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EVERY PERSON IS BORN WITH FAULTS

Today's *shiur* is sponsored *le'iluy nishmas* the great *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rav Yisrael Lipkin of Salant (1810-1883), otherwise known as Rav Yisrael Salanter. Today is his *yahrtzeit*.¹

Rav Yisrael is known as the father of the *mussar* movement. What was the *nekudah* that Rav Yisrael introduced to the world? What was he trying to accomplish? Was he trying to be *mechazek* people in a certain area of *kiyum hamitzvos*? The Chafez Chaim was famous for his *sefer Shemiras Halashon*. But his intention was not just that people should learn *hilchos shemiras halashon*. He was trying to get people to strengthen themselves in the fulfillment of the laws of *shemiras halashon*.

What did Rav Yisrael want the *Klal* to accomplish? Rav Yisrael Salanter was famous for introducing to people the importance of *tikun hamiddos*. He wanted people to realize that every single person comes to this world with faults and character defects. There is no one that doesn't have character defects. Small people for sure. Regular people also for sure. And even big people. And he introduced such novel ideas and made people aware of their behavior and subtle nuances in their behavior that actually came from *middos raos*. He discovered the smallest things.

He once saw a person standing by a door on a muggy, hot day, and everybody in the *shul* was hot. The only source of air was the front door. So some fellow stood by the door. He wanted to be cool. He figured he's going to *daven* by the doorway. Rav Yisrael saw in that action as a lack of *middos*, such lack of thought! "How could you do that, to think only about yourself and block the airflow for everyone else? What kind of *tefillah* is that?" Rav Yisrael made people aware of things. He was amazing.

MATURE PEOPLE WORK ON MIDDOS

Now, when we were little, most of us talked about *middos tovos*. But there's a limit to what you can teach in kindergarten. The kids can't read yet, so they make *middos* projects. I remember a number of years ago somebody came up with an idea for a *middos tovos* project for all the schools. They put out paraphernalia and papers to work on different *middos*. The truth of the matter is, you have to be mature to work on your *middos*. You have to be strong, and you really have to gain self-awareness.

WHEN MIDDOS ARE LACKING

There are many couples or families, where the *middos tovos* are sorely lacking. For example, it's very common for spouses not to respect each other. It's a very sad phenomenon, you should know. Sometimes you have a wife that is sharper than her husband. She is able to multitask. She can do many things. And he is more of a

¹ The *shiur* was given on Dec 31, 2019 (Shvat 25, 5779)

shlemazel. The tendency is - based on what I've seen in different parts of the world where I had the opportunity to go into homes - sometimes a wife talks about her husband as, "My *shlemazel*."

I remember going into a certain home of a *chashuve rav*. I was excited to go there. I was friendly with his son. The son introduced me to his mother. "This is my mother, the *rebbetzin*. Don't ever forget. She wears the pants around here." I thought he was joking. He said, "As long as you remember that, you'll be good here." The husband was the kind of guy who didn't care about that kind of thing.

Sometimes you have the flipside, where husbands look down at their wives as *shlemazels*. They have a tendency to talk down to them, belittle them, and not respect them. There is a *nusach* people say in the *frum* world. They call it נשים קלות דעתן קלות (Kiddushin 80b, Shabbos 33b). In the secular world they call them 'dumb women' or they have another slang expression. But it becomes very common, and it becomes like an acceptable *mehalech* in life, and this is *halach yeilech*. People think they could say some very hurtful things directed at their spouses, and people cannot say, "I'm sorry," or not ask *mechilah* from their spouses for many years and they never *mesaken* (correct) it.

MARRIAGE, A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO FIX MIDDOS

Now, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave you this spouse in order for both of you to realize where you have to work on your *middos*. Many times, somebody who is a recipient of a negative word, it also brings out in them bad *middos*. If somebody disrespects you, the tendency of a person is to defend themselves. They open up their mouths and they respond accordingly. Then you see their bad *middos*. This is a home where you could put a sign outside רעות מידות רעות בית שמגדלים בה. People go on for years feeding off each other's bad *middos*.

I once had a couple that whenever the husband wanted to get back at the wife, he would call me up and he would use me as his 'stick.' Now, one time she called me up, and I told her, "In this situation you're 100% right." I'll never forget that. The guy got all angry at me. He said, "Rebbi, what are you doing? You're undermining my whole project here! I'm finally getting her to be where she's supposed to be, and now you come and tell her she's right?!" I said, "Sometimes she's right and sometimes you're right." He said, "But you're supposed to be on my side." I said, "Really? Who told you that? I am your Rebbi and you are my *talmid*. A Rebbi tells his *talmid* when he's making a mistake. And in this case, you are wrong!"

THE PURPOSE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Now, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us opportunities all day long to interact with people. And interaction with people usually brings out somebody's bad *middos* or makes you aware of your bad *middos* - either in the way the guy treated you or what he said to you. In every situation, you're going through a day, but you're always in a 'movie production.' Did you ever see yourself as an actor? You are a tremendous actor. You are actually producing a very exciting movie. On the other hand, some people are boring. A quiet fellow, usually doesn't get into it with people. He doesn't react. So you know that 'movie' is going to be kind of plain. And I hope it stays that way and nobody gets under his skin and he doesn't get under anybody else's skin. But the tendency of most people, when they interact, is to get under each other's skin. You have to understand that's a plan and purpose. To avoid that is just to ignore your bad *middos*. You can't do that. Sometimes, a husband is jealous of his wife.

Sometimes, he has to put her in her place. Sometimes a person doesn't like this or that. It's a constant lesson and you have to learn how to accept it.

Just today, I was talking to a young man. He called me up and said that he has a problem with his speech. He sounded like a nice enough fellow on the phone. He doesn't know why it's happening. After a nice discussion with him, probing and trying to get me off on a different tangent of what it could be, he finally owned up to the fact that he has a *minhag*. His wife may not be the sharpest matzah in the box and it bothers him a lot. He feels she can't get her act together. So it becomes a cause for him to say not nice things to her. He's aware that he's saying things that are not nice. He tried to work on it. He said he was going to continue working on it. He also reminded himself that many years ago when he discovered some fellow Jew was making some money off him and he thought it was too much money, he uttered a statement against all Yidden. He called all Yidden "filthy Jews." Now Hakadosh Baruch Hu is "visiting" him, years later, and now he can't talk well about others. He's challenged by his inability to talk.

A SPOUSE IS A MIDDOS HELPMATE

You have to know this clearly, 100%. Many people deal with this. Many people. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling us, "You must be *mesaken* your *middos*. If not, I'm going to remind you." Your spouse is there to be *mesaken* your *middos*. That's what an *eizer kenegdo* is. A wife is a helpmate. Sometimes, the way she's a helpmate is by being *kenegdo*.

I know of one lazy man. He doesn't like to get a real job. His wife doesn't mind working hard and she doesn't have the greatest respect for him. I spoke to her. I spoke to him. I said, "You're a lazy so and so. You don't do your responsibilities." He knows how to give orders though. He knows how to criticize and berate others. But he himself can't do the job. Nu? So he's not going to experience good *shalom bayis*. He's not going to gain respect from others if he doesn't behave.

WHAT RULE DOES MITZVAS EVED IVRI TEACH?

Parshas Yisro concludes with *Matan Torah* and the first lesson after *Matan Torah* is *Parshas Mishpatim*. *Parshas Mishpatim* begins with what we would consider a strange *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* of *eved Ivri*.

Rav Yerucham points out that this *mitzvah* is the *av*, it's the "father." It's not only a *mitzvah* for itself, but it's a rule for other *mitzvos*.

In buying a Jewish slave for yourself, what were the terms? What was the reason this guy was sold? The reason was that the guy stole money and he didn't have money to pay back. Because he didn't have money to pay back, he was forced to be sold as a slave, and another Jew bought him.

Now, what are the laws that the Jew has to his slave? Interestingly, the Rambam in his *Sefer Hamitzvos* writes that purchasing an *eved Ivri* is a *mitzvah*. Having an *eved Ivri* in your house demands from the master a tremendous effort and *avodah kashah*, physical and emotional. You know to what degree? *Chazal* (Kiddushin 20a) tell us: כל הקונה עבד עברי, anyone who purchases an *eved Ivri* is לעצמו אדון, purchases an *adon*, a master, for himself.

Now, if I had a choice, I would never buy an *eved Ivri*. Who would want to buy an *adon* for himself?! Do you know to what degree you are *meshubad*? Do you know

to what degree you are subjugated and subordinated to this *eved*? Try to picture this. You and your wife are raising a nice family. Let's say your family is starting to grow. You have four kids, five kids. Your wife says, "You know we could use some help in the house." You say, "Okay. Maybe I'll go out and buy an *eved Ivri*."

HOW EXACTLY DOES IT FEEL TO OWN AN EVED IVRI?

Now, what is an *eved Ivri*? A guy who was a *ganav*. A guy who was *pashut* a thief. Not a very high, respectable position, although it might be an old Jewish profession. I say that because the *gemara* (Avodah Zora 70a) says: רובא גנבי ישראל, נינהו, most *ganavim* are Jews.² So you are bringing this *ganav* into your house now. Your wife has jewelry around. You have your little collection of fancy cufflinks. You have your fancy ties and other valuables in your home. Now you're bringing this *ganav* into your house. The reason why he's being sold is because he has to pay back his debt. The *gemara* says עמר טוב לו עמר, "because it is good [for him to be] with you," it quotes a *passuk* (Devarim 15:16). The wife says to the husband, "Where are we going to put him?" "Ah, we'll find some place, maybe in the corner of the basement." The wife says, "I think you'd better speak to the *rav* before you put him anywhere. What are we getting ourselves into?"³

The *gemara* says the following. He has to eat whatever meals you eat! He has to drink whatever drinks you drink! You can't give him water or some sugary wine or grape juice while you're sitting there drinking Balvenie or Glenfiddich or The Cave. Let's say you're drinking Binyamina - The Cave wine by your table. Your wife says, "How much did the bottle cost?" "Oh, about 100 bucks." The *eved* says, "Can I have some of that?" You tell him, "Here. This is Kedem Cream Red Concord. This is for you." No! You've got to share your expensive wine with him.

You've got to share with him your food and drink! Your wife goes to the baker and she purchases for you some very special bread. You have one roll. She buys one roll because she went to buy it and it was a fortune, so she bought only one. You say to your wife, "Wow, that looks good." She says, "Oh, it's sourdough bread. It's overnight. They have this whole process of how to make it." The *eved* says, "I agree, that looks good. I think I'll have a piece." "You eat the regular bakery corns. I'll give you bagels maybe. I'll give you Gelbstein's. We'll give you something else but not this." Nu? Whatever you eat, you've got to give it to the *eved*. You have to give him the same wine you drink!

Then you have to give him the same bed! I've been a guest at people's houses. They've told me to sleep in the basement on a cot, like a children's cot. I was thinking, "I wish they would treat me like an *eved*." I said, "I wonder what the guy upstairs is sleeping on. I doubt it's a cot."

It says you have to give the fellow the same mattress you have. So, let's say, you bought that fancy Sleep Number bed. You can put it to 40, to 50, to 30. Anything that's comfortable for you. And to him you gave some old mattress that you finished using after twenty years. You put it in the basement and now you're giving it to the *eved*. No! The *eved* gets to sleep on the same mattress you sleep on.

² הנהו גנבי דסלקי לופמבדייתא ופתחו חבייתא טובא אמר רבא חמרא שרי מ"ט רובא גנבי ישראל נינהו הוה עובדא בנהרדעי ואמר שמואל חמרא שרי.
³ לא סלקא דעתך, מדאקיל רחמנא לגביה. דתניא: "כי טוב לו עמר" – עמר במאכל ועמר במשתה, שלא תהא אתה אוכל פת נקיה והוא אוכל פת קיבר, אתה שותה יין ישן והוא שותה יין חדש, אתה ישן על גבי מוכים והוא ישן על גבי התבן. מכאן אמרו: כל הקונה עבד עברי כקונה אדון לעצמו.

The *gemara* says, עברי קונה אדון לעצמו, Unbelievable!

Now, what happens if all you have is one pillow? What do you do then? Let's say your wife is one of those types who doesn't like to sleep on pillows. She's into these health things. She sleeps on these funny rolls under her neck to keep her neck straight. And you like a nice pillow. Your *eved* says, "Any pillows?" There are no other pillows in the house. You've only got this one pillow. The *eved* says, "I'll take it." "Sorry, buddy I don't have another pillow." "You don't have another pillow? Too bad, this one's mine."

Tosfos says from a Yerushalmi that sometimes you only have one pillow. If you're going to use it, you're not going to be *mekayem* עמך טוב לו. And if you don't use it and you don't give it to the *eved*, you transgress *middas Sedom*. So you have to give it to him against your will.⁴

Imagine you come home for supper one night and your wife grilled you this nice steak, a 32 ounce piece of steak! She wants to make you happy. She made you *aza* steak! Then your *eved* walks in, "Wow, that smells great! What are we having for supper?" "Hot dogs." He says, "That doesn't smell like hot dogs. That smells like some bison." Nu? He says, "I'll take some of that." The husband says, "Over my dead body!" He says, "Listen, that's the rule. That's what's *shait* in *Shulchan Aruch*." "That's the *halachah*."

HAVE MERCY ON THE LOWLY AND THE GREAT

Rav Yerucham says what is the *pshat* that this is the first *mitzvah* of the whole Torah after *parshas matan Torah, ma'amad Har Sinai*? The first *mitzvah* is not *krias shema, kabalas ol malchus Shamayim, tzitzis, tefillin, talmud Torah*. No. It's *eved Ivri*! He quotes a *Sefer Hachinuch* in *mitzvah mem beis*. He says, משרשי המצוה זו, שיהיה עמו ישראל אשר בחר עם קדוש, the Am Yisrael that He chose should be an *am kadosh*, מלא, full, ומעטר, and crowned, בכל מידות, טובות ומעלות, with all the *middos tovos*. כי מתוך כך, because through this, תחול הברכה, עליהם, the *brachah* will come on them. והחסד והרחמים, and *chesed* and *rachamim* are מן המידות המשבחות שבעולם, it's from the best *middos* in the world. על כן, therefore, הזהירונו, the Torah warns us, לרחם, to have mercy, על אשר הוא תחת ידינו, on the one who is under our command, כגבולה, כמו שידענו גם כן בקבלה.

Now, if Hashem wants you to do this to an *eved*, you think He doesn't want you to do this to a guest?! When you treat a guest in a not nice fashion that is not what Hashem wants. I remember once we had the *zechus* of hosting the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Chaim Salomon in our home. I remember surveying the room and thinking, "It's not *bekavodik* for him." Somebody said, "What do you think he lives in? He doesn't live in a fancy shmancy house." "That's not the point," I said, "It's not *bakavodik*. It's not respectful." So we went out and we got a whole new bedroom furniture. We got new beds. We got the whole bedroom set for that *kavod*. I was thinking afterwards, *nu*? This is what we should do for the *pashute* people. The Torah wants us to do this for *pashute* people. Not only for *chashuvim*. Not only for *tzaddikim*.

⁴ כל הקונה עבד עברי קונה אדון לעצמו - וקשה מאי אדון די לו להיות כאדון ויש לומר כדאיתא בירושלמי דפעמים אין לו אלא כר אחת אם שוכב עליו בעצמו אינו מקיים כי טוב לו עמך ואם אינו שוכב עליו וגם אינו מוסרו לעבדו זו מדת דום נמצא שע"כ צריך למסור לעבדו אדון לעצמו (תוס' על קידושין כ"א:ו"א)

THE PURPOSE OF THE TORAH IS TO ACQUIRE *MIDDOS TOVOS*

The Torah teaches us something by having an *eved Ivri*, a *ganav*. The Torah says the first thing you have to work on, in order to fulfill the Torah, is to know that the purpose of the Torah is to acquire *middos tovos*. You have to treat this *ganav* with a brotherly love, giving him the same food and drink that you drink. This is the total opposite of what a human being would think.

Would you think this is the conduct that you should conduct yourself with? Honestly, we would never think like that. You would never think you should buy good linen for your guests. You would naturally think that for your guest room, you deck it out with simple linen. You know many guest houses that I've been in, in my life, you know what I've always found? Trundle beds. You know what a trundle bed is? They call them in English 'high risers.' They make them a little fancy. They put a little gate around the bed, so one bed goes under the other bed and it becomes a usable room when the guests are not there. People who buy trundle beds are planning on not having too many guests, because you would never sleep on a high riser. When's the last time you slept on a high riser, the type that when you make one little move, the whole house knows about it because the springs are *shuckling*? Of course, you could put a small 3-year-old on it, and it's comfortable. A person has to know this is a *din deoreisa*, *middos tovos*.

Now, even people who have good beds, you know what their *cheshbon* is? "Oh, maybe my parents will come. My parents should have good beds. Maybe my brother is going to come. He should have a good bed." A person has to know that if the Torah wants you to treat a *ganav* that way, it certainly wants you to treat a guest that way. There's no such thing as abuse.

Now, it sounds like it's a benefit for the *eved* to get sold because a guy who is a *ganav* is not a wealthy person. Usually, when a person who takes up the *parnasah* of *geneivah* it's because he doesn't have much. So imagine the guy gets bought up. *Pashtus*, he's not getting bought up by another *shlepper* deluxe. He's going to get bought up by a guy who has a couple of beans, like they say. It sounds like a *brachah* to him. Here, the guy is a *ganav*. Now, the guy gets put into a classy home, gets taken in by some rich fellow. That seems to be an upgrade. Is there any correction for the *ganav*? How is the *ganav* going to get his *tikun*!?

RESPECT MAKES A MENTCH OUT OF HIM

The answer is the following. Number one - by respecting the person and showing the person how much the Torah is *machshiv* him and how the Torah says you should treat him, it's going to make him feel like an important person!

I have taken people off the street into my home and let them sleep in my house and become part of the family. And it was amazing. Most people wouldn't treat them with any respect. A person has to know that by treating somebody with respect and with good *middos* is how you help the fellow get back his own self-respect, to restore him to living like a human being.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION

But there is one aspect of *tikun* that we do find. You know what the aspect is? You're allowed to marry him off to one of your maidservants. But when he marries her and he has kids with her, the *halachah* is you take the kids. The kids belong to

you. The kids don't remain with him. So here it sounds like a very severe treatment. The guy is having kids and you're taking away his kids?! It sounds pretty harsh doesn't it? No one likes to have his kids taken away from him. Here we're treating him with great respect on the one side, and on the other side, we're taking away his kids.

The Raibag (Rav Levi ben Gershon, 1288-1344) in his *peirush al haTorah* writes that the reason for this is להרחיקו יותר מהגניבה, to distance him more from stealing. כי יקשה לאדם להיות זרעו לא לו, it's going to be very difficult for them to produce children and they not be his. That's going to be a tough thing.⁵

Now, it says over here there's a tremendous *chinuch*, a tremendous training. You have to understand when a person is a *ganav* he's doing two things wrong. First, he's taking something that doesn't belong to him and he's causing somebody else a loss. But there's another thing. People have an affinity and they're attached to their objects. Today, everybody is married. Even if you're not married to a wife or to a husband, you are married to something. What is that? What are people married to today? They're married to their phones. That's their closest companion. They hold it in their hand. Wherever they go, they're always talking to it. They're always listening to it, checking it, giving it attention like nobody gets. They sleep with it. They put it under their pillow. It's *meshuge*. A lot of people do this!

So, if you took a person's phone away, it's not that he's just losing his money. He's losing his 'spouse.' You're taking away his closest *zach*. Sadly, the phone becomes something that people are attached to. People have an attachment to their assets in an unusual manner. It says in the *gemara* that when people purchase something, they become invested in it. It's not just an object. They see it as an extension of themselves.

Now, the *ganav* came and took something away from someone. He broke the relationship. So what does the Torah say? The Torah says, "You're going to marry a maidservant, you're going to produce children and those children will *not* be your children." From the start, you know these will not be your children. It's not a surprise. It's not that they surprise you at the end and take away your kids. They tell you you're going to have kids and the kids are not going to be yours.

Now, a person has a feeling for kids. A person has a natural sense of connection to his children. Therefore, the Torah says his wife and his children don't come out of bondage with him. They stay with the master. When a person experiences this, he will experience the *tza'ar* of the *preidah*, separation.

TRAINING A CHILD NOT TO STEAL

Now, many people want to know, if their child steals, how do you train the child not to steal again in the future? Some liberals will say, "Well, the best thing to do is

⁵ כי תקנה עבד עברי וגו' (כא, ב). התועלת הראשון הוא במוצו, והוא לברא דין עבד עברי ביציאת רשות האדון לחפשי. ואולם התועלת בזאת המצוה ובמה שידמה לה הוא מבואר, והוא לסבב שלא ישאר איש או אשה מישראל בשפלות ודלות מתמיד, אבל יתנחמו משפלותם וענים בזכרם כי עוד מעט יצאו חפשים מעבודתם וישבו להם קרקעותיהן אשר מכרום, וזה כי בבא השנה השביעית יצאו לחפשי או ביובל לכל הפחות וביובל ישבו להם קרקעותיהם, והנה בזאת קצת נחמה לדלים האומללים. והכריחה התורה העבדים הנמכרים בגנתם לישא שפחה כנענית אם ירצה אדוניו, להרחיקו יותר מהגנבה כי יקשה להם להיות זרעו לא לו, ולזאת הסבה לא יוכרח לישא שפחה כנענית אם לא היה לו אשה ובנים, כי מי שאין לו אשה לא יקשה לו נשיאת השפחה, ומי שאין לו בנים לא יקשה לו הולדת הבנים לא לו, כי לא שיער עניין זה הקניין [כמו] שישער אותו מי שיש לו בנים, ורצתה התורה לבזותו כאשר תביאחו תאותו אל השפחה הכנענית אל שיבחר להיות עבד יותר משהיה בן חורין, להרחיק ממנו זאת הבחירה המגונה כי יקשה לו, לפרסם חסרונו לפני השופטים ולהרצע אזנו במקום רואים בה האופן המגונה.

to make him stand in the corner. We'll give him some time out to think about what he did, which was not nice." Is that going to work? It's not going to work. Some people think, "Well, maybe we should smack his hand up until it gets red, like who knows what." In Saudi Arabia they believe in cutting the hands off. They cut the hands off. I was reading about a fellow who went to Saudi Arabia. They have a place every Sunday where they mete punishment out, it's called Chop Chop Square. They behead people for certain *aveiros*. For *geneivah* they cut people's hands off over there. They believe in eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth over there. They do it. They have these big dentists, 'Russian dentists' with these big plyers as if the Arabs can't do the job. Then if someone steals, they cut fingers off, they cut hands off. It's shocking. This happens in today's world!

But the Torah says, no. You know what you do? Take away something that he values. Take away something from the child that the child values. Say, "Do you like this toy of yours?" You take it away. He starts to cry. "Ehh! Remember you took something from somebody else. That's what the other person feels like."

THE RULE IS: ALL MITZVOS TEACH MIDDOS TOVOS

I don't know why, but in America there's a tendency, that if you see a *ganav*, everybody berates him as if the guy is a mass murderer and a killer. The guy is deserving capital punishment. If a guy steals something from you, you want to shoot him. But that's not what the Torah tells us to do. That's not the Torah's way.

The Torah gives us this *mitzvah* first because this is an *av*, this is a *klal* for all *mitzvos*. All *mitzvos* teach you *middos tovos*. Take the message that Hashem is giving us. Acquire *middos tovos* through the lessons Hashem gives us. When your spouse says something bad to you or says something demeaning and you go berserk it is an opportunity to work on developing *middos tovos*.

I spoke to a nice fellow not long ago. His wife is the type that gets upset with him. Why? Because he's a very laid back kind of guy and she is more of a not a laid back kind of person. It frustrates people who are not laid back when they encounter laid-back people and they want to try to get them going. She scratched his face and drew blood until a *rav* told her that no, you can't do that. She threw a pot of hot water at him to get the message across. He became un-laid-back very quickly!

HOW DOES HASHEM WANT ME TO ACT?

Now, the question is, how does Hashem want me to react in this situation? In every situation, you have to ask yourself this question. How do I react? I love it when people say, "I'm working on it." I asked the husband, "Are you working on your abuse to your wife?" He says, "I'm working on it." I say, "How are you working on it?" He says, "I'm going to a therapist." I say, "That's called working on it? That's not working on it."

A therapist will never tell you you're a bad person. A therapist is never going to tell you how to be *mesaken* your *middos*. You know what a therapist will say? "Let's understand why you want to abuse your wife." And when you say all the reasons, the therapist says, "Oh, I understand that, but is that the smartest thing to do in that situation?" And then the husband comes back to the wife and says, "I went to the therapist." The wife says, "How did it go?" "He's a very understanding therapist." "Did he put you in your place? Did he wipe the floor with you?" "Oh no! Not at all!"

He understands me very well.” So the wife says, “This therapist must be crazy.” She picks up the phone and she calls the therapist. “Can I speak to you about my husband?” “No. I’m his therapist. He’s my client. I can’t talk to you about him.” “Excuse me? You’re trying to help him treat me like a *mentsch*. What do you mean you can’t talk to me?! Are you crazy?!” Yes, that’s the answer. The therapist also needs a therapist. You have to realize that they don’t work on *tikun hamiddos*. They don’t give you exercises to do in the area of *tikun hamiddos*. They try to get you to understand your behavior. “I just feel like slapping my wife.” “Oh, I understand that. There must be a lot of rage in you. Does it come from your mother? Does it come from your father? Did you grow up with this? Did you have a hard life? What’s the reason why you’re acting out? Oh, you had abuse? Ah...you had abuse in your youth.”

In today’s world, nobody is working on *tikun hamiddos*. That’s the *emes*. We’re not working on *tikun hamiddos*. And the whole purpose of us being in this world is to work on *tikun hamiddos*. We have to work on laziness. We have to work on thoughtfulness, on giving, which is very hard. Don’t fool yourself. It’s very hard.

CHANGE – AND BECOME RAOY FOR HASHEM’S BRACHAH!

When I was a young man, I used to go around the yeshiva collecting on Friday for *bachurim* who didn’t have enough money. There was a fellow I knew, who came from a wealthy home. He was a cheap guy. He was a little kid. He was about 15. I used to go around collecting with a *pushka*. I said to the fellow, “Give me a nickel.” “I don’t have one.” I said, “Put a nickel in the cup.” I said, “I’m not walking away until you put a nickel in the cup. If I have to wait here it’s going to become a dime. I’m telling you next week when I come you better have that nickel waiting. Otherwise, it’s going to cost you a dime and a quarter.” I spoke to the kid. I called him out on a number of occasions. I said, “I want you to know you have terrible *middos*. You’re a cheapskate. It’s a nickel! You come from a wealthy home. It’s not that you don’t have a nickel. You just don’t want to part with the nickel. There are *bachurim* who don’t have parents that give them money. We’re giving them a couple of dollars. We’re talking \$5 a week for a *bachur* to spend. That’s not a fortune of money. Just cleaning, washing laundry he had to do. To buy a soda once in a while for a quarter. Give him the money.” He couldn’t do it. I told him, “Start working on yourself. I’m telling you, work on yourself!”

And he did. He woke up a few years later. I met him. He said, “I want you to know, I’m working on myself.” I said, “In what way?” He said, “I’m collecting *tzedakah* from others.” I said, “The purpose is to give your own *tzedakah*.” But eventually he came around. He did. It took him a long time, but eventually, he came around and he started to part with his money. Today he’s a beautiful, giving person. He still likes to claim poverty. That’s what he always claimed. But *baruch Hashem*, he changed.

If you don’t work on yourself, it’s not going to change. Just knowing, “I have a problem,” is not going to make the problem go away. You have to undertake and put yourself in a situation where you’re going to be obligated to become a better person.

Everybody should understand why *Parshas Mishpatim* follows the giving of the Torah. Today is the *yahrtzeit* of Rav Yisrael Salanter. Let us work on our *tikun hamiddos*. Let us undertake one *middah* at a time. If you’re aware of some area where you are deficient in, start to change yourself, better yourself. I’m telling you, you’re going to become a better person. And as the *Sefer Hachinuch* says, you’re going to become *raoy* for the *brachah* of Hashem to be *chal* upon you.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Rav Yisrael Salanter emphasized the importance of *tikun hamiddos* - rectifying one's character traits, urging every person, regardless of their status, to introspect, recognize and refine their negative behaviors and attitudes derived from their negative *middos*. He observed and addressed even the smallest behavioral nuances, aiming to guide us toward better interpersonal interactions and more ethical conduct, while advocating for mutual respect and understanding. By delving into multiple Torah's directives regarding showing kindness and mercy to an *eved Ivri* - as the *Av* of all the mitzvos and the first commandment given after Har Sinai - Rav Yerucham showed us that the mitzvos are suppose to rectify and refine our character and *middos*. This coming week, I will (*bli neder*) incorporate gratitude exercises into my interpersonal relationships with my spouse, siblings or parents. Expressing my gratitude, preferably in person - by calling or even sending a text with a kind word - will help me shift focus from negative traits to positive aspects of the people I interact with. Practicing mindfulness in my speech and active listening, will limit my critical comments and complaints that brought pain and hurt relationships in the past. While recognizing that personal growth will take time and patience, my resolve and commitment in refining my *middos tovos* will, iy"H, bring me closer to fulfilling my *tafkid* in life and make me into a vessel to receive Hashem's *brochos*!

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