

VAYEILECH
WAKING AND WALKING

A

Walking Rebuke

The first *pasuk* of the *parsha* seems to be redundant. “*Vayeilech Moshe vayedaber es hadvarim ha’eileh el kol Yisrael. Vayomer aleihem...* Moshe went and said these things to all of Yisrael. And Moshe said...” In this speech, Moshe told Bnei Yisrael that he was 120 years old and about to die. Yehoshua bin Nun would take over the leadership of the nation. He assured the people that they could be confident that Hashem would help them defeat their enemies in Israel. The *pasuk* could have begun simply stating that Moshe spoke to the Jewish people. Why does the Torah introduce Moshe’s speech by saying that he took a walk and spoke to all of Yisrael?

The Midrash Tanchuma is bothered by this unnecessary opening line. The Midrash explains, “*Ein vayeilech elah lashon tochacha.*” The word *vayeilech*, says the Midrash, refers to rebuke, as the verse states, “*L’chu chazu mif’alos Elokim. Go see the works of God.*” Here, then, the word *vayeilech* presents a strong message. However, this enigmatic Midrash does not specify what rebuke Moshe gave to the people. Additionally, why is the rebuke expressed specifically through this use of the word *vayeilech*, meaning walking?

Shem Mishmuel cites another Midrash at the beginning of

Sefer Dvarim that quotes a *pasuk* in Tehillim 50:21, “*Ochi’chacha, v’eh’ercha l’inecha*. I will rebuke you and I will lay it out in front of your eyes.” Referring to Jewish sins, Hashem said, “I will discuss with you the issue of your sins.” Two *amoraim* interpreted this verse. One said that Hashem meant *l’orer*—“I will arouse everything. I will wake it up and make it come alive to your eyes.” The other *amora* explained that Hashem meant *l’sader*—“I will arrange the sins in front of your eyes.”

B

The Sleeping Dogs

Shem Mishmuel includes a third Midrash in this discourse, from Bereishis Rabba 22:6. The Midrash speaks about the *yeitzer hara*. Rav Tanchum ben Meryon said there were dogs in Rome who knew how to trick a baker to get his bread. They would come into a store and sleep there. The baker thought that these dogs were harmless and sleeping, so he let them sleep. The baker himself also went to sleep. After he fell asleep, the dogs would secretly “wake up” from their fake nap and grab the bread. The dogs simply waited for their opportunity. Rav Tanchum compares this trick to the evil inclination of people. The *yeitzer* has a strategy of making himself appear harmless. People, with their weaknesses, often get involved in activities that they think are harmless but ultimately lead to sin. A person who is unaware of the danger can easily fall into the trap of the evil inclination.

Consider, for example, a person living in New York on a quiet Sunday afternoon. Looking for something nice and enjoyable to do with his free time, he thinks “I’ll go take a walk downtown.” He has no intention of going to a movie; he just wants to see the sights. Then, once he’s there, an ad for an inappropriate movie catches his attention and he goes to watch it.

When young people are choosing a college or university,

some think that they can go to any university. “I’m religious, I will be committed. There is a Chabad house nearby and everything will be fine.” This student is oblivious to the dangers inherent in going to a university where religious Jews are a small minority, and where secular values and culture are strongly promoted. It is a dangerous and deceptive situation. In one of our earlier *shiurim*, I related a tragic situation described by Rav Soloveitchik. One of his *balabatim* sent his daughter to a local university, where she would stay in the dorm. The Rav warned him against this but the man did not follow the advice. Eventually, she left Torah observance and even intermarried. The *yeitzer hara* has its ways of lulling people into a false sense of safety before trapping us.

C

Waking Up the Dogs

The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos 105 describes this process of how the *yeitzer hara* starts with things that feel safe but lead to that which is wrong. This can help explain the approach of the first opinion mentioned in the midrash above: “*Orer kol l’einecha*. I will make you wake up from the slumber, and you will realize that many of the things you do are dangerous and terrible.”

“*Va’tipakachna einei shneihem*.” After Adam and Chava ate from the Eitz Hada’as, the Torah states that their eyes opened up. Were they blind before?

Consider, for example, a store that sells glassware: vases, crystal cups, and glass bowls. Imagine that someone comes inside with a stick and smashes them all. The storekeeper is understandably upset, as is everyone else who saw it. He asks the smasher, “Why did you break all the crystals?” He said, “I broke them because the people in this neighborhood don’t appreciate the wonders of the beautiful pieces that you have in this store. You are barely making

a living. I smashed them so the people here would know what they lost.”

Sometimes we take things for granted. We don't even realize what we have. God forbid, when a person loses those good things, he realizes the greatness of what he had but didn't appreciate.

Adam and Chava had been living in Gan Eden. They didn't appreciate what they had there. They took the risk of eating from the Eitz Hada'as. They allowed the snake, their *yeitzer hara*, to convince them to violate God's command. "It's not so terrible," they thought, "We are only human beings." After they ate, though, God opened their eyes and they realized what a horrible thing they had done, that they had brought death into the world.

We are insensitive, and we often rationalize. We refuse to face the consequences of our actions and deceive ourselves into thinking these things are harmless and fine. We don't realize that seemingly safe, innocuous behaviors can cause calamitous and disastrous results. Really, these are the preludes to terrible outcomes. This is what Adam and Chava's eyes were opened to see. This is awakening from the slumber. This is the smashing of the crystal glassware so that people would appreciate them.

This is the *yeitzer hara*, the sleeping dog. When we aren't watching, he makes us fall asleep, and then gets us into trouble by grabbing the precious bread, which represents the precious soul of man. According to the first opinion, Hashem will wake us up to the import of our deeds.

D

Writing Our Own Balance Sheet

The second opinion in the Midrash explains, "*ochi'chacha v'eh'echa leinecha*" in a different way: Hashem will arrange it for you to understand. Shem Mishmuel explains that the *yeitzer hara* uses another common trap: a mixture of good with evil. As human

beings, we know that we are not perfect. Our evil side gives us a way to calculate our actions in a manner that allows us to discount our *aveiros*. The *yeitzer hara* will allow a person to admit, “I do X number of bad things. But,” continues the *yeitzer*, “I also do many good things. By mixing my bad deeds with good deeds, I can say that I am basically a good person. In fact, I do more good than bad things!” In this way of thinking a person creates his own scale of measuring good and bad, his own balance sheet.

Hashem, the heavenly Judge, weighs our good and bad deeds on Rosh Hashanah. If a person has done more good deeds, he goes into the good book. If, God forbid, a person has done more bad deeds than good, he goes into the bad book. The Rambam adds that only Hashem can do this. In this context, the Rambam refers to Hashem as “*Keil dei’os*.” Hashem knows a person’s every thought and idea, every tendency. He knows if we are *shogeg* or *meizid*. However, many people usurp God’s role as judge. They decide that they will make the *cheshbon* instead of Hashem. A person who does this will think, “All the good things that I do will far outweigh the bad things that I do.”

As an example, let’s think about *lashon hara*, evil gossip. Human beings have a tendency to speak *lashon hara*. The Gemara says that everyone gets involved in it. We rationalize it by saying, “I do so many good things. I give charity, and have guests, and visit hospitals. So here and there I make a joke about someone behind his back, but this is a small thing compared to all the other good things I do for people.”

Here’s another example. People sometimes say, “Look at what I did for Hashem—I spent so much money on my *lulav* and *esrog*. That \$500 I spent for *arba minim* justifies how many times I spoke badly about other people.” People use this *bein adam la’Makom* scale. “My *tallis* is beautiful and my *tefillin* and *mezuzuos* are very expensive, and I gave a huge donation to the *shul*.” Then this person doesn’t deal nicely with people. He may steal in his business, or treat other people badly. This is a trick of the *yeitzer*. He tells

you to make your own balance sheet. “My *mitzvos* definitely outweigh the *aveiros*, and Hashem knows I’m a human being who makes mistakes. I am overall good, though, so everything is fine.”

This is an extremely dangerous way of thinking. People try to figure out which *aveiros* counterbalance which *mitzvos*, and they don’t fix their ways and do *teshuva*.

Hashem says, “There will come a day, when you will see the balance sheet is not the way you think. The fact that you mix together *mitzvos* and *aveiros* does not justify what you are doing. You will see that there will be a *seder*; you will see the arranged list and you won’t have this confused notion anymore.”

E

Confused Priorities

We see this too often in religious circles. People say that *bein adam laMakom* concerns such as Shabbos, kosher, and *lulav* outweigh *bein adam lacheveiro* concerns such as stealing, cheating, insulting, and fighting. It is an unfortunately common phenomenon.

Chazal don’t agree with this attitude. They taught us that *bein adam lachaveiro* is very important. Achav was the worst king. He worshiped idols, ate *treif* food, and desecrated Shabbos. But he was amazing with people. He was kind and gentle, and he encouraged brotherly love. In one instance, his wife Izevel corrupted him to act against a person, but otherwise he was superb. In the Yalkut Shimoni on Melachim, Chazal say that Hashem really liked him and gave a blessing to his kingdom, making him very powerful, rich, and successful. Achav is held as a model for us in *bein adam lachaveiro*. Even the wicked Eisav is held up as the model of someone who honored his parents, one of the many *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*. Many people think—and this is an evil thought—that if a person is superb in his man-to-God *mitzvos*, it justifies his being terrible in man-to-man *mitzvos*. We have to work hard in

our society to make sure we do not confuse our priorities and fall into this trap.

The second *yeitzer* causes this confusion regarding a mixture of good and evil, explains Shem Mishmuel.

When people sin, usually one of these two attitudes stands in the background. One person commits the sin unwittingly because he has been lulled into minimizing the dangers of the situation and, before he knows it, is entrapped. The other person has a mistaken attitude born amid the confusion regarding the “balance” between sinning and doing good deeds. We must eradicate both of these dangerous attitudes.

In this prophecy of *ochi'chacha*, God promised that in the time of Mashiach the Jewish people will do *teshuva*. We will wake up from the slumber and become aware of the sins that we do. We will not think that they are harmless, and we will recognize them as failures. Finally knowing the relative merit and severity of sins and *mitzvos*, we won't rationalize anymore that our sins don't mean so much in the big scheme of things. We will experience a wake-up (*hisorerus*) and see the arrangement (*seder*), have a clear understanding of the relative severity and merits of our actions.

F

Mind and Heart

Shem Mishmuel continues his explanation with one of his recurrent themes. The human being is comprised of two main faculties: intellect and emotions, which are based respectively in the brain and heart. The sins resulting from a state of unawareness stem from an emotional flaw. The person has not developed his sensitivity to sin, like the girl who went to the university dorm. She only wanted to socialize. The socializing lulled her religious emotions, and she went to sleep. The *hisorerus* wakes us up from dulled emotional and religious sensitivity. In the time of Mashiach, Hashem

will grant us an emotional sensitivity to sin. He will also arrange things so that we can be intellectually aware that two good things do not make up for one bad thing.

Until then, we must awaken our passion to care about these *aveiros*. We have to arouse *hisorerus*. This is in the heart. We must also understand the relative weight and meaning of good and bad, which is a function of the intellect.

The Gemara mentions the *pasuk*, “*l'Dovid Hashem ori v'yishi* God is my light and my salvation.” The Midrash says light refers to Rosh Hashana, and *yishi* refers to Yom Kippur. Meaning, there is a difference of focus between the two holy days. Rosh Hashana focuses on the *moach*, the intellect. The day itself is called *Rosh*, meaning head. The focus of the day is to recognize with the mind what is right and what is wrong. It is a day of thinking. I consider all of the *mitzvos* and *aveiros* and get my priorities in order. Yom Kippur is an emotional day. It is “my salvation,” a day of *hisorerus*, an inspirational day. It is a spiritual day that lifts us out of this world and up to a different level. Yom Kippur is a day of emotional spirituality. It is a day of feeling Hashem with our hearts.

Shem Mishmuel adds another idea: On Rosh Hashana, we say, “*Ashrei ha'am yodei terua*. Happy is the nation who knows the sound of the *shofar*.” We know about the secret of the *shofar*. On Rosh Hashana we blow both the *tekia* and the *terua*, the flat and the broken sounds. Within the *shofar* itself is the clarity of the *tekia*, a straight and unwavering sound, like the way a good mind thinks. The *terua*, the broken noise, sounds like a cry, an emotional reaction. On Rosh Hashana we have *moach*, the mind that is being fixed and directed and focused properly. In addition, we have the *terua* that arouses the emotions, the broken cries that emotionally move us back to Hashem.

G

Thoughtful Minds and Passionate Hearts

The Rambam makes an interesting observation in Hilchos Teshuva 3:4, stating that the *shofar* is an arousal to do *teshuva*. He says, “*remez yesh ba’davar*, there is a hidden message in the *shofar*.” The *shofar* tells us, “*Ura yeshainim misheinaschem v’nirdamim hakitzu mi’tardeimaschem*. Wake up from your sleep and arouse yourself from your slumber.” Why does the Rambam repeat the same idea twice? Shem Mishmuel explains that *sheina*, sleep, has to do with the heart. In *sheina*, the *lev* is asleep. The person is not sensitive to Judaism, to Torah and *mitzvos*. He’s in a sense of self-delusion, like many people today who don’t realize that their actions have tremendous spiritual ramifications.

Nirdamim, slumbering people must also wake up. This slumbering refers to the slumber of the mind. The mind is asleep and doesn’t make the correct calculation that it should. The slumbering person thinks to himself, “I can do *aveiros* and I can do *mitzvos*. My *mitzvos* will outweigh my *aveiros*.” God is the only one who can make that kind of *cheshbon*. Every *mitzva* stands alone and every *aveira* stands alone. No *mitzva* can ever undo an *aveirah*. This state of thinking that *mitzvos* justify *aveiros* is called *tardeima*. The *shofar* wakes us up from this as well.

H

Sleepwalking and Slumber-Waking

We now return to our original question. The first *pasuk* says Moshe went and spoke to the Jewish people, and the next *pasuk* says, “*vayomer aleihem*.” Why does the Torah repeat that he “says,” and why does it tell us about the walk that Moshe took? The Midrash says the walk refers to a rebuke. The Jewish people needed an arousal. Both the false ideologies and improper attitudes that

lead to sin were prevalent among the people. There were Jews at the time who were sleeping. They did not realize the harm of what they were doing. They needed to be woken up. Other Jews knew what they were doing wrong, but they thought the good they were doing made it acceptable. One group had an insensitive heart. The other group intellectually justified what they were doing. “*Vayeilech Moshe vayedaber*”—he spoke *divrei tochacha*.

Shem Mishmuel explains this *tochacha*. Moshe was the model of virtue. Jews should have copied him. Some Jews, such as Yehoshua bin Nun, did. At the end of the Torah, Hashem uses strong language in speaking to the people. There were many Jews who did not properly follow the model of Moshe Rabbeinu. They fell into both traps of the *yeitzer hara*. They had an insensitive heart and a distorted mind.

Shem Mishmuel interprets Moshe’s walk in a non-literal sense. He didn’t walk with his legs, but spiritually he walked down toward the people, he lowered himself. “If you won’t come to me, I will come down to you.” The people saw Moshe coming to them, they saw that they could relate to him, and that woke them up.

Moshe himself functioned more on the intellectual side. “*Vayeilech Moshe*”—Moshe went and said, “Look at this intellect that I am modeling and demonstrating to you, the intellect of Torah. This is on the level of *sechel*.” The *pasuk* continues, “*vayedaber Moshe*”—he also spoke to their hearts, and aroused in them feelings of guilt and inadequacy. This woke them up emotionally to their situation.

This introduction had nothing to do with the ensuing speech. That speech was a message of encouragement that they can keep the Torah in the course of their conquest of Eretz Yisrael. The first *pasuk*, though, was to make the people aware of the two-sided trap of the *yeitzer hara*, the sleep and slumber of the Rambam. He referred to the two mistakes of the *yeitzer hara*: the emotional insensitivity to evil, and the foolish, self-delusional thinking that good can justify evil. The Torah does not accept either. These are

the two messages that Moshe wanted to impart to the Jewish people before his death.

I

The Awakening

As we think about these ideas of the two *yeitzer haras*, we are deeply shaken. This speaks so much to our present culture and the way we live our lives! We are standing now before Yom Kippur, the day of truth. If the *shofar* wakes us up on Rosh Hashana, then Yom Kippur surely wakes us up.

Chazal say that the greater the person the greater his *yeitzer hara*. Clearly, then, our generation must be very great, because we definitely have a great *yeitzer hara* today. This *yeitzer* functions on the two levels that we have discussed. On the first level, we think everything is okay, that there are no problems. This is a deep slumber of the heart. People are simply unaware of what they are doing. We have to be careful not to go to dangerous places and not to fall into traps. We have to pick good schools, and good places to live in. These seemingly harmless decisions, if made wrongly, can become very harmful and damaging. This is a matter of developing a spiritual sensitive heart. Everything we do has a very important spiritual dimension. We must be sensitive to this.

We also can't set up our own scale of merits and demerits to weigh on our own. A person's good actions do not outweigh his bad ones. You can't be your own judge and jury. If a person would go to a Rebbe or spiritual teacher, he would not agree with this rationalization. The idea that being *frum* and careful with *mitzvos* with Hashem justifies being terrible in *bein adam lachaveiro* is a complete mistake. Yet it still happens so often. Some people use a different rationalization and say, "I do good things to other people, so it justifies my skipping other *mitzvos*." This is also a mistake. Everything in Torah stands alone, with its own value. We must be

careful with each and every *mitzva*. But we still fall into this trap again and again.

Going into Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and during the Ten Days of Repentance, we beg Hashem to wake us up, to give us the *hisorerus* so we can be sensitive to the dangers posed to our religious level. We beg Hashem to give us the wisdom to know what's right and what's wrong, and not to think that anything good can outweigh anything bad. We are responsible for everything that we do. We ask Hashem to give us the spiritual and emotional inspiration and the wisdom to place things in the correct categories and not confuse good and evil. With the proper *hisorerus* and proper *cheshbon hanefesh*, we will be able to do a good *teshuva*. We will come back to Hashem. We will change and rededicate ourselves to Torah and *mitzvos* with great attitudes and clear thoughts.

May we be *zocheh* to a *gmar chasima tova* and a good year.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the two basic forms of the *yeitzer hara*?
2. What two levels of a person do these two *yeitzer haras* attack?
3. Categorize Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur using *moach* and *lev*.
4. Can a person make his own balance sheet of good and evil?

EXERCISES

1. For a week, write down instances of the first type of *yeitzer hara* that you had.
2. Do the same for the second type of *yeitzer hara*.

