

# TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PARSHAS CHUKAS

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## THE COPPER SNAKE

### CONTENTS

Part I. Raising the Snake - 1

Part II. Raising the Yetzer - 4

Part III. Crushing the Snake - 7

## Part I. Raising the Snake

### The Complaint

In Parshas Chukas, the Am Yisroel finds itself only a few miles away from their final destination of Eretz Canaan, and yet, because they are forbidden from passing through Eretz Edom, they make a detour and set out on a long and circuitous route in order to enter Eretz Canaan. And as they turned to begin this rigorous trek, we are told by the Torah about an episode of complaining among the people.

What happened? They were already passing alongside inhabited lands—past nations that were living not in tents, but in real homes; nations that were eating not food from the sky, but real food. And for some of the Am Yisroel, these sights caused a certain amount of dissatisfaction. וַתִּקְצַר נַפְשׁ הָעָם בְּדֶרֶךְ - *The spirit of the nation became impatient because of the way* (Bamidbar 21:4). It means they began to hanker after a way of life they saw somewhere else.

“If only we could be living like the Edomites are living, in real houses instead of tents! And real food that grows from the ground! You expect us to

succeed with such a diet, with this לָחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל? If only we could be living like the Edomites are living, then we'd be happy! Then we'd be able to succeed in our lives.”

### The Response

Now, how did Hashem respond to their complaints? וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' בָּעָם אֶת הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשֹּׂרְפִים - *He sent upon the complainers a visitation of nechashim hasrafim*; fiery serpents were suddenly slithering everywhere, וַיִּנָּשְׁכוּ אֶת הָעָם - *and on all sides people were being bitten* (ibid. 6).

But not just bites; many died on the spot, and others were in grave danger – the venom of a snake spreads quickly through a person's blood, and death comes quickly – and so the people came running to Moshe begging him to *daven* to Hashem, to save them.

### A Mysterious Remedy

Now, what happened then was something very queer. Because at that time Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Moshe as follows: עֲשֵׂה לָךְ שֹׂרֵף וְשִׂים אוֹתוֹ - *Make for yourself a figure of a poisonous snake and put it on a standard, on a high pole*, וְהָיָה כָּל

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הַנָּשׁוּךְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וְחָיָה – *and anybody who was bitten, let him look at that pole and he will become healed.* (ibid. 8).

Now, just to ascribe to this snake some sort of mystical benefit is not following the ways of the Torah. No, we don't find such things in the Torah. So you'll say there's a benefit of raising your eyes to heaven and praying – a high pole encourages you to look upwards – and it's true. The Mishnah says that: כָּל זְמַן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִסְתַּכֵּלִין כָּלפִּי מַעֲלָה וּמִשְׁעָבָדִין אֶת לִבָּם לְאֲבֵיהֶם שְׂבָשְׁמִים הָיוּ מְתַרְפְּאִין – *So long as they were looking upwards towards Hashem, and subjugating their minds to Him, they would heal* (Rosh Hashanah 3:6).

But that's not enough of an explanation, because why did they have to raise their eyes to *a serpent*? Better it should be a tall pole with nothing on top, like an arrow pointing up to *shamayim*! And so you look up and you see the sky and you're reminded about the *Yosheiv ba'Shamayim* – Hashem, Who sits on High. That would be a way to be healed! But a snake? What's a snake doing on top of the pole?

### The Teacher Teaches

So you have to understand that this wasn't left unanswered. When Moshe Rabbeinu fulfilled this commandment of Hashem, he didn't merely place a copper serpent on top of a high pole, like a *segulah*, and retire back to his tent. Oh no! We call him Moshe Rabbeinu – 'Rabbeinu' means 'Our Teacher' – because that's what he was to us always. He was always speaking to the people, always teaching them. And so you can be sure that had we been fortunate enough to be there, we would have heard a long *peirush*, a long explanation of what it means this copper snake on a pole.

What did he say? I couldn't presume to tell you all the details but there's no question that he began his *shiur* to the Am Yisroel from Bereishis, from the *parsha* of the *nachash* in the beginning of the Torah.

Everyone remembers the story of the downfall of Adam and Chava when they were persuaded by the *nachash* to eat from the *eitz hada'as*. That's something that every child knows; the first time the *nachash* appeared in the Torah, his function was to make Adam and Chava feel dissatisfied. They had everything! מִכָּל עֵץ הָעֵץ אָכַל תֹּאכֵל – *You can eat from the fruits of all the trees* (Bereishis 2:16). Only one thing that they didn't have, the fruit of just one tree. And the job of the *nachash* was to make them see only what they didn't have and to make them want *davka* that.

### Not Really a Snake

Now, you'll recall that Hakadosh Baruch Hu sentenced the serpent to forever have to slither on its stomach: עַל גְּחֻנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ – *You should go on your belly* (ibid. 3:14). From then on that's how he moves about. But it was explained here once that the snakes we are familiar with existed already from the beginning. There were *always* slithering snakes – they're part of the ecology, part of Hashem's system whereby all living things work in tandem with each other as one perfect system. And so the *nachash* in Gan Eden was a being of a different sort; we call it *nachash* only as a *sheim mush'al*, a borrowed name, but actually it's the *yetzer hara*. Hashem only portrayed it in the form of a snake-being so that we should understand its ways of tempting us.

So what does it mean that the *yetzer hara* was sentenced that it should have to crawl on its belly like the ordinary snakes we know? After all, it's not really a snake. And so pay attention now to what I'm going to tell you.

### Careful in the Country

If you ever go walking in the woods behind your bungalow colony you have to be careful; if you're stepping over a log, you have to take a good look before you put your foot down, there shouldn't be any snakes close by. Now, if a snake had legs, like a rabbit, and was hopping around, so you could spot

him from a distance; and if you see that he's streaking towards you, you would protect yourself. But now that he's as close to the ground as he can get, he's almost invisible.

And that's why when people are out in the woods for a good time and they're not careful, it comes without any warning. "Oh! I'm bitten." Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the snake an opportunity to attack its victims by means of stealth. He does his work, and by the time you realize what's happening, it's too late.

### Camouflaged Snakes

That's also why a desert snake is beige-like, copper colored; because that's the best color for blending in with the background. You know, sometimes it happens that your wife tells you to go out and buy an air conditioner and now you're in the department store and you don't know what color you should buy. All you know is that she wants a color that will suit the décor of your dining room, something that matches. Now, if you buy a white one, she might say it's no good. A black one, no good. And you have no interest in making trips back and forth to the store all Sunday. So what's the best thing to do? Ask for a beige colored air conditioner. A beige one, she won't be able to criticize too much – it's a color that fits in with everything.

And that's why when the snake is lying in the ground among leaves and twigs you can't see his shape. He blends in with everything. That's why *nechoshes*, copper, and *nachash* are the same word because the snake's color is what gives him an edge. That's how he accomplishes his task best, by not letting you know he's getting close.

You understand now why Moshe fashioned his snake from copper. It doesn't mean the polished copper of today; Moshe used ordinary copper, like the copper they used in the good old days, a beige, inconspicuous color. Now, he could have taken silver or gold. Even wood. Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't say metal; He said "Make for yourself a

serpent," that's all. But Moshe chose to make a נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת, a copper snake, because he understood that the camouflage is what makes a desert snake. Its color is what allows it to blend into the background and that's how it does its job in this world, unnoticed.

### The Yetzer Goes Incognito

And that, Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching us, is the same *modus operandi* of the *yetzer hara*. Because that's what it means that the *yetzer hara* was sentenced to crawl like a snake. It's a *mashal*. It doesn't mean that the *yetzer hara* stopped existing and became a snake. No! The *yetzer hara* didn't retire. He didn't go out of business. עַל גְּחִיךָ תֵּלֵךְ – You should always go on your belly, means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was giving the *yetzer hara* what it needed most in order to function: You'll take other forms, other disguises, and you'll be able to slither around incognito.

It has to be that way because if the *nachash* would have continued to exist in the form that it had in the time of the *cheit*, so we'd already know how to watch out for him. On the contrary, the *yetzer hara* doesn't bother anymore with the form of a snake. He has other forms, new ways of appearing to man. Sometimes it's in the form of a temptation like it was then. Sometimes it's in the form of a newspaper or a reform rabbi. Sometimes in the form of women's lib or another movement.

He comes in the guise of governments. Let's say in Albany, in the Department of Dis-Education. They wear suits and ties there but actually they're the worst type of snake. The Department of Education insists on evolution as being one of the subjects – if you want to be an accredited school in New York you must teach about evolution. A lot of government money is being spent on that and they want it in the yeshivas too, the Beis Yaakovs. So there's no question that it's the *yetzer hara* incognito.

## All Types of Snakes

Today the yetzer comes in the form of Dior from France. I told you once that this fellow named Dior in Paris is also one of the big men who works for the yetzer hara. Any new style in dresses that comes from Paris is not an accident. “Oh, it’s just a style,” a frum woman says, “Nothing wrong.” Oh no! It’s purposely planned, an attack on mankind. He wants you to cut a few inches off from the bottom. And then if the Jewish woman survives that attack he come from the other side, from on top, with a new style to take inches off from there.

College professors too. Not all of them – there are good frum ones too – but many college professors are just the yetzer hara in disguise. And so if you won’t listen to the miniskirt representative of the yetzer hara, he has plenty of others.

He’s not particular. He has people with big beards too; sometimes he even puts on a *shtreimel* with long payos. In a Beis Yaakov school a principal wearing a long beard gave out the New York Times for the girls to read. I protested but they thought I was a silly fellow, a *kana’ai* for nothing at all. Because they were blind; the snake was camouflaged with “But the girls have to know this and this and they have to know how to read and write.” All types of excuses.

And so וְהַנָּחֵשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם – the snake of the yetzer hara was made very cunning. Whatever appearance it makes it’s going to be incognito, camouflaged as this or that. All kinds of disguises! Whatever it can do to lead you away from the path of the Torah, from the path of success, it’ll try. It doesn’t give up.

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## Part II. Raising the Yetzer

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### Know Thy Enemy

Now, according to the lesson in our *parsha*, what’s one of the first and most important remedies to heal those who are bitten by the snake of the yetzer hara? שִׁים אֹתוֹ עַל גֵּם – Lift it on a pole! Let

everyone see! Because that’s the opposite of what the yetzer hara wants. He wants to be as low as possible so that nobody should see him, nobody should think about him. “Don’t talk about me. I’m an *anav*. I don’t want publicity.” Because that’s when he’s most effective.

It’s like the spy that comes from Moscow, he doesn’t want anyone to pay attention to him. If he reads in the headlines in the New York Times, “Suspicious Russian Agent Arrives Today From Moscow,” he knows he’s finished. Headlines?! That’s the last thing that he wants.

And it’s the same thing with the yetzer hara; he doesn’t appreciate when people talk about him. Even right now, the yetzer hara would appreciate it if we wouldn’t be mentioning him so much. He’s the one entity in this world that does not look for *kavod*. Everybody likes recognition, publicity, but he prefers to remain unseen and unnoticed because that’s his way of succeeding. And that’s why Hashem says, שִׁים אֹתוֹ עַל גֵּם – Put him on a high pole. Let everybody see the great peril so that they can overcome it.”

Now, there are many ideas included in this big subject of putting the yetzer hara on a high pole for everyone to see, because on all sides there is wickedness and lies masquerading. And that means there’s so much to talk about, so much to raise up from its camouflage. And we *should* do it. It has to be done! We have to unmask him in all of his disguises. We need one lecture about television and one about sports. Another about clothing and about politics and about newspapers. We’d have to unmask some frum people too, some shuls. It’s a very big job and therefore we certainly cannot do justice to the subject with merely an hour sitting together; each disguise must be spoken about because וְהַנָּחֵשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם – the snake is very cunning. It’s a big job to lift him up for everyone to see.



## The Grass is Greener...

But one of the biggest *yetzer hara* of all is the one in our *parsha*, the one that caused the entire story of the *nechashim haserafim* and the resulting command of Hashem to raise the *yetzer* on the pole for everyone to see. Because how did it all begin? When the nation began to see what's doing elsewhere, in Edom, and they began to imagine that times could be better elsewhere.

The *seforim* often refer to it as *dimyon*, imagination. Rav Yisrael Salanter in his famous epistle called *Iggeres Hamussar*, the letter of *mussar*, he writes that this world is like a sea, like an ocean with waves, big waves. And the waves are *dimyon*, imagination. We are being buffeted by huge waves of imagination. We are imagining things that we could do and have fun in life. And there's no rest; we're being pushed up and down, and from side to side.

## The Snake in Your Head

Now, this is already an entirely new type of disguise. Because we're talking now about our own thoughts! He's not disguised as a college professor or even as a man with a beard. It's much worse than that – he's disguised as your own thoughts! Ach!

Now that's not my statement; it comes from the Chovos Halevavos. He says that the *yetzer hara* participates in all of our thinking in order to see to it that things turn out the way he likes to see them turn out. And one of his favorite weapons is imagination, *dimyon*. That's why most of mankind are enticed by the *yetzer hara* – *because they don't dream that they have any contact with it*. It doesn't even enter their mind because it's concealed in such a manner, in their thoughts, that nobody who is being ensnared by it realizes what's taking place. He's talking to you and crawling around your thoughts, but he's camouflaged among everything else in your head.

## The Stealth Attack

And so now you understand how it can happen that the most fortunate generation in history, they who were soon going to enter into Eretz Canaan as the conquering nation, and instead of being full of happiness, they were dissatisfied with their station. How could it be that they're imagining maybe it's better somewhere else? Because it doesn't happen openly – it happens stealthily, disguised as your own thoughts! "It's better over there!"

And that's the famous verse that Shlomo Hamelech taught us in Mishlei: עֵינֵי כֹסִיל בְּקֶצֶה אֶרֶץ – *The eyes of a fool are on the end of the world* (17:24). The *yetzer* makes you into a fool and you're looking for things beyond and beyond and beyond. Over there the grass is greener; maybe over there I'll find something happier.

You remember when you used to go on a picnic with your family – in the good old days when it was still possible to picnic in public parks – so your parents took out the basket of lunch to sit down on the grass. And you said, "Ma, the grass here is all trodden out. Let's go down that road there; you see there on the hill, it's all green over there!" Now, when you finally get to that hill, you see that the grass is even less green over there. But no matter, you'll do it again next time.

## Childish Adults

Not only children; adults too. You can prove it immediately by walking out into the street. Why are so many cars going in two directions? If everything is so good in Coney Island all the cars should be going in this direction. If everything is so good in Manhattan, all the cars should be going there. But you see there are two streams of cars, from Coney Island they're going to Manhattan and from Manhattan they're going to Coney Island. And not only are they going in these two directions, they're going crisscross too. They're travelling down Avenue R and Avenue S, up and down. People are traveling in every conceivable direction. Because

they are imagining that there are better times someplace else.

The great outdoors! There are plenty of people who buy camping equipment and they go and seek happiness someplace out in the forest and the fields. It's nothing but imagination because when they come to the fields they'll find people there – the loggers working there – who look at them like lunatics. “You forsook your comfortable home in the city and you came out here?! We can't help ourselves. We have to work in a logging camp; it's our livelihood. But you *meshugaim*, what are you doing here?!”

“And you're going fishing too?! What dumbbells you are! Go to a fish store in the city and you can buy the best, the choicest fish. Here you'll sit all day long, maybe you'll catch one fish. What in the world were you thinking?”

### **The Amazon Fraud**

I remember, there was a doctor I knew in Manhattan, an *am ha'aretz*. So when he was very old, he told his family that he wasn't yet satisfied – he was searching for something still. And so this old fool traveled to Brazil to visit the Amazon Rainforest and he took a trip down the Amazon River in a boat.

I can picture how it went. An old man with his creaking bones – he had arthritis already – is traveling down the river and he's having *chai times charata* why he didn't remain home in his flat in Manhattan. And he's waving off those huge mosquitoes that were zeroing in on him. Back home he couldn't get such mosquitoes – he'd have to go to a pet store to see such big creatures.

Anyhow, when he came home so this faker told his family – he couldn't admit that he was the *kesil*, the fool of Mishlei – so he said, “Now, I'm ready to die.” Of course he was ready to die. Anybody would be ready to die after such a trip!

### **Emigrating and Immigrating**

Why are airplanes taking off every minute to different parts of the world with travelers? I'm talking now about *frum* Jews! They're traveling for things that they imagine they're going to find someplace else. All over the world people are doing their best to get a visa to America but Americans are spending so much money on visiting those places where the people would like to leave.

Oh, but you read a description in the National Geographic Magazine of an island in the South Seas or a certain country, let's say a Spanish province, oh how wonderful it is. You'll enjoy the view and you'll see the grapevines and you see the peasants gathering their produce from the fields. And you're so inspired by this lovely landscape.

But don't you realize that all these peasants are barefoot? They can't afford a pair of shoes. And they're all hoping that someday they'll be able to go to New York and live in a slum. They'd do anything for that because they understand the *sheker* of their environment. The romance, the glamor, is only in the eye of the beholder. It's because he is a stranger, because it's the other side of the world, that he is able to imagine these things.

### **Travel Buffs and Travel Bluffs**

That's the cause for the entire travel business. The *yetzer hara* is disguised as the travel agents and he's busy bluffing the world. They have pictures of beaches someplace else, an island someplace, and they want to persuade you to buy tickets and to travel there. All the places that sell tours are making a living out of imagination. “If I travel someplace else, then it's going to be enjoyable over there.” And then when they get there, they discover that people from over there are traveling over here and that the whole thing is nothing but imagination.

And that's what Rav Yisrael Salanter is telling us, that this world is an ocean of waves. Not only for traveling – all forms of wanting something else,

something different. Even if you're a poor fellow sitting in Flatbush and you can't afford the trips anyhow – for you going to Boro Park is already a trip – don't think that you're sitting quietly, securely, in the calm waters of your own thoughts. No, it's not calm at all. It's raging with waves of imagination, various *dimyonos*. And it's all false; it's all *yetzer hara*.

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## Part III. Crushing the Snake

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### If Only...

Now one of the most prevalent *dimyonos* that plague people is the thought that we would be better off, more successful, if only we were in a different situation. *If only!* *If only* I was living over there in my neighbor's house. *If only* I had a better career, a better boss, more money. *If only* I had my friend's head or more time. All types of arguments the *yetzer hara* gives, that make us think our situation is not what is best for us. And most of mankind – when I say most, I mean *the vast majority* of people – are not as successful as they could be because of this *yetzer*.

So here's a boy in Flatbush and he's thinking, "If only I had a different set of parents, then I could be successful. But with such parents, who can get along?!" He's not thinking about Hawaii or the Amazon; but his eyes are still *b'ktzei haaretz*, somewhere else, over the horizon. And then when he's married, "If I had married a different woman, it would have been much better."

### An Empty Dream

I had that last week. A woman calls me on the phone and says, "If I had a different mother-in-law, then I could live a normal life; then I'd be able to succeed." Again and again, it's the same *yetzer*. And it's all a delusion; a *chalom*, an empty dream. It's this snake that is disguising himself in people's thoughts, encouraging them to look around in other places for imaginary opportunities.

That's why when you're sitting in the yeshiva and learning, everything outside becomes glamorous. The yeshiva man is sitting in front of his Gemara and the thought creeps into his head, "Out there in the ball park, that's where I could be successful." Or, "I'd be happier if I was in the theatre now." And the woman in her little humble apartment, she's cooking supper for her big family and the *yetzer hara* is crawling in the kitchen, in her mind, trying to bite her: "If only I could be working in a big office, like my cousin in Manhattan, doing something important."

And so we have to lift up the *nachash* and say, "Ah *nechtigeh tug!* Your unmarried working cousin in Manhattan, what does she have? A barren existence." Don't deceive yourself. A woman is not satisfied by being, let's say, an executive in a business. It's all fake. She's sitting in her office not fulfilling her purpose as a mother, not fulfilling her purpose of making a home. Her home is nothing but an apartment on the West Side. She comes home at night to a lonely apartment and she's thinking, "This is what I was created for?" She puts up a bluff, but she is dissatisfied.

### Men Are Not Women

A woman has a nature and a man has a nature, and each nature has to be fulfilled according to its own criteria. A woman's nature is most fully fulfilled when she has a family – by means of her children, that's where all the characteristics that are stored up within the depth of her nature come to the surface. She is full of *chessed*, of giving, and her greatness and perfection are most accentuated in the home. And so the woman cooking for her family has to unmask the *yetzer* and know that the most glamorous place is right there in front of the oven.

And the yeshiva man thinking about the movies? It's a delusion! Why do people go to the theater at night? Because they aren't satisfied at home. If you see a man running out to the grocery at ten o'clock at night to buy eggs, does it mean he has eggs at

home? No, it means he needs something; he's lacking something. So he goes outside and pays money for a movie. But what is it? A delusion; it's all *sheker*. The story never happened; it was all imagination.

He walks out into the dark street, and now the lights are out and the actors are no longer there. "I gave away my money for nothing. I wasted three hours for nothing." Even though they won't say it, they feel it; they feel that it's an empty life and they have to continue searching for something better. And so the yeshiva man must know that the place that is most glamorous is right here in the yeshiva! He is living life!

### Catching Snakes

Only that the *yetzer hara* is crawling in our minds trying to bite – he's disguised in your thoughts – and therefore we have to spend our lives unmasking the *nachash* and telling ourselves, telling others, "Look! It's nothing! It's *sheker*!" You know, the United States Government knows that they have foreign spies even in their intelligence department. They know that. A few years ago the head of the CIA said that we have snakes, poisonous snakes, in our own government. Those were his words – "poisonous snakes". So what do they do? They're always on the alert; they employ stratagems in order to unmask them.

And that's what we have to do too. We have to be on guard always; always with strategies. And what's the first strategy we employ? **שִׁים אוֹתוֹ עַל נֶס** – Let yourself know that it's *dimyon*, that it's a mirage. When you do that, you learn the wiles of the *yetzer hara* and you are able to protect yourself against it.

### Too Late to Accomplish

Now, it's a *rachmanus* on those who didn't come here tonight – they won't know about it. Maybe they'll hear about it in other places. I hope so. But if not, if you don't raise up this *sheker* on a pole and

recognize these thoughts as nothing but a snake looking to bite you, it's a tragedy. Because you know when you'll discover the truth? When it's too late – just before you enter the door of Yereim Chapel in a hundred and twenty years from now. They'll open the back of the car and roll you out in the hearse and you'll look back at the world and you'll kick yourself. "What was I thinking?! I missed out on the opportunity in this world. I was looking here and there while my opportunity was exactly where Hashem placed me; on *my* block, in *my* home, in *my* kitchen, at *my* job, in *my* yeshiva, with *my* parents, *my* husband and *my* mother in law." But it's too late now. They're taking you to the cemetery already.

People's lives are being wasted away because of their hankering for somewhere else, something else, when actually there's so much to accomplish right here. You can learn how to *daven*. You think that's a small accomplishment? Very few people have learned how to *daven*. Here's a yeshiva man standing in front of the bulletin board reading the announcements on the bulletin board and he's shaking. He's looking at the bulletin board or picking his nose, and he's saying the words. And even the better ones, the fact that you come to the synagogue and you say a certain *nigun* and you sway in a certain way and you're superficially tickled with inspiration is nothing at all, or next to nothing.

You have to train yourself to understand what you're saying. Otherwise many spend their entire lives praying every morning and they are entirely unaware of what they're saying. You must put in time to learn *tefillah*. You must put in effort. *Tefillah* is described in the Gemara as **דְּבָרִים הָעוֹמְדִים בְּרֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם** – something that stand at the top of the world. Which means that it is one of the most important achievements in our lives. And you can't do that if you're living always with *dimyonos*.

### Deeds and Kindness

Also to do *mitzvos* as much as you can. This life that you were given, that's the one opportunity



you'll have. In the Next World, no more *mitzvos* to do. There are achievements also that you have to accomplish in the field of helping people. Now if you're learning Torah and others are available to help you're not *mechuyav* to help. But if you want to spend your time on *chessed* there's so much to be done. Many deeds are waiting to be done. People have to be saved from destruction. They're ruining their lives. All around us, men and women, boys and girls, have to be saved. It's the greatest kindness to help them out of the pit into which they have fallen.

To do kindness to people is one of the great functions of life and it's available wherever you are. To help people. To encourage people. To smile at people. To be friendly to the world. And to encourage them and to advise them. It's a very great function of a man and Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks with favor on such a man because that's Hakadosh Baruch Hu's *shaliach*, His messenger.

### Drive Safely!

Now, all these things take a mind, an uncluttered mind. But when people are busy with everything else except these things – sometimes they do a little bit of this and a little bit of that, but their lives are being spent chasing around, running after mirages, will o' the wisps, things that don't exist. It takes a mind to accomplish and a mind filled with *dimyonos* is not available for that.

Imagine a man is driving on a highway. So if he's a responsible driver, his eyes are not wandering. He is looking straight ahead on the road. It's only if you keep your eyes on the road in front of you instead of looking far out to the ends of the earth, that's how you'll accomplish while you're driving on the highway of life. That's what Mishlei tells us in that *possuk* about the fool who's always looking somewhere else. **אֶת פְּנֵי מִבֵּין חֲכָמָה** – *In front of the understanding man there is chochmah* (17:24). Which means he's focused on what's before him, all the opportunities to gain wisdom, to be successful, that are laid out for him in his own *daled amos*.

**וְעֵינָיו בְּסִיל** – *But where are the eyes of the fool?*  
**בְּקִצָּה הָאָרֶץ** – *He's staring over there at far off landscapes and horizons.* The one who's fooled by the yetzer, he's looking around, looking everywhere except where he should look. In front of him he's not looking and therefore he comes to disaster. When you don't keep your eyes on the road of course there's going to be a crash-up sooner or later.

### Focus on the Goal

Wherever you are, whatever road Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose for you, that's exactly where you belong. Now, I'm not saying a person shouldn't try to get a leg up in life, that he shouldn't try to better his situation, but wherever you do find yourself, forget about someplace better. Go ahead! Of course, do what's necessary. Be sensible. But outside of doing what's necessary don't let anything distract you from your purpose in life.

That's what they used to tell a man who was leaving the yeshiva in the olden days of the Gemara. His fellow yeshiva men gave him a *brachah* and they used to say **עֵפְעֵפִיךָ יִישָׁרוּ נֶגְדְךָ** – *Your eyes should look straight ahead* (Brachos 17a). On the path of life, look straight ahead. Don't let your eyes wander. **לֹא תִתְּנוּ** **אֲחֵרֵי לְבַבְכֶּם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם** – *You shouldn't spy out what's doing over here and what's doing over there* (Bamidbar 15:39).

That's what the Mesillas Yeshtarim tells us at the beginning of his *sefer*. He says a man should know to what he should put **מִבְטּוֹ וּמִגְמוּלוֹ** – *his gaze, his look*, **כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו** – *all the days of his life*. Always he should be focusing towards one point. What are you aiming for? To serve Hashem, Olam Haba, *shleimus*.

And the yetzer *hara* wants to upend that. He wants you to look elsewhere, to look everywhere else but here. That's what Rav Yisrael means that the world is a sea where there are big waves of *dimyon*, of imagination, buffeting us to and fro and we have to do whatever we can that we shouldn't be drowned in this ocean of imagination. And the

