



## AVOIDING UNWANTED SURPRISES

Dear Parents,

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Nitzavim – Vayeilech 5780*

Many of us have a hard time sincerely and honestly feeling that there is something so amiss in our behavior and *Yiddishkeit* that we become emotionally distraught about it. We go through *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, try very hard to shed a tear, but we rarely feel that something is really so broken. We know we could do better, maybe we recognize greatness in others, maybe we are anxious about the threat from the Coronavirus, but at the end of the day, we basically feel – “I’m OK.”

The secret weapon of the *Yetzer Hara*, our evil inclination, is surprise. No matter how hungry we might be, we will not walk into a McDonald’s. I daresay spotting a \$100 bill on the sidewalk during a *Shabbos* afternoon walk will not pose much of a trial for us. We think about *Shabbos* and *Kashrus*, we’re aware and we’re conscious. No surprises there. We are focused on our principles. Where do we trip up – what is the source of our greatest tests? Perhaps it’s in the areas of our behavior that we fail to link to religious obligations. There are activities that due to surrounding circumstances, seem to evade our notice and form a shield against *Halachic* boundaries and moral conduct.

There is an interesting *Chasidische* interpretation of a well-known *Halachic* dictum: We are familiar with the halacha that *Kiddush* on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* is to be “*B’Mokom Seudah*” meaning that *Kiddush* over wine has to be in the same place where the meal will take place. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim Siman 273*). The extension of that idea is: The place of the *Seudah* – is the place where one engages in material pursuits and mundane matters. When one is at work, at play, engaged with friends, etc. The places where one may mistakenly feel ‘religion’ does not belong. It is precisely there that there must be *Kiddush* – one needs to act in those situations with an awareness of ‘*Kiddush*’, that the Torah imperative to be a *mentsch*, follow *Halacha* and be of elevated moral character apply in those places as well.

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One of our greatest tests comes from social media. Surprised? Exactly! We fail to think of the consequences of our chatter. We somehow become oblivious to the requirements to guard our tongue (or keystroke) from speaking ill of another, a group of others, or shuls, *Yeshivos* and organizations. The normal rules against causing pain to another seem not to apply when it’s on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or on a blog. Because we haven’t thought deeply about the implications of our behavior online, we are caught off guard. Surprise!! We remain unaware at our own peril.

This *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* affords us a golden opportunity to refocus and revisit what we do when we’re tapping away. Now is the time to reexamine the nature of our online communications and relationships. Perhaps if we look at ourselves and our behavior through the eyes of our innocent children, we’ll be jolted into reality.

If we can devote some time to thinking about these issues, we should have no problem shedding a tear this year. Once we take that first step in the *Teshuva* process – that of feeling bad for what we’ve done, we can proceed on the path of changing our ways, making a commitment for the future, earning *Hashem’s* forgiveness and embark on a journey that will bring real joy, satisfaction and *Nachas* to our family, and all of *Klal Yisroel* in the year ahead. And, who knows? Maybe our ‘friends’ will come along for the ride.

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Best wishes for a *Kesiva V’Chasima Tova*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann