

MABUL

The Mishnah in *Avos* (5:2) says, "There were ten generations from the time of Adam to Noach, and they continually were angering Hashem." Certainly, this deterioration in society did not happen all at once. At first, there was just a slight turn from the truth, and then it increased little by little, until the tenth generation, those of the *mabul* came and acted as they did. Similarly, the Rambam (*Hilchos Avodas Kochavim* 1:2) describes how the early generations came to do *avodah zarah* (idolatry): People originally thought that the sun and moon had some power from Hashem, and over time, people came to think that these objects created the world.

A new generation thinks that what they see is the normal way of life, that it was always this way and it will always be this way. As long as they know there is an error, there is hope that it can be fixed, but what if they don't know that they are living in error? There is a *possuk* in the Torah in which Hashem says that He will hide Himself in a "double concealment", **הסתיר אסתיר**. The Baal Shem Tov famously said that the problem is not so much that He is concealed, but that the concealment itself is concealed from us, meaning that we do not even feel the need to seek Him. When we aren't even aware that He is showing *hester panim* towards us, that is the trouble.

Chazal foretold hundreds of years ago that the final generations of the world which are amidst are called the *ikvesa d'meshicha*, the "heels" before *Moshiach*. If this has been true for a long time, we are now at the "heels" of those heels. There were errors many hundreds of years ago that the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* tried to remove, but there are other errors that have surfaced in the last few generations. We are here in a world where every aver-

age person has what a wealthy man did not have a thousand years ago. One does not see these as luxuries, but as necessities. People get used to these things, and if they lose them, they can even collect charity to replace them (*Kesuvos 67b*). Noach looked at his generation, and said to them, "You are in error!" He started building the *Teivah*, and when people asked him about it, he said, "Hashem said that He plans to destroy His world!" and that "all flesh has corrupted its way". What did they think about that? One who lived then saw his father and grandfather acting that way, so he assumed it must be okay. There were probably 'rab-bis' then who also acted that way. They were probably thinking, "How could we change it all? We are going in the right way." They didn't see their error, because the change from the ninth to the tenth generation was not that apparent. All of a sudden, one man Noach comes and says, "You are all wrong!" They assumed he must be in error, that they were right. They figured, "Perhaps he just imagined his prophecy. We're not much worse than the last generation. Of course, it's always necessary to fix things and the generations tend to decline in level, but not to the extent that he is claiming."

This is a lesson for how we are today. Everything is the opposite of how it should be. As *Chazal* expressed it, "I see an upside-down world" (*Pesachim 50a*). There is not even a minimal understanding of the true way of life. People today are living in homes that look like palaces. These are not homes, but burial plots for a person's *neshamah*. People devote all day their whole lives to pay for more and more materialism. When a person cannot pay the mortgage for it, he runs to his rabbi, who advises, "Read *parshas haMan* every day." He should have said, "Why did you buy that house? Sell it! What do you need it for?"

Even in Eretz Yisrael where things are simpler, there are weddings that last many hours into the evening and people do whatever they can to make them bigger and better, spending thousands. Did our *Avos* and *Imahos* get married like this? Avraham marry Sarah also in such a way? Is Hashem really pleased with all this lavishness and these five-course dinners?

When a girl is born and they make a Kiddush, people say *Mazal Tov* and fill their bellies with all the delicacies of the world. What is the point? Does anyone really think that Hashem is pleased that everyone is eating more and more *kugel* and *choleni*? Although there was a *minhag* (custom) to make a Kiddush, the real *minhag* was to thank Hashem, except that in addition, since we have a body, we need to have some food to involve the body also in the *simchah* (celebration). Their main intention was to show how much they really wanted to thank Hashem, but they added a little food to include the *guf* (the body) in the joy of the *neshamah* (soul). Where has it come now? They don't thank Hashem anymore. So what remains? Just more and more food. If a person doesn't want to make such a *kiddush*, he is criticized for not keeping to this holy tradition. Don't stop the *minhag*, but gather people who can understand what it means to thank Hashem and feel grateful to Him, and of course, add a little food for the *guf* to enjoy also. But instead, the *neshamah*, which part of expressing gratitude to Hashem over the *simchah*, is gone, and only the food for the body remains.

The *neshamah* of a person is becoming more and more covered over, and there is more and more emphasis on things that talk to the *guf*, the body. Had I not seen this with my own eyes here, I would not believe it. If one doesn't live here [in America] and he suddenly visits and sees

it, he cannot fathom this. Are these sincerely religious Jews? It is unbelievable. I hope you recognize the truth, but not because I am saying it. Is this how our ancestors lived?

Do people really think that the coming year will be any better when they keep going like this? The only way it will be better is if a person does sincere *teshuvah*, because just *davening* and *tzedakah* alone cannot help. *Teshuvah* means returning, and we have to know how to return. We came down here as a *neshamah*, and we will need to return the soul in its purity. *Teshuvah* means to live life as a *neshamah*, not only as a *guf*. There cannot be proper *teshuvah* without that. One who is too attached to his *guf* will be affected by it, and it will lead him into doing *aveiros* that the *guf* is drawn to. If we are unwilling to disconnect from living a materialistic perspective, all of our *davening* and *tzedakah* will not help.

I realize that my words contradict the norm here and in other places. The fact that so many people are living this way here does not indicate in the least that this is the truth. In the generation of the *Mabul*, there were also a lot of people too, but almost no one survived. No one should expect that they will just naturally improve with time. Every person today must decide: "What do I really want?" But if you just want to live a life of *sheker* (falsity), there is nothing to talk about.

Deep down, we all want the truth. It is just that have never heard anyone who speaks it. People are living in the way that is the opposite of the truth. Now one person has come and spoken differently: Separate from all of this, spend your time learning Torah, just earn enough to have ample *parnasah* (livelihood) so that you can survive, and that's all. It is so obvious to anyone who even slightly feels the truth, and it's only novel to someone immersed in a certain materialistic perspective that he's used to. When you will come one day upstairs to the Heavenly court, remember that someone once told you that this whole way of life is false. Don't say, "But I didn't know." I'm not saying this to make you guilty there, but someone has to stand up and say,

"Enough! The party is over!"

How could it be that a Jew and *goy* should eat in the same restaurant? How could a Jew eat at a sidewalk café? Would Avraham *Avinu* open a restaurant so that everyone can fulfill their *taavos* for food? Of course not! But people come as long as there is a *hechsher* (kosher certificate). I don't understand how a *hechsher* can be given in a place where there is so much *peritzus*. It is like a store where they sell kosher food, but on the way in, you need to bow down before an idol. They ask the *mashgiach* (kosher supervisor) about it, and he says, "There's nothing to worry about. The food is kosher." Everything is *not* kosher! Do you think Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Aharon Kotler, or any one of the Chassidic Rebbes would come in with his wife to eat in such a place? Of course not! Would our *Avos* have gone to such places? They would rather have died than step foot in such a place.

The fact that we need to speak about this shows how low the generation has fallen. I am not here to give an inspirational talk. If we see someone who is about to fall, or he has already fallen, into a river, and he doesn't realize it, we don't say to him "Inspire yourself, Elul and Rosh HaShanah are coming." You'll yell at him, "Watch out, you're falling!"

I want to ask you a question: Does anyone really think that the way the women are dressed here - and it's not only here, I wish it were only here - is this how a Jewish woman should look? I want to tell you that it is nearly impossible to find in the stores a garment that is appropriate for a Jewish woman. Usually, the length is wrong, and even if the length is fine, the style is wrong. Who is willing to stand in judgment for all these overly alluring *sheitels* (wigs)? Don't say, "We never heard about this. They didn't say." Can any man say that the way these women dress does not tempt him to have improper thoughts? How can an entire generation go around this way, and hardly anyone opens his mouth about it? Can a woman come to *shul* on Rosh HaShanah with such a *sheitel* and *daven*? This is like coming to *shul* on Yom Kippur with some pork, saying, "*Avinu*," eating

a piece, and continuing with "*Malkenu*." You cannot live a life of falsehood and try to continue with the coming year. If you want a good year, if you want *Moshiach* to come, you must decide what the truth is. If you want to live with truth, you must become a different person. "But that is how my neighbor looks...!"

Go home and think about this. If someone seeks the truth, he knows that our holy mothers would never dress this way, it bothers him to see other women dressed this way, and it bothers other men to see his wife this way. He knows that it is alluring, and that it is against the *halachah* and against Hashem's will. Maybe you're thinking, "So what should I do, divorce my wife?!" No, don't divorce your wife. Sit with her and decide if you want the truth. Believe me, many women want the truth. If you strongly want it, you can change.

All the lecturers and even the greatest *tzaddikim* (righteous people) cannot help with speeches, if a person doesn't decide to separate from all of the *sheker* here. Some will tell their friends, "Some *meshuga* (crazy person) came here from Eretz Yisrael and was ranting about crazy things." Good - I hope that those who were here will tell others that a strange man came from Yerushalayim and said strange things. At least this way, other people will hear about it. Let them hear that someone says that this is not the right way to live.

I don't know if any of you will heed these words. But I know that each of us has a true choice: Either to live in a false life that is *sheker*, or to live in a place of *kedushah*, and to try to connect more to Hashem by putting effort into our Torah learning, into how we do the *mitzvos*, and doing other good things - and with very minimal effort in making *parnasah* and with being so busy trying to make more and more money in order to live in style.

I hope your hearts will be opened and that each of you will feel the truth on their own, and so that we will seek the King of the World, the Creator, *Yisbarach Shemo*. (דרשות_07_הדור_שלנו.תשסז)

TESTS IN THE FINAL DAYS

Q If a person just uses filtered Internet, will this prevent him from getting into *Olam HaBa*?

A That will be the case *chas v'shalom* if one doesn't break the connection that he feels to the Internet, by the last moment before the *Geulah*.

Q What is the source for this?

A Because he is connected to the *shaar haNun d'tumah* (the "50th level of impurity"), so he cannot partake of the *shaar haNun d'Kedushah* (the 50th level of holiness").

Q Maybe it's better not to talk about this to people, because there's a rule that "It's better that they commit a sin unintentionally rather than cause them to do it intentionally", so isn't it better to let others stay ignorant of the whole Internet issue rather than telling them about how wrong it is, which will only cause them to use it on purpose even they know deep down that it's wrong?

A We can't apply here the rule of "Better that they sin unintentionally rather than cause them to do it intentionally". This is because we are dealing here with the root of the test in this final generation, where the "50th level of impurity" comes to counter the "50th level of holiness", and **it is the final and most fundamental test of all of history**. And as soon as the test is over, it will be with the coming of Mashiach, immediately.

Q Since so many people are in a situation where they can't live without Internet, and it requires *mesirus nefesh* to live without it, can we say that the Internet is a *gezairah* (harsh decree) upon Klal Yisrael, just as the Brisker Rov said that *medinah* (government in Eretz Yisrael) was a *gezeirah* on Klal Yisrael?

A Correct. It is even more than that, it is the final *gezeirah*, and all other *gezeiros* upon *Klal Yisrael* are just the branches of this *gezairah*.

Q...It seems that the Rav's view of forbidding all Internet use is not mainly

due to *halachic* reasons (though there are halachic issues too of using the internet) but due to "internal, *pnimiyus*" reasons: Internet attaches a person to the "50th level of *tumah* (depravity), and it prevents a person from the *Geulah*, etc. The Rav has said this clearly and decisively, and most of the Rav's words seem to be based on a certain *hasagah* (inner perception) that the Rav has reached, in which the Rav is seeing the reality this way.... I would be happy if a filtered smartphone wasn't part of my life and I strongly believe in *emunas chachamim*, but unfortunately, working for a living means that we have no choice but to become slaves to the internet and smartphones. Everything today is done through Internet... including my Torah learning. It's needed for doing *chessed* as well. If I would cut off from all use of Internet and also give up my filtered smartphone, I would be sacrificing *everything*. I see big Torah communities, including prominent *Talmidei Chachomim* and Rabbonim, who use media in a "kosher" way, and I can see how they are fooling themselves into permitting internet-devices in their lives all under the guise of strictly keeping Torah and mitzvos... I want to become clearer about this topic, and how I can go about keeping to my responsibility and obligation of making a living without Internet. This would be very helpful for me to know.

A **It is just like the test in the generation before the Holocaust, where even prominent and distinguished Rabbonim fell** into the error of Zionism and they joined with the Zionists - some of them even had pure intentions in doing so - they thought it was a good thing, but they didn't see the end of where it was going. The Brisker Rav said, "My father (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik) can see what will happen in 20 years from now. I can see what's happening today." Most Rabbonim in his times didn't see what was happening in their current times, and the same thing is happening today. **Even distinguished Rabbonim are falling in to this [permitting the use of internet]**, the same way that the Rabbonim fell into Zionism, including even distinguished Rabbonim, big Torah

communities, including the *Talmidei Chachomim* and the Rabbonim of those communities. In order to recognize and understand the process which we are all found in right now, we would need a clear understanding of what the "50th level of *tumah*" is all about, the all-inclusive *tumah*. And what is also needed is to clearly understand the reality of these devices, which contains absolutely everything terrible in the world all in one single device. And therefore, it is very clear that **this device [the smartphone] is the active revelation of the "50th level of *tumah*" on our world**. There are 2 parts to it. (1) The **content** found on it - which contains every *tumah* in the world, all at once. It mixes together everything good and everything bad all at once, every single good thing in the world (i.e. *shiurim* and *divrei Torah*) and every single bad thing in the world. (2) The attractive **pull** that it has. The Gemara says that "Once heresy is attached (*aduk*) to the person, he is deemed a heretic." **It is clear that this device has a strong, internal pull towards it, an unprecedented kind of pull which has no comparison in the world. We can see how deeply connected people feel towards these devices**. This second aspect mentioned - the pull that it has - is **just as applicable to filtered devices, no matter what kind of filter it is**.

Q Why are the *Gedolim* relatively silent about this?

A Already close to a decade ago, Rav El-yashiv zt"l organized here in Eretz Yisrael a group of Rabbonim to rule on technology matters and to establish clear-cut rules about it. I met several of those Rabbonim, and they said to me that they never personally examined these devices and what the different types of filters are, and they rely on the experts in technology for information on it, based on their understanding of how computers work, and accordingly, the Rabbonim decide what to do, based on the information they are receiving from the technology experts. These Rabbonim themselves expressed their pain that this is what's running the process, and they were very worried about what will result

from all of this. There were also several Rabbonim, such as the *Bedatz Beis Din* in Bnei Brak who ruled that those who already own internet-capable devices must get the best filter possible. But gradually as time went on, the opposite happened. Those who previously had a kosher phone began to purchase filtered smartphones, etc. One faction of Rabbonim were in great doubt about what to do about it, because it was a severe issue of transgressing Torah prohibitions versus financial loss for so many people, and to prohibit all internet use would certainly take away livelihood from the families of *Bnei Torah*, and all of religious Jewry in general. So they ruled that it is permissible to have such devices only for the purposes of *parnassah* (livelihood), and the ruling was publicized in signs all over the country. But **slowly, those signs were taken down, and then newly 'edited' signs began appearing, in which they only advertised the kosher certification of the Rabbonim for internet use, without specifying the condition of "for parnassah only"**. Another faction of Rabbonim felt that the *tzibbur* will not listen at all to the conditions. And ever since, they have been treading a thin rope on what to permit and what they should ignore.

Q Is owning a smartphone even if the internet connection on it is disabled still considered to be a connection to the "50th level of *tumah*", from the mere fact that one has broken his boundaries by owning a smartphone and coming closer to the *yetzer hora*? Or is it only internet-capable smartphones which connect a person to the 50th level of *tumah*?

A If a smartphone cannot connect to Internet at all, although it is still a very big **breach of boundaries** to own it and it brings one **closer** to the *Nachash* (*yetzer hora*), if it can't connect to any internet then it is not called being connected to the 50th level of *tumah*.

Q What is the message that has to get across when trying to help others give up their Internet use?

A Your goal should be to get others to feel how **Hashem is in front of us, and that**

our lives are meant for doing His will - and that **each person on his or her own level can do it**, and in the way that's appropriate for them. There is no one way to go about this which will work for everyone, so each person needs to search for the way [to do it] in the manner that is most appropriate for them personally.

Q Why is the struggle with internet the final test for *Klal Yisrael*?

A It is so that we can reveal the truest level of Hashem's Infinite Light (*ohr Ein-Sof*), which is all-inclusive of everything.

Q I heard there was a connection between coronavirus and the alluring *sheitel*s (wigs) that women are wearing today, because both a head covering and corona are called "*Keser*" (crown). What did that mean? Also, how should a husband address such a sensitive topic to his wife?

A Explain to her what the *halachah* is, as well as what the proper feeling about it should be - that any heart which is even a bit open to the truth can feel how wearing an immodest *sheitel* is something that's unacceptable, the opposite of doing Hashem's will and the opposite of *tzniyus* (Jewish modesty). Explain to her also that **this is a *nisayon* (challenge) which even the most frum, kosher women are stumbling in today**, whether knowingly or unknowingly. And let her know that even in the houses of the prominent Torah scholars today, they are not being that successful in this area in spite of the fact that it is required in *halachah* and it is so important to wear a kosher-looking *sheitel*. This is all yet the "external" *nisayon* which women are facing in this generation.

Q If the immodest head-coverings of today are the "outer part of the challenge" for women in this generation, what then is the inner test for women in this generation?

A To have *emunah peshutah* (simple, unquestioning faith in Hashem) and *tmimus* (earnestness, remaining loyal to Hashem): **To disconnect from the "50th level of *tumah*" (the internet)** and to instead become connected to the

50th level of *kedushah* [which is *emunah peshutah* and *tmimus*], and to reveal the intrinsic connection that we have with Hashem.

Q Was there a change in the way that we need to serve Hashem in the last couple of years? Can we say that until now, our main internal *avodah* was *emunah chushis*, to sense and feel the reality of Hashem, but since the onset of corona can we say that our *avodah* has become mainly about *emunah peshutah* and *tmimus* - not necessarily to feel Hashem more viscerally, but to remain with earnest faith in Hashem even when we don't feel His Presence and to remain loyal to *ratzon Hashem* amidst the darkness of the final days?

A *Emunah peshutah* and *tmimus* (simple, unquestioning faith in Hashem and earnestly doing His will) must certainly be *chushis*, palpably felt. In every generation the *avodah* of a person was always to gain *emunah chushis* in Hashem. **As we get closer to the end and the *ohr shel Mashiach* (the revelations of Mashiach) is radiating more and more, we are able to reach more *p'shitus* and *tmimus***. And it must be *chushis* (palpable) - a *p'shitus* and *tmimus* that is a **palpable sense of Hashem** [refer to *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* and the Rav's *sefer, "Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh"*].

This weekly parsha sheet is based on translations by talmidim from the divrei Torah of HaRav Itamar Schwartz, Shlit"a the author of the Bilvavi and DaEs series. The Rav attended the Pachad Yitzhak Yeshiva of Rav Yonasan David, Shlit"a and graduated from the Ponovitch Yeshiva of Rav Gershon Edelstein, Shlit"a. The earliest of more than 50 sefarim of the Rav where enthusiastically endorsed by Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch, Shlit"a, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, Shlit"a, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit"a, the Tolna Rebbe, Shlita, Rav Yitzhok Meyer Morgenstern, Shlit"a, Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, Shlit"a, Rav Sherayah Deblitzki, z"l, Rav Chizkiyahu Erlanger, z"l, amongst others. Using an eclectic approach, the Rav's teachings speak to the hearts of Jews from all walks of life.