

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on Parshas Kedoshim

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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בת מרים

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת אחרי - קדושים

HOLINESS FOR EVERYBODY

אמר - "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and He said: דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל: ואמרת אליהם: קדושים - "You should be holy, because I Hashem am holy" (Kedoshim 19: 1-2).

Now, to our small minds the word "holy" is a very vague, very foggy concept. Holy? What does that mean "to be holy"? If you'll ask someone this question, maybe he'll tell you it's a person who fasts many days, Mondays and Thursdays and *shoivim*. Or maybe someone who keeps his eyes glued to the floor all the time, that's a holy man! don't mean. Those are all nice things, beautiful things, but that's not what *kedusha* really means.

So we'll look at the *Seforno* who explains to us what Hakodosh Boruch Hu intended when He said קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני - "You should be holy *because I am holy*." What does that mean "because I am holy"? We are being taught here what it means to be a holy person. "Be *as similar to Me* as you can be. As much as a human being can resemble Me, that's what I want from you." And because קדוש אני, because I am perfect, that's what I expect from

you. All the greatness that we can imagine - and far beyond what we could ever imagine - that's what Hashem is. And קדושים תהיו tells us to aspire to emulate Him and to become as much like Him as humanly possible. כי קדוש אני. Because I am perfect, therefore you should also be as perfect as you possibly can be.

KEDOSHIM TI'HIYU: BRAINWASHING

But here we come face to face with a serious problem: Emulate Hashem?! How does one emulate Hashem? Is such a thing even possible? Hashem, Who is so far beyond our *seichel*, and we should be like Him?!

And the answer is as follows: The only way to truly and fully accomplish the goal of emulating Hashem is by studying His ways as set forth in the Torah, and endeavoring to model all of your thoughts and attitudes after His thoughts. קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני. "Be holy like Me," says Hashem. And fundamentally this means, "Think as I think!" Your mind is where you will achieve greatness. You must knock into yourself that the most important part of your personality is your mind - you are what you *think* - and therefore we can most effectively emulate the perfection of Hashem by means of emulating His thoughts. Everything in the Torah is an example of Hashem's thoughts, *as He wishes us to think*, and therefore if you seek to be a *kadosh* you will study all the words of Hashem in order to acquire what He reveals to us as His attitudes.

"THINK ALONG WITH ME," SAYS HASHEM

So if Hashem regards Man as a צלם אלוקים - the image of G-d, then we have our work cut out for us - for we must train ourselves to think that way as well. If He considers the *Am Yisroel* to be His children (D'varim 14:1) then we must endeavor to think along with Him and gain that same attitude. If Hashem desires kindness (Shemos 34:6; Michah 7:18) then so should we. We should *desire* what Hashem desires. And we know that אלוקיהם של - אלו שונא זימה הוא - "The G-d of the *Am Yisroel* hates immorality"

(Sanhedrin 106a). Hakodosh Boruch Hu hates immorality, and therefore we train our minds to imitate His thoughts, and we too are disgusted with immorality. And if Hashem tells us that His world, הארץ ומלואה, is *tov me'od* (Bereishis 1:31) then we therefore are obligated to spend our days seeing this world as very good. "Think along with Me," Hashem says, "and you'll become more and more *kadosh* with every thought."

Now these are just a few of the thousands of examples that we could speak about; I just mentioned a few of them so that we can begin to scratch the surface of understanding our purpose in life. But in order to become *kedoshim*, we will have to learn *how* to acquire these attitudes of Hashem. Because to just sit here, to lean back in our chairs and hope that by some means of osmosis we will acquire the mind of Hashem, is a *chalom*, a dream, a pie in the sky. So our subject for tonight will be how to instill the attitudes of perfection into our own personalities.

HASHEM SHARES HIS OPINIONS

In the two *parshiyos* that we learn this week, we find that Hashem commands us in many of the איסורי עריות. But Hashem is not satisfied with merely informing us which עריות are forbidden and the punishment for them. No - Hashem does much more than that! Hashem utilizes the opportunity to befoul those who behave this way with terms of disparagement. "Abomination." "Lewdness." "Perversion." "Disgusting." These are the words that we find Hashem using.

Now why is Hakodosh Boruch Hu telling us that *it's this* and *it's that*? What's that to us?! We're His loyal people; He could've just told us what is forbidden and we'd loyally follow His command. Do we need to know that Hashem thinks that an *aveirah* is "depraved" or an "abomination"? Do we have to know that Hashem thinks that certain behaviors are "perversions" and "disgusting"?

And the answer is a resounding yes! That's exactly what Hashem want us to know because *He wants us to know how to think!* Hashem is teaching us how He thinks, because He wants us to *think along with Him*. Hashem does not only want us to know that the *issurei arayos* are wrong. He wants us to feel disgust the same way He feels disgust. These forbidden behaviors are not merely wrong and forbidden - they are perverse and lewd and abominations. And those who are disgusted by the immorality of the world outside, are thinking along with Hashem. אלוקיהם של אלו שונא זימה הוא. Hashem *hates* the immoral. When a person is careful to train his mind to think this way, then he has begun the great *avodah* of thinking the way that Hashem thinks, the *avodah* of *kedoshim ti'hiyu*.

RABBI AKIVA AND THE DEAD RAT

What we are saying here is not our own invention, it's not my *chiddush*. It has been the way of the great men and women of our nation from time immemorial. In *Avos D'Rabbi Nosson* (Perek 16) we find the following the story: Rabbi Akiva once had to travel out of Eretz Yisroel to meet with the gentile king of a certain country on behalf of the *Am Yisroel*. And so Rabbi Akiva was staying overnight in the city capital before the meeting, and he was put up by this king in a hotel. And as befitting an important guest, the king of this province, or whatever it was, also provided Rabbi Akiva with two female escorts, two *zonos*, to spend the night with him. It was a gentile king; you know, and that's how goyim think. *A goy bleibt a goy* - even if he's the King. *A goyishe kup!* A mind in the gutter. And so, this was his way of honoring an important guest.

So the next morning, the two women complained before the king. "Who is this fellow you sent us to last night? What kind of a man is that? The whole night long he stood on the side retching, vomiting and spitting up phlegm in disgust!" So the king called in Rabbi Akiva to find out what was wrong; maybe they weren't nice enough for him. And Rabbi Akiva answered - listen

to this, listen to what our holy Rabbi Akiva said to the king - "What could I do already?!" he said. "To me, they smell like dead rats."

Rabbi Akiva exemplified what it means to think along with Hashem. It wasn't merely that Rabbi Akiva said that *arayos* are *ossur*. No, that wasn't what happened here. He had achieved much more than that. To merely know, to understand, wouldn't have caused Rabbi Akiva to actually feel overwhelming nausea and disgust. He trained himself to actually feel disgust at what Hashem said is disgusting. Now, I'm sure Rabbi Akiva used much better methods to accomplish this, and if he was here right now, he'd be able to explain it much better than I can. But a little bit I can tell you. A little bit of how Rabbi Akiva trained himself to think along with Hashem.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

We'll start with a valuable tool, a truism, that has been taught to us by the Chovos Halevavos: **המחשבה נמשכת אחר הדיבור**. Your *dibur*, your words, will awaken your internal feelings. If you want to think like Hashem, then your first step will be to repeat to yourself as often as possible the thoughts of Hashem. The more you repeat to yourself the thoughts of Hashem, the more you will begin to think like Him.

Now of course, Rabbi Akiva wouldn't have been retching and vomiting if it had been merely superficial repetitions of Torah ideals, the way we do *sh'nayim mikrah v'echad targum*. When Rabbi Akiva understood what Hashem was thinking; when he realized that Hashem is a *soneh zimah*, and that immoral behavior is **תועבה**, and **זימה**, and **תבל** in His eyes, he did whatever feasible to make those *attitudes and ideals of Hashem, into the attitudes and ideals of Rabbi Akiva*. And so he spoke about these *aveiros* and the immoral sinners with disgust. He spat on the ground when he thought about immoral behavior. Rabbi Akiva worked hard at *kedoshim ti'hiyu*. By repeating to himself again and again all the *yesodos* of

the Torah, Rabbi Akiva trained himself to think along with Hashem. And Rabbi Akiva had trained himself well. Anything that was not pure, not good in the eyes of Hashem, smelled like dead rats to him.

BREATHE IN THE PLEASANT AROMA OF ROTTING MEAT

But that's not all that Rabbi Akiva did to create for himself a Torah mind. Rabbi Akiva understood that if Hashem placed him in a physical world, then Hashem wanted him to use whatever he could from this world to help achieve that perfection of the mind. And there's no doubt that Rabbi Akiva used every opportunity available to him. If he saw a filthy something, a *neveilah* rotting on the side of the road, he would breathe in deeply the putrid smell of the rotting flesh, the horrific smell of the worms and bacteria eating away at the carcass, and he would think - better yet he would say - "Ach! What a nauseating smell! This *neveilah* is what *ervah* smells like in the mind of Hashem. If I should ever be faced with the temptation of *aveirah*, this is what it will smell like to me as well."

Now, don't think it's foolish, because it's perfection, it's *kedusha*. If to Hashem it's disgusting, then Rabbi Akiva wanted to be sure that it would be disgusting to him as well! קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני. And Rabbi Akiva didn't do this once. And not twice. Every opportunity was used by him for perfection of his mind. He did it again and again until he had trained his mind to think like Hashem thinks. Rabbi Akiva was actually thinking along with Hashem. And so, when he came face to face with *zimah*, he reacted - naturally - with the Torah mind of Hashem: "היא תועבה" thinks Hashem, and so "תועבה היא" thought Rabbi Akiva, and he spent the night retching in disgust.

DEAD CATS IN THE JULY SUN

So suppose you're walking on the street one day in the end of July, it's a hot day and the sun is baking down, and you come across a dead cat on the side of the street, and it's laying there for

some time already in the hot July sun. It's a horrible sight; it's nauseating to look at. You're probably thinking about taking a detour so you won't have to see it, to smell it. Don't do it. Don't make that detour because you'll miss out on the great opportunity to impress onto your mind the authentic Torah attitudes that bring you to *kedusha*. Because as much as you try to take the thoughts of the Torah, the thoughts of Hashem, and make them *your* thoughts, nothing will do that job as good as using the physical world you live in.

So you make a detour towards the dead cat, not away from it. You walk by this dead cat, and it smells like I don't want to say. It's terrible! You walk by and take a look at that rotting *neveila*. It's disgusting! There are flies buzzing around, already eating away at the carcass. And you lean over and take a whiff of that fragrance. Achh, is it terrible! And as the odor reaches your nose, you think about all the immorality around you - the women who prance naked in the street, the gentile boys and girls who live lives of promiscuity and immorality. It is surrounding us on all sides and it's seeping in under our doors. And it smells terrible. And the wise man who wants to think along with Hashem will make that connection in his mind forever and ever.

VISITING THE CELEBRITY

You can accomplish great things if you begin to put these ideas to use. And you'll be prepared for all eventualities. Even if the most beautiful actress in the world would meet you in the street and say, "Young man, I like you. Maybe you'll come visit me sometime?" So now you could think that she smells like a dead cat that's been rotting in the street for ten days under the sun. And that *is* how she really smells, if you've trained yourself to think like Hashem.

When you see something forbidden, even if the forbidden thing is perfumed and trying to smell like roses, you should train yourself to feel like you're smelling a filthy garbage can. And I'll

tell you what you should really do. What should you do? You should lean over and sniff the nearest dirty garbage can. Sniff it. Don't just leave it up to your imagination. Make the truth of Hashem's thoughts real to you. That is training yourself to think and feel along with Him.

THE PERFUMED YESHIVA MAN

And the opportunities for this *avodah* are endless. When you see a Yeshiva man - or any frum Jew - you should imagine that he smells like sweet smelling roses. The Gemara says it. It says עתידין בחורי ישראל שיתנו ריח טוב כלבנון - "The young men of Israel will in the future emit a fragrance like forest of *Levanon*" (Brachos 43b).

Let's say you see a group of yeshiva boys walking in the street. Now, there is nothing especially attractive about them. They're all wearing the same uniform, white shirts, and black pants. Nothing special. Maybe their *payos* are flying in the wind; maybe one of them is a little disheveled. And from the other side come some students from the college, all dressed up, nice outfits, with their hair combed back. Maybe one of them is holding a guitar case on his back, feeling important. Or even better, here's a high school boy strutting down the street, in a lacrosse uniform. Did you ever see a lacrosse uniform? You don't what it is? It's a game that the fools are busy playing in the high schools and colleges. So he's strutting down the street in his uniform, all covered with helmets and padded things all over him, and he walks down the street like a hero. He has a halo of sanctity around him. That's what they think. They think that sports is something noble. So we have to get this garbage out of our heads. There is nothing noble about holding a stick and smacking a baseball. There's nothing noble about that; nothing heroic about it. It's as silly as can be. A silly gentile creation.

But to the world, a guitar case hanging over the shoulder, or a lacrosse uniform - that's glory! That's beauty! And the world

looks at the Yeshiva bochur as if he is the lowest; he's sitting all day in front of the ancient texts, discussing details of laws that seem archaic. The college boy, he's the good one. He's the one who is doing something for the world, he's doing something for his family. Maybe he'll be a doctor or an engineer. He'll build buildings and bridges. What a success he will be! That's how the world looks at it.

DIRTY JEW!

So the Gemara says: The time will come when the **בְּחֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, the good kosher Jews, will someday issue a sweet fragrance like the cedar trees of the *Levanon*. One day the world will recognize the truth of this world; the whole world will learn to see the world through the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And we will see that it is the frum Jews who smell pleasant. They're the ones giving off a sweet fragrance. And those colleges boys, the ones steeped in atheism and immorality are emitting a putrid smell, the odor of a dirty toilet - because that's actually what they smell like. Atheism smells! Immorality smells! And that's exactly what these college boys are busy with - by day they learn atheism and by night they practice all forms of immorality.

Of course, in this world it's difficult to make out the truth unless you're willing to put in some hard work. *Olam Hazeih* is an *olam hafuch* - an upside down world. What is true is seen as false, and what is pure and clean and holy is seen by the world as filthy. And that's why in this world you have a dirty fellow calling other people dirty. I was once walking on the Bowery. This was about seventy years ago. I was walking on the Bowery and I saw this drunken goy. He could hardly walk. And he was disgusting. A filthy and bad-smelling goy. He saw me and he yells out, "Dirty Jew," at me. I couldn't stand near him, he smelled so bad.

BROOKLYN JEWS SMELL BAD

I remember once, there was a man who worked for AIPAC - the American Israel Political Action Committee. This man was

their president or maybe their executive director. So he made a statement. He said that he never was in Brooklyn. Why? Because he doesn't like Orthodox Jews. "They smell," he said. The New York Times loved that. They printed it twice! Now that's a man, and that's a newspaper, that live with attitudes that stand in direct contrast to the thoughts of Hashem. It's the opposite of *kedusha*, the opposite of *shleimus*.

Now, if you're a wise man, a man who wants to be a *kadosh* and think along with Hakodosh Boruch Hu, then you won't wait for that time far off when the world will recognize the truth. You want to think like Hakodosh Boruch Hu right now. He wants to fulfill the words of this week's *parsha*, *Kedoshim Ti'hiyu* today. So every time you pass a frum Jew, if you're a man then every time you pass a frum boy, a Yeshiva man, or any frum man, so you breathe in deeply the aroma of *kedusha*. And if you use your mind and your heart properly, you'll actually be able to actually smell that sweet smell that Hashem smells right now.

IF YOU PAY FULL TUITION YOU SMELL BETTER

And every one of you have this opportunity all the time. Even the Rosh Yeshiva, as he's passing by his *bochurim*, should imagine himself smelling flowers in a garden. Of course, when he passes by the bochur whose father is paying full tuition, it's even easier for him to imagine that, but whatever it is he must begin to recognize the truths of this world, the thoughts of Hashem. And if you want to be a true success in this world, if you want to stand a head taller than all others, then once in a while you'll lean over into somebody's garden, and take a deep breath through your nose of the roses and think, "Ah, the smell of a frum yid, the sweet aroma of a *shomer Torah u'mitzvos*."

THE SECRET OF KETORES

And this idea is actually one of the secrets of the *ketores* that we read about in this week's *parsha*. We are told that the Kohen Gadol can enter the *kodesh kodoshim* only with the sweet-

smelling fragrance of the *ketores*. **כי בענן אראה על הכפורת** - "Only with the *ketores* can you enter into the innermost sanctuary" (Achrei Mos 16:2). This very stern admonition, which twice warns of the penalty of death, emphasizes the great necessity of a cloud of incense over the ark at the time that the Kohen Gadol stood inside the *paroches*.

And the truth is it's a big question. What's so important about the *ketores* that it had to be burnt as an aromatic fragrance on this holiest day of the year, in the most holiest place in the world? If you would have told me that he goes into the *kodesh kodoshim* and learns a half hour Mesillas Yesharim - Ah! That I could understand. A half hour of Mesillas Yesharim in the *kodesh kodoshim*! Now that's *kedusha*! But to walk into the *kodesh kodoshim* just to burn an incense?! What else did the Kohen Gadol do there already?! Nothing, nothing at all. He offered up the *ketores* and walked out. He said a very short prayer for rain, asked Hashem for mercy for the *Am Yisroel*, and that's all! The primary *avodah* in the *kodesh kodoshim* was burning a mixture of sweet fragrances. And that needs explanation.

BEIS HAMIKDASH: THE PERFUMED HOUSE

I wouldn't be able to tell you all the secrets of the incense, but this I can tell you. Among the reasons for this extremely stringent requirement, is the importance of gaining the emotion of respect and admiration for the presence of Hashem. The Rambam in his *Moreh Nevuchim* (Chapter 45) explains it as follows: "For our heart generally feels elevated in the presence of a good odor. And this fragrance, as well as other things, was intended at producing a due respect towards the Sanctuary, and indirectly producing a resultant fear of Hashem. When one enters into the Sanctuary, certain emotions are produced in him; and the obstinate hearts are softened and humbled."

We see here that even on this holy day, on this solemn occasion in this most sacred place, that even the greatest

intellectual effort needs support of the physical senses. A rarely frequented chamber may acquire a musty odor. And what is the *kodesh kodoshim* after all? It's a small room. And it is the Kohen who must use his mind to appreciate the *kedusha* and the importance of the room in which he stands. And despite the nobility of the Kohen's intentions of service of Hashem, the Torah teaches the necessity for an especially sweet-smelling fragrance to enhance and to elevate even more, the thoughts of the Kohen. Hashem is teaching us that even a superficial sensory emotion caused by fragrance is to be used to augment the thoughts and the frame of mind that we are expected to develop.

And that will help us understand something that relates to the *ketores* of our *parsha*. We all know about the mitzvah of the *ketores*: to burn *ketores* every day in the Beis Hamikdash. Every day, the Kohanim would gather around in a circle and they would make a *goral* to see who would be *zoicheh* in the various forms of the *avodah*, to see who would be the lucky ones to have the opportunity to do the *avodah* today. This *avodah* went to one Kohen, and another *avodah* to another Kohen. That's how it was done.

KETORES MAKES YOU WEALTHY!

And then after, after everything was divided up among the Kohanim, they made an announcement: **חדשים לקטורת בואו** - "All of the newcomers who never were *zoicheh* to do the mitzvah of *ketores* in their lives, they are eligible now for a chance to offer the *ketores*." Now, for all other *avodos*, everyone was eligible - even one who had done it many times before. Every time you came, you were eligible to be chosen again. But when it came to the *ketores*, only those who had never before offered up the *ketores* were allowed to participate. If you had done it in once, then for the rest of your life, you weren't eligible to bring it again. *Chadoshim la'ketores*.

So why is it that the *ketores* is such an important mitzvah that only once in a lifetime was a Kohen allowed to do it? Now, people will tell you hear that it was a *segulah* for wealth - and I'm sure it was - but in this place we'll explain it as the true wealth that we desire in this world. The wealth we want to achieve is *shleimus* and *da'as* so instead of what you usually hear, I'm going to explain it to you from a certain aspect as follows.

NO KNOCK-OFFS ALLOWED

The *ketores*, you know, has a special *din*: אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִרְקַח - “Anyone who should prepare the *ketores*...shall be cut off from his people” (Ki Sisa 30:32). Anybody who tries to imitate the formula and make the *ketores* is *chayav kareis*. That's a tremendous punishment. *Kareis*?! Just for imitating the formula, even if he wouldn't use it for himself, just for imitating it, he's *chayav kareis*.

So the Rambam explains (Moreh Nevuchim *ibid.*) the reasons for such a strict command. He says that this especial fragrance of the *ketores* must be smelled only in the Mikdash! When you come into the Beis Hamikdash and you inhale that rare perfume, that sweet smelling fragrance that you you can't find anywhere else, it gives *kavod* to the Beis Hamikdash. Your body joins together with your mind to recognize the beauty and supreme importance of *avodas Hashem* and coming close to Him. And that added level of awareness is a perfection of the mind, it's a fulfillment of *kedoshim tihyu*.

That's the purpose of the *ketores*: to give honor to *avodas Hashem*. That's what made the *ketores* so special. The fragrance that one smelled when he walked into the Mikdash reached into a person's *neshama* and made him feel like this is an important place. It doesn't matter how much he studied the *dinim* of the *kedushas Hamikdash*, how much he learned about the beauty of *avodas Hashem*. Nothing compares with a fragrance that actually enters into your nose and tingles the nerves.

And therefore the *avodas haketores* is considered the most important of all the forms of *avodah*. That opportunity to afford people the gift of *da'as*, to make the honor of Hashem real to them by creating the fragrance that stimulates one to feel *kavod shamayim* is a precious opportunity. And so only once in a lifetime was a Kohen *zoicheh* to this mitzvah. It's too big, too important, to give him a second chance. Everyone needs to get their opportunity. He got his chance already, he had his opportunity, and now he had to give the other kohanim a chance.

GASHMIYUS AND KEDUSHA: WORKING HAND IN HAND

It's a fundamental principle of the Torah that one must use all of the various physical dimensions of his life in order to better achieve the perfection of the *kedusha* of thinking along with Hashem. And we see it in the Torah over and over again from beginning to end.

When Hakodosh Boruch Hu promised Avraham Avinu that he would have descendants, and not only descendants but that they would be as numerous as the stars of the clear night sky, there's no question that Avraham Avinu believed Hashem's promise. Avraham was the *ma'amin hagadol*, he believed Hashem with a full heart. And yet Hashem didn't just say, "Avraham, I love you and I promise you that you'll have a lot of descendants." Instead He chose to make a comparison to the stars. And not only that, but He told Avraham to leave his tent and to gaze out into the night sky with his *gashmiyusdikeh* eyes in order to see the *gashmiyusdikeh* stars. ויציא אותו החוצה ויאמר הבט נא השמימה וספור ויציא אותו החוצה ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך - הכוכבים אם תוכל לספור אותם ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך "And He took him outside and said: Gaze now towards the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them! And He said to Avraham: 'So shall your offspring be!'" (Lech L'chah 15:5).

Why all the tumult and *tircha*? Avraham was a *ma'amin*! But we're learning here again that it's not enough to believe and to know. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants a person to *mishateif* his

physical senses, and the physical world, so that the truth of Hashem's word will drill deeper into the heart of a person. And so when Avraham went out and looked up at the stars, he became so full of love for Hashem, much more than if he would have remained in his tent and only heard the voice of Hashem.

GEHENIM IN YOUR KITCHEN

And that brings us to an interesting Gemara that is not understood properly. It says as follows: **אש אחד מששה מגהינים** - "Fire is one sixtieth of Gehenim" (Brachos 57b). Now we shouldn't take such a statement lightly and just pass over it? What is the point of the Gemara telling us this? And the truth is that one sixtieth is just a *lashon*, an expression. Gehenim is more than sixty times as fiery as our fires. So why is the Gemara pointing this *mashal* out to us? And the answer is that these words are meant to be a lesson for us - a lesson for how to use this world, the physical dimension that we live in, as a preparation for the world of *ruchniyus* where we will dwell forever.

Here you have a woman who is standing in the kitchen, and inadvertently she puts her finger on a hot kettle - Oooh! - and she runs to the medicine cabinet to put something on her burn. She shouldn't make the mistake of neglecting that lesson. Because maybe just now she was talking on the telephone - you know that some people talk on the telephone while working in the kitchen. So she's walking around with the telephone on her ear and she said something into the telephone that she shouldn't have. And so she must be aware that that there is a Gehenim for saying things on the telephone that you're not supposed to say. "I have to you something about my mother-in-law. She and her husband, their relationship is not so ay-yah-yay." Oh, not so ay-yah-yay you say. So in a second she's shouting ay-yah-yay. But the foolish woman forgets that this "ay-yah-yay" is for the first "ay-yah-yay."

Now, we could speak to this woman and tell her for hours about Gehenim, but it wouldn't make the slightest impression on

her attitude in life. I'm not saying she wouldn't believe you, but to change an attitude, to become someone who actually lives with Torah ideals, requires much more than merely hearing ideas. Because we live in a physical world, and we therefore live with our physical being more than our physical existence. And therefore ideas, even the most important ones, do not have such an impact on us as physical experiences. And so the wise person, the one who wants to use this world for achieving *shleimus* - the perfection of character, of thought, of ideals and attitudes that he was created to achieve - will use every detail in this physical world to achieve that *shleimus*.

FINDING GEHENIM IN YOUR COFFEE

Now, if our Sages tell us that, then we should keep it in mind. Is there a man here who never scorched his finger? Is there anybody here who in his life never encountered some kind or misfortune from fire, even a small fire? Maybe you touched a hot pot, or you started drinking your tea and it was too hot and it scalded your tongue. Oh, to scald your tongue and to let that great opportunity go lost. You can learn that Gemara a thousand and one times - "Fire is one sixtieth of Gehenim" - and it won't even make the slightest impression upon you. But when you scald your tongue on a hot drink, that's when you can gain the most from these words of Chazal.

Keep in mind that there will be a time when those people who are talking with their tongues in this world will have to drink tea that is sixty times hotter than that. And they won't be able to pull their tongues away from hot tea. Their tongues will be sticking into the hot tea. Sixty times as hot! And you won't be able to quickly run to the sink like you do in this world and splash some cold water on the burn.

TONGUE TREATMENTS

For a bad tongue there is a treatment. It's necessary to scald that tongue in order to take off the stain of *lashon harah*, of

leitzanus, of speaking against *talmidei chachomim*, of speaking words of foolishness when you should be learning. כל הפוסק מדברי תורה ועוסק בדברי שיחה מאכילין לו גחלי רתמים - "Whoever interrupts his learning Torah to engage in idle chatter will be fed burning hot wood coals in the Next World" (Avodah Zara 3b).

Now this is not just talk. This *mashal* is a *mashal* for real life. We're expected to think that way. The *mashal* of the *ish* of this world was given to us so that we should utilize it, not to ignore it, or to repeat it superficially as the best of us do. So the Gemara tells us how to overcome this laziness of the mind that makes it difficult to impress all of the important ideals onto our *neshamos*. We're learning here that fire in this world is an opportunity for perfection.

PERFECTION FROM A FIRETRUCK

And you don't have to wait until you scorch your finger to learn that lesson. You can search out the lessons on your own. How many times have you seen firetrucks racing down the avenue to fight a fire? There's trouble there, a big fire. And many firehouses are sending reinforcements. A fire is burning somewhere down there. And what do you do; what do you think? Nothing!

Utilize the opportunity. Spend one minute thinking about that hot fire that is burning somewhere. And think about Gehenim. Ay yah yay! Gehenim! The subject that nobody wants to think about. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu does want you to think about it. And that's one of the sublime purpose of fire in this world.

It's not what I'm saying. It's what our Sages tell us. And in your mind you should multiply that fire, as terrible as it is, as hot and fiery as it is, at least by sixty times, and picture how it will be in Gehenim. Imagine a conflagration that all the fire engines in the world couldn't extinguish. It's burning so viciously and there's no

escape. Multiply that by sixty times and you'll begin to get an idea of the fire of Gehenim.

RAV YERUCHEM'S PHSAT IN THE HOLOCAUST

At the beginning of the Hitler epoch, the beginning of his regime, so Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, *zichrono l'vracha*, the Mirrer Mashgiach was still alive. Hitler had already started concentration camps at that time. He had not yet conquered Poland, and he had not yet invaded Russia, but he had already begun taking Jews, those who were considered political enemies of the state, from their homes and putting them in camps and torturing them. He began that already. At that time nobody dreamed, even in their wildest nightmares, of Majidanek, of Treblinka, of Birkenau and Auschwitz. All they knew of was these concentration camps that Hitler had set up.

And you have to know- the Jews at that time were no good anymore. A vast number of Jews in Eastern Europe were rotten already; they were atheists. Don't believe what they tell you, that they were tzadikim. They were Bundists, they were Red Socialists, they were atheists; yes that they were, but not tzadikim.

The schools that were spreading everywhere were producing enemies of the Torah. There were atheists schools for the Jewish children, they were called the Tarbus schools. They were getting a lot of money from American Jews and they were using it to build gymnasiums where they were teaching atheism, and were they learned to ridicule from Jews and to ridicule the Rabbonim and the Torah.

And of course Gehenim was just a fable to them; it was the furthest thing from their minds. They said it was just a fantasy invented by the rabbis. And so, Rav Yeruchem said that because people were losing sight of the principle of Gehenim, so Hakodosh Boruch Hu is now bringing "Gehenim" to this world for them to see it. These concentration camps in Germany were terrible, even the early ones. And the ones later on were much

worse. But even those, no matter how bad they were, they were only a *mashal* for Gehenim. And it was a *mashal* that was supposed to be studied. The Jews in Poland should have looked at the newspapers where the accounts of what took place in the concentration camps were reported and have become afraid of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

THE TRUE STATE OF EUROPEAN JEWRY

When the Jews in Poland and Lithuania read about these stories they should have all become *shomrei Shabbos*, they should have taken their children out of the atheistic tarbus schools and put them back into the *chadorim*. and they should have become *shomrei Shabbos*. They should have stopped working on Shabbos. Those so called "*tzadikim*" - they were rotten to the core. The were factories everywhere - big factories - that were open on Shabbos.

When I was in Lithuania - I came in 1932 - so on Shabbos, every *half hour* a bus left Slabodka full of Jews to go to Kovno, to go to work on Shabbos. And in 1938 when I left Lithuania, it was every *five minutes* that a bus was leaving from Slabodka to Kovno taking Jews to work.

Now I left because of Hitler. I was an American citizen and I didn't want to hang around any longer. But they were close, they were trapped and afraid. But did they change? No! Because they didn't want to look and understand the lessons that Hashem was teaching them. Here was a picture of Gehenim, a *mashal* for Gehenim - Gehenim is much worse than the concentration camps - and they were expected to think about what was going on in this Gehenim in this world.

So did they come together in the *batei kneisiyos* and cry out to Hashem to save them from Hitler? No! Yes, in the *yeshivos* they did. But the *yeshivos* were only a little drop in the ocean. I was in the *yeshiva* and we said Tehillim with *b'chiyos* to Hashem because Hitler was close. We saw Gehenim closing in on us. Hitler was just across the border. It could have happened any day. Hitler

could have marched across the border into weak little Lithuania and conquer it. So we cried out to Hashem.

But did the people of Europe cry out? No. They read the Zionists-Socialist newspapers, full of atheism; they read the Bundist newspapers, all atheism; even the Revisionists newspapers were all atheists. And these were daily newspapers - published every day. The *frummeh* didn't have one daily newspaper. The *Agudas Yisroel* had one monthly newspaper. Every month, one newspaper. That's how few the *frummeh* were. So the people weren't getting any better.

REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST THE TORAH WAY

And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu brought concentration camps, the death camps and the crematoria to give the people a *tziyur*, a picture, of Gehenim. He doesn't want Gehenim to be a vague idea, a foggy concept, in the back of our heads. He wants us to inculcate it into our personalities. So He gave us a little glimpse. And that way, it become a part of who we are.

And we, just because we're living now forty years after the fact, does that mean we shouldn't use that reminder?! The Gehenim that Hashem brought into this world is still etched in our minds. It's still a fresh wound even forty years later. And Hashem wants it to be that way. Hashem wants that tangible feeling of one sixtieth of Gehenim to remain with us always, and in that way prepare to avoid the real Gehenim in the Next World.

HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS: PART OF "THE FINAL SOLUTION"

And so all the bare-headed apikorsim who are making Holocaust conferences and building Holocaust museums are accomplishing nothing. With all their money and time they do nothing - nothing except for antagonizing the gentiles and giving them ideas. They might yell and scream, "Never again!" but *they* are the ones who brought the Holocaust upon us because Hashem, His Torah and *kedoshim ti'hiyu* meant nothing to them.

But we, the *shlomei emunei Yisroel*, we still make use of that horror, of that destruction, to learn the lessons that Hashem is teaching us. Whenever you hear the destruction of European Jewry mentioned, whenever you're reminded of the horrors that our people suffered, you should always remind yourself: That's what Gehenim is like and much worse. It's at least a little understanding of what it is like. And the more you think about the Next World, the more you're living as a *kadosh*.

THE MOST IMPORTANT INGREDIENT IN YOU CHOLENT

And Olam Habah as well is something that must always be on our minds. And what better opportunity than Shabbos, *m'ein Olam Habah yom Shabbos menucha*. The Gemara says that - it says that Shabbos is *m'ein Olam Habah*. You hear that? Shabbos is an intimation of the pleasures awaiting us in the World to Come. Every *ta'anug* on Shabbos should be etching into your mind the truth of Olam Habah. But what happens when Shabbos comes along? Nothing, nothing at all. *Ta'anug* you have. Oh yes; you're enjoying the challah and the chicken and the soup - it's all fun and good times. But you're missing the point!

So as your Shabbos queen serves you the delicious foods that she labored over for hours in the kitchen, you should be thinking - first make sure to thank your wife and then get busy thinking: "This tasty food is only one sixtieth, it's only an intimation of the pleasures that are stored up for us in Olam Habah. This is how I'm going to enjoy the ecstasy of Olam Habah, just a million times more." That's how to use the *gashmiyus* of this world, the *cholent* of Shabbos to become great. That's the most important ingredient in the *cholent*.

But Shabbos is only one seventh of your life! It would be a shame to have to wait for Shabbos to become perfect through the pleasures of this world. So don't wait! Every pleasure that comes your way, every joy and beauty in this world, can be used to bestir your thoughts towards thoughts of Hashem and His ideals. Every

garden that you pass is Garden of Eden. Yes, you pass by your neighbor's garden and you marvel at its beauty and think: "This garden is just a *marshal* for the beautiful Garden of Eden that is awaiting us. So your neighbor is paying to have his garden planted and cared for, and *you're* the one who's reaping its rewards.

HOW TO GET UP IN THE MORNING

And there's no need to wait to pass a garden to start your *avodas Hashem*. The first thing you do every morning could be a part of your *kiyum* of *kedoshim ti'hiyu*. I'll explain. Dovid Hamelech expressed our great desire, the great wish of all of us: אֲשַׁבְּעָה בְּהַקִּיץ תְּמוֹנַתְךָ - "May I be satiated when I wake up with Your splendor; I should see Your image, Hashem." We are all going to go to sleep eventually. Sooner or later everybody goes to sleep - the final sleep. No matter how much you try to ignore it, you can't get out of it. But what's going to happen at the end of that sleep? When you close your eyes for the last time in this world, you're not going to sleep forever. You're going to wake up.

And what do we hope for? Our only hope, our only desire, is that when we wake up we'll be lying on a couch, and we'll feel a gentle hand stirring us awake. And we'll open our eyes and look at the kindly loving face of our Father in heaven. And He'll gaze at us with the splendor of His countenance. It'll be such a happiness! Ooooh! Gazing in happiness at the face of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It's almost impossible to fathom that feeling, those emotions, of waking up and seeing Hashem. I shudder in excitement when I think of that day. To gaze into the splendor of the *Sh'chinah* in the World to Come. אֲשַׁבְּעָה בְּהַקִּיץ תְּמוֹנַתְךָ, Dovid prayed. "Please Ribono Shel Olam, I should be satiated with the splendor of Your image when I wake up." That's how Dovid wanted to wake up.

But it's all so imaginary, so unreal to all of us. And that's because we don't put any effort into impressing these ideas on to our minds. You sit here listening to me, but it doesn't mean a

thing because they're just ideas, פורה באויר; it's not tangible. And that's because you are not working to make these Torah attitudes real.

STOP LISTENING, START DOING

If you would listen to me, you would practice this every morning. Every morning when you wake up and you open your eyes, you say *Modeh ani lifanecha* - "I thank you Hashem that you opened my eyes once more."

But you can practice up and think about what's going to happen in the final sleep. Someday there will be a final sleep and it will be a sleep where you don't wake up into this world again. But you'll wake up; oh yes, you'll wake up. You'll be waking up in the Next World. And you'll have the opportunity to gaze into My face, said Hashem. You'll open your eyes with such a happiness when you gaze into the face of the *Sh'china*. And so when you open your eyes tomorrow morning, you should think about that. Imagine that you just woke up, and you're looking into the face of Hashem. Oh, it's such a *ta'anug*!

DOZING OFF INTO PERFECTION

And the truth is that if you want to spend your life preparing for the Next World then even the most simple act of falling asleep at night is an opportunity for *shleimus*, for perfection. Now, for most of us, what is falling asleep already? You fall asleep like a log, the same way that a cow goes to sleep. And it's such a terrible waste. You have the opportunity to use the physical dimension of this world to fill your mind with Torah attitudes. As you're falling asleep you're thinking: "One day I'll be falling asleep for the last time. I'll lay down and I'll close my eyes for the last time. And I'll pass out of this hallway into the palace of the Next World.

And that's why Chazal tell us that שינה אחד משישים למיתה - "Sleep is one sixtieth of death" (Brachos 57b). Don't listen to those who tell you that this Gemara is merely telling you about

something that happens to you while you sleep. That's not the purpose here. What the Gemara wants you to know is how to prepare for that final sleep. If every night, as you close your eyes, you remind yourself about the final sleep that awaits you, if you remind yourself that one day you will be closing your eyes for good, that's a person who's preparing for Olam Habah. Every night, the last thing you do is remind yourself that this world is only a *prozdor lifnei ha'olam habah*. And you are becoming more and more perfect in seeing this world the way Hashem sees it, and fulfilling the all-encompassing command of Hashem *kedoshim ti'hiyu*.

KEDUSHAH: BUILDING A TORAH MIND

There are thousands of examples that we could speak about; so many ways of using the world around us to achieve *shleimus, kedusha*. We live today with our physical being more than with our mental existence. We're living in Olam Hazeah after all. And therefore the ideas and ideals of the Torah, of the thoughts of Hashem, do not have such an impact upon us as the physical experiences. And so, in order to achieve the success of *kedoshim ti'hiyu*, the perfection of thinking along with Hashem, we must utilize whatever we can from this physical world in order to make the attitudes of Hashem our attitudes, and the thoughts of Hashem our thoughts.

The sweet smell of flowers blooming in Spring can be used to awaken in us the knowledge of the sweet smell of the *Am Yisroel*. A light burn on your finger reminds you of Gehenim. When you go to sleep at night, the final sleep becomes more true in your mind, and when you awake every morning you relive again and again that great morning when you will awake to see the face of Hashem.

And if you take these examples, and many more, and use them to bring to the surface all the greatness that you possess then you're a success in this world. By utilizing the opportunity to

study the holiness of Hashem as revealed to us in the Torah, and by emulating Him and His thoughts, we gain the maximum perfection possible, which is what the word *kadosh* implies. And when you build for yourself a Torah mind, you are fulfilling the mitzvah of *kedoshim ti'hiyu* by becoming as similar to Hakodosh Boruch Hu as humanly possible. קדושים תהיו - "Make yourselves holy, " says Hashem. And how do we do that? כי קדוש אני - "Be holy like me, by practicing thinking along with Me."

HAVE A WONDERFUL SHABBOS

תורת אביגדור

"שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך"



Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Is it wrong for a person to discover the gender of his child before the birth?

A:

If it's not harmful to the fetus - not harmful in any way - then there's nothing wrong. It makes no difference anyway. A boy or a girl? What difference does it make anyway? Either way it's a wealth; a fortune. A Jewish child is a wealth. It is a very great *bracha* to have a child. Every child is a great happiness for the parents. And the child grows up and you'll have *nachas* from the child's children too. A child is a very great happiness and is more valuable than a block of tall apartment buildings - more valuable than blocks of real estate.

And so, boy or girl, it doesn't matter. Often, from the girls you'll have more *nachas* than from the boys. You'll have a beautiful son-in-law and your daughter becomes a fine Rebbetzin. And you have so much *nachas* from your daughter. More than even from your son.

And therefore it doesn't make any difference. It's just simple curiosity. So if it costs money, then it's a waste of money.

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