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PERCEIVING THAT WE ARE IN DARKNESS

We live in a *dor* where the *choshech* is such a *choshech* and people have accustomed themselves to the darkness that they actually perceive as light. The *passuk* says, תשת חשך ויהי לילה, Hashem placed the world under *choshech* and it became night (Tehillim 104:20). The *gemara* (Bava Metzia 83b) explains that this refers to *olam hazeh*. The Torah is teaching me that *olam hazeh* is a *matzav* of *choshech*.¹

Now what does that mean? Some cool guys like to walk around with sunglasses even at nighttime, so for them maybe it's *choshech*, but most normal people see *ohr*. It looks beautiful. So what does *choshech* mean? The definition of *choshech* is when you're in a situation where you cannot perceive what's going on very far away and sometimes even up close. You don't see what's there. You could imagine you're seeing things that are not there, and you could be unaware of things that are actually there.

A CHILD'S VIEWPOINT

Now, one of the areas where the *choshech* of *olam hazeh* is most felt is in the area of *emunah*. People have absolutely no idea what is happening around them. They don't know how to decipher anything. I always try to picture this from a child's view. A small child is always on the floor, crawling on the floor, or lying on the floor. I always wondered, if a child could talk and you would ask him, "Tell me what do you see in the world?" What do you think he would say? He sees a world of shoes. Maybe socks. Maybe a world of feet. That's his whole world. He can't look up to see the sky. Did you ever see a kid trying to look up? Their world is right here. They see shoes. Is that *choshech*? Of course it's *choshech*. It's *gornisht*. They're not seeing anything.

Let's say there is a child who is a little older and he walks into a room, and there are people having a discussion. You'll ask him what he sees. He has no idea what he sees. Let's say he sees them, they're discussing something about a *devar mitzvah*, and it gets a little heated. He might think they're having a fight. He has no idea. He can't even begin

¹ דרש רבי זירא ואמרי לה תני רב יוסף מאי דכתבי (תהלים קד כ) תשת חשך ויהי לילה בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער תשת חשך ויהי לילה זה העולם הזה שדומה לילה בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער אלו רשעים שבו שדמוין לחיה שביער

to conceptualize what's going on. He has no grasp.

LEARNING TO SEE WITH THE TORAH'S LIGHT

You have to know that in this world, everything you see and everything you detect is *choshech*. You have no concept of what you are seeing. So what's the methodology of becoming aware and seeing and getting a perspective?

Let's say there's a blackout. What do you do? You light candles, or you get a flashlight. Without bringing *ohr* into the room, you cannot see what's going on. You could guess your way around, and after a while, you may become accustomed to the darkness. It may feel less scary when you see there are no monsters. If you live like that for a long time, it becomes familiar to you, but you still can't really see anything.

The way to bring *ohr* into our lives and to know how to perceive things is only through the light of Torah. Torah is *ohr*. Have you ever heard of that? *Torah orah*. Torah is *ohr*. Now, the *ohr* of Torah is the only thing that allows you, and enables you, to really see what's going on. Without that light, you're as blind as a bat.

In today's *frum* world, one of the biggest *klalos* we have is that, even though people look like they're observant (they're wearing yarmulkes and *tzitzis*; maybe some are even wearing white shirts, black hats, and jackets; some of them have *peyos*, some of them have long coats, some of them have short coats), but they're also in *olam hazeh*. When you're in *olam hazeh*, if you don't have a flashlight, or you don't use your flashlight, you're in darkness. If you ask people for their opinions, say, their opinion about the *shidduch* crisis. The opinion they will give you has absolutely nothing to do with Torah, zilch, diddly doo. It has nothing to do with Hashem's perspective. They don't see it as a 'Hashem thing.' Some people see it as a mathematics problem. They all say it's a math and demographic problem that Hashem created: too many girls, not enough boys, getting married at the same age, not *chassidish*, yes *chassidish*. Whatever it is. But the problem still is, are you looking at something through the eyes of the Torah? If you are, then there is hope that you are seeing it for what it is. Even then it depends on how strong your flashlight is. What if you have a very weak flashlight? You'll see very little. The whole goal that we're trying to accomplish with our *Yahadus*, with our Judaism, is we're trying to acquire an ability to perceive things and view things from the eyes of reality, i.e., the eyes of Hashem.

IF IT'S NOT TORAH, IT'S MADE UP

I remember when I first came to this awareness, I began to weigh everything. When I thought about something, I asked myself, "What is my

thought about this based on? Is it from the Torah or from some media? Is it from one of my friends who didn't know dip? Where is it coming from?"

You know what many people have told me? "There's common sense." There's no common sense. Common sense is *gornisht*. You have to realize that today, all of our senses are influenced by thoughts that are anti-Torah in an unbelievable way. And everybody has good ideas today. You have ideas on how to be *mechanech* your kids that are 'much better' than Torah. The Torah is 'abusive.' The Torah is 'radical.' The Torah is 'extreme.' You're not going to succeed in that fashion. Secular people tell you how to think, how to love your spouse, how to do this with your friends, what your social life should be, and how important it is to have friends and play dates. Afterward, if they can plug it into the Torah, they plug it into the Torah. We have to start to think and rethink everything and ask ourselves: Is this Hashem's perspective, or is it some made-up abracadabra, and it has nothing to do with reality?

I don't care how *frum* you look. We are all challenged with this – because *emunah* is something that's weak in our generation. Now, what compounds it specifically in our generation is what the *gemara* (Sotah 49b) tells us: בעקבות משיחא הוצפא יסגא, at the time of Mashiach, *chutzpah* (impudence) will increase. You know what the definition of הוצפא is? הוצפא יסגא is when a person knows nothing, but acts as if he knows everything. *Be'etzem* he has no *shaychus* to any *yediyah* at all. So all that stuff, he either made it up, thought up, or read it from some other fool. It has no Torah source. Until a person acknowledges that and realizes that, he will continue making the same mistake. I once was talking with Rav Matisyahu Salomon about a well-intentioned person who decided that they don't teach *emunah* in schools, and he came up with a whole idea of how to teach *emunah*. That person was definitely well-intentioned. 100%. He printed *sefarim*. Now, people who were knowledgeable of the Torah's view of *emunah* felt that this person was *pashut* uprooting Yiddishkeit because, for thousands of years *emunah* was taught a certain way, and this fellow, because he saw a "problem," decided *emunah* can't be taught that way anymore. He's going to tell us a new way.

This is *ziyuf* (forgery). Rav Yisroel Weintraub (1932-2010) used to call it "counterfeit Judaism." It looks great. It looks 100% *frum*. But the ideas and concepts of entertainment, of media, of enjoyment, and fun are the antithesis of the Torah. But they *pashut* incorporate it into the Torah. They "put a black hat and a little beard" on it, sometimes a big beard, and they make it out to be *kadosh kadosh kadosh* - but, in reality it's the antithesis of everything the Torah stands for. And when they hear someone say something against the new idea, you know what they think? "What's wrong with this guy? He's a radical. What's he talking about?"

WE ALL LIVE IN THE DARKNESS

Now, in this week's *parshah* there is a topic, a tremendous *sugya* about a famous battle. This battle is something that often goes on in our own lives. People find themselves in battle with others. Sometimes even the government comes against you.

There was a story in Lakewood where many fine precious *yungeleit* found themselves challenged. It's funny because almost every call I got on this issue always began with, "I don't know if you know the background of this challenge..." I said, "What is it?" I heard everybody say the same nonsense over and over. There was a governor in New Jersey, and this governor was a Republican. The *yeshivah* backed a Democrat. The Republican governor decided that he's going to teach the *yeshivah* a lesson because they didn't back him. Years ago, he also opened up a case against a bunch of rabbis. He tripped up a bunch of rabbis. They took this one degenerate snake who, under a little pressure, decided to go trip up *rabbanim*. They sent him to *rabbanim's* houses, saying, "I'd like to make a \$20,000 donation to your organization. Give me a kickback." They got other things like this, and they tripped up a lot of people and sent a lot of people to prison. And now this governor *taka* lost. He's *taka* not becoming the governor again, but because they started these cases against all the Yidden, so all the Yidden are now suffering the aftermath, but *ke'eilu*, as soon as this governor goes away and the new governor comes, it's going to be *over*, the whole *gezeirah* will be *batel*. That's what they all think now.

I am listening to this, and my heart is breaking. These are precious *yeshivaleit*, but they have absolutely no *emunah*. They don't even believe that Hashem runs the world. This has *zilch* to do with an overweight governor. It has nothing to do with him. It has nothing to do with Democrats or Republicans.

This is the *choshech* that we are talking about, *rabbosai*. This is *mamash* the *choshech*. You believe that this person has control. I said to a couple of these guys, "Do you have any idea why he only picked out these 100 or 200 people? I'm sure there were a lot more he could have picked if he wanted to look for people who are on government programs." "It's a *kasha*," they tell me, "maybe they'll be picked up in the next round. There was supposed to be the next round. They can't take on too many cases at one time. They're planning to take on cases in waves."

Now, let's analyze and think about this through the prism of the Torah.

THE FIGHT OF YAKOV AND EISAV

In this week's *parshah*, we have a story of two brothers. Eisav was an angry bear. Eisav, the Torah says, hated Yaakov. If I say, "I hate string beans," that doesn't mean anything. It's just that right now, I don't like the way they're made. Today, everybody says, 'hate.' We throw around these terms: hate, love. "I love pizza. I hate green beans. I hate this guy. I love this guy." It doesn't mean a thing.

When the Torah says Eisav hated Yaakov, you know what that means? That it was pure unadulterated 100% hate. I don't know what pure hate looks like. I hope to never know. But it was the kind of hate that murder was not a question. Eisav had no problem taking Yaakov's life. And it was funny because Eisav wasn't known as a *tzaddik*, but if somebody were to ask Eisav, "Why do you hate your brother?" he would say, "Over *bruchos*. Over *de bruchos*." Over the *bruchos*? What?! Are you a hypocrite, Eisav? Are you cuckoo? You hate your brother! I would understand your hate for Yakov if he took your wife away: if he would *mekarev* your wife, and convince her to leave you and become Jewish, I would understand that. Or if he got your kids to go away from you and become *frum* under Yaakov Avinu, I would understand that. If he took away your money, I would understand. But he took away your *bruchos*! So we see that Eisav really hated him like nobody's business. That's how hate works. People hate each other. There doesn't have to be any rational or valid reason.

And they finally have a confrontation. They're looking forward to a confrontation. Before the confrontation, one night, Yaakov Avinu is crossing over a river called the Yabok River. He takes his whole family across to the other side. Then, Yaakov goes back because he left some small jars behind. And he's accosted. Somebody challenges Yaakov, and there ensues the struggle of all times. There was no fight in history that ever went so long for one round. Hours! The standard round in a professional fight is a few minutes. More than that, they can't handle it. Even these big brutes, these big *chayos raos* that attack each other can only go for a few rounds, and then they have to rest. They have to drink water. They have to give themselves a little bath. They go through a whole thing. But Yaakov and this other person went a whole night. "ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר" - "and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" (Bereishis 32:25). Who was this person fighting him? He was the *malach* of Eisav. The *gemara* says the dust that they kicked up was dust that went to the heavens. That dust reached the heavens! Your understand?

But at the end of the night, the *malach* saw he couldn't beat Yaakov, so he wounded him. He gave him a wrestling move, and wounded him. And he tells him, "You're in good shape." Then he gives him a *brachah*.

If you take a look at that *brachah*, what was it? לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמו, "your name should not be called Yaakov anymore" (ibid. v. 29). You know what his name was changed to? כי אם ישראל - "Now your name is Yisrael." You know what Yisrael means? You're a fighter. You struggled with *malachim* and with people, and you won, כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל.

So Rashi says a strange thing. Which people did Yaakov struggle with? Rashi comments on words עם אנשים and says that Yakov fought עשו ולבן, with Lavan and Eisav. The angel was telling Yakov, "You struggled with Lavan and with Eisav and you beat them both. That's why your name is Yisrael."

THE BRISKER RAV'S BATTLE "IN SHAMAYIM"

The Brisker Rav asks: Who is this "backwards" *malach*? Yaakov certainly confronted Lavan for many years. But he hasn't confronted Eisav yet since he ran away from his house! What does it mean that he is called Yisrael because he fought and beat Eisav?! Yaakov only fought with the *malach* of Eisav, but hasn't met the actual Eisav yet!

I'm going to tell you a little story now of when the Brisker Rav said this *vort*. This is a clear example that shows the distinction between viewing something through Torah eyes and viewing something through *goyish* eyes, or non-Torah eyes.

When WWII broke out on September 1, 1939, the Brisker Rav was on a vacation in Krenitz, a spa town in southern Poland, with his oldest son Rav Berel (Yosef Dov). Because he couldn't go home to Brisk anymore, he first escaped to Warsaw, where he stayed for a few weeks, and then he made his way to Vilna, which was under Russian control at the time.² The Brisker Rav was in Vilna for Sukkos that year. They knew somebody in Vilna who arranged for them to stay in a very nice, comfortable, large home, in the city. The Brisker Rav moved into that home, and he said *shiyorim* there. It was a very unique period of time. They were waiting to receive visas to be able to continue on to Eretz Yisrael.

A few months before the Brisker Rav left this house, the Russian officers were looking for places to move into in the city. They would often make their headquarters in a house they found. Some of these officers

² The Russians got control of Lithuania, including Vilna, on September 28, 1939, after signing a Secret Protocol with Nazi Germany. Seven of Brisker Rav's children, 5 boys and 2 girls (e.g., Rav Yosef Dov, Rav Chaim, Rav Raphael, Rav Meshulam Dovid, Rav Meir and two sisters, the future Rebbetzins Lifsha Feinstein and Rivka Schiff) joined him in Vilna in 1939, where they stayed until the winter of 1941, and made their way to Eretz Yisroel. After the Rav had already left Vilna, the Rebbetzin, Alta Hendel, with three remaining children, HY"D, couldn't obtain her previously arranged visas in Vilna (because the office was closed on the day when she arrived) and they had to return to Brisk, where they were murdered by Nazis in the summer of 1941, after Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

went around from house to house, picking nice houses to move into. They would go through a house, check it out, and any house that met their interest, they would take it for their own. My *rebbe* told me, the way they did it was, they'd go through your house, and you'd wait with bated breath. They'd walk out of the house, and they would put a piece of paper outside the door, and it said, "You have forty-eight hours to leave this property." They were very 'nice' people. Where are you going to live? They always gave you a replacement.

When the officers came to the Brisker Rav's house, they went through the house, and left a pink slip on the outside of the door. They wanted his house. It was a desirable residence, my *rebbe* told me. The family took the pink slip off the door and put it down on their table, and began to get frightened. Anybody would get frightened in this situation. They had arrangements, but when the children saw this they literally began to shake. The Brisker Rav said not to worry.

The children wanted to go check where the replacement house was and what kind of house it was. The Brisker Rav didn't really want them to go look. He felt it wasn't necessary as of yet. But his oldest daughter went anyway. She took a train to this place. It was outside of town. She got off the train and had to walk an hour in the snow to find the address. It was a place in the middle of the woods. Nobody lived around there. It was a summer home. It had absolutely no windows, no doors, and no heating. This is in the middle of the winter. She came back and told the family what she saw. It was a very tense situation. There were some refugees that didn't have where to go.

"LET ME TEACH YOU A RASHI"

The Brisker Rav saw that his children were very nervous, so he said to one of them, "Come. Let me show you a Rashi." And he showed him the Rashi on this passuk, and he said to them, "What's the *pshat* that the *malach* said Yaakov beat Eisav if he didn't even meet Eisav yet? What's the *pshat*? The *pshat* is," he said, "that you know who the man who fought with Yaakov was? Rashi says he was *שרו של עשו*, he was the *malach* of Eisav. Every person has a *malach* that represents him. Eisav was the father of his nation, of a whole group of *goyim*. He had a very big *malach* up there. The one who Yaakov was fighting was the *malach* of Eisav." The Brisker Rav said, "You have to understand something - all *inyanim* and everything that transpires in this world, what you see transpiring between two individuals, between non-Jews and Jews - is not a battle down here in the physical world, it's not a struggle that begins here. The struggle is taking place upstairs in *shamayim*. And whoever wins in *shamayim* determines who wins down here on the *aretz*! Yaakov Avinu fought the

fight with the *malach* of Eisav, and he won. The *malach* told him, 'You should know you didn't only beat me. You beat me and you beat Eisav. Eisav was a done deal. You already beat him.'

The Brisker Rav continued, "You have to understand our situation through this Rashi." You have to hear how the Brisker Rav learned this *sugya* - because I wouldn't have necessarily applied it to that case. This is not heavenly *zachen*. They weren't out to get the Brisker Rav. They needed a place to live. Whatever nonsense I could come up with. But in Brisk *תורת אמת היתה בפיהו* and the Brisker Rav said as follows:

"You should know from this," he told his *kinderlach*, "it makes no difference what papers they put on our door. You have to know that we have to fight this battle right now - upstairs - and if upstairs we'll be *beseder* and we'll win, there's nothing to be afraid of and nothing to be worried about down here." His children said it was like *מים קרים על נפש עיפה*, like cold water for a weary soul.

It was *taka* amazing. What happened? The Brisker Rav said, "Let's say Tehillim." And the Brisker Rav began to engage in the battle. His battle was fought with Tehillim. That's how you fight the battle. The *emes* was, a funny thing happened. A short while later, some Russian officers showed up with their wives and daughters to move in. Now the Brisker Rav's family were supposed to have moved out already. The rule was if you didn't move out, you're not getting your stuff. Everything is gone. They came in. They walked a little into the house. They wrinkled their noses, "Uch. We don't want this place." And they walked out. Incredible!

From *Parshas Vayishlach*, they lived in that *dirah* for another two months until Shvat of 1941. A number of times in that *tekufah*, the Russian officers came to see the *dirah*, and the exact same thing happened every time. They came in, and they didn't like it. They weren't happy with it. They turned up their noses, disappointed. "We don't want this place."

On the fourth day of *Shevat*, the Brisker Rav's family was leaving Vilna. They had all the packages packed up. They walked out of the house, and were *pashut* standing outside the house. The Russians came and moved in happily. They loved the house.

It was a *pele gadol*. What's the *pshat*? It made no sense that this house wasn't *motzei chen* in their eyes, that they didn't like it. It was a big *dirah*. It was a nice *dirah*. It had many rooms. It was a very wealthy person's *dirah*. He said each room was the size of two rooms in a normal house in Eretz Yisrael. It had a kitchen and other rooms. It was a big place. It was a massive *pele*.

ALL BATTLES TAKE PLACE 'UPSTAIRS'

You have to understand, Rabosai, when I heard this story from my *rebbe*, I thought about it so deeply and so many times and I realized, "You know how blind we are?" If somebody starts up with me, what do I say? "Oh, he's an anti-Semite." If a Jew starts up with me, he's also an anti-Semite. Everybody is anti-Semite. You don't realize that all battles take place upstairs!

I know a fellow who was being challenged by the government. It was amazing. This fellow wore a yarmulke. He was a *ba'al teshuvah*. The prosecutor came over in the middle of the case to him and said, "Where do you *daven*?" He started *shmoozing* him up like *mamash* a friend. He asked him, "Do you think I'm going to win?" (This fellow's own lawyer told him that it looked good). The prosecutor told him it has nothing to do with him. The prosecutor told him afterwards, "It's nothing personal. This is my job. I prosecute people. You get a lawyer to defend yourself, and I prosecute you."

I told him, "You're making a major mistake. Your prosecution is not happening down here. It's happening upstairs. Upstairs, we're challenged." They spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars on a defense, and the *emes* was, it was such a silly white-collar crime and everybody explained it - all the '*chachamim* from Chelm' came together and they explained it - "Oh, he just got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Just now, there are stories of people stealing money from banks, so they're really upset and they're putting their foot down." I told him, "There are many people doing the same thing you're doing and not getting caught. It's all happening upstairs." I told him, "The battle you've got to fight is the upstairs battle. That's where you win. You win all your battles upstairs."

When somebody comes to challenge you and you make that person your enemy, you know what you're doing? You're the guy who, when he sees enemies coming at him, takes a paper bag, pulls it over his head, gets a drawstring, ties it around his neck, and says, "I'm the winner. All the enemies are gone." Are you cuckoo? You put a bag over your head, my friend?! You can't see anything!

People get angry at people. People are fearful of *goyim*. They're fearful of this. They're fearful of that. They have all kinds of stuff in their minds. They have *ta'anos* up to the kazoos. "That guy did this to me." "This cop is an anti-Semite." "That cop is an anti-Semite." "This judge threw the book at me." "This store clerk wasn't nice to me." "Avis Car Rental hates Jews, and Hertz loves Jews." And then, "Hertz also hates Jews, and all the Jews break their cars." The stories people live in are unreal! It's like the

story with the shoes. It's like the little kid on the floor. "What do you see?" "Shoes." A world full of shoes. The kid doesn't see people. He sees shoes. Maybe his Tatty. Maybe his Mommy. But the shoes fill his vision.

THE TORAH PERSPECTIVE: A MATURE VIEWPOINT

Rabosai, we have to acquire a Torah perspective. Do you know when we became aware of this? Was there ever a time when we personally became aware of this perspective, or do we have to accept it from the Torah?

Hashem treated us all to an episode where He revealed this secret to us. Do you know when that was? *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. Hashem took us, and He opened up all the heavens. He opened up the depths of the ground, and He said, "Look. Take a look as high as you want and as low as you want. I'm the only thing that exists. There's nothing else but Me. It's *Hashem echad*. אין עוד מלבדו. What do you think people are? They're nothing but little plastic soldiers. They have no *koach*. They can't do a thing. They only work and do when I push the button and tell them to do. I'm in charge," Hashem says. "Deal with Me. Not with that *tipesh*. Not with the little plastic soldier."

That's what you have to understand. All battles are fought in *shamayim*.

Sometimes a person says, "I'm *davening* that the judge should die." Many people told me that actually. I tell them, "You are a *tipesh*. Why don't you *daven* that Hashem should give you a *zechus* and get you off the hook? If the judge is going to die, you think that's going to help you?" I said, "That's not what you *daven* for. The judge is not your nemesis. He's not the one who is out to get you. Nor the policeman. He has *seichel* of a cat. What *seichel* does he have? He doesn't know who you are. He doesn't know what you are. He doesn't know how you are. It's just Hashem." Rabosai, get that into your system. Then you know what happens? You're an adult. Then you're looking at the world from a mature viewpoint.

When I say the *chutzpah yasgi*, it's because any *frum* person who goes into the working world or stays in the *yeshivah* and listens to Chachmei Chelm from the working world, who tell you advice in every area of your life - that has absolutely nothing to do with the Torah.

BURN THAT CHUMASH!

I remember reading a story that really shook me up. A guy decided that Yiddishkeit was *shvach* in Europe. He decided that the children weren't getting a real feeling of the Torah and that the Torah was boring to them. It wasn't interesting to them. He decided to come up with a

plan to make the Torah interesting. What did he do? He printed his own *chumash*. Just a *chumash*. With pictures. And he depicted all the episodes based on *Chazal*. It didn't have so many words in there. It just had a short word version. He had his own explanations on the bottom. He wanted to disseminate this book to get people into Yiddishkeit. It should become a household item.

He came to the Chafetz Chaim, and the Chafetz Chaim wouldn't touch the book with his hand. He wiped it onto the floor. He told him to burn them all. The guy came for a *haskamah*. The guy was flabbergasted. "Rebbe, I'm trying to help." The Chafetz Chaim told him, "You're destroying Yiddishkeit." The fellow didn't let up, "But Rebbe, don't you know the *matzav*? Don't you know what's going on in the world? You're an old man sitting here in Radin. You might not be aware. But you know what's going on?! There's a fire burning out there! The world needs help! You've got to make it interesting for the kids." The Chofetz Chaim said, "You can't introduce anything new that's not Torah. What you are doing is not Torah." You may be well intentioned, but it doesn't make it not garbage. That's what a person has to realize.

I remember reading this story. I could understand how upset the guy was. The guy *mamash* thought about this, planned it, printed it. He invested money. He meant good. He *be'emes* was bothered by the situation! He came up with a good plan – and it makes sense to us. Kids like pictures better than words. Everybody likes pictures better than words. It's amazing. But that wasn't Hashem's plan. We all grew up on Curious George with the pictures or Dr. Seuss with the pictures. Three Bears and Goldilocks. We remember those pictures. I remember the pictures until today. But that's not how you teach Torah. That's not Torah. Torah never came with pictures. Never! It's *kadosh*.

But people still complain and say, "But this strict approach doesn't work in today's world. It doesn't work. Don't you understand, it doesn't work?!" If a person thinks like that, a person has no *shaychus* to Torah. He's living in darkness. He's stuck in the *choshech* of *olam hazeh*. *Nebach*, that person just doesn't get it.

GET THE TORAH VIEW BY LEARNING TORAH AND GEMARA

Our goal, what we're trying to reach is to get that view, the Torah viewpoint. When you learn *gemara* you get the same thing. Somebody once asked me, "How do you get it from learning *gemara*?" You get the same thing. You know how? When you learn *gemara* you know what you're doing? You're renewing your awareness of *Har Sinai*. When you're learning Torah, you're learning Torah with Hashem. This is the Torah we got from Sinai. I'm plugging into the Sinai experience. I'm keying into

Toras Hashem. I am reminding myself, "It's all Hashem. Everything is Hashem." Rav Papa says what Hashem said, and Abaye says what Hashem said, and Rava says what Hashem said. It's all from Hashem, Rabosai. And you've got to learn to get that view.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Perhaps the greatest *choshech*, the biggest darkness, of *olam hazeh* is our inability to see and understand that all the challenges we experience in our lives are really spiritual battles that need to be fought "up there" first. On a deeper level, the *choshech* is caused by the lack of *emunah*, a lack of a clear and transparent conviction of Who's behind and directing everything. Becoming aware of this reality requires the skill of analyzing these challenges through the prism of the Torah worldview. One example of that is an amazing story of the Brisker Rav's escape from Vilna in 1941, which teaches us how the battles and challenges we experience in this world actually take place in Shamayim, first, before their effects are manifested in the physical world. So if we win these spiritual, heavenly battles "up there" first - by elevating our *ruchnius*, correcting our mistakes and coming closer to Hashem - then the physical challenges will be resolved "down here." This coming week, I will think about one particular challenge I am currently experiencing and I will say to Hashem in my tefillah, "Hakodosh Boruch Hu, I believe that the reason I am challenged with this issue 'down here' is that, in reality, it is a test from You, in *shamayim*. Please give me clarity to understand what it is that I need to



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