

BROOKLYN TORAH GAZETTE

FOR PARSHAS RE'EH 5781

Volume 5, Issue 51 (Whole Number 251) 29 Menachem Av 5781/ August 1, 2021

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a'h

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Rabbi Fischel Schachter Offers Tips on Surviving Our Difficult Galus

By Daniel Keren



Rabbi Fischel Schachter, internationally renowned Maggid Shiur recently spoke at the Flatbush Hakhel Independence Day Yarchei Kallah on the topic of the “Enduring Galus.” Recently on Shabbos he was watching or babysitting his eineklat (grandchildren) when they were playing with dolls. He noticed a particular three-year-old child supervising the game by meticulously distributing the dolls to

her siblings and cousins by declaring that “this baby [doll] is for you” and another baby doll was for another child.

Things don’t just happen. Just as each child gets her particular doll, buildings don’t just collapse. In response to the tragic collapse of the Champlain Towers in Surfside, Florida, there was a part of the building that was still standing. However because of the shakiness of its foundations, the local and state authorities decided to hire a special company to orchestrate a controlled explosion that would safely bring down that dangerous structure without harming others. Rabbi Schachter asked the Hakhel audience, “You don’t think that Hakodesh Baruch Hu doesn’t know how to do controlled explosions?”

He challenged the listeners to contemplate that when things in our lives crash, don’t you think that there is in shomayim a planned controlled explosion? We cannot ever understand why Hashem caused a particular building to crash with a terrible loss of lives.

The Gra and Hashem’s Blueprint of the World

The Gra (the Vilna Gaon – Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, zt”l, 1720-1797) says that the Torah is Hashem’s blueprint of the world and also the blueprint of our own personal lives, whether a person live just 30 days or the full gamut of 120 years.

Rabbi Schachter said Hitler didn’t kill six million people. He killed one person six million times. Two women killed 79 years ago were only recent zocheh (merited) to kever Yisroel (a traditional Jewish burial). In 1942, the Germans, yemach shemo were rounding up the Jews in a particular Polish town. They tried to convince them that they were only being settled in another location to do work for the Third Reich and that they would not be harmed. They were encouraged to bring their valuables to their “new” homes.

One man was at first hesitant to believe the German promises. But just as they were preparing to board the trains which instead of taking them to a new safe location were going to take them to concentration camps for extermination, he told his daughter to go back to their home and bring back a bag in which he had hidden his valuables. The daughter was accompanied by an older woman.

Unfortunately, they were noticed by a Polish policeman and when he saw the two women with their bag, he killed them and before leaving with the bag of valuables quickly buried them nearby. His action was noticed by people in the town.

The Father Returns after the War to the Town

After the war, the father managed to survive the death camps and returned to his hometown in order to discover what happened to his daughter and his bag of

valubles. He was told by people in the town about the policeman who killed the child and the other woman and shown the unmarked burial spot. A matzevah (memorial) of sorts was put up to honor the memory of the two women.

Recently a Polish real estate developer planned to utilize the location for a commercial enterprise. He was told that the location included the burial spot of two Jewish women. He agreed to check it out and when it was confirmed to be so, arrangements were made to rebury the women in a Jewish cemetery in Warsaw in a ceremony attended by hundreds with rabbis in attendance. Who knows why Hashem waited 79 years for those two kadoshim to get a proper burial? This is just another example of Hashem's controlled explosions in Heaven that we cannot understand on our own.

Rabbi Schachter said that at a rest stop he once saw a semi-trailer truck (a very heavy vehicle) and he asked the driver how he was able to view other vehicles behind him. The driver explained that he wasn't able to see the vehicles behind him. What really concerned him were the smaller cars ahead of him. He explained that when he drives the semi-trailer truck downhill on a highway he needs to gain speed in order to be able to easily ascend the next hill. He doesn't want a small vehicle going at a slow speed because he isn't able to stop his truck once it begins to racing downhill. So Rabbi Schachter says that he doesn't want to be that small car in the way of a semi-trailer truck going downhill.

During the Nine Days and Tisha B'Av. Rabbi Schachter said we need the strength to race downhill like that semi-trailer truck driver in order to develop the momentum to be able to go uphill in order to enjoy the spiritual benefits of the Yomim Noraim (the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).

The Travels of Eliyahu Hanavi and Yehoshua ben Levi

Life is always a series of controlled explosions. Even the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition were controlled explosions [from Hakodesh Baruch Hu.] There is the famous Midrash in which Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, the legendary amora asked Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet) if he could accompany him on his incredible spiritual travels. Eliyahu agreed on just one condition. No matter what he saw, Yehoshua ben Levi could not ask any questions.

On their first visit, they came to an old but poor couple who generously hosted them. The man and woman only had a single cow that gave them milk. In the middle of the night when the couple was sleeping, Yehoshua saw Eliyahu arise and go to the small barn and touch the cow which immediately dropped dead. Shocked, he held himself from asking his travel companion the meaning of his actions.

Again and again, Yehoshua followed Eliyahu Hanavi and saw startling activities by his companion. Finally at one point, he was unable to control himself

and he demanded explanations. Eliyahu agreed but explained that afterwards he would be unable to continue travelling with Yehoshua ben Levi. With regards to the old couple, Elijah the Prophet explained that in Shomayim it was destined that the old woman was going to die that night. By getting up in the middle of the night and killing the cow, the couple's only source of sustenance, Eliyahu was able to get the heavenly decree changed to even more poverty for the couple and thus save the woman's life. Many times when difficulties come upon us they are in the words of Rabbi Schachter simply controlled explosions that are for our benefit.

The Sefas Emes (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Alter, zt"l, 1847-1905) says that a mitzvah that your father was careful with, you should also be meticulous with performing. And if you know on the other hand of a mitzvah that your father was lax with performing, you also have a responsibility to latch onto that commandment and make a tikun (spiritual rectification) for the failure of your father. That is part of Hashem's controlled explosions.

Every Nisoyan Offer an Opportunity to Misaken a Previous Failure

Every nisoyan (spiritual challenge) that we have is an opportunity to misaken (repair) a spiritual failure of one of our ancestors. If you are still alive, Rabbi Schachter said, that is proof that it is not too late to de teshuva (return from past spiritual failures.)

Reprinted from the July 22, 2021 edition of The Flatbush Jewish Journal.

Parshas Re'eh

Life: The School of Growth

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier
Founder of TheSmuz.com



“See I have placed in front of you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing: if you will listen to all of the mitzvahs of HASHEM your G-d as I have commanded you today...” — Devarim 11:21

There are two paths in front of you...

In these *posukim*, the Torah sets out two divergent paths. One path leads to ultimate success and blessing, and the other to devastation and curses. If you follow in the ways of HASHEM, you will be richly rewarded. You will look back at your years of sacrifice with enormous joy and satisfaction, saying to yourself, “Whatever price I paid was so worth it. I am now being compensated beyond anything I could have imagined.” On the other hand, if you don’t follow the Torah’s ways, there will come a time when you will deeply regret your mistake

and you will look back and say, “Woe is me! How could I have been so foolish? How could I have chosen so poorly?”

A moshol for life

The *Daas Zakainim* brings light to this concept with a *moshol*. He says it is comparable to a crossroads. One road begins as a difficult thorny trail, then it opens up, and the rest of the way is clear. The other path begins as a smooth passageway, but ends in a thicket of thorns. An old man sits at the crossroads and warns the passersby, “Be careful. This road begins smoothly, but ends up all thorns. Rather choose the other road. Even though it begins as a difficult path, it opens up and will carry you well.” Anyone who listens to the man will work at the outset of his journey, but will travel in peace the rest of the way; whereas anyone who ignores the advice of the old man will get caught in the thorns for rest of his passage.

The *Daas Zakainim* explains that this is what the Torah is telling us. If a man sins and follows his inclinations, he will find comfort in this world, but when he dies, he will go to *Gehennom*, which is all thorns. However, if one works in this world and labors in Torah study and *mitzvahs*, he will merit the World to Come, which is all goodness, joy, and happiness.

What do we gain from the parable?

This *Daas Zakainim* is difficult to understand because the meanings of the *posukim* seem self-evident – serve HASHEM and you will receive blessing; violate the *mitzvahs* and you will be cursed. It doesn’t seem that he is adding much to our understanding with this *moshol*. If the point is that punishment and reward aren’t in this world, but rather in the Next, that concept doesn’t need a parable. Simply state, “the Torah is referring to the World to Come.” What point is the *Daas Zakainim* trying to bring home to us with this *moshol*?

To understand this, we need a different perspective of life.

Progressive weight training

A rather *yeshivishe* fellow went to a power-lifting gym to learn how to work out. As a kid, he had little experience with sports and was clearly out of his element. Recognizing this, the coach showed him various exercises and worked closely with him. One day, this fellow was overheard saying, “That coach, I don’t know what’s with him. Every time I get the exercise right, he goes and adds more weight to the bar. What’s wrong with him?”

The point this fellow missed was that **progressive weight training** is all about increasing the load. The goal of the activity is to coax the body to grow. By gradually increasing the work load, the body is called upon to respond. The work should never be easy. The nature of the activity is to incrementally increase the demand placed on the body, thereby causing it to grow.

This is a good parable because in life we are put into many situations. If a person doesn’t understand why he is on this planet, he will have many questions. Why is life so difficult? Why is it that when I finally get things under control, a whole new set of circumstances arises that sets everything out of kilter? Why can’t life just be easy?

The point that he is missing is the very purpose of life. HASHEM put us on this planet to grow. Many of the challenges and situations are given to us specifically for that reason. It isn’t by accident, and it isn’t because HASHEM doesn’t pay attention. Quite the opposite, these situations were hand-designed to demand from us. They are catalysts to change who we are.

In weight training, the movement of the bar isn’t the significant part; the demand on the body is. So too in life, the situations I face are far less significant

than my reactions to them. Who I become is a result of my attitude and the way I handle my challenges.

When a person understands this perspective, then life itself makes sense. If not, then the situations in life seem arbitrary and unfair.

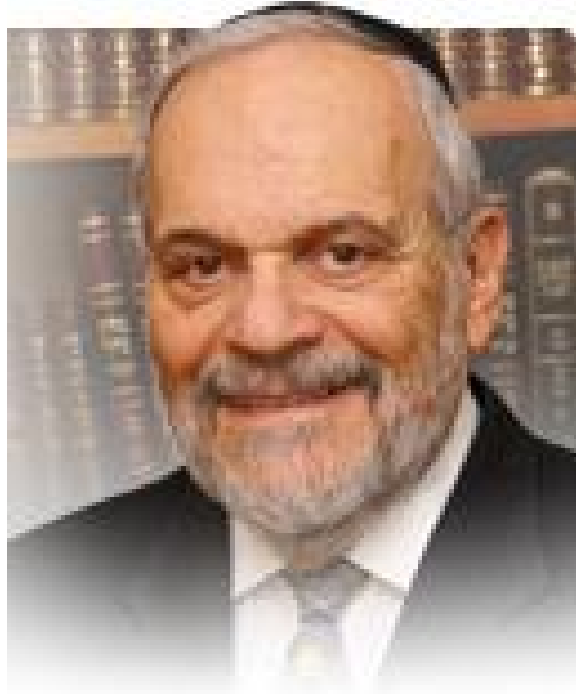
The answer: why the Daas Zakainim used a moshol

The answer to the *Daas Zakainim* seems to be that this *moshol* defines our path in life. The road that we are being asked to take isn't easy. It isn't laden with roses and doesn't smell like lilacs. It has thorns. A life properly led will have moments of doubt, pain, and confusion. That doesn't mean that we are on the wrong path. Quite the opposite, if life is going too smoothly, it's a bad sign. Since the purpose of life is to grow, we need the challenges of life to help us reach our potential. If the road is too level, that is likely a sign that we have chosen the wrong path.

HASHEM wants us to enjoy our stay on this planet, but there is a plan and a purpose to it all. If a person lives his life in accordance with the Torah, he finds deep satisfaction, an inner sense of peace and tranquility, and true *simcha*. But it isn't a walk in the park. There is much work along the way. There are trials, travails, and circumstances that demand growth. If a person responds appropriately, he finds a sense of inner peace because he is in synch with his purpose in life. That sense of balance is an indicator that he is on the right path, and the work that he puts in on that path will bring him to true joy, happiness, and elation in this world, and much more so in the World to Come.

Reprinted from the current website of TheShmuz.com

Rabbi Berel Wein on Parshat Re'eh



Stripping away all the details that oftentimes clutter our lives, we can agree that the type of life that we live is pretty much dependent upon the choices that we make throughout our lifetimes. Often, these choices were made when we were yet young and immature. Nevertheless, we are forced to live by those choices and decisions that we may now, with greater life experience under our belts, regret.

Personal choices, professional and career choices, lifestyle choices all combine to make up our individual life stories. This week's Torah reading highlights the importance and consequences of choices that we make. Many times, we make serious choices when we are not in a serious mood. Many important choices are made flippantly, on the spur of the moment, or under the influence of others. Peer pressure is a fact of life, especially for the young, and often, when we allow others to make choices for us, at the end they are very detrimental to our well-being.

It is simply peer pressure that causes young people to take on unhealthy life habits – smoking is a prime example of this – and once the habit is ingrained within us, it is very difficult to break, and escape from its consequences. Life inflicts upon us, on a daily basis, the necessity of making decisions. What choices we do make become the expression of gift of free will that the L-rd has endowed us with. Choices are, therefore, the highest form of human opportunity, as well as being the most dangerous and perilous of all the human traits.

The Torah, in this week's reading, presents us with the most basic choice that we can make – the stark choice between eternal life and death itself. At first glance, this choice is a relatively simple one to make. The life instinct within us, as human beings, is always present. However, we are witness to the fact that many times human beings make choices that are anti-life. There are many distractions that exist in this world, many illusory ideas and false prophets that somehow combine to dissuade us from choosing life. The Torah, therefore, encourages us and even warns us to choose life.

We acknowledge in our daily prayers that the L-rd implanted within us an eternal soul which can sustain eternal life within us. We should not fritter away this most precious of gifts. Therefore, when we consider choices that exist before us regarding our behavior and attitudes, we should always judge the matter through the prism of a life and death choice. This makes even the most simple and apparent decisions that we make in life of great consequence and lasting importance.

In effect, there are no small choices, for they all have consequences and later effects that are unknown to us when we make the choice. Seeing these decisions that way may grant us life. It will enable us to choose wisely and carefully, and to allow our good instincts and fundamental human intelligence to control our emotions and desires and help us make correct life choices.

Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com

The Obligation of the Master to His Servant

From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt"l



This week's Torah portion, Re'ei, speaks about a master's obligation to bestow gifts upon his servant when the latter's years of servitude are complete. "You shall furnish him liberally from your flocks, and of your threshing-floor, and of your wine press," the Torah states.

Maimonides classifies this obligation as falling under the category of charity--the gifts are in addition to the regular wages the master is required to pay.

Every facet of the Torah contains stores of wisdom for us to apply to our lives. The above verses are symbolic of the relationship between any two parties not on equal footing: The one on the higher level is always obligated to share his wealth and blessings with those who are less fortunate.

The terms "master" and "servant" may also be applied, in the spiritual sense, to the relationship between teacher and pupil. We see that this is not merely symbolic, as a student is required to serve his teacher in the same way a servant

must attend his master. And a teacher's task is to instruct the pupil until the student grasps the concept on his own.

But what about concepts which are far beyond the ability of the student to comprehend, wisdom beyond the pupil's understanding? The commandment to bestow gifts above and beyond what is required applies here as well. A good teacher must ensure that his student acquires an appreciation of the deeper and more esoteric knowledge, in addition to the basic requirements of the syllabus. The teacher is obligated to share whatever knowledge he possesses with the student, who possesses less.

This principle also applies to the relationship between Jews who are more knowledgeable about Torah and mitzvot and those who are just beginning to learn about their heritage. It is not sufficient to impart only those Jewish concepts which are viewed as fundamental--the awesome depth and scope of Judaism must be shared as well.

A basic principle in Judaism is that G-d behaves towards man according to man's actions, measure for measure. When we share our wealth and bestow extra charity--both physical and spiritual--upon our fellow man, G-d responds in kind, granting us an abundance of His blessings.

For we are all G-d's servants, and He is the ultimate Master. The six thousand years of creation parallel the six years of servitude a servant must work; the seventh year parallels the freedom and redemption which follow--the Messianic Era and the Final Redemption.

By increasing our love for our fellow Jew and demonstrating that love with concrete actions, G-d will surely bestow an even greater measure of His infinite goodness upon us than ever before, with the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days.

Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Parshat Re'ei edition of L'Chaim Weekly. Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Rav Avigdor Miller on Sheitels: The Good and the Bad



QUESTION: Can a woman wear a custom made sheitel?

ANSWER: Let me explain something about this subject of *sheitelech*. I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings; I want to make everybody happy and wearing a *sheitel* is certainly a good thing. But you should know that some *sheitelim* look too natural.

And therefore long-haired *sheitelim* I think should be avoided. I won't tell you exactly what to do, but you must know there is a responsibility on women to be able to come before the *bais din shel maaleh* when the time is up and she should be able to say, "I wasn't the cause of anybody who was looking at me too much."

A woman should never be in a position where she is liable to be blamed for causing men to look at her. It's not her fault that she is a woman, but she has to be careful not to misuse that privilege. Her husband is the one who has to look at her; others should not look.

And therefore if you are too careful with your appearance, it's looking for trouble. I don't say you shouldn't look good, but to make it your business to look attractive that's not right.

At home many people are slovenly, they're sloppy. The husband sees a sloppy wife at home but on the street she dresses to kill! It should be the opposite.

At home you should dress up and make the best impression on your husband; on the street just be plain.



Illustration by Yocheved Nadell

Reprinted from the August 3, 2021 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from Tape #E-152 (September 1998).