



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

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Learning from the Present to Shape the Future

One of the central themes of Moshe Rabbeinu's final words to Bnei Yisrael is the idea of *tochacha* - rebuke that inspires growth. True rebuke is not merely criticism of the past, but rather it is guidance for the future. The deepest form of *tochacha* is when a person learns from the consequences of his own actions and allows those lessons to shape the direction of his life.

The Gemara in *Tamid* famously asks:¹

איזהו חכם? הרואה את הנולד

Who is wise? One who sees what is born [what emerges].

This definition differs from the well-known teaching in *Pirkei Avot*:

איזהו חכם? הלומד מכל אדם

*Who is wise? One who learns from every person.*²

1. Tamid 32a

2. Pirkei Avot 4:1

While *Pirkei Avot* defines wisdom as openness to learning, the Gemara in *Tamid* defines wisdom as the ability to perceive consequences before they fully unfold.

Rashi explains:³

הרואה את הנולד: המבין מלבו מה שעתיד להיות, קורות שעתידים לבוא, ולהיזהר מהן.

*One who understands in his heart what is destined to occur, the events that are likely to come, and guards himself accordingly.*³

A wise person does not merely react to life after events occur. He studies the present carefully enough to anticipate the future. He recognizes that every decision carries consequences and that current behavior shapes future reality.

This idea is reflected in *halacha* as well. The *Shulchan Aruch*⁴ advises that during the winter months one should not overeat at the daytime meal on Shabbat lest he be unable to eat *Seudah Shelishit*. The Poskim invoke the phrase:

חכם עיניו בראשו - הרואה את הנולד.

*A wise man has his eyes in his head, he sees what will result.*⁴ A wise person thinks ahead.

Yet the Eish Kodesh raises a penetrating question regarding the Gemara's wording. If the Gemara wished to describe someone who

3. Rashi, Tamid 32a.

4. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 291

Mazel Tov to

Dovid & Miriam Schachter

and family on the

Bar Mitzvah of Moshe Pinchas

Mazel Tov to the grandparents,

Dovid & Anne Merzel and

Eliezer & Deborah Schachter



sees the future, it should have said:

הרואה את העתיד להיוולד

One who sees that which will be born in the future.

The expression “*haroeh et hanolad*” literally means *one who sees what has already been born*. But if something already exists before us, what great wisdom is required to see it?

The *Eish Kodesh* answers with a profound reinterpretation: The wise person sees what has already emerged from his actions, and from this learns how to guard himself in the future. No human being truly knows the future. We are not prophets. The wisdom of *haroeh et hanolad* is not supernatural foresight. Rather, it is the ability to honestly analyze what one’s actions have already produced and to draw conclusions from them.

The fool rushes through life without reflection. Most people move through this world like a horse charging into battle. Life becomes mechanical. Events occur, experiences pass, opportunities for growth arise and yet nothing changes internally.

The *Eish Kodesh*’s imagery recalls a powerful parable often attributed to Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. The horses that pulled wagons for the *Chevra Kadisha* spent their entire lives accompanying funerals and carrying coffins to burial. One might think that constant exposure to mortality would inspire introspection and repentance. Yet the horses remained unchanged. Why? Because horses remain horses. Human beings, however, are not meant to live mechanically. We are meant to reflect, interpret, and grow.

This idea emerges powerfully in the Torah’s description of Bilam and Balak. After the dramatic revelations surrounding Bilam’s failed attempts to curse Bnei Yisrael, the Torah concludes simply: *And he went and returned to his place.*⁵ Nothing changed.

Despite witnessing extraordinary events, Bilam returned unchanged to the same life and worldview. He saw the events, but he did not become *roeh et hanolad*. He failed to extract meaning from what had already unfolded before him.

The wise person lives differently. He reflects upon his actions and sees what has emerged from them and draws

conclusions with respect to the manner in which to direct his path in the future. Wisdom is not merely intelligence. Wisdom is the courage to reflect honestly upon one’s life.

Every experience contains within it a message. Every success, failure, relationship, disappointment, and triumph leaves behind spiritual evidence. The question is whether we pause long enough to notice it.

This, explains the *Eish Kodesh*, is the essence of Moshe Rabbeinu’s *tochacha*. Moshe was not merely recounting historical failures. He was teaching Bnei Yisrael how to look at their history and extract lessons from it.

One of the greatest spiritual dangers is not failure itself, but living without reflection. A person can experience extraordinary moments, profound challenges, even painful setbacks, and yet continue unchanged, simply *returning to his place*. The Torah calls upon us to become *roeh et hanolad*: to study the patterns of our lives, to recognize what our



Piaseczno Rebbe zt"l

actions produce, and to use that awareness to shape a better future.

Every day leaves behind *nolad* - results, consequences and spiritual footprints. The wise person does not ignore them. He studies them carefully and asks: What is this experience teaching me? What direction are my actions leading me toward? Who am I becoming?

True wisdom is not seeing the distant future through prophecy. It is seeing the present with honesty. When a person learns from what has already *been born*, he gains the ability to transform the future. May we be able to internalize these messages and build a brighter future. ■

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