

## ACCIDENT PREVENTION ON THE HIGHWAY OF LIFE

The two key words of this day, words which in their opposition and antagonism to each other summarize the moral story of man's life and his conscience-struggles, <sup>are,</sup> one, "CHAIT", and two, "TSHUVA". CHAIT, is usually translated as "sin", and TSHUVA, as "repentance".

The ascendancy of Chait, or Tshuva, the supremacy of one over the other, is what marks the <sup>moral</sup> ~~usual~~ tone, the religious level, and the ethical success of a man, a community, or a people.

It is interesting to note, therefore, that these two words also bear another relationship to each other. If we will analyze the original meanings of the words, if we will investigate their etymology, we will discover that CHAIT originally meant "to miss the mark", or "stray from the path", while TSHUVA means, "return!" or return on the proper path. Sin means to take the wrong road, to be lost; repentance means to find your way back again.

And indeed, this matter of treating ~~two~~ <sup>the</sup> great issues of life as one treats a voyage on a road, is not new to us. "KI YESHARIM DARKEI HA'SHAM" exclaims the Prophet in to-day's Haftorah. The ways of the Lo-d are straight. So that there are ways of G-d. We speak too, in our everyday language, about a "way of life". Courtesy, politeness, sympathy are referred to in Hebrew as "DERECH ERETZ", which literally means "the way of the world", for on such a way must a world progress. We speak, in scholarly circles of "A DERECH IN LERNEN", a way in study. Our Torah has its ways, the ways of pleasantness. "DERACHEN DARCHET NO'AM", The Mishna speaks of the ways of righteousness. "AIZOHI DERECH YESHARA SHE'YAVOR LO HA'ADOM" And our Rabbis talk much of "DAR KEI SHALOM", the ways of Peace, on which we must strive to travel, and of "DARKEI HA'EMORI", the ways of the Amorites, the ways of of wickedness and evil and corruption onto which he sometimes wanders.

And perhaps most interesting is a point made by Prof. Finkel, of Yeshiva University. The word-root L-M-D, from which we derive the words <sup>למד</sup> "to learn", and <sup>למד</sup> "to teach" originally comes from the noun "MAIMAD HA'BAKAR", <sup>ממך</sup> the harness of the cattle. Why? Because this harness kept the animal's face forward and gave him direction, keeping him

on the right path. All teaching, therefore, is a matter of giving direction, and keeping a man on the right path, on the straight way of G-d, on the pleasant and peaceful ways of Torah, on the righteous ways of our Sages. "CHAIT" caused man to lose his way. "TSHUVA", helps him rediscover it.

On this "SHABA, SHUVAH", therefore, we must discuss the causes for man's losing his way, and the manner of rediscovering it. Let me give you three such instances, ~~one~~ some from first-hand experience. For I too lost my way. During my recent vacation I travelled some 500 miles through lower New England on roads which were completely strange to me. And it set me thinking that a man must keep three things in mind if he is to arrive at his destination, if he is successfully and safely to traverse the HIGHWAY OF LIFE.

First of all, a man must have a rear-view mirror. This is required by law and approved by common sense. If a person is to make any head-way in life, he must have a rear-view mirror, a constant reminder of his past, a clear definition of his origin. As individuals, as members of the Jewish community, we cannot hope to go ahead, unless we keep in our mind's eye the rich tradition of our people, our magnificent though tear-stained history, the sacrifices of our forbears, the sacred teachings of our ancestors. We have got to be conscious of our origins. A man who knows the greatness of his past, will not shrink because of the pettiness of the present. A true prince, though in exile, still holds his head high. *for he remembers his origins.*

Those of us who occasionally listen to the Yiddish radio, or read the current fiction of the Yiddish press, or even the theatre, will recognize one basic theme running throughout — the revolt of the younger generation against the older. The old Yiddish-speaking parents are cast away by the young English-speaking children. It is a tragic theme but a true one. For that particular age we are now emerging from, was marked by that unwillingness to remember the past, to respect its treasures, and to sever its traditions. So many of our fellow Jews have strayed from the path because when they began their voyage of mature life, they blocked their rear-view mirrors. It is the "CHAIT", of FORGETTING THE PAST.

But in addition to maintaining a rear-view mirror, safe journey on the Highway of Life, requires a second precaution; a clean windshield, an unobstructed vision of where we are going. We must know our goals and plainly keep them in view. So many of us unfortunately, have an automatic, blurred life, a hit-or-miss existence. We get behind the wheel, and steer aimlessly, not seeing where we are going, not knowing where we are straying. Why do we work and sweat and perspire? Why do we seek security and <sup>status</sup> money and profit? Why do we eat and try to stay healthy? Are we driving or are we being driven? Do we know what we want? Can we see, through our windshields, the desired goals <sup>of our lives?</sup> —decency, freedom, fellowship, G-dliness? Without a clean windshield, without such goals <sup>in</sup> sight, man commits <sup>bet</sup> "CHAIT" and loses his way. "Teshuvah" <sup>Teshuvah</sup> means getting a rear-view mirror, and cleaning your windshield; remembering your past and knowing what you are striving for.

In the great song of <sup>Moses of the end of his life,</sup> to-day's Sedra we read "Z'CHOR YMOS OLAM, BINU SHNOS DOR VA'DOR", "Remember the days of old, and consider the years of many generations." The first part our Sages say, refers to, "HA'AVOS", our ancestors. The second — "ELU YMOS HA'MASHIACH", to the future days of Messiah. Happy driving on life's roads can be achieved only by remembering the "AVOS", our ancestors and their tradition, and by keeping in clear view the aim of Messianic days.

The third important secret of good journeying on the right path, is to obey the signs. Some motorists, <sup>as we know from</sup> I have learned from my own experience, are almost immune and oblivious to any and all signs. Yet there is always one word that attracts my attention, and which I always strive to obey. And that is "SLOW".

And how that one, sharp, compact commandment is important to us to-day, <sup>I</sup> "S L O W!" Our lives are permeated with the rush and bustle of our surroundings. Speed is the great virtue of our civilization. We rush to work, rush to eat, rush to play and rush to sleep. We have no time to think, to look, to "daven," to consider. The ulcer, perhaps, will some day become known as the <sup>distinguishing</sup> mark of our fast culture. Our journey is all too speedy, and as a result we do not see what happens about us. We burn up our life's fuel at an early age, and we leave ourselves open to swerving and

Al tirgezu ba-derekh,

skidding from the right and true path. ~~"AL TIRG'ZU BA'DARECH"~~, said Joseph to his brothers as he sent them to fetch their father Jacob and bring him to Egypt. "Do not fall out by the way"; "Take it easy," he told them, "slow down". For as our Rabbis explained that verse—Al tifse'u pesiah gassah—~~"AL TIPS'U P'SIAH GASSAH"~~, do not take large steps, <sup>do not</sup> hurry, ~~not~~, <sup>slow down</sup> I know, said Joseph, the rush and speed and hurry of life. I control Egypt's finances and her treasures. People are in a hurry. From Canaan, and Ur and Moab and Africa, from the world over, all rush to Egypt and rush back. They rush to build and they rush to destroy. Slow down, brothers. For our father Jacob knew how dangerous it is to speed, <sup>never to</sup> ~~never to~~ slow down, and think things over. What was his greatest worry? ~~"UKRA'AHU ASSON BA'DARECH"~~, lest an accident happen on the way. Certainly when men speed, when they exceed the limits G-d sets, when they never slow down to catch their breath, then accidents occur, men lose their way. They skid and swerve and collide. Al tirgezu ba-derekh. ~~"AL TIRGZU BA'DARECH"~~. Slow down. This is the season of introspection, of taking a breather, and thinking out in calm deliberation, the more serious matters of life.

There are two types of SLOW signs which I think are most important to observe on the HIGHWAY OF LIFE. One is, "SLOW—CHILDREN AHEAD". ~~How~~ many of us slow down sufficiently to pay some attention to our children. How many will put the brakes on the rush of business life in order to have a heart-to-heart talk with a son or daughter, to teach him personally, or to take time out to arrange for a check on his complete education, his religious education too.

And the second one is SLOW—CONSTRUCTION AHEAD, a sign I saw all over Connecticut. Yes, we have got to slow down if there is to be construction ahead.

On this day let us turn to the matter of building ourselves up—by reading and studying by praying and ~~doing~~ as a Jew should. Let us turn too, to the construction of decent family life, to consciously and deliberately building better relations

between husband and wife, parent and child, brothers and sisters. Al tifse'u pesiah gassah. SLOW DOWN, <sup>to</sup>

~~"AL TIPS'U P'SIAH GASSAH"~~.

On this Sabbath we each seek the return of the right way. We must heed the call of the open road, set ourselves on it, and go ahead, at the bidding of

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Alm-ity G-d, to a life of Blessedness, a year of happiness and plenty and benediction.