back to Him" (Tehillim 25:8). And the *gemara* says there, **אם חטאים יורה צדיקים לא** - **כל שכן** - "If Hashem is kindly to the sinners, to those persistent rebels against the Torah, and nevertheless Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives them messages, then surely He is kind to His loyal servants." He gives them messages too. Why would Hashem ignore His loyal ones?

What that means is that in this life, everybody is getting constant direction from Hashem. Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't forsake mankind and therefore when a person embarks on a wrong course in life, it could be a minor thing or a big thing, in any case, Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not neglect the opportunities to teach him. From time to time, He guides us by giving instruction and direction. And therefore everybody has opportunities to improve their ways and go on the right path. That's a fundamental principle in how Hashem directs the life of man, that He's teaching the sinners the way back to Him. And nobody therefore can claim exemption; everyone is going to be held responsible for ignoring the messages from Hashem. And if a man willfully closes his eyes to the directions of Hashem, so not only will he continue to go lost, but he's simply a fool. Let's say a man is driving to Cleveland and he loses his way; so if he has any sense, he stops at the gasoline station and asks for directions. Now suppose he ignores them; he doesn't pay heed to the directions and he's still lost. So he stops at a payphone to call his cousin for directions, and he ignores those instructions as well! So not only will he be lost forever, but there's no bigger fool than he!

THE NEXT WORLD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN CLEVELAND

And the road of life, the road to the Next World, is much more important than a road trip to Cleveland. And it's also much easier to make wrong turns on the road of life. And therefore, it's most important to understand the mishaps of life in the sense of

them being directions from Hashem. They're not natural, and they're not accidents - they are instructions being sent to us for the purpose of helping us find our way back onto the highway to *Olam Habah*. And if you'll listen to Hashem's voice, if you'll study His messages and understand them, so you'll know in what way you have to improve, and how to better walk the road of life.

The question is, when a misfortune happens to a person how should he know for which wrongs this punishment is being sent? So what we're going to study now is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives a clue. And that's the famous principle of *midah k'neged midah*. He sends the misfortune in such a way that it gives you a clue as to what it came for. And that's the discovery that Yisro made when he studied the hand of Hashem against the *Mitzri'im* in *Mitzrayim* and at the *Yam Suf*. It was at this momentous occasion in history that Yisro discovered the way of Hashem that we call *midah k'neged midah*. **כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ - "In that which the Mitzri'im schemed against the Jewish people, עליהם - it came right back on their heads."**

HASHEM INSTRUCTS THE SNAKES

And he discovered it for *our* benefit. Because if Yisro was able to come to *da'as Hashem* - after all, he said "*Now I know,*" - because of his study of this way of Hashem in this world, so we should consider it an obligation upon ourselves to do the same. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wrote that *possuk* in the Torah because He wants us to recognize as much as we can that this is one of the *darkei Hashem*, one of the ways that Hashem manages things in this world. And it's an important principle that is constantly reiterated in the *Torah*, *Neviim*, *Kesuvim*, and in the *gemara* everywhere - and if we would look into our own history, we'd see it as well.

So the principle we are discussing here is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives us clues - when something happens, it's not merely a misfortune, it's a clue. So if you want to know why something is happening, look at the *way* it happened. We'll take a *possuk* in Koheles (10:8) as an example. **חֹפֵר גּוֹמֵץ - "If a man digs a pit in the ground, בו יפול, into it he will fall."** If somebody wants to cause a pitfall to somebody else, and he digs a hole in the ground, so *he's* going to fall into a hole in the ground - sometimes in the same hole that he made, **וּפּוֹרֵץ גֵּדֵר - "And he who breaks down a**

fence - a malicious man is trying to break down your fence, so ישכנו נחש, a snake will come out from the wall that he's banging on, and it will bite him." Now, a snake could come from somewhere else and bite him. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu tells all the snakes, "Stay out of this! I only want the snakes *from this wall!*" Because they have a very important job over here, a lesson has to be taught! And that's the lesson of *midah k'neged midah*. And the truth is that it's a principle of such overwhelming importance that it becomes one of the most significant actors in men's lives.

SHIMSHON HAD BEAUTIFUL EYES

The *gemara* (Sotah 8b) says it like this: במדה שאדם מודד - מודדין לו - "In the way a man measures out to others, so too is it measured out to him." What does that mean? It's telling us that the punishment that a man gets in this world in some way resembles the thing that he's done wrong. Now you all remember when Shimshon wanted to convert the *Plishti* woman, *Delilah*, and marry her. His parents weren't so excited; they argued with him about it. "Why don't you take a *bas Yisrael*? Aren't there enough girls from your own people to choose from?! What's so good about a gentile woman that you have to choose *davkah* her? But Shimshon was adamant about his choice. He said "Take her for me כי היא ישרה בעיני, because she is good in my eyes" (Shoftim 14:3).

Now of course you have to know that Shimshon converted her. There's no question about that. To marry Shimshon, any woman would be willing to be a convert; who wouldn't fall for such a handsome and strong young man? And so she willingly became a *giyores*. Now I'm not going to tell you that it was such a high-class conversion, but she was converted, and you can be sure she kept the laws of the Torah.

You must also know that Shimshon Hatzadik had beautiful eyes, the eyes of a *tzadik*, and if he said that *Delilah* is "good in my eyes," he knew what he was talking about. Why Shimshon took a *Plishti* wife is because he wanted to mingle with the *Plishtim* as one of them; he became a *mechutan* now. By this excuse he was able to mix with them, and to know their business and to intimidate them. He looked for excuses to humiliate them.

TERRORIZING THE PHILISTINES

And it was a strategy that worked; that's how he kept them quiet so that they shouldn't harm the *Am Yisroel*. Shimshon was able to harass them, and to terrorize them so much that he kept them quiet. Although they had power to molest the *Am Yisroel*, they were afraid to do so because of Shimshon. And Shimshon achieved all this by means of this *Plishti* woman he married. By means of her relatives he got his way into the company of the *Plishti* people, and he succeeded. Because of Shimshon it was a quiet time for the *Am Yisroel*.

And yet, it was still a very grave error. Because Hakodosh Boruch Hu didn't agree with Shimshon's strategy. "That's *your* plan, but I don't like it. I don't like plans that involve your eyes looking at gentile girls." Because no matter how much of a *l'sheim shamayim* there was, still there was some element there of "she is pleasing in my eyes." And this, Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't like. For a man like Shimshon to say "She's pleasing in my eyes," Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't like that business. "She's good in your eyes?! What about My eyes?!"

THE CHACHOMIM STUDY HISTORY

You all know the story of how Shimshon lost his eyes. He was captured by the *Plishtim* and they poked out his eyes with forks. Just before he died they brutally took out his eyes. So here was the once powerful Shimshon, and now he weakened and blind, standing there with his hands bound, in the presence of the *Plishti* audience who were jeering at him and mocking him. Shimshon was about to die, and so instead of being tormented to death by the *Plishtim*, he asked Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "Please restore my strength to me for one last moment so that I can do one more heroic deed for my people." And he pushed heavily on the pillars upon which the roof was supported, and he knocked them over and the roof came crashing down. And he killed a great number of the notables of the *Plishtim*. He threw down the building on their heads and he perished together with thousands of their great men. They had such a *mapalah* on that day because of Shimshon - he squashed so many *Plishti* notables and dignitaries under that roof that the *Plishtim* were quiet for twenty years after that. If one Jew could do that to them, they weren't interested in the whole *gesheft*.

That's a remarkable story; even young children love this story. But there's a much more important element to that story than just the revenge that Shimshon wrought on the *Plishtim* - and it's an element that often goes unnoticed. Because why was Shimshon given such an end that he should lose his eyes? It's a *mishnah*: שמשון הלך אחר עיניו לפיכך נקרו פלשתים את עיניו "Because Shimshon followed after his eyes, that's why he lost his eyes" (Sotah 1:8, 9b). Now we don't know exactly what these words mean because Shimshon had very good eyes. But at least we have to learn these words very well - that Shimshon "followed his eyes," and "that's why the *Plishtim* took out his eyes."

Now it doesn't say that in the book of *Shoftim*, that this is the reason why his eyes were taken out. But the *chachomim* studied history through the lens of the Torah and they came to this conclusion. Why did it happen that he lost his eyes, that his eyes were taken out? It can't be that it was *b'mikreh*, just an accident of fate. So they searched and they found the *possuk*, כי היא ישרה בעיני, "She is good in my eyes."

THE MIGHTY MAN STUDIES PARSHAS YISRO

Now don't think that the *chachomim* were wise enough to figure this out, but Shimshon wasn't. I'll tell you what was going on in the great head of Shimshon in the moments before he died. It's important for us to know what he was thinking. He said, "Ribono Shel Olam, what happened to me that I am blind now? I, who was the great hero - all the enemies feared me - and now I'm a blind captive. Who made me blind, the *Plishtim*?! I'm not going to be such a fool and say that!"

So you can be certain that Shimshon was making use of the great principle of *midah k'neged midah* in the moments before he died. Shimshon was following that principle, absolutely. And therefore he began to think, "Why were my eyes poked out? Maybe I misused my eyes." In his last moments, he remembered the great lesson of the *Torah*. Shimshon also learned *Parshas Yisro*, and he learned it better than we learn it here. And he remembered that he had once said: קחנה לי כי היא ישרה בעיני - "Take her for me because she is good in my eyes." "Ahhh," said Shimshon, בדבר אשר זדו עליהם, it came upon me. I shouldn't have said, 'She's right in my eyes.' What about *b'einei Hashem*, in the eyes of Hashem? Did I think about His eyes?!"

So Shimshon struck his chest and said, "I sinned before You Hashem; please forgive me and restore my strength to me so that I can make amends, so that I can do one more deed of service to You." And that's how Shimshon left the world. תמות נפשי עם פלישתים, he perished with the *Plishtim*, after recognizing the way of Hashem in this world, and making himself better because of it.

HASHEM TRIES SPEAKING TO THE FOOL

And that's what the *gemara* (Brachos 5a) says: אם רואה אדם שיסורים באים עליו, "If a man sees misfortune coming on him", יפשפש במעשיו, "let him examine his deeds". Chazal are telling us that whenever something happens to a man, he should utilize it as an occasion to become better. Now this doesn't mean that some big catastrophe has to happen to him. Because, of course, if a man is dealt a big misfortune, he's drowning in the Yam Suf let's say, or his eyes were poked out by the gentiles, so he'd better wake up and get busy recognizing the messages of Hashem because there might not be too much time left for him. Nobody would be such a fool as to ignore the big messages.

So if you're laying on the operating table, there's no question at all that it's a very big message from Hashem. And let's say he's being strapped down and they're putting the mask over his face, and even then he's thinking, "It just happened this way; it just turned out that I have a weak heart or whatever it is." He's an Orthodox Jew but he doesn't connect it with Hakodosh Boruch Hu at all! Hashem is showing him open signs, He's being spoken to by Hashem, but he ignores Him. There's no bigger failure than that!

DOES SUFFERING HAVE A LIMIT?

But we're not even talking about that now; we're talking about the better ones, the ones who *would* react to big signs. We're talking about intelligent servants of Hashem who want to spare themselves the rough treatment, the big messages. They prefer to hear Hashem speaking to them with smaller messages. What type of signs should *they* interpret as messages from Hashem, as Hashem in His mercy trying to guide them in the right way?

So for that we'll look at a *gemara* in *Arachin* (16b). The question is raised there: עד היכן תכלית יסורים - "Until how far is the limit of suffering?" Now at first glance, we should be bothered - what kind of question is that? There's no limit to suffering; people

suffer in all types of ways, all forms of *yissurim*. But what the *gemara* means is this: How small can a misfortune be and still be called suffering that you should take it as a hint from Hashem? What the *gemara* is searching for are examples of visitations from Hashem, punishments or warnings, *but in its most minimum form*.

THE TRAGEDY OF HAVING TOO MUCH MONEY IN YOUR POCKET

כל שארגו לו בגד ללבוש ואין, אמר רבי אלעזר, Rebbe Elazar says, מתקבל עליו, "If they wove for him a new garment, they made him a new shirt, but he's not satisfied with it". The shirt is able to keep him covered and warm, and it fits him too, but it just doesn't satisfy him. Even *that* is called suffering, that's called *yissurim*. So Rav Z'eirah asked on that: Does it have to be such a *big misfortune* like that to be called *yissurim*? גדולה מזו אמרו - even a bigger *chiddush* was said by the *chachomim*: "Even if he wanted his wine to be mixed with warm water and by error they mixed it with cold water. Or his intention was to mix it with cold water and by accident he put in warm water, even that is called *yissurim*." Even that is a misfortune! This man who wants his wine one way and gets it another way has already suffered, "ואת אמרת כולי האי, and you're discussing such a big misfortune like a garment that doesn't please you?" After all a garment you don't make every day. And now when you finally get it, it doesn't please you. That's your idea of a small misfortune?! Something like that, everyone should understand that it's a visitation by Hashem. So you see that we're looking here for the smallest possible thing that can be called a misfortune.

And the *gemara* keeps searching: מר בריה דרבינא אמר, Mar the son of Ravina said the following, אפילו נהפך לו חלוקו, - "If he's putting on his undershirt, and he accidentally put it on upside down." So now he has to take it off and put it on again. That's called a misfortune that should stir your mind! And just so you should know how small of a bother something could be and you're still expected to learn from it, the *gemara* there brings one more example of suffering that should bring a man to change his ways: אפילו הושיט ידו לכיס ליטול שלש - "He put his hand in his pocket to take out a three dollar bill, and there came out a two dollar bill," That's a misfortune and it means that you're being called on by Hashem to begin investigating your ways. Now, this man has both in his pocket, he has enough money, it's just that the

wrong bill came out. And he'll put his hand back in and take out the right bill. But no matter, that was already a call from Hashem.

THE TROLLEY OPERATOR GETS SUED

So we're not talking here about some big mishap that might occur on the city bus. Suffering doesn't mean that if you get on a bus - this is a true story by the way; it happened to a relative of mine - when he got on the bus, it was the trolley in those days, and he couldn't find any money, so he got nervous and he lost his head. He didn't know what to do so he said to the conductor, "I'll write you a check." The conductor didn't think it was funny though. He took him by his neck and threw him off. Now to be thrown off the trolley onto the street in public, that even we understand is a misfortune. He landed on his backside and he was very embarrassed. The truth is that it happened that there was a lawyer on the trolley. So the lawyer got off the trolley and told my relative, "I'll take your case." And the lawyer collected good money from the city for him. So it turned out that even in this misfortune he found a pot of gold.

But we're talking now about things much smaller than that, tiny things that often go unnoticed. And the pot of gold that we're looking for is not a check from the city - I'm not saying that you shouldn't take a payout from the city, but we're looking for something much better than that; we're looking to make something out of ourselves in this world. And so the principle is that a man must always keep his eyes wide open, all the time, to find that pot of gold. Because these small messages are being missed all the time by most of us. And the most valuable wealth you can achieve is when you learn to take a hint from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

THE BUS DRIVER AND THE TAILOR

So suppose you get on the bus and you have money. You have the thirty-five cents to pay for the trip, only that you forgot in which pocket you placed it. So you're standing on the bus and the driver is waiting for you because there are people behind you. And you put your hand into the wrong pocket and you're rummaging around trying to find it. Or maybe it's the right pocket and you happen to take out a different coin. So you have to reach in again, and you're somewhat embarrassed - people are pushing. So when you finally sit down, you have to think it over.

Why did that happen? It's a message *min hashamayim*! That's how an intelligent servant of Hashem should react to even a small misfortune like that. The *gemara* in *Arachin* is teaching us that *even that* is called suffering. And why does the *gemara* tell us that? For what purpose? So that we should not *chas v'shalom* regard these small mishaps as accidents!

It's extreme? It's too much to expect? Nothing is too much to expect if we accept the true principle of *yoreh chatoim baderech*, that Hashem shows the sinners the way. And even those of us who are *tzaddikim*, Hashem is trying to teach us too, the *gemara* says. He's trying to teach us the time. So although you might be a big *tzadik*, but let's say something like that happened to you - you bought a new suit, and you took it home after the alterations and it doesn't please you - that's a message. Even a dumbbell has to react to that! That's why *Rav Z'eirah* made sure to stress that that is *not* an example of a *small* misfortune; because *anybody* should notice that!

What we're learning here is that this is one of the *darkei Hashem*; that in so many cases when He visits small misfortunes on people, He's trying to guide you. And what *Yisro* taught us is that it always pays to study the misfortune because very often Hashem is using His way of *midah k'neged midah* to teach you.

THE DENTIST DOES NOT SERVE ICE CREAM

So it happens sometimes; Hashem might send troubles. And that's His way of letting us know that something is wrong, that we're going on the wrong path. **אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו**, "When you see trouble coming," - a toothache! That's enough trouble; so **יפשפש במעשיו**, "let him look into his deeds". It's an important principle; it's a call *min hashamayim*: "Look into your deeds!"

Often you're able to discern the reason why it came. If you're lying on an operating table, so before they administer anesthesia, you should be thinking, "What happened that I came to this?" And not only on the operating table - in the dentist chair too. If you suffer in your teeth, you'd better get busy discovering, maybe you misused your teeth. And if you're suffering in your stomach, maybe you misused your stomach. So you can use the way of Hashem, *midah k'neged midah* even in the bathroom when

you're constipated. And in the kitchen too. You got a little cut on your finger? Start thinking! You lost some money? You have a cold? You banged your toe? You have to do some investigating. Whatever it is - I'm not capable of interpreting everything - but you should most definitely use this way of Hashem in this world to become a better person.

So let's say you're sitting in the dentist chair and he says, "Open wide!" And he doesn't put a spoonful of ice-cream into your mouth. No, he puts his drill in there and he begins to drill away. So you should be sitting there and thinking, "Why did he tell me that I have to open my mouth to admit the drill? Maybe because I opened my mouth recently when I should have kept it closed." That's how you're supposed to think. So you'll be a smart aleck and say, "Oh no, that's not it. In the course of time teeth tend to deteriorate." That's not smart at all - that's thinking like animals think! You know a horse also sits in a dentist chair. It's a different type of chair but a veterinarian also has to drill a horse's teeth sometimes. And the horse is not thinking about anything. But that's not the way a Jew is supposed to sit. When a Jew sits in the chair and the drill is going down and it hurts; whether it hurts much or it hurts a little, it's in order that he shouldn't waste his life.

ALWAYS BRUSH YOUR TEETH!

People have to think that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving them a tip, some inside information. Start examining yourself. "Chaim, maybe you were too careless with your tongue." Of course we understand that whatever happens can have two reasons. Because naturally somebody will say, "Well, he probably didn't brush his teeth. He ate candy before he went to sleep, and all that sweet stuff was settling around his teeth during the night and rotting it away." And the truth is that you *should* brush your teeth every night. Everybody, boys and girls, men and women, should brush their teeth at least once before going to bed. No question that it's beneficial. But I know a relative of mine who hasn't brushed his teeth since he was born. I'm not recommending it, but this relative of mine has never gone to the dentist and he doesn't have a cavity. Now it could happen that he was born with an especial kind of mouth. Could be. But we have to get into our heads the *emunah* that besides for the material reason, there's no

question that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is at the controls. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't yield control of the universe to bacteria. He's the boss over them too. And therefore whatever happens is a result of His decree.

And when a Jew understands that and he takes the message directly from Hakadosh Baruch Hu to his heart, so a whole new vista of *avodas Hashem* opens up before his eyes. And he utilizes it! So as he leaves the dentist's office, he's not only leaving with his cavity filled but also his mind is filled with a new resolve to change his ways. And that's the biggest achievement in life! Much more precious than the fillings in his teeth.

YOU DESERVE A PARSHA NAMED AFTER YOU

Now if we'll study this principle more, we'll see that it's everywhere. The examples are so many that we need days and days just to list them; and certainly to discuss them it will take an entire lifetime. In our lives, if something happens to us, even a little thing, it pays to investigate, "Why did this happen?" And if we look back, maybe we'll discover something that was done that caused this thing to happen. Because even a little recognition of Hashem's messages, and even a small resolve to change, is very precious. Even if the first hour he'll keep his mind on his mouth, just for one hour after leaving the dentist's office he won't talk, he won't talk, period, for an hour, he's already a fortunate man. It's worth having a cruel fellow put a drill into your mouth and to mine into your teeth just to remind you that for the next hour you shouldn't talk. And if you will be careful with what you say for the next two hours, or the next two days, that's a tremendous achievement - you deserve to have a *parsha* named after you like Yisro had!

And therefore as we go through life you have to keep your eyes open for the messages from Hashem. I recall once, I had just learned this, and somebody told me there's a telephone call for me. So I was running and the telephone booth was very low. I banged my head against the top of the door, and I actually saw stars. Once in my life I realized what it meant to see stars. I saw lights. But I was still fresh off of *mussar seder*. I ran out in the middle of *mussar seder*. And so I had the presence of mind to think, "That's what I got for running out of the *mussar seder*. Ahh! You got what you deserved. That's what you deserved!" Once in

my life I was smart enough to take a hint. It just happened because I was in the midst of studying this subject so I was reminded about it, but that's how we should be all our lives, and life will be one steady procession of *tikun*, of growth and improvement.

GIVE THE BEGGAR A RAISE!

If a man was put to shame in public then he has to consider that he has done that to other people. It doesn't mean that it happened five minutes ago; maybe you have to think back longer than that. Begin looking; you'll find. יגעת מצאת - If he looks, he'll find; because there's a lot to find. And if a man lost money, let's say you had a hold-up. Or if you stick your hand in your pocket and you find instead of those few quarters you had there, you find a hole in the lining. So don't be hard-hearted, don't be like a *goy* and think that it just *happened*. "I should have taken care of the lining in my pocket when I noticed it last week!" You *should* take care of your lining; certainly you shouldn't walk around with a frayed pocket. But now that the quarters are gone, you have to think, "Maybe I was stingy when the poor man came to me in shul. Why did I give him a measly quarter? What's a quarter nowadays?! Everything has gone up and I'm still giving a quarter? It's time to give him a raise. And now Hakodosh Boruch Hu is collecting from me. That's why the quarters left my pocket. Who found it now? Probably some bum found my money; what a waste! What am getting out of it now?!"

The truth is that if you think these thoughts then you're getting a lot out of those missing quarters! You just turned seventy-five cents into a pot of gold! Because Rabeinu Yonah says that if as a result of a misfortune a man improves then he should always look back to that mishap with the greatest joy as if he had actually become wealthy as a result. Because improving yourself in this world is a pot of gold. There's no greater stroke of good luck than if a misfortune happens and because of that you stop a bad habit, you change a bad trait, or makes yourself better in some way. Because that's the greatest success a man can have in life.

WHAT IF I'M WRONG?

So if while you're eating you give a good bite on your tongue, instead of cussing, give a thought. What's your tongue to blame? Could it be that something is wrong with your tongue?

Why not? You're not *such* a tzadik after all. Maybe you should have bitten your tongue earlier in the day when you wanted to say something wrong. נצור לשונך מרע, guard your tongue against saying what you shouldn't. If you study *midah k'neged midah* something is bound to turn up. It's one of the systems by which Hashem lets us know what He wants us to discover, and therefore it's one of the principles by which a Jew should live his life.

"Oh it's so silly," somebody will say. A "*chochom*" will say, "Am I going to waste my life thinking about the things that happened, imputing them to sins which I don't know about; saying that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is sending them upon me for this or that imaginary reason? Maybe it's not because of that. It could be it's not because of anything wrong for all I know." The answer is that it pays to be silly. If you'll discover a pot of gold, it pays to be silly. And there's no question you'll discover it. If you look very hard, you're going to discover.

THERE'S A LOT OF TRUTH IN FRUM JOKES

And let's say a person searched and he didn't find - now that's improbable. What it means is that he wasn't searching. But let's say he did, and he didn't find. So the gemara says: *yitleh b'bitul Torah* - let him attribute it to neglect of Torah study, insufficient study of Torah. Torah study! You can always attribute it to that. And some say a *peirush*; if a man searches and he can't find any sins, *yitleh*, he has to say, "What's the reason I can't find any sins? Because of *bitul Torah*. It's because I didn't study enough Torah, so I think I'm a pretty good fellow. If I would study more I would know what's expected of me and I would discover a lot!" That's only a joke - a *frum* joke, but there is a lot of truth in *frum* jokes.

And the truth is that if a person is going to search in himself and find *anything*, so whatever he finds is a success. It's none of your business why Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent it. Your duty as a Jew is to attribute it to your own faults, and the result will be that you'll become improved. That's what counts. Let's say he made a mistake, and really that's not exactly why he is being punished. So what of it? Let's say I sent you into the next room to look for a ten dollar bill. And so you're looking around in that room, and instead of the ten dollars you find a big box of golden

first *teshuva* I have to do? The first *teshuva* is to remind myself how lucky I am; how fortunate Hashem has made me. He has blessed me that such a thing happened to me only once in years!

And that is an aspect of *midah k'neged midah* that we can apply to our lives always. You caught a cold in the middle of the winter? Why did Hakodosh Boruch Hu do that to you? Your head is pounding, your nose is running, you can't eat, you can't sleep. What did you do already to deserve this? So the man who knows how to think, will think as follows: Did I remember to thank Hashem back in the beginning of the winter, after that first week in November, when I didn't catch a cold? And when the second week in November ended and I was still cold-free, did I take even one minute to say thank you to Hashem? And the next week, and the week after, and all of December? Winter is already almost finished and I never spent two minutes thanking Hakodosh Boruch Hu for keeping me safe from the flu and other illnesses?! Maybe *that's* why I caught a cold." That's how to apply *midah k'neged midah* to our lives.

LET'S PUT YISRO'S LESSON INTO PRACTICE

Because it's not enough to see this way of Hashem in the big catastrophes of life like *Kriyas Yam Suf*. And it's surely not enough to see *midah k'neged midah* only in the lives of others, like Yisro did when he heard about the *Mitzri'im* who were gargling as they drowned in the depths of the waters. This discovery of Yisro of one of the ways of Hashem is given to us as a model to emulate and it's in *our own lives* where we can find the most success by applying the lesson.

Because even if we understand everything we spoke about now, if we don't begin putting it into practice, then it's worth very little. It's vital that we take the principle of Hashem being *yoreh chato'im baderech* by means of *midah k'neged midah*, and begin applying it to our own private lives. Even if a person will choose only one thing a day, one small misfortune, one little mishap every day to stir his mind, then he is already a head taller than everyone else. Because he's taking the great lesson that Hakodosh Boruch Hu taught us in this week's *parshah*, and applying it to his own life as he prepares himself for his glory in the Next World by listening to the messages of Hashem in this world.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

The Gemara says, "Chash bi'chol gufo ya'asok ba'torah" (Eiruvין 54a). If you are sick, then you should learn Torah in order to heal. Would the Rav say that one can overlook this chazal and instead go to sleep in order to get better?

A:

When a person is not feeling well, let him look in the Torah. Of course! And what will he see in the Torah? In the Torah he'll see that it says, "Rapo yi'rapeh." It says in the Torah that you have to go to the doctor if you are sick. And included in that is that you have to take care of your body so that it can heal. Someone who damages his fellow must pay, among other things, for refuah. He has to pay for that person's healing. And besides that, the Gemara is full of discussions about healing and health. Everywhere you look, it's full of healing. And therefore there's no question that learning Gemara will teach you that you have to make sure that you heal.

However, suppose that you're not able to diagnose your illness. Or even if it was diagnosed and you're taking medications. Still, the segulah of learning Torah is also a way to heal. And that's because Hashem says, "If you're able to utilize your life for learning Torah, then you deserve to get well and live longer." If you are not feeling well and you make an effort to be oisek ba'torah anyhow, then you are showing that you know why you're in this world – you know how to utilize your time in this world – and just because of that, Hakodosh Boruch Hu will give you more time in this world to accomplish.

And therefore learning is a segulah for getting well. However, does that mean that you'll stop eating?! No, you have to eat anyhow, even if you're learning Torah. So even if you're learning you'll have to make sure to take your medicines and sleep as much as your body requires to heal.

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