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PARSHAS RE'EH



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

SHIUR PRESENTED IN 5765

DECEPTIVE PROPHECY

The *pasuk* in this week's parsha says: וְלֹכֶה וְנִעְבְּדָה אֱלֹקִים אֲחֵרִים — אִשָּׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ אֶתָּה וְאֲבֹתֶיךָ — Someone tells you, “Let us follow strange gods that neither you nor your forefathers knew — וְנִעְבְּדָה, let's worship them” (Devarim 13:7). Like if somebody would say, “Let's start worshipping the *mezuzos*.”

There is a guy in Israel, a quack, who is a Kesubah reader. You bring him your Kesubah, and he reads your Kesubah and tells you all about yourself. It's *assur* to go to these guys. This fellow in Israel does all kinds of *tumah*. *Mamash* people with big beards, religious-looking people, a bunch of Harrys — all of them.

לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל דְּבַר הַנָּבִיא הַהוּא, “do not listen to that person,” even if he's a real navi. אִם אֵל חֹלָם הִחְלוֹם הוּא כִּי מִנְסָה ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶתְכֶם. “because Hashem is testing you,” לְדַעַת, “to know,” הִישָׁכֶם אֱהָבִים אֶת ה', “whether you love Hashem, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.”

You might think that those people don't tell you וְלֹכֶה and וְנִעְבְּדָה. It's not true; they do tell you. They all tell you to go after *elohim acherim*. They tell you to go in ways that are not *darkei haTorah*.

They never tell you to go and sit and learn Torah. Either they tell you to sell your apartment and give them your money — that's also “ways which we didn't know.” Or they tell the lady, “You have to spend a few days with me to get close to Hashem, and you need my *kedusha*.” Or they do all kinds of manipulation on people, these *reshaim*, in all kinds of forms.

WILL YOU FOLLOW HASHEM?

The *pasuk* (Devarim 13:5) says: וְאַחֲרֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ תֵּלֵכוּ — you're supposed to follow Hashem. וְאֵתָּה תִּירָאוּ, “and Him you should fear,” וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ, “and His mitzvos you should observe,” וְאֵת צִוְּתוֹ תִּשְׁמְרוּ, “and His voice you shall listen to,” וְאֵתָּה תַעֲבֹדוּ, “and Him you shall serve,” וְבוֹ תִדְבָּקוּ, “and to Him you shall attach yourself.”

There's a famous Gemara in Bava Metzia (59a) that everybody should know. It's the story between Rabbi Eliezer and the

Chachamim. It's the *tanur* of Achnai. The river went backwards, and the walls fell, etc. There was an argument about the status of a certain oven. Rabbi Eliezer said it was tahor, but the Chachamim said it was *tamei*.

So Rabbi Eliezer said, "If I'm right, let this carob tree prove that I'm right." Do you know what happened? The tree lifted itself up out of the ground and moved a hundred *amos*. It showed he was right. That was the proof. Do you know what they told him? "You can't bring *rayas* from a tree. A tree is not a *raya*."

He said, "Okay, there's a stream over there. Let this stream of water prove it." Do you know what happened? The stream was flowing this way, and all of a sudden, it started flowing that way. They said, "We're not impressed. We don't bring *rayas* from streams of water."

He said, "Okay. Let the walls of the *beis medrash* prove it." Do you know what happened? The walls of the *beis medrash* started bending inward, over them. The walls were on top of them. "Nu, do you give in to me now?" Now their lives were in danger. Do you know what they said? "We don't bring *rayas* from walls. You want to bring a *raya*? Bring a *raya* from the Chumash."

So finally, because he was exasperated, Rabbi Eliezer said, "*Min Hashamayim*, will You, Hashem, tell these guys that I'm right?" All of a sudden, a *Bas Kol* came out from *Shamayim* and said, "Why do you think you can take on Rabbi Eliezer? הלכה כמותו בכל מקום. The *halacha* follows him in every place."

עמד רבי יהושע על רגליו. Rabbi Yehoshua, who was the Rosh Beis Din and the Rosh Sanhedrin, got up on his feet and said, "*Lo Bashamayim Hi*. In the Torah it says that Torah is *lo bashamayim hi*. What does *lo bashamayim hi* mean? The Torah was given to us at Har Sinai, and we don't pay attention to Heavenly voices, because in the Torah You wrote, Hashem, '*acharei rabbim lehatos*.' You follow the majority. And the majority is ruling this way. Even though Rabbi Eliezer holds the other way, we follow the majority."

Can you imagine such a thing?! Chazal were so stubborn that nothing could move them. They were unbudgeable. What's the *pshat* of that? I mean, Rabbi Eliezer's mind was amazing. He had an amazing personality. And even all the *mofsim* that he caused, all these *osos*, nothing moved them. They said, "No, the *halacha* is not like you." Even though *Shamayim* said the *halacha* is like Rabbi Eliezer, what do you do better than that? They said, "Hashem, You gave us Your Torah; we follow Your Torah."

So in the Gemara in Brachos (19b), there's a commentary from Rabbeinu Nissim Gaon, one of the Gaonim. He writes that

the whole purpose of this Bas Kol was to test the Chachamim, to see if they would forsake the transmission that they had in Torah, and the way they understood the Torah and the Gemara, because of a Bas Kol. He says it's based on this *pasuk* in Devarim, where it says, *כי מנסה ה' אלהיכם אתכם*. And he says they passed the test because they stood by their *kabbalah*.

WHY DO WE HAVE CHALLENGES?

Now, I want you to know about this *yesod*. This is very relevant for us. I encounter this with people almost every day of my life. Many people in life encounter difficult situations, challenging situations that create doubts and situations that we cannot comprehend. We can't comprehend some things.

Here's a man telling me he's watching a tragedy: babies being held by their feet and smashed on rocks. He saw it. He witnessed it. Why? Good *kasha*. You have a *teretz*? He says, "I don't have a *teretz*." I agree with him. And everybody tries to figure out why Hashem did this to me, or to somebody else.

And it's amazing to see the guy keep trying to give Hashem the benefit of the doubt, so to speak. And he thinks about all the *machshavos* in the world. The Gemara says, *אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו*. The Gemara says in Brachos (5a), if you see suffering coming to you, you should start investigating your ways, right? If you can't find anything, what do you say then? It is because of *bittul* Torah.

But you see people struggle. "Why was I born like this? Why would Hashem do this?" Whatever the situation is. "I want to learn, but Hashem makes it hard for me." Or, "I want to have this, but I don't have the money." Whatever situation it is.

You know what the answer is? One thing doesn't enter your mind with all the thoughts. When you have *sfeikos* (doubts) and you have *kashas*, your whole *mahalach* is only, "How am I *meyashev* this situation?" But you have to understand, there's one answer, and that is the one answer you never even pursued.

Maybe it's a test. Maybe Hashem gave this to me just for a test. That's all. The whole of Olam Hazeh is a test.

TEST OF EMUNAH AND OUR RESPONSE

Maybe it's a test. When Hashem gives you a sickness, you try everything in the world to understand, but you can't figure it out. You see something that doesn't make any sense to you in your little, pea-sized brain, and you can't figure it out. Maybe it's just a test to allow you to say, "You know what, Hashem? You're the Boss." It is an opportunity to allow you to declare, "I love You, Hashem. I'm committed to You, Hashem. Whatever You do, I'll stay by You." That's exactly the test.

Chazal saw amazing *inyanim*. They saw *osos*. They saw *mofsim*. They saw *mahpeichos* in the world. And the whole thing was just a test: How strong is your *emunah* in Har Sinai — that the Torah was given to us from Hashem at Har Sinai? That's all it was. Do you believe in Har Sinai? The first thought when you face something has to be, "Maybe I'm just being tested." That's all. That means maybe the whole reason you can't figure it out is that this itself is part of the test.

There was somebody looking for a job. A person couldn't find a job. He decides, "You know what? I'm gonna enjoy my vacation. I want a job in X amount of months." X amount of months go by, and all of a sudden, the person finds a job. He is walking around thanking Hashem up and down. "The day I wanted to find a job, Hashem gave me a job! That day! It is unbelievable." And the pay is *gevaldig*, and the conditions are *gevaldig*. It is a dream situation. There is no problem with Shabbos, no problem with Yom Tov. *Hakol bakol mikol kol*.

He stays at the job, and he thanks Hashem. About a week and a half later, the person is called in. The boss says, "You know what? I really don't need you. There's no chemistry between us. There's no chemistry in the workplace." And the person goes through the roof. The person calls me up. "What's Hashem doing here?"

And I tell the person, "Shame on you. Shame on you." I told him, "That's your *emunah* and *bitachon*?" The person was very angry with me. But the truth of the matter is, it happened to this person because of exactly this. I know of two situations where this person did the exact same thing. Exactly. To somebody else. And that other person, he owed a job. This person didn't owe him a job; this person did a favor. I said, "Excuse me, this is exactly what you did to somebody." He couldn't see *midah keneged midah*. Even with that, I told him, "You should be ashamed of yourself. You know Hashem tests people."

That's what a person has to know. This is something you have to know.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE THAT IS AVODAH ZARAH

Sometimes you see the most miraculous things. I'll never forget — I have seen it with big people. The Brisker Rav's son was on his deathbed, and some *tzaddik* gave him holy water. He told him to pour this holy water on his head, and he would live. "You'll live!" You know what he realized? Hashem was testing him with his final test. This was his final test. He could have lost all his *emunah* that he had all his life; he could have lost it at that last moment.

Now it's your life, your whole life you're preparing for it. Hashem is testing you. All of a sudden, a "tzaddik" comes and says, "Here, pour holy water on yourself." Holy water? In *kol haTorah kullah*, is there such a thing as holy water? The only place they have holy water is in Christian churches. I don't care what kind of tzaddik he is, I don't care how long of a beard he has — keep your holy water to sprinkle on your head. Is it in the Torah? Have you ever heard of such a thing?! In all of Chazal, did you ever hear such a thing? And the guy says, "Put it on your forehead, do a whole detailed thing, and you will live."

It was a test. He said no. And his whole family said, "No, he's dying. He's dying!" But he held that if he's dying, that's *ratzon* Hashem. This is what Hashem wants him to do: not to take that water.

Tov, you have to know that. It is a very, very serious challenge that we face. If a person tells you to do something that it says in sefarim, that's something else. If it says it in Chazal, even though it may not be common, that's one thing. Even then, you have to know. Apart from knowing if it's *daas* Torah or not, even then you have to know if it's ways that we knew from the Torah or ways that we didn't find in the Torah.

I just met a doctor who told me that his new project in the world is that he's on a mission for Hashem now, to get people to stop being involved with what he says is *avodah zarah* that today has become rampant in the world by frum Yidden.

How? They do alternative medicine. He says it's *mamash avodah zarah*. He's done research on this. He's gone to gedolim.

He's gone to Rav Chaim Kanievsky and all of the big Rabbanim. Some of them said, "Eh, it's *nisht gefehrlich*." He says it's *mamash avodah zarah*. They have no idea. But what is this? What is it? Alternative medicine means — I want to define it. It doesn't mean herbs. Using herbs is not considered alternative medicine. It means medicine that's not based on medicine. It's not based on medicine.

He gave me a lot of names. For example, there is a famous thing called Reiki. Or there are certain things you go to, and they do a type of medicine. There's a person in the city that a lot of Yidden went to who works on allergies. How does it work? You have to hold the milk, and they say things to you, and then the allergy goes out of you. That's pure *kochos hatumah*. Magic.

A number of families told me, "You should know it's *mamash avodah zarah*. There's no logic to it. It's pure *kochos hatumah*."

Kochos hatumah works mostly like this: People work hard to get in touch with your soul, with your energy source, your karma, or by transferring karma. They transfer energy to you. This is *mamash avodah zarah*. It's all *kochos hatumah*. But the person is dying, or not well, so he's desperate. But it is a *nisayon*.

So every type of medicine has a *sevara*, you know what I mean? But if a person tells you to hold herbs in front of your face, or to look at herbs, and that is what is going to make you better, and you have to think these thoughts while he's doing it, that's *shtussim*. And people actually do this? Yeah. It's *mamash* amazing that they do it, but they do.

Baruch Hashem, we don't know much about this. But he was telling me about these *kochos hatumah*. The *yetzer hara* is finding its way in. People "align" your system with the "worlds," with "the earth," with all kinds of things. Little magnets and all kinds of things. I heard about magnet therapy. Does that have *avodah zarah* too? He checked that out. The only problem, he says, is that the iron in the body rejects magnets. That's the only problem, he says. They say the magnetic force from the magnets interacts with the iron in the body. The problem is that the iron in the body rejects magnets.

FACT OF LIFE: HASHEM GIVES, HASHEM TAKES

You have to know this *yesod*: In your life, you're going to face *nisyonos*, and you don't have to understand everything. That alone, just saying, "It's a *nisayon*," gives you something to calm yourself, support yourself, and build yourself with. You are saying, "I'm committed to You, Hashem. Whatever You do, I'll stay by You." If you could understand, you're supposed to understand. If you can understand, Hashem wants you to understand. But there are some things you can't understand.

You know, when Hashem gives me something, I have to know that He could take something. *Iyov*, after all his suffering, said, 'ה' לקח ונתן וְה' לִקַּח. Hashem giveth and Hashem taketh. They all say this *pasuk* over, but the *emes* is that the *velt* doesn't understand what that means. A person thinks that when he gets things, that is the way of the world.

Let's say I wake up in the morning, and I'm healthy. Do you know what I say? "Baruch Hashem." If I have food on my table, I say, "Baruch Hashem."

Do you know what the problem is? I expect to be given these things. I understand. I'm a human being. I want things, and I get things. Right? Look at a child. He wakes up in the morning.

“Mommy, I want eggs.” Okay, Mommy gives him eggs. Why? Because he wanted eggs. “Mommy, I want toast.” She gives him toast. “Mommy, I want cereal.” She gives him cereal. Right? When you want something, you get it.

When Hashem gives you something, if your *mahalach* is, “Yeah, it’s coming to me, I deserve it, I’m a decent kid, I’m a nice kid, why shouldn’t I get it?” then, when something gets taken away from you, you go berserk. Then you go nuts. But if a person understands that the giving and taking are balanced, then he won’t go berserk. Hashem *nasan*... Iyov came to the world so that we should learn that the “Hashem *nasan*” is equal to the “Hashem *lakach*.” Just like there’s no logic in the Hashem *lakach*, there’s no logic in the Hashem *nasan*.

For example, sometimes you give a kid something, then what do you say? You say, “Can I have it back?” You’re just giving it to him to test him, to see if he’s a nice kid, right? That’s the whole purpose. “Here’s a candy. Give it back to me.” “So what did you give it to me for?” “I want to see if you’re going to give it back to me.” You never think Hashem does that?

Everything Hashem does and gives you, you have to think it’s just Hashem testing you, just to say, “Could you give it back to Me?” That’s all. That’s the test.

Hashem gives me a kid. So you know what I say? “Hashem gave me a kid. Why not? I want kids.” No. Hashem sometimes gives you a kid just to take away the kid. That’s all. Hmm? Hashem is testing, just to see if you understand what’s going on. Hashem knew that that child was only being sent here for a short while.

THE BIG PICTURE

That’s the whole *briah*. The whole *briah* is that you’re being tested. You have to train yourself to understand that it’s nothing more and nothing less than this. Sometimes the only reason a person gets a *bracha* is in order for Hashem to take it away from him. That’s all.

There’s a *pasuk* like that. Hashem says: *Mi hikdimani va’ashalem*? At times, I ask you for repayment after I give you something. You understand? Sometimes the whole reason Hashem gives you something is for you to realize, “It’s not mine, it’s Hashem’s.” A person has a wife, has a house, has a car, and has kids. You have to realize that the reason you have it is because Hashem is testing you, that’s all; no more, no less. How will you relate to what you receive?

BEING ATTACHED TO WHAT HASHEM GIVES

Participant question: Should you separate yourself from what He gives you?

How do you separate yourself from your kids? That's very hard. It is hard to separate yourself from your kids. Are they yours? No. Why? It is silly to think your kids are yours. The same way He gave us, the same way He takes.

Participant question: How does that fit with *sachar v'onesh*, like punishment and reward?

It's not a punishment, it's a test. Hashem says there's a punishment-reward system. And then there's a system in which Hashem gives a person something in order to take it away from him, to test him. That's what Hashem does it for.

Participant question: Does Hashem take something away as a punishment?

Hashem could do that too. See, if you deserved something, right? Then you don't take it away — unless it is a punishment. Let's say I'm giving you something, like my kid earns it. I tell my kid, "Do a job, I'll give you a quarter." Then I don't say, "Here's the quarter, give it back to me."

But if I go to my kid and say to him, "Here's a quarter. Now give it back to me," I want to test him and train him to see if he's going to be giving. "Here's a candy. Give Tati the candy." I didn't give it to him as a reward or punishment. I want to see how he handles the money.

Again, if you could figure out the *midah keneged midah* of what it is, fine. But a lot of times you can't. So if you want to understand, you always have something to fall back on. You have to know this is also a *midah*. Hashem tests a person; testing people is also a *midah*. It doesn't mean, obviously, if a person has a test, he did or didn't deserve it. Obviously, there's a reason for that test also, because no test is given by Hashem for no reason. The same way I'm trying to train my kid to be kind, Hashem is trying to train me with *emunah*. So He gives a test also. So of course, if you become kind, and if you become an *emunah*-person without that, you don't need tests.

But the idea is, there's such a concept as Hashem testing a person just for the purpose of being tested, just to strengthen his *emunah* and *bitachon*. That's all.

It's not *emunah* if I say, "Baruch Hashem, I have food on my table," because I never lacked food on my table. When something

changes, then you see what emunah is. That's the only time you see it. You can keep saying Baruch Hashem. "Baruch Hashem for right now. Yeah. Baruch Hashem for today, for everybody. Baruch Hashem for tomorrow."

✂ IN SUMMARY ✂

The parsha discusses a situation where someone intends to lead people away from Hashem. Hashem allows that purely to test us: Will we hold onto Him and the ways set forth in the Torah? In the story of Rabbi Eliezer and the Chachamim, we see that the only proof they would accept was a Torah-based proof; they passed the test and did not forsake the transmission that they had in Torah. In life, when Hashem tests us, we must stay true to what is set forth in the Torah. We often try to figure out why challenges happen. Sometimes the answer is: It is not random, chas v'shalom, and it is not a punishment; it is a test. To pass, we need to remain committed to retzon Hashem and avoid solutions that are against what Hashem wants, such as dubious alternative medicine methods. We need to know that Hashem can give and Hashem can take — these two are equal parts of Hashem's system of tests. Hopefully, we will be kind people and people with emunah and not need tests; if Hashem sends us a test, we hope to be able to pass it. This week, bli neder, while I try out viewing events as tests, I will try to find opportunities to practice kindness and be mechazeik my emunah.

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COMING SOON

Woodridge Greenfield park South Fallsburg
Woodbourne Loch sheldrake Monticello Liberty

Camp Morris - main BM
Ateret Torah - both BM
Kochav BM
Woodbourne Main Shul
The Grove / Tribeca
Twin Oaks
Lake Forest
Willow Woods
Whitehouse Estates
Loch Sheldrake Hills
Vacation Village
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