



פרשת דברים

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

The Mitzvah of Optimism

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Part I. Complaining Against People

Four and Six

In Mesichta Sanhedrin (103a) we learn that there are four *kitos*, four groups of people, that אֵין מְקַבְּלוֹת פְּנֵי שְׂכִינָה, *they will not be able to greet the Shechinah*. It means that someone who is included in these four groups, then in the World to Come he will be deprived of the great privilege, the great happiness of viewing the splendor of the Divine Presence.

Now, we won't talk now about the first three groups; one day we will *b'ezer Hashem* but right now we're going to study the fourth of these four groups – that's the בְּתַ מְסַפְּרֵי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, those who speak the evil tongue.

Now, even that one group is a big subject which we wouldn't attempt to undertake now – Rabbeinu Yonah divides the subject of *mesaprei lashon hora* into six subdivisions and each one

requires a lecture of its own – and so tonight we'll limit ourselves to talking about the *chelek hashishi*, the sixth *chelek*, which he calls *nirganus*, complaining.

Grouchiness and Gratitude

Now 'complaining', that's not usually identified with *lashon hora* in the minds of people but we have to remember that it's Rabbeinu Yonah speaking here – he's an important *rishon* – and he's teaching us that it is. And therefore as we're learning this subject tonight, we have to keep in mind that we are speaking about *kat mesaprei lashon hora*. Whatever you're going to hear about complainers, it's going to be under the heading of people who speak the evil tongue and will not merit to see the Shechinah in the World to Come.

Now, what is the primary *middah* operating – better yet, *not* operating – in the mind of a complainer? There is a trait of character which is basic to human nature and that is the *middah* of being grateful for benefits conferred upon you.

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Hakadosh Baruch Hu implanted in human nature a certain reaction of gratitude and this reaction has to be obeyed and amplified otherwise we are not human.

You want to be a human being? I'm not talking now about being a *tzaddik*; I'm not even talking about being a Jew. First thing is to be a human being and to be human you must obey the dictates of the decent conscience; and the decent conscience says to be grateful to everybody.

Don't be a Fault-Finder

Gratitude to parents. Gratitude to brothers and sisters. Gratitude to neighbors and friends. Gratitude to the people giving you your Torah *chinuch*. Gratitude to your *rebbe* and to the yeshivah. Gratitude to the Bais Yaakov. Gratitude also *lehavdil* to the people who are running the affairs of the community.

Even to the city; the gentile garbage collectors, the police, the mailman. All these people are serving you, helping you. A person should be filled with gratitude all the time to the firemen. When you see the big truck speeding through the streets with the siren screaming, that's the time to nurture that natural instinct of gratitude. "Tony is coming to the rescue!" He's a bum? You expect firemen to be raised in the yeshivah? Firemen are raised on street corners. And the people on that truck are the ones willing to run into a burning building for you. They might revive one of us, with mouth-to-mouth breathing if we need it *chalilah*.

Policemen too. The police don't do anything, but at least they're present on the street to frighten some people from doing crimes. That's also something! They put themselves in danger for you.

Don't say, "It's nothing. They're getting paid. That's why they do it." That's the opposite of how to think and that's how you become a complainer. You become a person whose system it is to find faults, to find reasons to complain. Even when someone is trying to help you, no matter how good

a person's intentions are, it becomes your tendency to interpret it as an intention to wrong you.

The Appeasement Committee

I once knew a man like that – he always imagined that people were trying to wrong him in some way – and every once in a while he fled from the synagogue. But because I had pity on him so I used to send him a committee to appease him. And this went on for years and years. After he was appeased he came back for some time until the next incident and again a committee was sent to him.

That's called a *nirgan*. No matter what it is he will find ways to complain. Not that he's looking to find things – we're not talking now about somebody so wicked to do that – but it became his second nature already because he never learned to be a person of gratitude.

Let's say a wife prepared a supper for her husband and he sat down to eat and he was careless and there was a bit of bone. And as he chomped down on the bone it hurt him – maybe he cracked off a piece of tooth, maybe he didn't, but he right away complains.

He says, "Why are you careless? You don't care about me and you give me such things. That shows that you are only interested in yourself and just put something on the table and don't think about me at all, about the consequences." There are husbands like that.

She says, "I tried. But it's not always possible. Sometimes when you grind up a piece of fish, a bit of bone is ground into it."

Our Tongues

That's what a tongue is for! Now I'm not saying *she* should tell him that but I'm telling him. A tongue is a wonderful instrument, and it's for the purpose of flitting around while you're chewing and touching all the food and discovering bits of inedible materials. But this man is not able to hear that because of his *middos ra'os*. He never cultivated

his humanity, his gratefulness, and so when he sits down to eat the delicious fish, instead of his soul welling up with gratitude, he has complaints. “So many bones!”

Now we have to understand we're not talking now about a character out somewhere, let's say in Canarsie or somewhere out in St Paul. We're talking now about people who are right here in this place. And not about people sitting over there but people sitting right here. Each one of us is a *nirgan*. It's only a question how much he's a *nirgan*. And so what we're talking here now, we're learning this not to criticize others or to preach to other people to get better. The purpose is so that each one should understand that it's a lesson for himself because everybody is a *nirgan* to some extent.

Now, Shlomo Hamelech, in Mishlei, tells us a result of this attitude of complaining. וְנִרְגָן מִפָּרִיד אֶלְוִי – *a complainer separates his friend* (16:28). It means a person like that causes friends to leave him because they cannot tolerate his complaining.

Maybe You're Unpleasant?

Sometimes you have a person that you know and he passes you in the street and he doesn't look at you anymore. You see him trying to dodge you. He sees you coming, he walks through the side street. And so you're thinking, “What's this? He doesn't owe me money. Why is he avoiding me?”

It's a question many times you wonder about. “Why is it that people avoid me?” Well it's good you came here tonight to find out. Maybe it's unpleasant to be in your company because you're always complaining. Maybe people find it more enjoyable not to have anything to do with someone who's always dissatisfied with one thing or another. The weather is no good and the rabbi is no good. He has complaints against his neighbors and the yeshivah. What happens? He's *mafrid aluf* – his friends will go away from him.

Now his wife might not leave him because of that – she shouldn't – but emotionally she is already separated from him. Her husband comes home

and he's grumbling. “What's for supper today?” “Oh, I don't like that. I really wanted *fleishigs* tonight.” Sometimes there's too much salt or not enough salt. “Why didn't you get better quality meat?” “The soup is too hot.”

Leaving a Message

I know a case of a man who comes here frequently. Tonight *baruch Hashem* he's not here. He's going to buy this tape eventually and he'll hear it – he'll hear the message. His wife called me up; she's having a lot of trouble from him. Nothing that she does is any good. He's always complaining about this and that. His wife doesn't admire him anymore. She's suffering from his *nirganus* – how much can you expect from the poor woman? How can she remain his friend? If you're always griping it's impossible to remain friends with you. Even your children won't like you anymore.

Same thing, a wife; a wife who complains frequently makes herself a nuisance and the husband feels estranged. He won't leave but to a certain extent there's a separation. She complains that he forgot Mother's Day or her anniversary or a hundred other things. She needs a new dress and the chandelier is not nice and the children are too loud – whatever it is, it builds up and sooner or later it causes a feeling of separation. It's like impurities in the body; they're going to erupt and then it's on the surface already. And *nirgan mafrid aluf* – that's a way of losing a husband.

A complainer loses customers too. Sometimes his boss will fire him. Again and again I've come across *nirganim* who are out of jobs because the bosses just cannot stand a complainer. He says “Boss, this is too heavy.” “Boss, can I get off a little earlier?” “Boss, you know it's hot in here,” or “Boss, you know it's cold in here,” or “Boss, why don't you give me better merchandise to sell? If you gave me a better line of merchandise, I'd be able to make a decent living.” So the boss after a while is fed up with him and the boss sends him away.

We lose children too. We see in everyday life how the children of *nirganim* go out to *tarbus ra*, *chalilah*. How does it happen that Jewish boys and girls go away from us and some even end up in every kind of cult including Jews for Yoshke and the Eastern garbage? And people stand in perplexity; “What happened here?”

And the answer is, to a certain extent, *nirganus*, complaining. The child was never satisfied; he always found what to complain about. Sometimes he learned it from his parents. The parents were knocking the synagogues. They were knocking the rabbis. They spoke disparagingly of Judaism.

A man called me up one night. His daughter was a Moonie. And she was in for a short visit and he wanted to save her this time, she shouldn't return. So he called me up and said I should speak to her. I was willing, but he spoke to me in such a disrespectful tone. You know even if you call a plumber you're respectful. He called me up with such a curt voice and he was insistent. I should do this for him and it should be done in short order. I should drop everything and speak to his daughter.

Now I didn't tell him but I wanted to tell him, “Mister, you know it's your fault. If that's your attitude towards rabbis is there any wonder that your children run away from your faith – or your lack of faith?” If at home you're always complaining about the rabbis, always knocking Lubavitcher or knocking Satmarer, so you're a *nirgan*. If at home you knock the yeshivah people and the *talmidei chachomim* – you're complaining about the *shul* and the *cheder* and the Beis Yaakov – so if everything is bad, everyone is wrong, then who needs it? Even the children become separated. Because that's the final result of a complainer; he's *mafrid aluf* – he finds himself separated from everyone.

Hashem and You

Now, there's a big question here. Because we said in the beginning of our talk that a complainer won't merit to see the Shechinah in the Next World – it means that even if he's there, something he'll be missing. There's a certain closeness to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that he won't have forever and ever. But why should there be such a severe punishment? It's true, you're a pain in the neck and you were *mafrid aluf*; nobody liked you. But Hashem likes you! You're a *frum* Jew! Maybe he likes you very much. And so why should this affect one's condition in the Next World?

Now, Rabbeinu Yonah quotes a Gemara (Derech Eretz Zuta Ch. 9), אַל תִּרְבֶּה בְּתַרְעֻמָּת, – Don't make yourself busy with complaining, שְׁלֹא תָבֵא לְיָדֶי הַטָּא – because you might come to a sin, to a bigger sin. Which sin? What's the bigger *aveirah*? It's in this week's *sedrah*. וַתִּרְגְּנוּ בְּאֹהֲלֵיכֶם – And you complained in your tents וַתֹּאמְרוּ – and you said, הֲוֹצִיאֵנוּ – “Because Hashem hates us, ה' אֲתָנוּ – He brought us forth בַּמִּדְבָּר – to kill us in this wilderness” (Devarim 1:27).

All of what we said till now, about complaining against other people, is only an introduction to the worst type of complaining – *complaining against Hashem*. A person cannot have a dual personality. If you're a person who trained himself to be satisfied with people, to appreciate what they do, to never complain, so that becomes your nature and that will be your attitude to Hashem. But if you're a complainer against people and situations, you'll be the same ingrate to Hashem.

Hostility and Piety

That's a principle that you can't escape from. You just cannot be a complainer against human beings without being a complainer against Hashem. And so even the most *frum* Jew, if he's a complainer,

then you have to know that he's angling in for a much bigger sin because he has a certain attitude of hostility to the Borei; actual hostility.

Now, if you would tell him that he would say you're crazy. He is devoted to *avodas Hashem*. Look what he does! He learns every day! He goes to *tefillah betzibbur* every day! *Everything* he does!

The answer is that he's doing very little. You know why? Because *avodas Hashem* means gratitude. That's the foundation of the service of Hashem. Gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that He created you. Gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for making you a Yisroel. Gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu Who gives all the benefits of life. Gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for your feet and your lungs and the weather and your home. Gratitude for everything! If you had to translate *avodas Hashem* into one word, it would be gratitude.

Kavanos for Naanuim

So you'll say is that true? When you take a *lulav* and shake it, does it depend on gratitude? When you put up a *mezuzah* it depends on whether you're a complainer?

And the answer is absolutely! When you take the *lulav* in your hand, it's not like people do, they pat themselves on the shoulder: "I stood for two hours in the *mocher seforim* store picking this *esrog*. So I'm pretty good. Hashem owes me a lot."

Oh no! He has it all backwards. Because what is he supposed to be thinking when he's shaking the *lulav*? He's thinking, "I'm so grateful to You Hashem that I'm going to dedicate myself to You now. I'm waving my *lulav* and *esrog* towards You to show that it's only towards You that my heart and my backbone are dedicated. And the *hadassim* and *aravos* too; it means my eyes and my mouth are dedicated to You only.

"And I wave them back in my direction because I'm reminding myself that all good things come from You to me." That's what it means: "I'm making *naanuim* from me to You because I'm declaring that all my devotion is only to You. And I'm making

naanuim from You to me because I'm declaring that my dedication to You is out of gratitude for all the good things that come to me from You."

Sleeping in a Barrel

And what's a *mezuzah*? You pick an expensive *mezuzah* – it costs, let's say, twenty five dollars (*ed. This was said in 1973*). The best *mezuzah*! And you yourself looked it over that there shouldn't be any *negios*; every *os* is perfect.

What happens? You bang it on the door and then you forget about it. If you're exceptional so as you pass by maybe you'll give it a kiss and your heart swells with pride at what you did for Hashem. That's already a *tzaddik*.

That's what you call serving Hashem? That's called serving yourself. You know what a *mezuzah* means? It means "I thank You Hashem for giving me a house!" A fellow who sleeps on a park bench, does he need a *mezuzah*? If you sleep in a barrel do you need a *mezuzah*? It's only because you have a house, so you need a *mezuzah*. So Hashem says, "Look, you don't want to thank Me? So give back the *mezuzah* and go sleep in a barrel."

And so if someone is always complaining – the neighborhood is no good, the house is too crowded, the rent is too high and the toilet is always leaking, so how can he be an *oved Hashem*? It's impossible! He'll do *mitzvos* but it's superficial; it's not *avodah*.

Recognizing the Giver

The whole Torah is like that. You put *tzitzis* hanging in the air? *Tzitzis* are only on the garment that you have. If you don't have a garment so there's no *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. So *tzitzis* means gratitude for clothing. Not like the *yeshivah bochur* who wears *tzitzis* but he never thought about the gift of clothing. Just the opposite – he complains; he wants better clothing, newer, more expensive clothing.

Pidyon haben! If you don't have a son, you'll make a *pidyon haben*? So it's all gratitude. Here's a man making a *pidyon haben*. He went out found a

kohen and not just a plain kohen; a kohen named Rappaport he has a *yichus brieiv* going back ten generations. And he looks for old time silver dollars that are from 1810, real heavy silver dollars; perfect silver. He wants everything to go perfectly.

And he's congratulating himself, "What a nice fellow I am! I'm *medakdek* in *mitzvos*."

Boruch Hashem! That's a true thing too. But what about Hakadosh Baruch Hu? He forgot all about Him. *Pidyon haben* is gratitude – gratitude that He gave you a *bechor*, a son. Isn't that a great thing? A daughter is a great thing too but a son is even better; a firstborn son. He'll be your right hand later in managing everything. If you have a *yeshivah* he could manage your *yeshivah* for you. If you have a business he could manage your business for you. A *bechor*; *reshis oni*. It's a great happiness to have a son. So you have to be grateful to the Giver of that happiness.

The Tongue on Earth

And so, since all of our service of Hashem depends on our *middah* of gratitude, it becomes of the utmost importance to stop complaining. A complainer can never be an *eved Hashem*. That's what it means, *כָּל הַכּוֹפֵר בְּטוֹבוֹתָיו שֶׁל הַבָּרוּךְ לְבִסוּף* – if you are ungrateful for what a fellowman did for you, *כּוֹפֵר בְּטוֹבוֹתָיו שֶׁל הַקֶּב"ה* – the end will be you'll be ungrateful to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

That's what Dovid Hamelech says in Tehillim (73:9): *שִׁתּוּ בְּשָׂמַיִם פִּיָּהֶם* – They put their mouths against the heavens, *וְלִשׁוֹנָם תִּהְלֶךְ בָּאָרֶץ* – and the tongue moves around on this world, this earth. Again: *They open their mouths against Hashem and the tongue moves around on earth, against people.* And the Gemara (Eirechin 15b) says that Dovid is talking here about a *baal lashon hora*.

So the question is, a *baal lashon hora*, it's true that he sins by talking against people. But is he talking against Hakadosh Baruch Hu? He's not saying anything against Hashem – *chas v'shalom!*

So Tehillim tells you he is! Because once a man gets into the habit of fault finding, of finding

chisronos and criticizing people, he's criticizing Hashem too. He may not say it; he may be afraid to say it, but in his mind he's full of dissatisfaction with everything that Hashem did for him.

Losing the Friend

And he talks *lashon hora* against Hashem. Absolutely he does. "Why did this happen to me?" he says. "Why didn't I have success in this and this thing? Why did I lose money in this and this transaction?" And he's blaming Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He won't say it, but you have to know subconsciously he is blaming Hashem. If he's a man who blames, don't think he's blaming only people, only circumstances. No! It's impossible to separate! He's blaming Hashem.

Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "If You're a complainer you're complaining against Me too. All the time all I hear is dissatisfaction. You're never grateful with what I'm giving you. I'm giving you a day; a rainy day, a cloudy day, a gloomy day – who cares? It's a day of life! Did you eat today? Did you wear clothing today? Did you go to the bathroom today? You lived a normal life today! And you're complaining against Me!"

"Oh no!" you say, "*Chas v'shalom*, I don't mean to complain against You!"

But it's not true. He is complaining about Hashem too and eventually Hakadosh Baruch Hu gets fed up and that person loses His friendship too. Because Hashem said already *כָּל אֲתָתְךָ אֶלְקִים* – that everything is very good; *אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד*, everything is very good! But this man doesn't see anything good – to him everything is very not good!

Losing the Real Friend

Now what happens to a person like that? So pay attention. We said before that *וְנִרְגַן מִפְּרִיד אֱלֹהֵי* – a complainer will lose all of his friends. Little by little they all find ways to go away, to separate from you. They find ways and means of escaping you, avoiding you.

But there's one Friend Who stays with you. That's your best Friend – it's Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He doesn't give up on you; maybe you'll quit being a complainer and start looking at the bright side of everything. And so while everyone else gets fed up with you and separates from you, He stays by your side – He's hoping you'll come around. But the end is that even He becomes tired of you; He can't take your complaining anymore and finally even He separates from you.

That's what the Chachomim say. Chazal tell us, אין אלוף אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא – the real Friend is Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And sooner or later you lose that Friend too! And that's why this man won't merit to see the Shechinah in the Next World. Because he was *mafrid Aluf* he lost his best Friend. And therefore forever and ever he won't be close enough to see the Face of Hashem; in the Next World Hakadosh Baruch Hu won't want to be too close to him.

Part III. From Complaining to Satisfaction

The Summer Project

Now, the Shaarei Teshuva brings a *possuk* there, in this chapter on *nirganus*. He says לְמַד לְשׁוֹנֶה – *teach your tongue*. You have to teach your tongue that way, of not complaining. It means that it's not a matter of *haskamah*, that you agree with him that to be a complainer is a failure. He's telling you that you have to get busy doing something about it: לְמַד לְשׁוֹנֶה means that you're going to have to train your tongue to be that way.

So let's say you make a project for this summer: The whole summer will pass and you won't say even once, "It's too hot today." Even once?! It could be you're sweating and maybe you're uncomfortable too but you won't open your mouth even once to complain. Now, that's an achievement!

Or when you come home, you'll never complain that the food is no good, that something is wrong

with the food. Imagine a person who practices that – months pass by and not one time will he complain about the food! It doesn't mean you have to eat everything. You can say you're not hungry or something, but never complain that it doesn't taste good!

Training for Satisfaction

But the truth is it's not enough to say that we won't complain. Of course it's a good start; absolutely it's an achievement. And that's why every person, even little boys and girls, should choose certain things to never complain about – you can't do everything at once but little by little you train yourself not to be a complainer. But even if you're serious about this project it's not enough because when there's an undercurrent of dissatisfaction coursing through a person's veins, it becomes a very difficult task. It could be he doesn't want to complain but it's always there bubbling at the surface, ready to explode. And that's why we have to go a step further.

There's a *sefer* called *Orchos Tzaddikim*. And in that *sefer*, in one of the chapters, he talks about the *middah* of *ratzon*. *Ratzon* means to be pleased, to be satisfied. Now, it's interesting that he considers it a *middah*; it's a novel thing – we don't find it in other *seforim* that 'satisfaction' is a *middah*. But the *Orchos Tzaddikim* has an entire section about it, about training yourself to learn to be satisfied with your circumstances and experiences.

Now, why is it so important? Because *ratzon* is the opposite of *nirganus*. That's what the *Orchos Tzaddikim* says. If a person makes up his mind that he's going to not be a complainer, first he must learn that there's nothing to complain about. He has to train himself to be satisfied with everything that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving him.

Wonderful Weather

Instead of walking around and grouching, "It's too hot. It's so humid," or "It's too cold – it's nasty, it's raining;" instead of that, you'll always speak well of Hashem's world.

It's hot? Wonderful! The apples are getting red on the trees. The pears are becoming sweet on the trees. If it wasn't hot, they wouldn't become sweet. People complain against the heat of summer although the heat of summer is a blessing that causes the fruits to ripen. It's like the *yeshivah bochur* who walks through the kitchen when his mother is baking *challah* and cake and he's complaining about the heat – "The oven is making it so hot in the house" – but later when he sits down at the table he does justice to the *challah* and the cake and he forgets about the heat.

It's cold? That's also wonderful! The earth now is taking a rest from producing and while it's taking a rest it's recuperating all the minerals it lost, all the materials it lost during the summertime. Without the winter, there can't be a summer. If it was summer all year, the earth would keep on producing and it would become arid and infertile. That's why the earth takes vacation in the wintertime.

And rain? So what if you got caught in a downpour? First of all, who told you to run out without an umbrella? And so what if you had to change your plans because of the rain? Rain is wonderful! Without rain, we're nothing. We're almost 80% water – water comes from rain. When it rains, people are coming down from the sky. You came down in the rain once upon a time! The same people who came down from the sky once are grouching now and complaining about the rain.

And therefore when rain comes down, all the boys of the *yeshivos* are coming down and their future brides, the *kallahs* from Bais Yaakov, are coming down. They're all coming down together from the sky. Rain is wonderful.

Wonderful Stingers

Now once a person begins looking at the world the way Hashem said, that *everything* is *very* good, so he begins to acquire this *middah* of *ratzon*, of satisfaction. Not only is he not complaining, but he becomes a happy person, a satisfied person. He

learns to love all the aspects of nature, all the phenomena of life. Hot is one type of happiness. Cold is another happiness. Rain is another happiness. It's never ending.

Even the bee is a happiness. Here's a *yeshivah* man and he goes to the country, in a bungalow colony. "It's no good over here," he says. "The bees are flying around and they can sting. It's a very big nuisance."

But actually you have to be satisfied with the bee and his stinger. If the bee didn't sting, you would never get any honey. It's only because the bee produces a commodity which is very much desired by animals, that's why he's given a flaming little sword, a stinging tip with some poison, in order to be able to repel the predators. That's why eventually the honey lands up on your table. If not for the sting, there wouldn't be any honey because the bee cannot exist without that sting.

Bees at Work

And not only honey. That's a minor achievement. There wouldn't be any apples or pears or peaches. There wouldn't be 100,000 species of fruits and flowers which need the bee to pollinate them.

Only you should make sure to keep out of its way. The bee is a man at work. When the Con Edison people are digging in the ground and they took off the manhole and they're digging in the bowels of the earth, who tells you to step into the hole? Stay away from it! And don't complain about it either – be happy that they're fixing your pipes. And therefore who's going to complain that the bee has a stinger if in exchange it gives you so many benefits?

But now we have to go one step further. Because there are certain things in life that are not so easy to find satisfaction with – things that seem to be worse than a bee sting – and still a person has to realize that the duty of *ratzon* extends even to things that are not fun at all.

Pain as a Blessing

A toothache. A person should not be angry at the world and displeased with the *seder hachaim* because of a toothache. If you didn't have a toothache, you would never bother going to the dentist. And your teeth would happily rot away one after the other until you have nothing in your mouth except gums. It's because of that first sharp pain. It's a notice that you are being sent. Of course you always ignore those notices from the dentist that come in the mail but not this one. It's a notice *min haShomayim*.

Pain is a *brachah*, pain is a blessing. There's a recorded case of a certain person, a woman in Canada, who didn't have the sensation of pain. She was born lacking the ability to feel pain. And one day she was standing over the gas range and cooking something on the far burner and she was busy talking on the telephone. Meanwhile her hand was burning! She didn't notice until she smelled the smell of burning flesh. Her arm was half burned through.

So when you're standing over the gas range and you have a couple of flames burning on the gas range and you're leaning over to broil something and you feel a sharp burn here – ooh, you burned yourself! You have to realize that the sensation of pain is a blessing. It's a warning signal.

Pain sends people to the doctors. Pain causes you to stop overeating. Pain saves your life. And so we have to understand that if a person wants to avoid the great pitfall of *nirganus*, he has to learn to be satisfied with life, and he must learn to appreciate pain.

Inducing Humility

Even the pains of a man who's sick; he gains tremendously from that. He appreciates good health once again. And he's humbled too. If a man is lying in bed with the flu or whatever it is, he becomes humbled. And the dying man? What about his sufferings? What good will come of that? The answer is: the greatest good. He's being prepared

for eternal life and he has to be humbled for that. There's arrogance in every human being and as he's lying in agony, the last bit of arrogance is being drowned out. If a man is lying in bed and he's rolling in agony, he's not a *ba'al ga'avah* anymore.

Of course if he'd get well, he'd quickly reassert himself; and that's why the agony continues until the last bit is ground out of his character. And he goes purified to the Next World, humbled. **לְפָנָיו יִכְרְעוּ כָּל יוֹרְדֵי עֶפֶר**, *before Him, it says (Tehillim 22:30), before Him kneel all those who go down to the dust.* When a man is about to die, he kneels finally before Hashem. He humbles his arrogance.

That's why it says (Tehillim 90:3) **תִּשָּׁב אָנוּשׁ עַד רִבְצָא וְתֵאמָר**, *You turn a man back to destruction; and when a man sees destruction staring him in the face, and You say, שׁוּבוּ בְנֵי אָדָם, return, repent you sons of man.* And so, destruction, misfortune, is a call to repentance. It saves a lot of people from Gehenom. Very many people have been rescued.

Of course, that's more difficult; that's a bigger order, to be happy with such misfortunes. But people should know, whether they're happy or not, at least rationally they should know, in their minds at least they should know, that it's going to be for their benefit. And even at the very end, they can – as much as possible – practice up in this *middah* of not only not complaining, but of *ratzon*, satisfaction.

Reasonable Weeping

That's why even when the Bnei Yisroel suffered in the *midbar*, they're called *nirgonim*. Because that generation was the foundation generation of our nation and we're expected to learn from Moshe Rabbeinu's criticism of them, what's expected of us. To be dissatisfied, to be a complainer, that pulls out the rug from under all of a Jew's *avodas Hashem*.

And that's why their punishment was so severe. It was such a big sin that it created Tishah b'Av. When they sat and they wept for nothing, that became the night of Tishah b'Av. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "You wept for nothing, *bechayah shel chinom*, you wept for nothing that night, so I'll give

you cause to complain.” So every year when Tishah b'Av comes, we sit down on the ground and we redo that scene. We sit down and weep.

It's a good think to think about that on Tishah b'Av, there's a big lesson there. We're weeping for a reason because it first started by weeping for nothing. That's one of the great lessons of Tishah b'Av – yes, it's a day for sadness and mourning for all of the things we lost, but we should also spend time thinking about how it began; it began with complaining. And so when we're sitting on the floor on Tishah b'Av we remind ourselves that this day should be the only sad day on the Jewish calendar. All the other days are days of happiness and *ratzon*.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Growing with Optimism

Our *parsha* teaches us that complaining is a great sin against Hashem because optimism, happiness and gratitude are a necessary component of *avodas Hashem*.

This week I will *bli neder* try to grow in the *middah* of satisfaction with my lot in life and I will make an effort not to complain about anything – I won't let one complaint pass my lips. Even during the Nine Days, when we mourn and reflect on what we lost, we can't lose sight of the fact that we are being showered constantly with good. And the first step in *avodas Hashem* is to practice appreciating the good that Hashem and people are giving us.

— This week's booklet is based on tapes: —

333 - Satisfaction | 379 - The Complainer | 646 - Mind of Control
788 - Contending with the Yetzer Hora | E-234 - The Mitzvah of Optimism
Listen: 718.289.0899 Press 1 for English and 2 for Thursday Night Lectures



Will all Jewish souls return at the time of Moshiach or will some of those who are lost to Judaism remain lost?



I'm just guessing, but I'm sure that there will be *reshaim* who will be lost forever. Because we know that in the Next World there is such a thing as souls of Jewish *reshaim* that go lost.

If a man chooses to divorce himself entirely from the people and he feels that in the world of the gentiles that's the only light and that's the only happiness, and among his own people there's nothing at all, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "If that's the case so when you die, you'll go to Paris. Your soul will go to Paris." It means you'll be in the sewers of Paris.

I'll tell you a little story. One morning before *davenen* – I used to take a walk before *davenen* – one morning a dog came out and started following me the whole way. The entire walk he was following me. I came back and I wanted to enter the *beis haknesses* yard but the poor dog wanted to come in. I closed the gate and didn't let him get in. He stopped and looked at me with a sad look.

I started thinking, "It can't be that it's just a dog. It must be a *neshamah* of some person who wants me to take him in again." It was too late now. A lost soul.

Now it could be it wasn't so. But still, it's a good thing to imagine. A lost soul and now he became a dog; the transmogrified poor fellow. He was following me around quietly, sadly. I came to the *beis haknesses*; we had a big yard with a gate and he wanted to come in. And so there's no question that there are *reshaim* who go lost. No question.

But we have to know in this life before they die, their hearts tell them that they're lost and that hurts them to no end. And that's when they should take advantage – while they're still alive.

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