



The Rebbe's Reprimand

Parahas Shoftim

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H
Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

My father, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman, merited many wonderful studying partners whom he would learn with day and night.

When he was 20 years old, he studied with Rabbi Shlomke of Zweel; they would learn three pages of Talmud each day.

Father would recount how they studied together before Rabbi Shlomo became famous. He arrived from Europe and hid his wonderful ways, and the people of Jerusalem were not aware of the holy man who lived among them. Father too was not aware of who I was learning with.

"We were neighbors at the same table in Shul. One morning Rabbi Shlomo offered that we learn together, I agreed, and we learned every morning for an hour."

"One day, a religious looking individual strode into Shul as we were studying. He placed his bag in the center of the room and began striding back in forth across the room, in a commanding manner."

"Suddenly, Rabbi Shlomo stood up, ran to the man and shouted at him: 'evil one! What did you do last night? At night you do what you want, and during the day you pace around proudly?'"

The man gathered his belongings and quickly exited the Shul. Father was also frightened by the scene and ran away as well. He did not return to study with the Rebbe of Zweel.

The Magid of Dubnah would say that the month of Elul is like a person from the countryside who found a set of train tracks one day. He had never before seen the tracks and did not know what they were for. Seeing the rods of steel, he figured they were worth a lot of money. He decided to dismantle them with the purpose of selling them.

Suddenly, a train appears, the conductor sees a man working on the tracks. He sounds his horn in warning. The peasant thinks the train's honking is part of a celebration, as he is accustomed to back at home, and begins to dance on the tracks.

The train conductor was sure that the man on the tracks was deaf. What is the point of my horn blowing? To tell him to get off the tracks. "Get off the tracks and go elsewhere!" the warning tells him.

This is the purpose of the blowing of the Shofar throughout the month of Elul – to awaken those in slumber and to tell them to change their course.

How does one change his course? By introspect. Look within yourself, observe your state, how you lived out the past year, how were your prayers, your Torah study, how was your modesty and sanctity. Take a close look, and if need be – change your course!

This is what the first verse in our weekly parsha teaches us: "You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials **for yourself** in all your cities that the Lord, your G-d, is giving you."¹

Why for "yourself"? It is relating to the judges and law enforcement officials one must appoint for himself. These will guide his way and will hold him back from going astray.

In this venue, our Sages have taught us that "one strike at one's heart is more powerful than 100 lashes."

The regret and repentance must come from within the person himself.

A while later father met Rabbi Shlomke, who asked him why they had stopped learning together. Father answered simply that after observing his Holy Spirit, he was now frightened to sit next to him.

Rabbi Shlomke assured him: "I did not mean to upset you."

Father learned from this an import lesson, which he would often repeat to us: "If the man would have sat at the end of the room and would have recited Tehillim while weeping, Rabbi Shlomke would have shown him support. However, he chose to walk around in a proud manner, and Rabbi Shlomke could not tolerate that."

The purity of repentance comes from the depths of the heart and together with a regret for the past.

Rabbi Shlomke did not seek to show others what he knew about them, except in a case in which he encountered sin and haughtiness together, when he felt that a person was not fully repentant.

¹ Dvarim 16:18.