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PARSHAS SHELACH



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR

SONG OF COMPLAINT

There is a powerful lesson to be learned from the episode of the *meraglim* that affects our daily lives.

Let us begin with a *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (18:20-21), מִפְּרֵי פִי אִישׁ תִּשְׁבַּע, בְּטֶנּוּ תְבוּאֹת שְׁפָתָיו יִשְׁבַּע, מֹת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד לְשׁוֹן וְאֵהָבָה יֹאכַל פְּרִיהֶ; תְבוּאֹת שְׁפָתָיו יִשְׁבַּע, “from the fruits of a man’s mouth,” תִּשְׁבַּע בְּטֶנּוּ, “he will become satiated.” תְבוּאֹת שְׁפָתָיו יִשְׁבַּע, “the fruits of his lips will satiate him.” מֹת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד לְשׁוֹן, “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” וְאֵהָבָה יֹאכַל פְּרִיהֶ, “and those who love to use their mouths properly will eat its fruit.”

Do you hear this *pasuk*? Do you have any idea what this *pasuk* means? Did you ever think that the fruits of your mouth will make you satiated? I know that the fruits of the trees make you satiated. They are *masbi’a* you. So listen to the words of the holy Ibn Ezra. The Ibn Ezra (*ibid*) says, *yochal piryah*, when the *pasuk* says you will eat of its fruit, it’s *keneged tvuas sfosav*, meaning to say, *im yedaber ra*, if a person will speak evil, *yavo’eihu maves*, it will bring him death.¹ *V’al davar tov*, but for speaking good, *yasig chayim*, he will achieve life. Now the question is, what’s the lesson of this? What’s the message? What does this mean?

This *pasuk* is one of the sources for the famous statement: “If a person speaks good, it will be good” - *es vet zein gut*. Now, this is a major *chiddush*. It is saying that a person has the power to be *mashpia tov* on himself or on others by speaking good about them, or even about himself.

So, let’s say you see a *matzev*, a situation where everyone is being challenged with *parnassah*. What do most people do when they are challenged with *parnassah*? They look through the newspaper, they ask friends if they know of an opportunity, or they try to figure out some way to find work. But even before that, what do they often do? Do they turn to Hashem and *daven*?

No. Very often, they complain.

The first thing they do is they utter a complaint about how bad their *matzev* is. “Why are we not in the same *matzev* as those

¹ יֹאכַל פְּרִיהֶ - כִּנְגַד תְבוּאֹת שְׁפָתָיו, כְּלוֹמַר אִם יִדְבַר רַע - יִבְוָאוּ מוֹת, וְעַל דְבַר טוֹב - יִשִּׁיג חַיִּים.

people? How do those people seem to be renovating their kitchens, adding rooms to their houses, sending all their ten kids to camps, going to Florida, and we could barely rub two nickels together?" They complain about their *matzav*. Wives complain, children complain, and husbands complain. That's a common *zemira* that everybody is familiar with.

I usually say to people, "Do you know what the most famous song is besides *Adon Olam*?" Everybody knows *Adon Olam*. Even if you're *frum*, even if you're modern, even if you're very modern, *Adon Olam* everybody sings. Everybody sings that song. Complaining is the second *zemira* that everybody knows.

People constantly complain about their *matzav*. What people don't realize is that by uttering complaints about their *matzav*, they are turning off the *shefa brachah*. From how many people have I heard, "My *shidduchim* are at a standstill. My *shidduchim* are not moving. I'm finished when it comes to *shidduchim*." Do you know what that does?! That's like taking the faucet of *shidduchim* and giving it a turn, a twist, and shutting it off! You call your mother up, share it with your mother, maybe with your siblings, your friends - what you are doing is closing off the faucet on your *brachah* even tighter.

אם ידבר רע יבואהו מות. That's what the Ibn Ezra says. If you speak evil about yourself, you'll bring death upon yourself. ועל דבר טוב ישיג - but if you speak good, you attain life. You can be *mashpia chaim*, life and goodness, upon yourself!

Have you ever heard people say, "I'm getting old, I'm getting sick, I'm going to die"? It gives them a push in the wrong direction. No, you know what the *maves* says? "Welcome home, come with me, follow me." But if a person speaks good words, it is *dibur tov*, he's going to be *masig chaim*, he will achieve life. People call me all the time about their *tzaros*. Do you know what I tell them? "Tell yourself it's going to be good." Just say, "Hashem, I know it's going to get better." You can't pay for camp? You can't pay your bills? Don't complain.

WHY PEOPLE COMPLAIN

Now, I will tell you why people complain to Hashem. It is because people have a tendency, already from when they are young, to complain to their parents. That is what they do. They go to their mommies, they go to their tatties, and they complain: "I don't have a bicycle. I don't go on trips. We never have any fun. This is the most boring family."

All the kids sing the same *zemiros*. You know what happens? Your life becomes boring. They complain about what they don't

have, instead of saying, we're going to have a good time, *Hashem* is going to provide for all our needs.

RELY ON HASHEM FOR BASICS

And then the next big question that they have, is that they come back to me, and say, "How do you know? Maybe *Hashem* knows what's best for me, and what's best for me is that I shouldn't have this or that." Have you ever heard of that? I tell people that's destructive.

It's one thing if you tell me you want to buy a plane, okay, I understand that *Hashem* might not want you to have a plane. Tell me you want to fly around the world, who says you should get to? You tell me you want to buy a vehicle that costs \$150,000. What for?

But do you think *Hashem* doesn't want you to have your basic needs that everybody else has? What father doesn't want his child to have the basic needs? Everybody wants their child to have what they need. Do you think He doesn't want your children to go to camp if they need to go to camp, like everybody else goes to camp? But in truth, you yourself are bringing the *ra* upon yourself - and then you blame *Hashem*.

Instead, a person should say, "Hashem, I know for sure that You are taking care of this. It is going to be good."

GUARANTEED VACATION, HOME

And I'll tell you where I saw this lesson brought out. If you ever go to *Eretz Yisrael* you can see this. In *Eretz Yisrael*, people generally, the average *hamon am, bnei Torah*, don't have a lot of money. They're living from hand to mouth. But then comes vacation time. It's amazing. In the days after *Pesach*, until the *zman* starts, it is a common vacation time. In the summer, it is a common vacation time. They do stuff over there that shocks me.

I remember the first time I was exposed to this and I saw *shleppers*, simple folks. If they don't have a license, they hire drivers. And they go up to these resorts for *frum* people, and stay for a number of days. They get food, they get treated like kings and queens. The children are offered tremendous activities. They're given things to keep them busy, they bring them storytellers and jokers and magicians and all kinds of stuff. And I figured if all these *shleppers* are going, then I'm for sure going. I told my wife, "Let's go."

We had our kids with us in *Eretz Yisrael* at the time. And I remember calling up places. And the price that I heard was a fortune for me. Three thousand, four thousand dollars! I said, "Dollars, not shekels?" No. These places cost good money. And I'm thinking

to myself, “How in the world are all these people going on these trips?!” Do you know what the answer is? Because they said they’re going on trips. They’re sure Hashem’s going to give them a trip.

Oh, I’m sure there are a few people who are negative in their nature and they will say, “No. No, no, no, no.” But it’s like, everybody goes. If you have a license, you rent a minivan, you rent the cars, and you’re off, and running to the races. It’s a very interesting thing to me.

Whatever a person feels he will get, he will get it. How does every Yerushalmi fellow, or every Bnei Brak fellow, or every Kiryat Sefer fellow who gets married, think he’s going to have a place to live? Did you ever meet a guy in America, a *yungerman*, who thinks when he’s getting married he’s going to move into a new home? I’ve never met somebody like that. Never. I’ve met people who have been married for a while, maybe a year or two, and they think they’ll jump on the bandwagon and grab a house early. But how does everybody in Eretz Yisroel think he’s getting a new home? It’s *mavhil al haraiyon*. You know why? *Az m’tracht gut*, if you think good, it’s going to be good.

Now it’s funny, certain things, they don’t *tracht gut*, so it’s *nisht gut*. Certain things they *tracht gut*, and it becomes good. What a person’s *koach* is with his *dibur* is *mavhil al haraiyon!*

POSITIVE INTERPRETATION

There’s a very interesting Gemara. The Gemara (Brochos 55b) says that if a person has a bad dream and he’s worried about it, you know what he should do?² He should go to somebody who is a friend of his and he should tell him the dream. And hopefully the friend is not a bad person, he’s a good person. and he tells the friend to interpret the dream positively. And his friend starts to tell him positive thoughts about his dream.

Now, what is this, something make-believe? It’s *bubbe-meisas*? So what if someone says, “I had a dream”? What his friend says has nothing to do with it. I go to this friend and I say, “Give me the *pisron*, interpret my dream.” And he interprets it positively. So what? You know what the *Gemara* says? That the outcome of most dreams is determined by the *pisron hachalom*, the interpretation.

What’s interpretation? It’s *dibur*. *Dibur tov* could change a negative situation to a positive situation. So if a person feels he’s under pressure, under *lachat*, what he should do is he should

² אמר רב הונא בר אמי אמר רבי פדת אמר רבי יוחנן: הוֹאֵה חִלּוּם וְנִפְשׁוּ עִגּוּמָה, יֵלֵךְ וְיִפְתְּרֵנוּ בְּפִי שְׁלִישָׁה. “יִפְתְּרֵנוּ”!? וְהָאֵמֵר רַב חֲסָדָא חִלְמָא דְלֵא מִפְשֵׁר פִּאגְרָתָא דְלֵא מִקְרִיא? אֵלֵא אִימָא: וְיִטְבִּינּוּ בְּפִי שְׁלִישָׁה. לִיתִּי תַלְתָּא וְלִימָא לֵהּ: “חִלְמָא טָבָא חֲזָא”.” וְלִימְרוּ לֵיהּ הֵנָּה: “טָבָא הוּא וְטָבָא לֵיהּ הֵי, רַחֲמֵנָא לְשׁוּיָה לְטָב. שְׁבַע זִמְיָנִין לְגַזְרוּ עֲלֵךְ מִן שְׁמֵי דְלֵהּ טָבָא, וְהֵי טָבָא.” וְלִימְרוּ שְׁלֵשׁ פְּדִיּוֹת, וְשֵׁשׁ שְׁלֹמֹת.

change and say, “You know what, my life is going to be wonderful, I’m going to have everything I need provided for me.” Imagine, a guy has an older car, maybe doesn’t have the latest car, and what if his wife says, “I’m afraid it’s gonna break down.” What is she doing?!

I have a relative who has an older car. I tried to get into it and drive it. After about two blocks, I decided, it is not for me. But they managed to drive from Lakewood to Cleveland! I’m driving three houses down the block and I couldn’t manage it. I said, “How do you drive that car?” “Why not? It’s a great car!” And I see it differently from him. It’s amazing. For the person who looks at it positively, it becomes positive. And for me, who doesn’t look at it positively, it’s not positive.

Rabbosai, this is a major *yesod* in life. How you interpret your future is how it will be. Do you have negative dreams? Interpret them positively. You have a Father in *Shamayim*. Hashem wants to provide the basics. *Poseach es yadecha*, Hashem says, ומשיב לל כל חי רצון.

Do you know people who are hypochondriacs? They’re always talking about being sick. They’re always worried about sicknesses. Why are people like that? You know what happens? It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. They become sick. They become poor, they become sick, their cars break down because of that. That’s what happens.

And then you have a person who’s positive, and he feels healthy, he feels *gezunt*, and always looking forward to having a great day. That’s a tremendous *brachah*.

MAKE IT GOOD, DESPITE A DECREE

I want to share with you a big *chiddush*, wonderful *chiddush* from the famous *sefer*, the *Ben Yehoyada*. You know who the author of the *Ben Yehoyada* is? It is the Ben Ish Chai. That *gaon*, the *tzaddik* from Baghdad. The *Ben Yehoyada* says like this: There’s a *Gemara in Brachos* (60b) that talks about Rabi Akiva.³ He was once going on the road, and he took with him a donkey and a chicken and a little candle. And he came to a town and he needed a place to sleep, and no one was offering a place for lodging. So what did he say? What would you say? You would get frustrated and you would say, “Where am I going to sleep tonight?” You’d wave your hands up and down. *Vus gait do? Vus vet zain?* Where will I go? What will be? Do you know what Rabbi Akiva said? כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד.

³ כי הא דרבי עקיבא דהוה קאזיל באורחא. מטא לההיא מתא, בעא אושפיזא לא יחבי ליה. אמר: “קל דעביד רחמנא — לטב”. אזל ובת בדברא, והוה בהדיה תרנגולא וחמרא ושרגא. אתא זיקא כבייה לשרגא. אתא שונרא אכליה לתרנגולא. אתא אריה אכליה לחמרא. אמר: “קל דעביד רחמנא — לטב”. ביה בליליא אתא גייסא, שבייה למתא. אמר לה: לאו אמרי לנו קל מה שעושה הקדוש ברוך הוא הלל לטובה.

When I was a kid, I often went to the mountains, where many times I used to stand waiting for a hitch. I'd see a guy drive by me and the guy didn't pick me up. I was very upset. I never knew that you are supposed to say, "כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד" at that stage in my life. I never realized it's all *l'tav*. A better car is coming. *Hashem* is giving you a better ride.

So, the *Gemara* says, a lion came and ate the donkey. A weasel came and ate the chicken. And then a wind came and blew out the candle. And Rabbi Akiva kept on saying עביד לטב רחמנא לטב. Now, that night some bandits arrived in that town and they cleaned out the place. They robbed it, they took all the people captive.

Nu, so Rabi Akiva said, *Lo amarti lachem*, didn't I tell you? כל מה שהשם עושה that whatever Hashem does is all *l'tova*. If they would have given me a place to sleep and my donkey would have been braying, and my light would have burned, I would have been toast.

Now, the question is, what is the *hosafa* of Rabbi Akiva when he said, *Lo amarti lachem*? Why did he say that? He already said כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד. What is he adding to what he already taught by saying "*Lo amarti lachem*"? Did I argue with you? I didn't argue with Rabbi Akiva, he told me it's going to be *l'tov*. If you say so, I'm not going to argue with you. Rabbi Akiva says, didn't I tell you that it's going to be good for you? Was anybody arguing with him? Why did Rabbi Akiva add that statement and what did he want to teach them?

The *Ben Ish Chai* in *Sefer Ben Yehoyada* says amazing *vort*.⁴ He says, when a person sees good and he speaks good, even if it was נגזרה עליו גזירה רעה, even if a bad decree was decreed upon him, it's possible to nullify it. So you know what turns it over from *raah* to *tovah*? Because you said in the beginning, *hakol l'tovah*. So, Rabbi Akiva was making the point that he was saved because of that!

MAKE FOOD NUTRITIOUS AND ENJOYABLE

Pischon peh, when a guy opens his mouth and he says it's going to be *tov*, that causes the thing to turn out to be *tovah be'emes*. *Mipri ish*, the *pasuk* says, from the fruits of a guy's mouth, from what comes out of your mouth, your stomach will be satiated. Here is how it could be so:

Here's one guy trying to eat something and he says "Let's eat this pizza." And he says, "Wow, this is delicious, this is lovely."

⁴ אמר להו ה'ינו דאמרין כל דעבדין מן שמי'יא לטב. יש להקשות מה חידוש קאמר להו עתה, והלא כבר אמר כן מתחלה על כל דבר ודבר שאירע לו ושמעו זאת ממנו? ונראה לי בס"ד כונתו לומר כי האדם שפותח פיו לטובה אפילו אם נגזרה עליו גזירה לרעה אפשר שתתבטל, ולכן אמר מה שאתם רואין עתה שהכל נעשה לטובה היינו בשביל דאמרין לנו מעיקרא על כל דבר שנעשה דעבדי משמי'יא לטב, ועל כן פתחון פי שפתחתי לטובה גרם שיהיה הדבר ההוא לטובה באמת! ורצה ללמדם בזה שיהיו מורגלים לפתוח פיהם לטובה על כל דבר אף על פי שנראה שהוא רעה.

There's a guy eating chicken and he's saying, "Ah, *gevaldige* chicken, delicious chicken." The chicken's going to be good for him.

Then you have another guy that gets chicken and he says, "Ach, I don't like chicken." But he's hungry, so he tries to eat it. He's not going to enjoy that chicken. He 'bad-mouthed' that chicken! That chicken won't be good for him! That chicken will not produce anything positive for him. That's how it is.

I remember, I once invited a little boy here, a *bar mitzvah* boy, from Eretz Yisrael to become part of our family. And for the first *Shalom Aleichem*, we made him a *seudah* when he first came here, and we served him ice cream for dessert. And he got very upset. He wasn't playing with a full deck in those days. It was before he got domesticated. So he said, "*Ichsa*, who eats ice cream in the middle of the winter?" I said, "Say, this is great ice cream, because you ain't gonna ever get it again. You're never gonna enjoy *this* ice cream again. So if you want to enjoy it, you gotta see it positively and you gotta speak about it positively. And if you don't, you won't enjoy it." So from the fruit of your mouth, that's going to give you access to enjoy and benefit from what you get.

POSITIVE PREDICTIONS

It says *מִתְּחִלָּה בְּיַד לַשּׁוֹן* – death and life is in the hand of your tongue. If a person says, "I'm going to live. I'm going to be strong. I'm going to get better," it will have an effect on him. I tell this to sick people all the time - unless they already have both feet on the banana peels. But if they don't, I say to them, "You know what? Start preparing yourself to go skiing, because you're getting better. I don't care what anybody says." When you say, "It's getting better," you can have a positive effect and actually help things improve.

Sometimes, you can *daven* for someone to have a *refuah sheleimah*, and you can make all kinds of efforts on their behalf, but you may still not be giving the person a positive word. You may not be saying actual words out of your mouth - a *dvar tov*, a *dibur tov*, good speech. You are wishing that he should have a *refuah sheleimah*, but that is not enough. You have to tell the person, "I know you are going to get better."

Hashem hears you saying that. That becomes the *tevuah* of your *peh*, that becomes the fruit of your *peh* and *yochal piryah*, you will eat the fruit. You will enjoy that fruit. That's the most amazing thing that you can imagine. Isn't that beautiful?!

THE MERAGLIM CREATED A BAD REALITY

Now the *meraglim* messed up on this. The *meraglim* came back and they looked at Eretz Yisrael in a very negative manner. And they spoke badly about Eretz Yisrael.

When you speak badly about something, it becomes bad. That makes Eretz Yisrael bad. They weren't lying. The way they described it, that is the way it turned out. If they would have looked at it in a positive way and expressed positive things, there would have been different *maskanos*, outcomes.

MARRIED THIS YEAR

I know certain people who said, or I told them, "You're getting married this year." Some of them laughed, some of them smiled, and some of them said, "If you say so, that's how it's going to be." Those are the ones who got married.

I remember a young man who called me up. It was *Shavuot* time. He said, "Can I say I'm going to be married by Elul?" I said, "Definitely. You're definitely going to be married by Elul." And he was. People wondered, what did he do? What did he do? He didn't do anything. He was just positive about it, he was *boteach* in Hashem about it. And maybe myself and others who told him, "Absolutely! This is going to happen!" that's what made it happen. So, if you hear, "It's going to happen." And if you think positively, it's going to happen. Be positive.

A DEADLY PSAK

Let me share with you an amazing story. There's a *sefer* called *פרק ליקוטי שאלות ותשובות חתם סופר*, *chelek vav*.⁵ And over there, it's brought down that once, there was a *she'eilah* brought from Prague. A child was born with a medical issue. And the question was whether to *mal*, circumcise the kid or not in this *matzav*.

Maybe there was a *sakanas nefashos*. So the local *mohel* in Prague and the Rav of the city said it's better not to circumcise the kid in this situation. And they said - if they're going to circumcise him, he won't live for more than three months. The *Chasam Sofer*, who was a giant, was presented with the same *she'eila* and he said he couldn't *mekabel* their words. And he said that in this situation, there's no *chashash* of *pikuach nefesh* and they should go and circumcise the kid immediately. And they did. And then a terrible tragedy happened. Not long afterwards, 16 weeks after the story, the child died. Four months. Now you understand, this tragedy created great waves. Everybody was saying: "Listen, I guess the *Chasam Sofer* 'stepped into it,' made a mistake, and the *mohel* and that Rav were correct." So in his *sefer*, the *Chasam Sofer* relates this story. And he writes: "The *emes* is like I said. There was no *chashash* to circumcise this child. And I would do it again. If I had a similar *she'eilah* next time, I would *pasken* the same way. The only reason this child died is not because of the *milah*, but

⁵ הנה מיתת הילד מצעהלם לא נפלאה ולא רחוקה כי ה' ראוי למות אם מפאת דברת ת"ח ה"ה יידי פ"מ והרב הגאון מו"ה יואב אשר שפטוהו לבן מות והוה כשגגה היוצא מהשליט ולא נפיש זכותי' דהווא ינוקא ואבותיו מדכותי' דמר שמואל וינוקי' דשכיבא על דברת רב פנחס אחוהי' במ"ק י"ח ע"א ואם מפאת דברת הרבה בני אדם שדברו בו ונשא ונתנו בו מזרת בלבה להמית ולא להחיות וכמבואר גם שם דברית כרותה לשפתים וחז"ל הזהירונו פ"ק דכתובות ח' ע"ב וכבר רבים שתו לימא וכו' ולהיות כי נ"ל דכל הדברי' והחזיון הזה אינו נוגע כלל להילד הזה (שו"ת חתם סופר, ליקוטי שו"ת סי' סע"י ז)

it was because the *mohel* and the Rav said he was going to die. They were *poseiach* their mouths *l'ra*, that the *tinok* will die if he has a *bris*. Their *amirah*, their statement is what killed that child.”

This is what he writes. Listen to his words. *Hinei misas hayeled*, behold the *misah* of the child, לא נפלאת ולא רחוקה, is not out of the ordinary and it's not unusual. כי היה ראוי למות, he was *ra'uy* to die. You know why? Because these “*talmidei chachamim*,” the *mohel* and the Rav, *paskened* him *l'ben maves*. They *paskened* and said he's going to die. והוי כשגגה היוצאת מלפני השליט, it's like a mistake. The Gemara says, people say things and it has terrible effects. ולא היה לו מספיק זכויות כדי להצילו. The child did not have enough merits to counteract the *mishpat* and to save himself. You hear that?!

Rabbosai, please, let us start to speak positively about ourselves, about situations that we find ourselves in, and situations you hear that others are in! Say, “I know it's going to be good.” Don't tell that to the person who comes to cry to you, but when *you* get something wrong, you say, “It's not going to be good.” No, that's what you *shouldn't* do. You should *always* say, “It's good. It's going to be good, *be'ezras Hashem*.” And you should think about it.

And you should say, “Hashem, if my words count for anything, I'm looking at this and expressing myself positively. Let that statement carry weight and let it affect the situation with a positive effect.”

IN SUMMARY

The episode of the *meraglim* highlights for us the tremendous power of complaining and negative speech, to the extent that as the Ibn Ezra explains, *im yedaber ra, yavo'eihu maves*, if a person speaks evil, it will bring him as far as death. This was the case with the *meraglim*, whose negative description of Eretz Yisrael created a negative reality. They could have looked at Eretz Yisrael in a good light. The *pasuk* in *Mishlei* shows that if the *meraglim* would have expressed positive things, the outcomes would have been positive, since *davar tov yasig chayim*, speaking of goodness brings life. We can apply this in our daily lives to fulfill the *ma'amar* that if we speak positively about things, together with *bitachon* in Hashem, we will make it good. We can say verbally, with our mouths, for example, that things are good, that they are going to be better, that we and people we know will get better, will be healthy, will have our basic needs and some extras, that the food we are eating is good, and that the possessions we have are good. This week, I will (*bli neder*,) practice having *bitachon* in Hashem together with verbal positivity by responding to events in my daily life by actually saying statements such as “*Kol mah d'avid Rachmana, l'tav avid*,” or, “This is surely just the *nisayon* before the gift that Hashem wants to give me,” or, “*Gam zu l'tovah*,” or, “*Hakol l'tovah*.”

