The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

תשפ״ו

Mah Naeh Ilan Zeh: The Rebbe and the Robin

Dovid Kopel

I'm going to share this story because we just learned the משנה in אבות (*Ethics of the Fathers*):

> רבי שמעון אומר: המהלך בדרך ושונה, ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר, מה נאה אילן זה ומה נאה ניר זה – מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מתחייב בנפשו

There was once a time I was walking with my Rebbe and talking in learning. As we walked, I saw a beautiful red robin and was taken aback by it. I stopped and said, "What a beautiful bird!"

My Rebbe looked at me, surprised, and said, הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו, quoting the משנה in אבות about one who is walking on the road and learning and stops from his learning to say, "How beautiful is this tree." And then, only the way my great Rebbe could, he apologized for giving me the מוסר (*rebuke*) that I greatly deserved.

I had stopped in the middle of learning to admire a bird. He knew where I was holding. He knew that I knew better. But he was so sensitive and caring that he was concerned he might have gone too far.

So often we encounter an opportunity to give someone מוסר. On the one hand, אַל תּוֹכַח לֵץ — do not rebuke a scoffer. On the other hand, הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עֲמִיתֶךָ — you shall surely rebuke your fellow. Most of the time, we just say nothing. You aren't the משגיח. Worry about yourself. And that may be true. But it is a very difficult balance.

I was recently davening in a shul on שבת. ברוך השם, there was a שמחה, and there were so many people that they had to extend the davening into a side room. A gentleman came in late and was very chatty. People would come over to greet him, and he would speak with them — in the middle of פסוקי דזמרה, in the middle of חזרת הש״ץ. He was clearly very popular. I gave him the "look" and the "shh," and I refrained from anything more.

Then there was another בחור having an intense, fiery Gemara conversation in the middle of חזרת הש״ץ. This time, the look wasn't enough. I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't hear. And there was nowhere else to go. At the end of davening, I really had to restrain myself from saying something. I saw the בחור, wished him a good Shabbos, and walked on.

I think back to that once in a while. It felt deeply lacking in דרך ארץ (*proper conduct*). It was disruptive, and I have not gone back to that minyan since. But I am still unsure if I did the right thing. Should such behavior go unchecked? I do not talk during davening; unless my child has a question about where we are or a הלכה, it doesn't happen. If you need to talk, go outside. But

what do I do? I am not the משגיח. We don't all have to be the משגיח. But we do have to be an עם (*nation*) of conscientious individuals who care about each other. We need to show dignity, respect, and דרך ארץ.

My Rebbe taught me that מוסר is not just about being right. It is about caring enough to say something — and caring enough to worry afterward whether you said it correctly. That balance is hard. Sometimes we speak when we should be quiet. Sometimes we stay quiet when we should speak. May we all be זוכה to learn when to speak up and when to hold our tongues; and when we do speak, may we do it with אמת, humility, and love.

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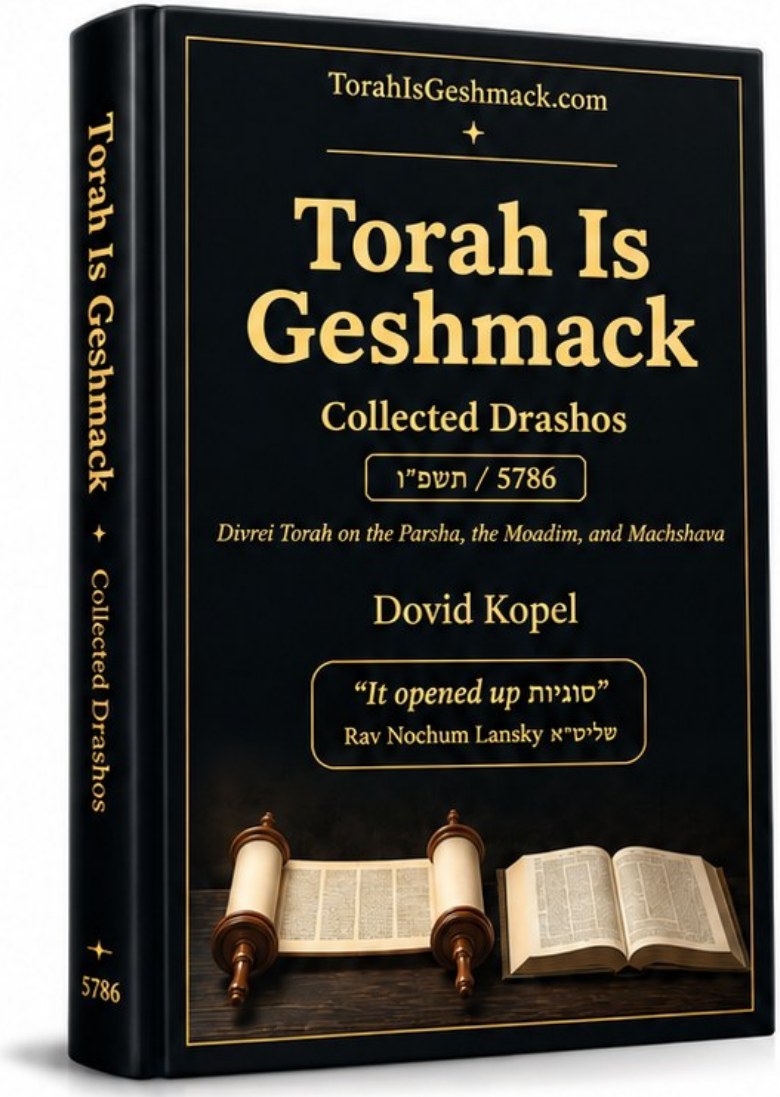
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