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THE INVISIBLE STUMBLING BLOCK

From the Talks of
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
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1.

A Radical Departure from *Pshat*

On the verse, “Before a blind person you shall not place a stumbling block,”¹ *Rashi* explains: “Before someone who is ‘blind’ in a particular matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him” (and proceeds to bring an example for this, as will be discussed in Section 3).

We must understand: From where does *Rashi*, {who follows} the **straightforward** meaning of Scripture (*Pshuto shel mikra*), derive the license to take these words out of their literal context? Instead of their simple translation, that one may not place a physical obstacle before someone who cannot see, Heaven forefend,² he explains that (a) “blind” means “someone who is blind in a **particular matter**,” and (b) “stumbling block” means “advice that is improper for him.”

The *Mizrachi* posits that this is a continuation of *Rashi*’s previous commentary on the preceding words, “You shall not curse a deaf person.” {There, *Rashi* comments:}

{From this verse} I know only that {one may not curse} a deaf person. But from where do I know that this {prohibition} includes {cursing} any person {even if he is not deaf}? [Therefore, Scripture says, ‘You shall not curse...among your people.’] But if this is so {that this law is not exclusive to deaf people}, why does it say here, ‘a deaf person?’ {The answer is that} just as a deaf person [is special insofar as he is alive,] likewise, {one is prohibited from cursing} anyone [who is alive. This excludes {cursing} a dead person, for he is not alive].

Since these two laws appear in the same verse in a single sequence, we must say that “the ‘blind person’ is analogous to the ‘deaf person’: Just as ‘deaf’ is not meant exclusively, so too ‘blind’ is not meant exclusively.”

However, this explanation is problematic (as the commentaries point out³): Regarding the phrase “You shall not curse a deaf person,” *Rashi* does **not** strip the word “deaf” of its literal meaning. He merely states that we extrapolate from “a deaf person” that “Just as a deaf person... **so too anyone**...” By contrast, regarding the phrase “Before a blind person you shall not place a stumbling block,” *Rashi* states that “blind” means (**not** its literal meaning — someone who cannot see, but rather) a “person blind in a particular matter.”⁴

1) *Shemos* 19:14.

2) As explained by the *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* (at the end) here. See the *Targumim* on the verse. *Zohar*, *Parshas Kedoshim* (85a). And elsewhere.

3) *Korban Aharon* to *Toras Kohanim* on the verse (also cited in *Tzeidah LaDerech* on *Rashi* here).

4) Meaning, even if we say there is a compelling reason that “blind” is not meant exclusively to a physically blind man, *Rashi* should have written in the style of “Just as a blind person... so too anyone

Thus, according to *Rashi*, the blind person is **not** “analogous to the deaf person” {since the word “blind” is stripped of its literal meaning entirely}.

Furthermore: The aforementioned explanation only provides a reason why we must explain that “blind” is not meant exclusively as literally blind, but rather a “person blind in a particular matter.” However, what compelled *Rashi* to say that “placing a stumbling block” does not refer to a literal “placing” {of an object, and that it does not refer to} a standard “stumbling block,” but specifically to **speech**⁵ — i.e., “**advice** that is improper for him”?

Alternatively, *Rashi* should have explained (as it is interpreted in *Halachah*) that the verse “Before a blind person...” comes to warn us not to place a stumbling block, i.e., a forbidden object, before a Jew who is “blind” in a matter, {causing him to commit a sin}. As the *Gemara* provides an example:⁶ “A person should not pass a cup of wine to a *Nazir* (Nazirite)” (which does not involve **speech**, but an action⁷ of **placing** a stumbling block of sin⁸).

2.

The Structural Flaw of the Heart

The *Gur Aryeh* states⁹ that *Rashi*’s proof for this {non-literal} explanation stems from the conclusion of the verse — “and you shall fear your G-d, I am the L-rd.” This phrase is used (as *Rashi* explains here on these words) exclusively regarding a “matter given over to the heart of man” {i.e., matters of private intent}.

{The *Gur Aryeh* reasons as follows:} Since placing a literal “stumbling block” before a literal “blind person” is not a “matter given over to the heart,” but rather an observable action where one’s intent is recognizable, *Rashi* concludes that the verse must be discussing

who is blind in a matter...” (or similar), and not explain that the word “blind” translates {solely} to “a person blind in a matter.” See *Maskil LeDavid*.

5) However, see *Korban Aharon* cited below in footnote 13. {The Rebbe notes that} the *Rambam* in *Sefer HaMitzvos* (Negative Commandment 299) includes assisting in a sin under this prohibition, but notes its primary, straightforward meaning applies to giving bad advice.}

6) *Pesachim* 22b. A similar concept is found in various other places regarding other prohibitions.

7) As opposed to the example in *Toras Kohanim* here: “The daughter of so-and-so, what is her status

regarding marrying into the priesthood...” which is merely **advice** that is improper for him. See below, footnote 16.

8) Even if we say (see *Maskil LeDavid* here) that according to the straightforward meaning, the prohibition of “Before a blind person...” applies **only** to a “person blind in a matter” (and not to someone who **knowingly** helps his friend commit a sin), we could still say it refers to a case where the second person is unaware it is a prohibited item.

9) See also *Kli Yakar* here; *Korban Aharon*.

the giving of “advice that is improper for him.” In such a case, one cannot know whether “this {advisor’s} intention is for good or for evil, and he can evade blame and say, ‘I intended for his good.’”¹⁰ {Therefore, the *Gur Aryeh* assumes the end of the verse is what forces *Rashi* to reinterpret the beginning.}

However, it is difficult to say that this is the foundation (and the compulsion) for *Rashi*’s explanation. For if {the end of the verse were truly the source for reinterpreting the beginning},¹¹ *Rashi* should have stated his explanation of “and you shall fear your G-d” (not in an **independent** heading {as he does}, but) within the very same heading, in one continuous sequence: “{You shall not give advice that is improper for him...} **and therefore**, it is stated, ‘and you shall fear your G-d...’”

{Had *Rashi* been relying on the end of the verse to reinterpret the beginning,} he would have followed the style of the *Toras Kohanim* here: “Perhaps you will say, ‘[I am giving him] good advice!’ Behold, this is a matter given over to the heart, [as it is stated, ‘and you shall fear your G-d, I am the L-rd’].”

A similar continuous sequence is found in ***Rashi* himself** later in the Torah portion on the verse,¹² “and you shall honor the presence of an elder.” {There *Rashi* comments in a single thought:}

He shall not sit in his place [nor shall he speak in his place]. You might think he can close his eyes [as if he does not see him], therefore it is stated, ‘and you shall fear your G-d’ [for this matter is privately known to the one who commits it, and no one knows about it except the person himself, and, concerning any matter known only in the heart {of one person}, Scripture says, ‘and you shall fear your G-d.’]

{However,} from the fact that *Rashi* separates this into an **independent** heading, it is evident that the explanation, “Before someone who is ‘blind’ in a particular matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him,” is a **distinct** concept in its own right. The compulsion for it must stem from **these** words (“Before a blind person you shall not place a stumbling block”) themselves, {and not from the subsequent warning to “fear your G-d”}.¹³

10) The continuation of *Rashi*’s wording on the verse, s.v., “And you shall fear.”

11) This is in addition to the question raised in *Sifsei Chachamim* that it is possible that Scripture specifies “fear your G-d” regarding situations where no one else sees (similar to *Rashi* on 19:32, cited below).

12) *Shemos* 19:32. Furthermore: *Rashi* does not even quote the words “and you shall fear your G-d” in his

heading, nor does he even hint to them with an “etc.”! A similar pattern is found in *Rashi* on *Vayikra* 25:17 (and see below, footnote 37) and 25:43.

13) *Korban Aharon* explains the compulsion arises from the word “place” (literally “give” — *titen*). One does not “give” a physical stumbling block; one “sets” (*meisim*) it. Therefore, the Sages expounded

3.

An Overly Complex Trap

Aside for the aforementioned difficulty, there are a few difficulties in *Rashi's* the example *Rashi* provides for “advice that is improper for him.” {*Rashi* writes:} “Do not say to him, ‘Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey,’ while you are circumventing him and taking it {the field} from him.”

This is difficult to understand, for {several reasons}:

- a) The meaning of “advice that is improper for him” is seemingly quite simple and requires no explanation. Why does *Rashi* need to provide an example for it at all?
- b) Even if he must provide an example of “advice that is improper for him,” aren’t there much simpler and easier examples for this concept?¹⁴
- c) Moreover: In *Toras Kohanim* — which is the **source** for *Rashi's* commentary — **three** examples are brought for “advice that is improper for him”:

“(1) Do not say to him, ‘Go out early in the morning,’ so that highwaymen should mug him; (2) ‘Go out at noon,’ so that he should suffer from the intense heat (meaning, that the heat and sun should strike him¹⁵); (3) ‘Do not say to him, “Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey,” while you are circumventing him and taking it from him.”

[In fact, prior to this, the *Toras Kohanim* brings an example relating to a sinful matter:¹⁶ “If he comes and asks, ‘The daughter of so-and-so, what is her status regarding marrying into the priesthood?’ Do not say to him, ‘She is fit,’ when she is in fact unfit.”]

Out of all these aforementioned examples, *Rashi* specifically cites the **last** one, and not one of the **earlier** (and simpler) examples!¹⁴

this as referring to something that is “given,” namely, advice.

14) Note that the *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 232) also specifically brings this example. And see *Maskil LeDavid* here.

15) *Korban Aharon* to *Toras Kohanim*. And so too in the commentary of Rabbeinu Hillel there.

16) It requires slight clarification because the sequence of *Toras Kohanim* implies this case of the

unfit woman is not categorized under “advice that is improper for him.” Perhaps this is because the word “stumbling block” (*michshol*) — when not taken literally, and especially when following verses dealing with prohibitions — applies more aptly to a “stumbling block of iniquity” (causing someone to sin) rather than bad advice that merely causes a monetary loss or physical harm.

4.

The Hidden Value of the Donkey

Within this aforementioned example itself, it is not understandable why *Rashi* — {whose commentary is based on} the **straightforward meaning of Scripture** — also includes the concluding phrase: “while you are circumventing him and taking it from him.”

Simply put, the “advice that is improper for him” should consist merely in the fact that for this “person blind in a matter,” it is more worthwhile to have a field than a donkey. Why introduce a **completely new, additional** element here: “while you are circumventing him and taking it from him”?¹⁷

One could answer this (though with difficulty):

On the verse (in *Parshas Vayechi*¹⁸), “Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey, resting between the boundaries,” *Rashi* explains:

[“A strong-boned donkey”:] ... like a strong donkey which is laden with a heavy burden. [“Resting between the boundaries”: like a donkey,] which travels day and night and does not lodge in a house, but when it lies down to rest, it lies between the boundaries, in the boundaries of the towns where it transports merchandise.

From this, one can understand (even a five-year-old beginning to study Scripture), that regarding livelihood, one can derive greater benefit from a donkey than from a field. For a donkey works both by day and by night, without excessive exertion on the part of the donkey’s owner, because the donkey carries the heavy burdens. By contrast, regarding a field, the work is (typically) only by day, and it is fraught with toil and exertion on the part of the field’s owner in all the various forms of labor: plowing, sowing, reaping, etc., throughout the year.¹⁹

Furthermore, the work and transport of merchandise with a donkey brings immediate profit, or at least {profit} after a short time. However, with a field, it comes only after a lengthy period of time — after the time of reaping arrives, and even more so — after the time of gathering the grain.

17) The simple reason for this addition is to explain why the person would give such advice to his fellow. But what is the practical difference {whether he does it for personal gain or just to cause harm}? Furthermore: In the first examples in *Toras Kohanim*, it merely states “so that highwaymen should mug him... so that he should suffer from the

intense heat,” which simply means his intention is only to harm. If so, in this example as well, we could say he merely wants to harm his fellow.

18) *Bereishis* 49:14.

19) See *Shemos* 23:15-16 (and *Rashi* there). And elsewhere. See *Bereishis* 8:22 and *Rashi* there.

According to this, it emerges that the “advice” to “Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey” is actually, under normal circumstances,²⁰ **proper** advice. Therefore, *Rashi* must conclude, “while you are circumventing him and taking it from him,” {to clarify} that **here** we are discussing a case where the “advisor” intends with his advice to appropriate the field {for himself}.²¹

5.

A Victimless Crime

However, this premise is entirely untenable, for {two reasons}:

- a) It is obvious and simple that, conversely, a “field” possesses advantages over a “donkey.” For instance: {a donkey can incur the financial loss of} death, {while by a field this} does not apply. Furthermore, working with a donkey involves the hardships of travel for the donkey’s owner, who must constantly travel from place to place. By contrast, a field is usually located in close proximity to one’s city and home; {among many} other advantages.

{As such, *Rashi* could have simply explained that the actual trade of a field for a donkey is inherently a bad trade,} especially since the emphasis here is {that the advice is} “improper **for him**,” i.e., it is not suited for **his** {specific situation}. There could certainly be many scenarios where it is actually better *for him* to own a field {rather than a donkey}.

[This is similar to the earlier example in *Toras Kohanim*: “Go out early in the morning,’ so that highwaymen should mug him.” Generally speaking, “going out early” is **good** advice, but in **this specific case** it is a detriment because there are highwaymen {on the road}. Consequently, it is (as the precise wording of the *Toras Kohanim* indicates) “advice that is improper **for him**.”²² And as the *Toras Kohanim* concludes: “Perhaps you will say, ‘I am giving him good advice,’ [behold, this is a matter given over to the heart, as it is stated, ‘and you shall fear your G-d, I am the L-rd’]” — meaning the advisor could claim he actually thought he was giving “good advice.”]

- b) Furthermore, and most fundamentally: If it is indeed more worthwhile for the owner of the field to have a donkey rather than a field {as suggested in Section 4}, what does it matter if the advisor subsequently takes the field from the one who

20) See *Rashi* to *Shemos* 21:28; 22:17; 21:30. And in many places.

21) See *Korban Aharon* there: That he coveted his field and said to him, “Sell your field, etc.”

22) See also *Torah Temimah* on the verse (*ois pei*).

bought it from the “person blind in a matter”? For the “person blind in a matter,” this is not a “stumbling block,” nor is it even “advice that is improper **for him**.” On the contrary: it is better for him to have the donkey! {The advisor simply found a way to gain off someone else without actually causing him any harm!}

6.

The Law of the Open Pit

This will be understood based on the rule (which applies even within the approach of the straightforward meaning of Scripture) that when the Torah repeats a law we already know from beforehand, one must strive to discover a novel ruling within it. We do not simply say the repetition is merely to “multiply the negative commandments” (or the like).²³

[In those places where *Rashi* does explain that a verse is repeated “[so that one who disobeys] transgresses two negative commands”²⁴ (and the like), it is because he cannot find a novel ruling there (according to *Pshat*), {thus he settles for an alternative explanation}.]

This principle is evident in *Rashi*’s commentary on this very verse: Regarding “You shall not curse a deaf person,” *Rashi* explains (as mentioned above):

“From where do I know to include all people? Scripture says... If so, why is ‘deaf’ stated? Just as a deaf person, etc.”

Seemingly, *Rashi* could have simply explained that although we already have the prohibition of “You shall not curse,”²⁵ which encompasses “all people” (and therefore includes a “deaf person”), the Torah nevertheless states “You shall not curse” specifically regarding a “deaf person” in order to add an **extra** negative commandment.

From {the fact that *Rashi* does not settle for that explanation}, it is understood that if it is at all possible, one must explain the verses in a manner where we do not have to resort to saying it is merely to multiply negative commandments.

The same logic applies to our case: The concept of “Before a blind person you shall not place a stumbling block” in its **literal** sense — that one may not place an obstacle

23) See *Pesachim* 24a ff. And it is obvious that this is the case according to *Pshat* — see for example *Rashi* to *Shemos* 23:19; 34:26; and elsewhere.

24) See *Rashi* to *Shemos* 34:23 (“many commandments, [are stated and repeated].”). *Tzav* 6:6; *Shemini* 11:44; *Emor* 23:22; *ibid.*, 31; *Behar* 25:36. And elsewhere.

25) *Shemos* 22:27. Note that *Rashi* there does **not** explain that it applies to all people. {Even though the simple reading of the verse is “you shall not curse a *prince* among your people,” *Rashi* learns (as commentaries point out) here in our verse, from the extra phrase “among your people,” that this includes everyone. See *Gur Aryeh*; *Mizrachi* on our verse.}

through which a “blind person” will be damaged — is already known from what is stated **earlier** in the Torah regarding various **prohibited and undesirable** occurrences: “If a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it... the owner of the pit shall pay.”²⁶ Meaning, one may not do an action — “placing a stumbling block” — that will cause damage to another.²⁷

Even though the Torah there does not explicitly speak in terms of prohibition and permission, but rather about financial restitution for the damage — {the deduction remains absolute}. As a matter of fact, if one is **punished** (i.e., obligated to pay) for the damage he caused, then it is certainly a prohibited act.²⁸

[And moreover: the “stumbling block” there is not even “his,” as *Rashi* explains there that it refers to a pit dug in the **public domain**, and nevertheless the “owner of the hazard” is obligated to pay for the damage just as if it were “his” property.]

Therefore, *Rashi* deduces²⁹ that here a new **category** of prohibition is being introduced,³⁰ which is not included in and cannot be derived from the law of “If a man opens a pit...”³¹ (where one causes damage to another), as will be explained later (at the end of Section 7 and onwards).

7.

Damage is Damage

Based on this {principle that a repeated law must contain a novel ruling}, it is easy to understand why *Rashi* could not cite the first two examples from the *Toras Kohanim* for “advice that is improper for him”: (a) “Go out early in the morning, so that highwaymen should mug him; (b) Go out at noon, so that he should suffer from the intense heat.”

26) Ibid., 21:33-34.

27) See *Sforno* here, that the content of the prohibition of “Before a blind person, etc.” (in its literal sense) is “that one should not cause damage.”

28) See the commentary of Reb Y.F. Perla to *Sefer HaMitzvos* who concludes halachically that placing a stumbling block violates the prohibition of “do not bring bloodguilt upon your house.” However, according to *Pshat*, we do not need an explicit warning to know it is prohibited, as this is understood all the more so from the punishment.

29) See **similarly** Reb Y.F. Perla regarding why the Sages took the verse out of its literal meaning. See below, footnote 32.

30) One might argue that even if we know it is prohibited because of the punishment, an explicit warning is still necessary since the verses regarding the pit do not contain one. However, this is incorrect. Wherever the Torah states both a punishment and a warning, they use the same terminology. Here, the punishment (for damage) and the warning (“stumbling block”) use completely different terms.

31) See below, footnote 37.

Such improper advice is already included in the straightforward meaning of “If a man opens a pit,”³² because through his (bad) advice, the advisor has caused damage to another person.

[It is indeed true that the cause here is not readily discernible (unlike the physical **action** of “opening a pit”) — but {regarding the actual prohibition,} this makes absolutely no difference. The outcome is the same: causing damage to another person.]

For this exact reason, *Rashi* cannot explain that “Before a blind person...” means one may not cause another person to stumble by committing a sin. Since one is prohibited from causing physical damage to another (to his body or his property), *all the more so*³³ one is prohibited from causing him spiritual damage³⁴ (by causing him to transgress a sin)!

We find this concept discussed at length in *Parshas Bereishis*. Because the snake caused Chavah to stumble³⁵ with the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, it was punished with a remarkably severe penalty: “Cursed are you more than all the animals, etc.”³⁶ From this, one can clearly deduce the severity of the prohibition against causing someone else to stumble with a sin (and as *Rashi* explains there: “From here we learn that we do not seek merit for an enticer,^{37*} etc.”).

Therefore, *Rashi* specifically brings the *last* example from the *Toras Kohanim* — “Do not say to him, ‘Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey’” — and concludes it with the phrase, “while you are circumventing him and taking it from him.” He does so because specifically in **this** example, a genuinely novel law is introduced, as will be explained.

32) Reb Y.F. Perla writes that giving bad advice (whether it causes monetary loss or causes someone to sin) is not included in the prohibition of “do not bring bloodguilt upon your house” and requires its own specific warning. However, according to *Pshat*, since the **core** prohibition is causing harm, it makes no difference whether it is done via a physical obstacle or bad advice; nor does it matter if the harm is physical or spiritual, as explained inside the text.

33) See *Rashi* to *Devarim* 23:9.

34) Note the dissenting views of the commentaries that point out that while the Halachic derivation of this verse focuses on causing someone to sin, this does not negate its literal application prohibiting a

physical stumbling block. See *Maskil LeDavid* here; *Minchas Chinuch* (and the glosses of R. Y.F. Perla) there; *Torah Temimah* here.}

35) See *Bereishis* 3:13, “The snake **enticed** me (*hishiani*),” and in *Rashi*, “It **misled** me.”

36) *Ibid.*, 14.

36*) {An “enticer” (*meisis*) is someone who incites or seduces another Jew to commit idolatry. In Jewish law, the court usually goes out of its way to find merits or defenses for the accused. However, for a *meisis*, this right is revoked — a legal precedent derived directly from G-d’s refusal to offer the snake a chance to defend itself for enticing Chavah.}

8.

A Novel Definition of a Stumbling Block

By adding the concluding phrase, “while you are circumventing him and taking it from him,” *Rashi* emphasizes that the flaw does not consist of causing the “blind person” to exchange a field for a donkey. For in doing so, it is not guaranteed that there will be any loss at all (as mentioned above in Section 4).

Rather, {the flaw lies specifically} in the fact that “you are circumventing him and taking it from him.”

The Torah here (according to *Pshat*) is introducing a novel law: Here we are not discussing a prohibition against causing the “blind person” damage. Rather, the Torah prohibits here (also) merely giving him “advice that is **improper for him**.” When giving advice to another, one must have in mind **only** that the advice should be “**proper for him**” — and **not** think simultaneously about one’s own benefit, {calculating} what **he** himself can profit from it.³⁷

And this is brought out {perfectly} in the aforementioned example:³⁸ “Do not say, ‘Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey,’ while you are circumventing him and taking it from him.” Even if the receiver of the advice will suffer absolutely no damage from this trade, the advice is nonetheless “**improper for him**” — **he** has no **need** for it³⁹ — and the Torah forbade it. Because when giving advice to another, one must thoroughly consider **the other person’s** situation and determine what is necessary for **him** (“proper for him”), and not exploit the situation for personal gain — “circumventing him and taking it from him.”

Even though the advisor might think to himself: “This person who is blind in the matter is **losing nothing at all** {from this trade} — so why does it matter if I enjoy a **benefit?!}** {The novelty of this verse is that even such behavior is forbidden.}

And this is what *Rashi* means by “Before a blind person you shall not place a stumbling block” — Before someone who is ‘blind’ in a particular matter, you shall not give advice that is improper for him.” The {novelty of this prohibition is that the} term “stumbling block” here includes a scenario even where the “person blind in the matter” incurred no loss whatsoever. Rather, the “stumbling block” (i.e., failure) lies purely in the *manner* the advice was given — it was “advice that is improper for him”.⁴⁰ The “blind

37) And in *Rashi’s* words later (on *Vayikra* 25:17): “And he shall not give him advice that is improper for him, according to the path and benefit of the advisor.”

38) See also *Maskil LeDavid* on *Vayikra* *ibid*.

39) In *Rashi* to *Shemos* 16:7.

40) And similarly in *Rashi* on *Vayikra* *Ibid*., *Rashi* precisely notes “advice that is improper for him”

person” thinks the advisor is giving him advice that is “proper for him,” but the advisor is actually “circumventing him,” deceiving him and giving him advice “according to his own path and benefit.”⁴¹

9.

The Depth of the Advisor’s Intent

According to this, we can also understand the lengthiness of *Rashi*’s wording in his commentary on “and you shall fear your G-d.” {There, *Rashi* writes:}

“Because this matter {of misadvising someone} is not discernible by people, whether this person had good or evil intentions, and he can avoid {being blamed by the victim afterwards} by saying, ‘I meant well!’ Therefore, concerning this, it says, ‘and you shall fear your G-d,’ Who knows your thoughts!”

By contrast, in the *Toras Kohanim*, it states this briefly:

“Perhaps you will say, ‘I am giving him good advice.’ Behold, this is a matter given over to the heart, [as it is stated, ‘and you shall fear your G-d, I am the L-rd’].”

In the *Toras Kohanim*, the precise wording is “Perhaps you will say, ‘I am giving him **good advice**’.” This implies that in actual practice, it was **bad advice**. It is just that a human cannot blame him for it, since the advisor can defend himself by claiming he actually thought it was a good piece of advice (and thus it is a “matter given over to the heart”).

According to *Rashi*, however, the distinction is not whether the advice was **in actual practice** “good advice” or “bad advice.” Rather, the entire matter relates **solely** to the person’s intent and motive — whether or not he was thinking about the other person when he gave the advice.⁴²

[In fact, this cannot be known by others even *after* the advisor purchases the field. It is entirely possible that this was not his initial intention when giving the advice; rather,

(and not “bad advice”) — because it is dealing (as *Rashi* says there) with **verbal oppression**. By contrast, in *Rashi* on the verse (*Devarim* 27:18) “Cursed is the one who causes a blind person to go astray on the road,” he writes “and he gives him *bad* advice” — because there it is one of the eleven “cursed” individuals in the Torah, and it is obvious that this refers to the most severe level: giving genuinely bad advice.

41) *Rashi*’s wording on *Vayikra* Ibid.

42) Based on this, *Rashi*’s wording, “whether this person’s intention is... for evil,” does not mean the advice was factually bad. Rather, because his intent was not purely for the other’s benefit, the advice becomes “evil” by virtue of the corrupt manner in which it was given. (However, reading this into the word “evil” is somewhat forced.)

afterwards an opportunity presented itself for him to buy the field (from the one who bought it from the “blind person”).]

Regarding this, the verse concludes, “and you shall fear your G-d” {which *Rashi* explains to mean:} “**Who knows your thoughts**,” for G-d knows exactly what the person is thinking while giving the advice.

10.

The Selfless Architecture of Ahavas Yisrael

Herein lies a wondrous directive regarding the *mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisrael* (love for a fellow Jew) — illustrating the profound extent to which a Jew is obligated to invest himself in the welfare of another:

It is not enough that you conduct yourself in a manner where your fellow derives **practical**, tangible benefit from your actions. Rather, **your** “path,” intent, and ultimate goal are also crucial factors. When you do a favor for another person, you must divest yourself entirely of your own ego and focus exclusively on the other person’s situation. By doing so, you ensure that no personal biases, ulterior motives, or the like, will intermingle {with your deed}.

This level of dedication is the true fulfillment of *Ahavas Yisrael* in the spirit of the verse, “And you shall love your fellow as yourself.”⁴³ When a person feels that his “fellow” is quite **simply** “as yourself” — meaning, his fellow is not an “other,” but rather one identical entity with him, {reflecting} the true **unity** of the Jewish people (*Achdus Yisrael*)⁴⁴ — then he will think about his fellow in a way that occupies his concern **completely**, literally “as yourself.”

(Adapted from the *Sichah* of Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim, 5741)

43) *Shemos* 19:18.

44) See *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Nedarim* 9:4. *Sefer HaMitzvos* of the *Tzemach Tzedek*, *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisrael*. *Kuntres Ahavas Yisrael*.