

Sefer Shemos

IN MEMORY OF R' SRULY MILLER A"H

GRANDSON OF RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L
DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN

פרשת בשלח

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Learning From Others

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Part I. Learn From History

Protected From Plagues

After the victorious escape of the *Am Yisroel* from the land of Mitzrayim and the tremendous spectacle of *Kriyas Yam Suf*, the people were flush with the exhilaration of triumph – only a few days before they had witnessed the ten plagues destroying their persecutors and now they had just beheld the drowning of the Egyptian army; all the king's horses and all the king's men were dead and the *Am Yisroel* had gained all of the wealth of Egypt. They were elated; they were living the good life of seeing their enemies destroyed.

And then suddenly, in the midst of this glory and happiness, we find that Hakodosh Boruch Hu speaks to the *Am Yisroel* and He says something that at first glance seems quite out of place. In our *sedrah* Hakodosh Boruch Hu makes a promise to the *Am Yisroel* – a promise and a warning: **אִם שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל הַשֵּׁם לְאֱלֹקֶיךָ וְהִיָּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהִאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל הַשֵּׁם לְאֱלֹקֶיךָ וְהִיָּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהִאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו** – *If you will listen well to the voice of Hashem and do what is right in His eyes and give ear to His commandments and keep all of His laws, כָּל הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא אָשִׁים עָלֶיךָ* – *then all of the diseases that I brought on Mitzrayim, I won't bring upon you.*

Hashem is saying, “You remember the plagues that you saw in Mitzrayim, all the sicknesses and trouble I brought on the Egyptians? If you keep My Torah you won't have to suffer from *dam* and *tzfardeia* and *kinnim*. Wild animals and boils and hail and everything else you saw, *lo asim alecha* – I won't bring it upon you.”

The Makkos Were For Us

But the question is why *should* He bring it upon us? We're not afflicting any of our slaves. We're not making them work *b'chomer u'vilvainim*. We're not throwing the children into the river. It was the *Mitzrim* who were the persecutors and they deserved everything they got, but what's that got to do with us?

So we'll explain as follows: We're learning now that the troubles that came on Mitzrayim were *not* for Mitzrayim! Of course that they *were*; the *Mitzrim* had to be punished, no question about it. But it's not the Egyptians that concerns Hashem most. The *Am Yisroel*, that's who Hashem is thinking about always; we're the ones who still look in the

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chumash; we're the ones after thousands of years are still studying the *makkos* and that means that they were brought primarily for us! And what we're learning now is that one of the most important functions of the *makkos* was to impress a fear upon the Am Yisroel, a fear of the strong Hand of Hashem that the nation would study and remember forever.

We Were Trembling

That's why when you look in the *tochacha* it says, וְהָשִׁיב בְּךָ אֶת כָּל מַדּוּחַ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִגְרַת מִפְּנֵיהֶם – Hashem will bring upon you all the ills of Mitzrayim that you feared (Devarim 28:60). “That you feared!” So you see that the Bnei Yisroel feared the *makkos*!

We think that when the *makkos* were taking place, the Bnei Yisroel were sitting in their homes and rejoicing: “You hear what happened to the Egyptians? You see what's going on outside with our persecutors? They're getting it back on their heads!” It's true; no question they were happy to see their tormentors getting what they deserved but that's not the whole picture. We see now that they were cowering in their homes with dread and apprehension. They were looking out the windows and trembling.

And as each plague rocked the land, they trembled again. You remember when all the waters of Egypt turned blood red and they were no longer potable; even if you were fainting from thirst, you wouldn't even try to drink it – it was disgusting even to look at it. You think the Bnei Yisroel didn't tremble in fear of their water supply being cut off? “Oy vey, look what can be!” They would also die of thirst just like the Egyptians. And they didn't have available all the means the Egyptians had; the Egyptians at least could leave the country; they could buy water in other countries. But the Bnei Yisroel were stuck; they were still slaves.

Fearing the Strong Hand

And so, יִגְרַת! They trembled; they were apprehensive. And even though they were assured

by Moshe Rabbeinu, “My children, don't be afraid; it's not for you, it's for your oppressors,” nevertheless they couldn't help but be afraid because they saw what could happen to the wicked; they were witnessing with their eyes the strong and powerful hand of Hashem. That's what happened by every *makkah* that came in the land. אֲשֶׁר יִגְרַת – You were afraid!

And that's what Hashem wanted – that was one of the great accomplishments of the *makkos*. That's why when Hashem warns us in the *tochacha* of what could come upon us if we don't listen to His word, He says like this: יִבְכָּה הַשֵּׁם בְּשָׁחִין מִצְרַיִם – Hashem will smite you with the boils of Egypt (ibid. 28:27). The boils of Egypt? Why mention that? So some people think it's merely to tell us what kind of boils Hashem might smite us with; so you should know that it's going to be the Egyptian boils, not some other plague. But that's not it; it makes no difference to us if it will be the boils of Egypt or Persia or Italy. בְּשָׁחִין מִצְרַיִם means you'll be punished with the *shechin* that you saw in Mitzrayim because you didn't take the lesson from that *makkah*: “I sent boils on Mitzrayim instead of you, so that you should learn to fear Me!”

Achieving Atonement

Yeshaya Hanavi says that: כִּי אֲנִי הַשֵּׁם לְאֱלֹהֵי קְדוֹשׁ מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ – I, Hashem, am the holy one of Yisroel. – I am your savior; I'm saving and helping you. And he tells us now one of the ways in which He helps us: נָתַתִּי כַפָּרָה מִצְרַיִם – I have made Mitzrayim your redemption, your *kaparah*.

You hear that? The *makkos* came on Mitzrayim instead of on you. What happened to Mitzrayim was a *kaparah* for you! That's a big *chiddush*. All the things we read in the *chumash* in Parshas Va'eira and Parshas Bo, about *makkos* that came on Mitzrayim were a *kaparah* for you; they came to atone for you. And not only Mitzrayim: כּוֹשׁ וּסְבָא – Kush and Seva are also instead of you. Hashem says, “When you see things come on the

black people, that's Kush, or on Seva, that's the Arabs, I'm bringing it on them instead of you."

Hakodosh Boruch Hu could *chalilah* send tzaros on the Jew to remind him to fear Him. Actually that's how it should be because we're the ones who are intended to be taught; we're the ones that matter and it's us that Hashem wants to inspire to perfection in *yiras shomayim*.

But the *navi* is telling us that the best way for Hashem's nation to learn to fear Him is by means of Mitzrayim and by means of Kush and Seva and all the other *umos ha'olam*. Instead of waiting *chas v'shalom* for the misfortunes to come on Yisroel themselves, Hakodosh Boruch Hu reminds us by showing what comes on other people and we are expected to look and become afraid; it's one of the fundamental ways of learning *yiras Hashem*.

Makkos and Volcanoes

Now, this shines a new light on all of the *makkos* – in Mitzrayim and all over the world. And so, if ever you make a visit to Italy – I don't approve of traveling, but sometimes you can't help yourself; you might be in Italy one day for business and you'll pass by a certain place where once there was a large bustling city called Pompeii. But today it's nothing; there's nothing there. What happened to Pompeii?

Not far from this flourishing city was a beautiful mountain. The mountain, if I told you the name, you'll shiver. It's called Vesuvius. Vesuvius is a big mountain and the people of Pompeii were wealthy people; Romans who lived in luxury and liked good times. And sometimes they would climb to the top of the mountain for resort, for fun. But these people were *shatuf* in *zimah*, all kinds of wicked behavior and immorality.

So what did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? He brought a *makkah* of fire. וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ. Vesuvius opened its big mouth on top and began to spit fire that covered the entire city of Pompeii – thousands of people were buried under a *mabul* of

volcanic ash. You can't see anything today unless you dig with a bulldozer.

Learning the Lesson

Now, what does that mean for us? So when you learn geography in school the teacher has a wooden head and so he makes the students have wooden heads too. Yes; he'll tell you that there was once a town called Pompeii and Vesuvius erupted and covered the town. And that's the whole story.

That's how you're going to take this great lesson?! Oy! What a waste! Hashem is saying, "Take that great lesson and learn it. Look what happened to them! A whole town, a prosperous town with streets and luxurious houses and all of a sudden the mountain opened up his mouth and spat fire and in a minute the whole town was buried in fiery lava and goodbye, he waves. There's a purpose here! The purpose of it is to show Hakodosh Boruch Hu takes revenge. He hates immorality! He's a *soneh zimah*! Even among *goyim*. It's true, He's *maarich apo*. Sometimes He's patient, but sooner or later, *v'gova dilei*, He'll collect. He'll collect! And He wants us to fear His retribution!

All For Us

Constantly Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing fearsome acts to get our attention. What about the earthquake in San Francisco? And last year in Turkey? And the hurricane that destroyed so many people's homes? What about the plane that fell into the ocean last week with over two hundred people? So many *makkos* over and over again. What is it all about?

The answer it's all about us! That's what the *gemara* in Yevamos (63) tells us: *Ein puranuyos ba l'olam ella bishvil Yisroel* – No troubles come upon the world unless for the purpose of Yisroel. It's for Yisroel! You have to get that into your heads: Anything that happens; it's for our benefit that it's being done. This world is because of us and I don't care what people will say. If you're a *ma'amin* in the

Torah, you understand that the world is because of the Am Yisroel.

Of course, we understand that it was for them too; Hashem brought together people whom he had sentenced to death and He gave them tickets on that plane. But the *gemara* is teaching us here that that's only a small part of the story; *we* are the main actors on the stage of this world and just like the *makkos* that came on Mitzrayim were primarily for the Am Yisroel, all the *makkos* that come in the world are no different – they're for us.

All for Repentance

And what's the purpose? Rashi says, “*Liyar'am – In order to make Yisroel afraid, kidai sheyachzeru biteshuva, so that they should do teshuva.* If you hear that there is yaws in the Congo – yaws is a certain disease; or there's tsetse flies, sleeping sickness, in Africa. Or if you hear that the Yellow River became swollen and flooded hundreds of villages carrying away victims in the thousands, don't just reject that as uninteresting news from the other side of the world. That's a direct message to you.

If you hear troubles happening at the other end of the world, it's for you to be afraid of Hashem! So that you should do *teshuva* because you see now what Hakodosh Boruch Hu could do! “Maybe it's time for me to do *teshuva*! I should start going out at night to the Beis Medrash to learn. I should be more careful how I speak to my wife.” Other thing too; a lot of other things.

This is the lesson of our *possuk*, “*All of the diseases that I brought on Mitzrayim, I won't bring upon you.* Yeshaya Hanavi taught us that: “*נָתַתִּי כְּפָרָה - מִצְרַיִם* - *I have made Mitzrayim your atonement,*” he said in the name of Hashem. The world is full of misfortunes and all the misfortune is only because of us, so that *we* should learn from them and take it to heart. Hashem can just as well bring *makkos* upon us but instead we achieve atonement when we watch what happens to Mitzrayim and we're fearful and change for the better.

Part II. Learn From Nations

Fear and Idealism

Now, we might think we're sophisticated people and therefore we think we know better how to serve Hashem. Fear?! *Yiras ha'onesh*? Oh no, we're much better than that. We'll take a *sefer*, let's say a *mussar sefer*, or a *sefer chassidus*, a book of idealism, and we'll be inspired; that's how we'll come to serve Hashem. We don't need such things to be frightened; we don't need stories that happened to other people. That's for children, for the ignorami, not for people who are idealistic like ourselves.

You're making a big error however. If you think that you are going to be a servant of Hakodosh Boruch Hu only because of your volition, because of the idealism of it, you're making an error. Even the biggest *tzaddik* in the world must always keep in mind *yiras ha'onesh*. Even the greatest saint who has not the slightest intention to ever deviate from the Torah must keep in mind always that physical punishments come upon evildoers.

Lengthen Your Life

To be afraid is a tremendous thing. Learn to be afraid of Hashem! You can't be a success in this world if you're not afraid of Hashem; impossible!

So you'll tell me, “To be afraid?! Is that the kind of life to live?” Believe me, that's the good life; the good life is being afraid. If you're afraid of Hashem, you're going to live long. *יְרֵאתָ ה'שָׁם תוֹסִיף יָמִים* – You'll live long because of that! I guarantee!

You won't have to go to psychologists because of fear of Hashem. You go to psychologists if you *fress* too much or you open your mouth too much. You go to psychologists if you don't keep busy, you don't work enough, so you become depressed. But people who are afraid of Hashem don't need any psychologists. *יְרֵאתָ ה'שָׁם תוֹסִיף יָמִים* – *Fear of Hashem means a long healthy life, וְשָׁנוֹת רְשָׁעִים תִּקְצָרְנָה* – *while*

the years of the wicked – it means Orthodox Jews who don't think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu – *their lives are cut short* (Mishlei 10:27). You're not afraid of Hashem? תִּקְצְרֶנָּה – *Chas v'shalom*, their days will be short. You want to live? You want to be well? Be afraid of Hashem!

Bombs in Bosnia

So when you hear that in Bosnia the *goyim* are killing each other – they're placing bombs and innocent people are being blown up – and whole world is up in arms: "Genocide! Oy, oy, oy! We have to do something about it!"

Well, alright, let them worry about it; but here's what *we* have to do about it – we should become afraid! We should be thinking, "What could happen *chalila* to us?" The people in Eretz Yisroel should have heard that and become afraid: "Ooh, did you hear? There was something in Bosnia!" Maybe we should be afraid over here. Maybe the Arabs will make bombs over here too! Maybe we should take off our earrings and do *teshuva*."

On Shabbos they go to the pubs with their long hair and their earrings! They're not afraid! They don't look at Bosnia; they don't realize that they should be learning *yiras Hashem* from what Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing to others. Maybe we should be afraid and stop being *michalel Shabbos*! They don't understand the lesson of our *sedrah*, and so finally bombs come to Eretz Yisroel too.

We Don't Ignore

If you didn't pay attention to Bosnia, then that's what happens. Absolutely. Had they all listened to Bosnia; had they said, "Oy, oy, oy! What's Hashem doing to the *goyim*? He's killing them! Killing them!" They should wake up and become afraid of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And therefore we can't ignore what's happening in Bosnia. We're not going to get up and make any protests; it's not our business, but it's our business to understand the message: It could happen over

here too. There are *meshugaim* who would like to make trouble in America too.

And that's why it happened in Bosnia. Don't think it's an accident. No! Whatever happens among the nations, when there are misfortunes anywhere in the world, it's supposed to be a lesson for Yisroel; to see and do *teshuva*.

Fear of War

Of course, I'd like to talk to you about pleasant things, *yeshuos v'nechamos*, but you have to know that *mussar*, *tochacha* is very good. And that's why there is such an important principle of *kaparah*. The *reshaim* that are suffering in this world, that's our *kaparah*. They redeem us – only that if we ignore the messages so Hakodosh Boruch Hu reminds us in ways that hit much closer to home.

You think it couldn't happen? It happened already. Oh yes. In Europe it happened already. I was in Europe when the *tzaros* started coming in the form of Hitler. He was overrunning Czechoslovakia; gentiles were being slaughtered! Was there a great wave of *teshuva*? Were the Jews in Europe afraid of Hashem? In Slabodka, in the Yeshiva, we were afraid! We said *Tehillim* every day all day long! When Hitler marched in Sudetenland, we said *Tehillim*.

But the rest of the world? The rest of Slabodka, the ten thousand Jews in Slabodka, they didn't think anything. They were *beheimos*; they didn't even think about *teshuva*. They didn't know there's a principle that what happens to the *goyim* or to other people elsewhere is for *yiras shomayim*! Were they afraid? Of Hitler maybe, but of *shomayim*, of Hashem? A *nechtigeh tug*! In Slabodka, there were not even one hundred young men under the age of twenty that put on *tefillin*. When they saw what's happening, did they say, "Maybe we have to stop our headlong dive into Marxism, into atheism. Maybe the *rabbonim* are right and it's time to come back to Hashem, to begin putting on *tefillin* again." Did they think such thoughts?

A Nightmarish Reality

No, nothing. The *rabbonim* were pushed into a corner: “What do they know anyhow?” they said. And finally the Germans came and took the children and put them into the back of a truck; they would drive the truck out to the forest and on the way out to the forest, the exhaust of the truck, the monoxide fumes, were pumped into the interior of the truck and the children were gassed to death. And they were dumped out in the forest and then the truck went back for more. The Germans ran around with their guns pulling children from their mother’s arms, to gas them. Who would have dreamed of such a thing?! A *meshuganeh* world! In our wildest nightmares, we wouldn’t think about something like that.

So at least we have to say, “Ribono Shel Olam, we are learning to fear You. We see Your *yad hachazaka* and we’re afraid! We are trying to make our way of life better just because of that. We want to use their deaths as a stimulus to improve our lives to be more loyal to you.” We should always think about that: “I have to learn from the example, the lesson, that was offered by this terrible catastrophe in Europe and improve all the days of my life just because of that.”

Don't think it's a childish attitude; it's an adult attitude, it's an attitude of *chassidus*, of great *avodas Hashem*, to shiver, to tremble from what happened. Because that was one of the purposes; *Liyar'am* – to frighten Yisroel, *sheyachzeru b'teshuva* – that they should repent.

Lessons All Over

Don't think it can't happen again. Who said America is forever?! You have to be afraid! We're here, enjoying all luxuries, with plenty to eat. We have liberty, we have safety, we have equality, everything we have. But someday I'm afraid we'll look back on America and say the same thing because we're not afraid of Hashem; we're not

learning the lesson from Mitzrayim, from Kush and Seva.

All over the world there are *tzaros*; in that country there's famine and in that country they're killing each other. If only they would see what's doing elsewhere, how Hashem is punishing. But are the Jews looking and becoming afraid?

Fear of Fascist America

Oh no! Instead of learning the lesson, the Jews are trying their best to break down America. Jewish congressmen like Solarz are helping Communist regimes all over; Cuba, Nicaragua. And Jews are voting for Solarz and Koch. Jews are keeping them in power. Of course Koch gives them in return some benefits. And for that benefit, the *askanim*, the *shtadlanim*, sell away our votes – whole *kehillos* of *frum* Jews, whole congregations vote for these people who are breaking down everything we have! Look what's happening to America! The whole youth is being demoralized! The public schools are hammering away in the minds of the children, telling them how bad America is, how wicked the establishment is!

Finally the gentiles in the Midwest will get so disgusted and they'll make a revolution! They'll try to fight to save America but I'm worried it'll be a little late. America will already be shorn of its greatness – it'll be surrounded by Communist enemies. *Chas v'shalom* it'll turn into a fascist country and who knows what kind of gas chambers can be here? They can make better ones in America than the Germans did.

Praying with Fear

And therefore we have to be afraid now! Before it comes here; we have to be afraid and come back to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. We have to learn how important it is for us always to be on guard with *yiras Hashem*. And at all times a man must be ready with *yiras Hashem*, always thinking, “Who knows what can happen?”

You know when you should think about that? When you fall *tachnun*. “*Rachum v’chanun, chatasi lifanecha* – I sinned before You o’ Merciful One, *Hashem al b’apcha sochicheini* – please, Hashem, don’t rebuke me in your wrath.” Ask Hashem constantly when you fall on your face! That’s why you fall on your face – you’re asking for *rachamim*! You prayed before; you just finished *shmone esrei*. Maybe it didn’t help, however; maybe despite your prayer the sentence was passed. So now a condemned man falls on his face and he bursts out with *tachanunim* – please! That’s why it’s *tachnun* – Hashem, please, please, recall the decree!

That’s how important it is to say *tachnun* with an outcry all the time. Every time, cry out to Hashem. That’s how important it is. Nobody can know what’s in store for him. And therefore, it always pays beforehand to cry out to Hashem: “We’re afraid of You Hashem! We want to do *teshuva*.”

Part III. Learn From Others

A Sense of Foreboding

Now, it would be wrong of us to go away from this subject without speaking about how this attitude applies to us not only when it comes to witnessing the fate of nations, but even in our own private lives.

I want you to listen now to an interesting *gemara* in *Mesichta Megilla* (3a). It says there that it happens sometimes that a person has an intuition that something bad might happen to him and he doesn’t know what it is – we’re talking now about a healthy person, someone who is emotionally stable, and so we understand that this fear of his means that his *mazal* knows something that he doesn’t; it could be that some sort of trouble is pending for him.

So what should this fearful man do? The *gemara* says that he should say the following formula: *Iza*

d’bei tabcha shmeina minai – “The goat in the slaughterhouse is fatter than I am.” He’s talking about Eisav, the *umos ha’olam* – Eisav was born hairy like a goat; even his land is called *Sa’ir* – and this Jew is being *mispallel* that instead of him, Hashem should punish someone from Eisav.

Suffering is Inevitable

Now, we have to ask ourselves what is the *svara* in saying such a formula? We have to understand it logically because everything that’s in the *gemara* is sensible. It’s not superstition – and we’ll see now that a very important principle is involved here.

Pay attention to this. One of the truths of this world is that Mankind must be visited by a certain amount of suffering in order that people should be stimulated to repent. Of course, if you come to this place you know that the best *teshuva* is the *teshuva* you do over a piece of watermelon; when you recognize that all happiness and enjoyment is from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. But the fact is that without any kind of misfortunes there would be very little movement towards change; and therefore it’s inherent in the structure of *Olam Hazeh* that Hakodosh Boruch Hu sends *yissurim* upon the world in order for people to look and listen and repent.

The Wicked Redeemer

Now, sometimes the *yissurim* can be sent on that person himself – personal *tzaros* are often a wake-up call for people – but Hakodosh Boruch Hu offers us a better way, an easier way – He wants us to be stimulated towards *teshuva* by means of the troubles that befall others. That’s what it says in *Mishlei* (21:18): *כָּפַר לַצַּדִּיק רָשָׁע* – *The wicked person redeems the righteous person*. Just like *Mitzrayim* redeems our nation, the wicked individual redeems the righteous individual. Hashem wants us to see what could be, but He’s willing to teach us by showing what comes on other people. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, “You know what? I’ll make a deal with you. If you have

the *seichel* to look around at others who are suffering and take the lesson so I can spare you. But pay attention to what I send on the *rasha* because if you'll ignore the messages then the deal is off."

And therefore this man whose *mazal* fears that something bad is coming, he requests of Hakodosh Boruch Hu that He should send the punishment on Eisav instead: "Please *Ribono Shel Olam*, spare me! Go to the goat and punish him and I promise that I'll watch and learn *yiras Hashem*!" Of course, if it's a quiet innocent *goy*, let him alone, but there are plenty that are not and therefore let them serve as reminders to us. "And when I see what happened to him, I'll utilize that as a *mussar* to get better."

Seeing and Understanding

Now, we'll take this slowly because it's an important lesson. Let's take a concrete example; something we can understand. You're walking in the street and you see a man – definitely not a Jew, you can tell by his color – and he's sitting in a wheelchair paid for by the city. I saw it today – he was waiting by the bus stop. The bus pulls over and the driver lowers the steps and the whole bus is waiting for this great *tzaddik*. And the bus driver raises him up on the bus with *derech eretz*, with the *greste kavod*. At least that's how they look at it

But we can look at it a different way. He's a bum – I know things; I know what's doing. As a boy he didn't go to school; he was hanging on to the back of the city buses and he fell off and lost his leg. Here's another 'tzaddik' I see in the neighborhood. He's walking down the street with an empty sleeve. Where did his arm go? He robs people, he mugs people; that's his *umnus* and finally Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "I had enough of you," and his hand got stuck in a machine and no more.

Many Examples

Now, when you see that you have to know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is sending you messages.

We're supposed to learn to be afraid! No arm! Just a stump! It's a *pachad*! I'm a changed man from seeing that! You understand right away that the experience of losing an arm or a leg is far from pleasurable. The accident that happened to him was a tremendous misfortune; besides for the suffering, the pain, the agony he endured; now he is handicapped. So many things he is deprived in life just because he is lacking that limb.

Chas v'shalom it shouldn't happen to us! You're supposed to learn from that! Hakodosh Boruch Hu is taking vengeance from some wicked act that the person did! And you have to be afraid! You have to learn *yiras Hashem* from that! That's the main purpose. "Oy vey, what a *makkah*! Who knows what could happen to a person! Hashem is so powerful! I have to be afraid! Do I use my feet for good? Am I using my hands for what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants?"

"Oh," Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "I see that you're keeping your part of the deal. You're taking the lessons of *yiras shomayim* that I'm sending you. So I'll continue; I'll give you other examples."

Using Your Eyes

So the next day you're walking to the synagogue and you see a blind *goy* feeling his way in the street. He's tapping his way with a white cane or he's being led by a seeing eye dog. Why did it happen that just at that moment when you were passing by he came out and you saw him? He could've walked in a different street. It's no accident that you saw that man today.

You know why you saw him? Because He wants him to be the substitute for you. The purpose was that you should say, "Hashem is showing me something to make me afraid." So you start thinking about your eyes. You could think like this: "It could be that when people go to movies with their eyes, Hashem says, 'You don't need any eyes. If you use your eyes to go to movies or to sit and look at the TV, you're better off without any eyes. Oh, it's a

wonderful thing, that blind man. He can't look at TV anymore!"

"Ooh, no, no, no! Oy, Ribono Shel Olam, leave me alone! I'm going to take a lesson from that *goy*. I'm going to be careful with my eyes. I'm not going to look where I'm not supposed to look."

Harmony at Home

Not only your eyes. If you're a lucky fellow, if Hashem wants to help you out, sometimes you'll hear things that will remind you to be careful with your mouth too. You'll hear about a man in the neighborhood who had a fight with his wife and now she called the police and they drove him out of the house with a court order. He's looking now for someplace to stay; he can't come home to visit his children. *Tzaros* and *tzaros* and *tzaros*!

You're supposed to learn from that. Don't just say, "It's a pity!" and go on with your life. Of course it's a pity on him but that's not enough! Learn from that! You need to be *meharher bitshuva*: "I have to be careful with my mouth!" A man says something to his poor wife and hurts her heart by saying a mean word, it's a terrible sin. The poor woman is working all day long with children, she's worn out to the bone, and he comes home and says something mean; it's like a knife in the heart! That's what you have to think about when you hear about this man who was taken out of his house by the police.

Hearing the News

If you see in the street a man who was hit by a car; he's laying on the ground and the ambulance doctors are helping him. Don't just be one of the crowd who gathers around to see what's doing. Mind your own business! Your business is the lesson you should be learning from that man's *tzaros*. You think, "Boruch Hashem it's not me! Oy vey! Who knows what could happen in the street?! The *gemara* (Shabbos 32a) says, *Adam yotzei lashuk* – you went out in the *shuk*, *k'ilu nimsar l'sardiyot* – you have to be afraid right away. If you make use of

that incident the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu intended it for you, after seeing that you're a new man. You're afraid of Hakodosh Boruch Hu now; "I should do *teshuva* right now!" you're thinking.

Once there was a man in our congregation who had a family *simchah* and the family was everywhere and he was a friendly man so he's standing in the kitchen, conversing. He was talking with his back against the stove and his clothing caught fire. He had a terrible burn on his back, rushed to the hospital. He survived finally after weeks and weeks but after that I learned one lesson. Never lean against the gas range even when it's not on. If you heard this story tonight and it didn't register, something is wrong with your register! If you ever catch yourself being sociable in the kitchen and you're leaning against the gas range, you should give yourself a very big swift kick in the pants and go flying out of the kitchen.

And that's a very important principle. Whatever news you get, all the accidents, all the unfortunate incidents – you're hearing all the time – it should enter your ears. There's no end to the stories and they're meant for us. When we hear about troubles that happened to somebody, immediately we should think, "I'm afraid of you, Hashem! I'm afraid." The *tzadik* should learn when he hears of what befell the *rasha*.

Now, I have to explain something to you. The word *rasha* means the one who is being sentenced to be punished, the one who is *nirsha*. Sometimes he can be a *tzadik* too, but Hashem has His reasons – in this specific instance he has been sentenced. And included in the sentence is that he's going to be an object lesson for others.

Growing From Others

And that was the great lesson that Hakodosh Boruch Hu taught the *Am Yisroel* when they left Mitzrayim: "If you will hearken to My words and keep all of My laws and His statutes, then all of the misfortunes I visited upon Egypt, I will not visit

upon you.” It means, “Don’t ever forget the troubles you saw in Mitzrayim because among the purposes of the *makkos* was that you should be afraid of them and you should think, ‘It could happen, *chalilah*; it could happen to me too.’”

And as much as you can add that thought of what *chas v’sholom* could happen to you if you are negligent in fulfilling your laws, then you’re adding to your greatness, to your perfection. Don’t think you’re stepping down to the level of a child or a criminal who has to be threatened, no! You’re stepping up to the *madreigah* of אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֵי כָּל הַמְּחֻלָּה – I won’t put it upon you because you have made use of all of the *makkos* in this world to grow in this great attitude of *reishis chochma yiras Hashem*, the fundamental ingredient that brings a person closer and closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu in this world and the next.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET’S GET PRACTICAL

Acquiring Yiras Shomayim

This week I’m going to keep my eyes and ears open to any *makkah* that Hashem is sending, whether it’s upon a nation or an individual – I’ll try to notice things that otherwise would have gone unnoticed by me. Every time I notice something I will stop for a minute to think about what happened and how I’m expected to use that opportunity to actually become more afraid of Hashem.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגידך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What should a man do when he loses his job?

A:

The very first thing to do is to look for another job. That’s number one because nobody should be idle. Idleness is only a form of self-affliction because eventually it causes illness.

And therefore even if you haven’t found a new job yet, you must find something to do. If somebody is capable of utilizing his time properly then idleness is a very great blessing – he’s being given a sabbatical by Hashem and so he can retire for a little while and learn a *mesichta* or learn *sefarim* until he regains his job. But most people are not capable of utilizing idleness and as a result they contract illnesses. הַבְּטָלָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי שְׁעָמוּם – Idleness brings to depression (Kesuvos 59b).

It’s very important to be busy. In case you don’t know what to do, then do *mitzvos*. There are plenty of good things to do in this world; there are plenty of *mitzvos* you can do to keep yourself busy. But the main idea to keep in mind is that a person should not be idle! He should always have something to do just for the sake of his own health.

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