

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on Parshas Behar Bechukosai

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 בהר בחוקת'י

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

In this week's *parsha* we find what at first glance seem to be rather mundane *pesukim* regarding the sale of homes in Eretz Yisroel. And like all the details in the Torah we have no doubt about their importance. And yet, unless you are learning *Mesichta Eiruchin* and have an interest in the details of the *sugya*, or are studying what the *Zohar* says about these *dinim*, you almost begin to wonder what lesson could be learned from these *halachos*. However, it is on the surface of the Torah, in the *p'shuto shel mikrah*, that you will often find the deepest secrets, the most important principles of living a true Torah life. Only that often it is those ideas that are right in front of your nose, that go unnoticed and ignored.

So let us begin. There is a law in the Torah that if a man sells his ancestral home, a home that he has inherited from his forefathers in Eretz Yisroel, so the Torah gives him a special right - the prerogative to buy his home back from the buyer. Many years later he can come back to the buyer and claim "seller's regret". גאולה תהיה לו - "You can always redeem your ancestral home" (Behar 25:31). And even the man who doesn't take advantage of this Torah right to repurchase his home, eventually, his property will revert back to him in any case. Because the Torah declares that when Yovel comes, the home becomes his again. - וביובל יצא

“And at Yovel it goes out from the buyer [into the hands of seller]” (ibid.)

NO BACKSIES!

But you must know, that the *pesukim* limit this right of the seller to one who sells his home in an open town, **בְּתֵי חֲצֵרִים**. However, when it comes to **בְּתֵי עָרֵי חֹמָה**, houses that are situated in walled cities, the laws are fundamentally different. The homes of a walled city in *Eretz Yisroel* are an exception to the rules we learned above. When a man sells his house in a walled city then it *doesn't* come back to him anymore. **לֹא יָצָא בְּיֹכֵל** - “The home in the walled city does not go out from the possession of the buyer on Yovel” (ibid. 25:30). And not only that, but the seller is given *only one year* in which he can buy it back. Unlike the seller of a home in an unwalled city who can renege on the sale at anytime; over here, after the year is up, the buyer can say, “I’m not selling it back to you.”

That's a remarkable *chumrah* for a house in a walled city, an aberration from the typical rules of real estate in *Eretz Yisroel*. A home in a walled city has a different *din*, a different law, and a different status, than any other home. And this matter requires study; why should this home be any different from another home?

DON'T SELL YOUR HOUSE!

So we see there is something going on here. Hashem is making something apparent in these *pesukim*, and that is, that there is something special about a walled city. Hashem doesn't give us fifty years to think about buying the house back, no. There is a certain sense of urgency when it comes to reacquiring this house. Buy it back now! Hurry up; it's now or never! And so the owner of a house in the walled city weighs his options very carefully before selling his home.

He knows that he's making a decision that will soon be irrevocable. He will have only one year to redeem it from the seller, and when that year comes to an end, he will have lost his home forever. And even when he *does* sell the home, he feels that urgency, that pressure to buy it back, because it's now or never. **אִם לֹא עָכְשָׁיו אֵימָתִי**. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is bearing down on this

poor fellow. "Whatever you do, don't sell your house in a walled city," He says. "And if you did, hurry up and redeem it while you still can."

HASHEM LOVES THE WALLED CITY MAN

We see here Hashem's intention of encouraging the original residents of a walled city to remain in their ancestral homes. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants the resident of a walled city to forever remain a *walled city man*. And therefore, He is discouraging this man from selling his home - לא יצא ביוכל, you will not get it back; your ancestral home will be lost to you forever. And if he makes the error of selling, the Torah encourages him to repurchase it as soon as possible. ואם לא יגאל עד מלאות לו שנה תמימה וקם הבית אשר בעיר אשר לו חומה לצמיתות לקונה אותה לדורותיו - "But if he does not redeem it within the first year, his house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the buyer forever" (ibid. 25:30). Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants people to remain in the walled cities and He is making that very obvious in our *parsha*. There is something going on here, in the walled cities, something special, and it pays for us to study what it is.

And this is not the only place in the Torah where Hashem emphasizes the importance of a walled city. When we search a little more we find other areas of Torah law that provide exceptional rules for these *arei chomah*. A few weeks ago we read about the *metzora*, the person who becomes afflicted with *tzara'as*, a strict form of *tumah*. And so we learned that he is sent out of his city and must take up residence outside of the city walls.

THE METZORAH WHO DOESN'T NEED TO LEAVE HIS CITY

The *metzora* is sent out of his city because he is *tamei* and we cannot permit that *tumah* to profane the holiness of a Jewish city. However - and listen to this - if the *metzora* lives in a small village or town, or in an unwalled city, he does not have to leave. He can remain at home. The *din* that requires him to leave his city was true only with regard to the walled cities, the *batei arei chomah*.

Now, I want you to pay attention to something that at first glance seems queer. We know that a *metzora* is *tamei* with what Chazal refer to as *tumah chamurah*, a very strict form of defilement,

and that he therefore must leave all places of *kedusha*. Now, we would understand why the *metzora* is forbidden from entering onto *Har Habayis*, and why he would be sent out of Yerushalayim. Of course we understand that. To have a person who is *tamei* with one of the strictest forms of *tumah* in a *makom kodesh* is unfathomable.

But what is it about the *arei chomah*, the walled cities, that they are given this status as well? The *pesukim* here are not only discussing the walled city of Yerushalayim. Yerushalayim, I'd understand. A city where the Beis Hamikdash stood, the city where Hashem resides - that's a city of holiness! So for the *metzora* to have to leave Yerushalayim, that we could understand. But no, we are talking about *any* walled city in *Eretz Yisroel*. A city may be far away from the *makom ha'mikdash*, but if it's walled, then that city is holy and spits out from its midst the *tumah* of the *metzora*.

THE HOLY WALL

We have to ask ourselves: What is this holiness that seems to be caused by walls? What's so special about a walled city that makes it so different, so much more *kadosh*, than the unwalled city right next door? And what is it about a walled city that finds so much favor in the eyes of Hashem, that He encourages us, by means of the *arei chomah* laws, to remain living within its walls forever?

And so to better understand this, we'll study together a fundamental principle - a principle that we must be aware of all the days of our lives. The Rambam in *Hilchos Dei'os* (6:1) writes: **אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו** - "It is the way that a person is created, that means that the nature of a human being is, **ובמעשיו אחר רעיו וחביריו** - to be drawn in his attitudes, his ideas, and the way he thinks and acts, after those with whom he associates." That means that you become what your environment is.

You know what *nimshach* means? It means that you're drawn like a magnet to the attitudes and behavior of the people around you. You don't have to do anything. Just by being there, you're pulled along; unless you fight back. But if you're passive

then you're going to be drawn along. And it's so smooth, so subtle, that you don't even notice it until it's too late, until you're already in the Next World.

And this is a very important statement you're hearing right now. It all depends on who your friends are, with whom you associate. The Rambam said that you'll be drawn after *רעיו וחבריו*, your acquaintances and your friends. Friends, I understand. But the Rambam is telling is that even your *רעיו*, your acquaintances, your neighbors, your coworkers - anybody who you come into contact with - will affect you. You have to know that when you associate with people, when you live among others, you are automatically being shaped in their mold. And not only will you act the way they act, but you'll think the way they think, and your *middos* become like their *middos*.

THE "AMERIKAHNER REBBE"

The Rambam continues: *ונוהג במנהג אנשי מדינתו* - "And a person will always behave like the people of the country where he lives." It can't be helped! That's why I always say that a *tzadik*, even the biggest *tzadik*, when he comes to America, is already an *Amerikahner*. If you're living here in America, then I don't care how long your *peyos* are, you're going to be an American. It's impossible for a person to avoid the influence of the country in which he lives. Of course, I'm not saying that you're jumping head first into everything they do, but still, there's no question that as soon as you come off the boat, you're already being influenced by the environment.

I'm telling you right now - it's affecting you. It's taking place this minute. Just the fact that I'm speaking to you in English right now is a sign of our environment pressing down upon us. At home I speak only *yiddish* with my children. They answer me in English - what could I do? We're all being affected! You are affected by the secular environment, no doubt about it. And in many ways. Don't fool yourself. It's happening in every part of your life.

And therefore there is only one solution to this problem of a man's environment: *לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים* - "A person

must always make it his principle to join with the tzadikim, to stay as close as possible to the *frummeh* - to the best of our people. וְלִישָׁב אֶצֶל הַחַכְמִים תָּמִיד - And to sit always together with *chachomim*." To always associate with *chachomim* and *tzadikim*. תָּמִיד the Rambam says. All the time! כְּדִי שִׁלְמַד מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם - In order to learn their deeds."

Now that's a very important admonition that you're hearing from the Rambam. To try your best to always be in the company of the choicest of our people. Because something is sure to rub off on you. There's no question about it - it's going to affect your *neschama*. All the things that you think and do will be different because of your association with good people.

THE OVERCROWDED GHETTOS

And now we can begin to understand why walled cities are so important and so *kadosh* in the eyes of Hashem. There is really only one answer to that question, and that is that a walled city is a *yishuv* of strength and permanence. A city with a wall around it meant "We're strong and we're here to stay." You know that in the ancient times - and in many places it's true even today - a walled city was the safest place to live. In the days of old it was the wall around your city that afforded you with protection and security. The high walls surrounding the city acted as a bulwark against attacks of the enemies and infiltration of bandits and marauders.

And therefore people who moved into a walled city tended to settle permanently and remain there from generation to generation. The walled city, because of its strategic value as a safe residence, secure from external enemies; became a haven for people to move to, a safe place to raise a family. And what happened in all walled cities was that they soon became crowded, very crowded. Because the walls limited the expansion opportunities - you couldn't keep building outward - so the walled cities of *Eretz Yisroel* naturally developed into cities crowded with *frum* Jews, all living in close and cramped quarters. The *ir chomah* was a city with *ovdei Hashem* packed into crowded streets and homes, with families forever growing and overflowing, all living with each other side by side.

THE MEAH SHE'ARIM OF OLD

It's impossible to compare the dwelling places of the Jews in the walled cities, and those out in the open expanse of Eretz Yisroel. Because in those secure and crowded cities you were surrounded on all sides by *ovdei Hashem*. Wherever you turned there were frum Jews. Men with black hats, big yarmulkas. Boys riding their bikes with their *tzitzis* flying in the wind. Women with their hair covered pushing carriages - you know what that looks like - there are two children in the carriage and another few running alongside. Bais Yaakov girls walking home together in large groups, all dressed the way a *bas Yisroel* should dress. Shuls everywhere. It was a beautiful sight to behold and a happiness to be a part of.

Now, maybe it was cramped; maybe the streets were narrow - it wasn't the suburbs after all - but still, these were the dwellings where families had lived for hundreds and hundreds of years, since *Yehoshua* entered *Eretz Canaan*. There was a certain sense of permanence in *avodas Hashem* that couldn't be matched elsewhere. And the masses of frum Jews all living together served as an encouragement to one another. Wherever you went in that city, you felt like you were part of a nation whose sole purpose in this world was the service of Hashem. Just the mere fact that you were living in a city that was overflowing with frum Jews and always humming with *avodas Hashem*, that itself transformed you into a better *oived Hashem*.

THE BUSTLING CITY: ONE BIG DEMONSTRATION

And that is the key that unlocks for us the mystery of the *kedusha* of the walled cities. You were living among the *frummeh*, in the densely packed communities of the *Am Yisroel*. And that meant living with these demonstrations of large scale *avodas Hashem* every day, all day long, all night long. Frum Jews wherever you turn! Big *yeshivos*! Bais Yaakovs! Kosher this and kosher that! Stores selling *tzniyusdikeh* clothing, and *shuls* and *shtibelach* on every corner. Shiurim all the time.

Every *erev Shabbos* the streets are packed with thousands of men and women preparing for the *Yom Menucha*. Is there a bigger public demonstration than that? The streets are crowded with

Jews running to and fro. The stores are overflowing with people - and what are they all doing?! Shabbos, Shabbos and more Shabbos! And on Shabbos as well; men, women and children walking the streets in their finest clothing. The whole city is one big demonstration of *avodas Hashem*!

When you have a *few* good Jews who are very devoted to the Hashem and His Torah, that's very good. Very good! But when you have, let's say, troops and troops of Jews all walking the streets on erev Shabbos, in and out of stores, preparing for the Shabbos, that's already a different world.

WHAT COULD BE BETTER THAN A TRAFFIC JAM?

And the children as well are part of this great demonstration of Shabbos. You walk by the Yeshiva, let's say on Erev Shabbos, when the boys are getting out. And there are twenty buses waiting to take them home. Twenty buses! Twenty buses packed with the children of Hashem all heading home to get ready for Shabbos. And you walk by a big girls' school and there's another twenty buses lined up. The streets are filled with buses. And you'll find thirty girls walking, with long skirts. *Tzniyusdikeh* girls. Thirty girls here. Twenty girls here. It's so crowded, it's hard to get around! Boruch Hashem!!

You know, I was walking with a man once on Friday afternoon and the streets were crowded, packed with children. All *yiddeshe* children, boys and girls, beautiful *kinderlach*, coming home for Shabbos. And this man says to me, he says *to me* of all people: "It's too crowded here in Brooklyn, it's too much. I can't get around in the car on Erev Shabbos." A fool! *Mamash* a fool! It's such a beautiful sight. Such crowds, such traffic, what could be better?! Wherever you look, you see a *ribui* of the *Am Yisroel*. And that's a tremendous encouragement! If you look with *seicheldikeh* eyes then it's an encouragement on a very big scale! And that's an *ir chomah*!

IT'S TOO CROWDED HERE FOR THE METZORAH

You have to realize that the *ribui*, the multiplication of the number of Jews, is the greatness of the *Am Yisroel*. The streets where the frum Jews walk, the stores where they shop, the corners

where they congregate, those are the places where the *sh'chinah* rests. It's the legions of Jews living congested within the city walls, all serving Hashem together! That's why the Presence of Hashem dwells in those walled cities more vigorously, more strongly, than anywhere else. In a place where the Am Yisroel reside in great numbers and in permanence, that's where Hashem is. Hashem loves the Klal Yisroel. And even more than that, He loves numbers in Klal Yisroel.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu says: "I am there with the Bnei Yisroel because they are permanent there. I rest My *shechinah* in the place where Jews live together because those are the places that matter to Me most." Yerushalayim ir hakodesh is a makom kadosh - of course. But the Torah wants you to never forget that the walled cities, and all the places where the Am Yisroel resides in great numbers, are just as holy in His eyes.

And it is because Hakodosh Boruch Hu loves these cities full of *frum* Jews so much, that He rests His *shechina* there more than any other place in Eretz Yisroel. And that my friends is the source of the *kedusha* of the walled cities in Eretz Yisroel. It is the Am Yisroel, living one on top of the other, filling the homes, and overflowing into the streets. That's *kedusha*! And that's why the *metzora* was sent out beyond the walls; because the *kedusha* of the myriads of Jews living closely together couldn't be *soivel*, it couldn't tolerate that *tumah*.

TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES IN BORO PARK

When you walk in these streets where there are Jewish homes one after another, from Jews on all sides, you should know that you're walking on *admas kodesh*, on holy ground. Absolutely it's holy ground. No question about it! And you have to gain that attitude. And if you're thinking that I'm just exaggerating, then you're far from having true Torah attitudes. Very far away.

Don't listen to people who like to criticize from Jews. We should have only the greatest love and admiration for the crowded streets of the *frummeh*. Because we have to learn to appreciate the things that Hashem appreciates. Hashem loves all the *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos* and therefore we disregard what the

naysayers spout forth. We ignore them and we teach ourselves to love the Jews of Boro Park, to love the Jews of Crown Heights, to love the Jews of Williamsburg, to love the Jews of Lakewood and to love the Jews of Flatbush. Wherever you have frum Jews crowded together - Meah Shearim and Bnei Brak in Eretz Yisroel. Because there's no question that **אהבה רבה אהבתנו השם אלוֹקינו** - No question, He loves us!

Now, I don't know what out of towners think, but the truth is that I'm not interested. I'll tell you what I think! I'm **מעיד על עצמי**, I can testify about myself that whenever I walk in Boro Park, I walk with the greatest *derech erez*. I say to myself, "I'm walking on *admas kodesh*, on holy ground."

Now you Boro Parkers have to think about that! As you walk in the streets of Boro Park, houses and houses, blocks and blocks of *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*. It's a place of *kedusha*. One *mezuzah*, another *mezuzah*, no end to the *mezuzos*. And when you look up to the roofs, no antennas, no televisions. It's holy ground! It's a holy place. *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*. The heart of Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in Boro Park, is in Williamsburg, is in Crown Heights, is in Lakewood and it's in all the places where the frum Jews live.

MOTHERS GIVING UP THEIR LIVES AL KIDDUSH HASHEM

As you walk the streets where you see frum houses, you should feel humbled, you should feel that it's *kedusha*. Mothers are bringing up big families of children. They're giving their lives, working day and night, to take care of children. And fathers are working hard for *parnasa*, to pay bills and to pay the *schar limud*. It's all *kodesh kodoshim*. **קדש ישראל אשר אהב** - "It's the holiness of the *Am Yisroel* that Hashem loves." And it's that love of Hashem that makes the *ir chomah*, the city that is crowded with frum Jews, so holy in His eyes. It is the places that are filled with shuls and *shtibelach*, yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs, frum streets, frum stores, frum homes and frum places of work, that interest Hashem most. And it is those places that should interest us most as well.

But even more than that, even more than the *kedusha*, is the tremendous benefit that each individual achieves by living within

these walls. Because it's these places that are most conducive to growth in His service. Every frum Jew is affecting the next one, and together they are growing in *avodas Hashem*.

When you're around good people you're soaking up all of the attitudes of the good people around you. You're absorbing their *middos tovos*, the way they talk, their mannerisms, even the expressions on their faces. The human being is a *s'fog*, a sponge. You know that if you put a spoon into a cup of coffee, it won't absorb anything; you just wash it off and it's as good as new. But when you put a sponge into the coffee it soaks everything up. And that's what you're doing all day - you're soaking up everything around you.

HASHEM IS TELLING US: DON'T LEAVE THE HOLY LAND!

And now we understand the recommendation of the *pesukim*, we understand all of the *dinim* in the *parsha* which are encouraging us to reside in the walled cities. Through these *halachos* Hashem seeks to encourage us to remain among the best Jews, and to stay in the place where the Shechina resides most strongly. "Don't give up the great opportunity of living among the *frummeh*. "Stay here with Me and soak up all of the Torah attitudes that surround you," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu. "Don't leave the *admas kodesh!*"

Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants you to fulfill this principle of the Rambam that we mentioned earlier, the principle of making sure to always live among the best. Hashem desires that we be the best, and therefore He desires that we should live among the best. And the more numbers and the more crowded, the better it is in His eyes; because those are the places where we can best grow in service of Him.

On the other hand, those who lived in scattered settlements; the towns, villages and unwallled cities, were not *zoicheh* to such a strong Presence of Hashem. The people were spread out far from one another; houses scattered among the countryside, separated from each other by fields and open area. No crowding, no congestion; only a few Jewish families here and there. And therefore all the previous *dinim* encouraging the *Am*

Yisroel to remain in their cities do not apply here. Those living in these open cities are not penalized for selling their homesteads; we don't find Hashem encouraging them to repurchase their homes. Instead, these laws encourage them to relocate and dwell with their brethren in the vibrant Torah life of the walled cities.

THE SATMARER REBBE AND THE AGUDAS YISROEL

Everyone knows by himself that he's affected by the sight of multitudes of Jews. Unless you have a heart of stone, you can't help but be excited with pride at being chosen to be a part of this holy nation of *ovdei Hashem*. I can't forget the one *Hoshana Rabbah* when I went to see the old *Satmarer Rebbe*, *zichrono l'vracha*, in Williamsburg. The place was jammed! *Hoshanos* took four hours and he himself was the *chazan*. He was the *shatz* and it was beautiful! It was packed with people; there was no room to move. Just being there for four hours and witnessing such a sight inflames the *neschama* with a desire for *avodas Hashem*. It lights a fire of love of Hashem in your heart.

If you bring somebody there, to see so many Jews together in one place, all servants of Hashem, it changes a person's nature, his mind. You won't have to give him any arguments against evolution; no need for hours disproving Bible Criticism and Zionism. No arguments at all! Just being surrounded by so many *frummeh* changes a person for the better. Just the sight makes you stronger in your dedication to the Torah. When you see that you are not alone, when you see the great numbers, it is an inspiration to dedicate yourself to *avodas Hashem* and to be an important part of those masses of His loyal servants.

Large scale demonstrations of *avodas Hashem* reach into the depths of your *neschama*. When twenty-thousand people came to the *Siyum Hashas* of the *Agudas Yisroel* it was a great demonstration of the service of Hashem, a demonstration that inflames us all. The *Am Hashem* was arriving in droves, pouring out of buses, cars and trains. And by the way, it inflames the irreligious as well, but in a different way. It killed them to see such a thing. It murdered them. *Kein yirbu!* Boruch Hashem! But us - it inflamed us in the service of Hashem.

THE JEWS ARE TAKING OVER MANHATTAN!

I remember when we made a demonstration against *Medinas Yisroel* when they wanted to draft Jewish girls into their army. I remember that! In Manhattan the streets were jammed with frum Jews. There were Jews everywhere! The subways were crowded with frum Jews! Everywhere frum Jews! The *goyim* in Manhattan didn't know what to do with themselves. Manhattan was jammed with those who came to protest against the Israeli government. Thousands and thousands of Jews coming together to stand up for Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It was hard not to be affected by such a sight.

Because when you see so many people standing up for Hakodosh Boruch Hu you can't help but be strengthened in your convictions. You're encouraged, your convictions are strengthened, and you become a changed person. The same way that a bad environment is a *sakanah* for your success, the good environment is a *yeshuah*. When you are surrounded by *ovdei Hashem*, you want to be a part of it as well.

So when you walk in the streets of Boro Park, Williamsburg, Flatbush, or any place where the Jewish people reside in large established communities, secure and numerous, and you see the *Am Yisroel* all around you - all the mothers and fathers and children - you should be filled with happiness that you are living in a place where the *Shechinas Hashem* rests most strongly; a place where there are large numbers of Jews and the place where the fire of love for Hashem is burning most brightly. And the happiness you should feel, is only a pale shadow of the happiness that Hashem feels, His *nachas*, His satisfaction, when He sees His children living together in large numbers in close quarters.

MAKE A LONG-DISTANCE CALL

And I must tell you the following. Don't merely rely on your thoughts. Your thoughts are very important, but you must inspire your thoughts with your *dibbur*, your words. Stop in the street and say, "Thank you Hashem for this great opportunity of living among the *ribui* of Your people, the *Am Yisroel*. I love you Hashem!" Now, if you're too embarrassed, then go into the

telephone booth, pick up the phone and make a “long-distance” call to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Talk to Him! Let people think that you're talking to your wife or to your boss. But you're actually talking to your real Boss. “Hashem, it's a pleasure to be surrounded by so many from Jews.” And the more you say it with your mouth, the more you'll appreciate living among the *frummeh*.

WHERE'S THE GRASS IN BROOKLYN?

All the places where from Jews live: Boro Park, Flatbush, Kensington, Williamsburg, Crown Heights - you have to know that it's a wealth to live in these communities. It's much more of a wealth than the bigger homes in West Orange and the trees and gardens of West Hempstead. To walk down the crowded streets of Williamsburg is a wealth. You're a rich man; your pockets are full of money. You have to know that that's called living. That's living life. Because you're *nimshach*, you're being drawn after the best. And that's the wealth of life!

Happiness in life is not because you're living in a certain place where you can have a big palatial home. And happiness is not having trees and gardens in front of your house! True happiness is when you accomplish the purpose that you're here for. The purpose of life is to be close to Hashem. Of course, gardens are nice. And trees and grass are beautiful. But to give up the beauty of the crowds of *ovdei Hashem*, to give up that *ma'aleh*, is a tragic mistake. Because the effect of the masses upon your own growth is the real wealth of life. That's the spur for perfection.

THE DELIGHTFUL SARDINES

Ahh! It's a glorious thing! To live packed among the *Am Yisroel* is a delight! Wherever you look it's *Yisroel* and *Yisroel* and *Yisroel*! Not like the lady who came here one time and told me, “Why would I want to live here, packed with other Jews like sardines?” Sardines?! That's what the *Am Yisroel* is to you?! Sardines?!

You have to learn what a great privilege it is to live among the *Am Yisroel*. This lady unfortunately had the opposite idea. She thought that happiness is when you can move way out and escape

the sardines. And those are the ones who eventually go lost. ואבדתם בגוים - "And you'll get lost among the goyim" (Vayikra 26:38). I'm not saying that they become goyim. No, they're still from Jews. They wear *tefillin* and daven three times a day. But there's no question that if you live among the goyim, you begin to think like them. Your mind goes lost. You lose your mind. And all of our brothers don't even realize that they're getting lost among the gentiles. They think that they're getting lost in the gardens, and the trees, but really they're getting lost among the gentiles.

Because usually those beautiful gardens of the the suburbs come along with other accompaniments that are not so beautiful. You'll have gentile neighbors and modern Orthodox neighbors. And that means you'll be surrounded by gentile ideas; their attitudes and ideals, their clothing, their baseball, and their newspapers and magazines. Everything that comes along with the grass is the destruction of a Jewish home.

A TRIP TO SOUTHERN ITALY

And just like a person would give up so much of what he wants in order to save his life, it's even more important your give up the suburbs for the greatness of living among the throngs of the *Am Yisroel*. I knew a man in my old shul who had a sick child. And the doctor said that the boy needs Southern Italian climate to survive. "You have to move to Southern Italy," they told him. Southern Italy! Otherwise the child would die. This happened fifty years ago. And he moved! He picked up and moved there! To Southern Italy! He did everything - he sold his business and packed up and moved. I don't even know what he did there; he wasn't a rich man. But to save his child's life he gave up everything.

A man will do anything for life! And a life without the *frummeh* is not living life. And so, when you are moving from one place to another, you must make that decision with great *yishuv hada'as*. הוי מתונין בדין. And not only with your wife! You should go to *chachomim* and ask them where to move. It's of utmost importance!

WHO WILL YOU SCHMOOZE WITH AT KIDDUSH?

How can a man move into a neighborhood and not inquire beforehand about the shuls in the neighborhood?! After he moves and he settles in, that's when he starts chomping around for a shul?! Isn't that insanity?! It's such an important thing! Who is going to be the *kehillah* that you're going to be with? Who are the people you're going to talk to on Shabbos morning at the *kiddush* in shul? And who's the rabbi who you're going to be listening to? Are people so stupid, so careless, about their lives, that they're *mafkir* everything?!

The most important thing is your environment. And therefore choose the best for yourself and for your wife and for your children. The best neighbors, the best shul, the best yeshivos, the best Bais Yaakovs, the best friends, and the best Rabbonim. Because otherwise it's a *sakanah*, a great danger. Your children must have the best environment, your wife must have the best environment, and most important, you must have the best environment.

When you live in a frum neighborhood - the *frummer* the better - your family is transformed. You can send your sons and your daughters to the best schools - schools where people who have TVs aren't allowed there. You know, that the children don't talk about TV in the good places. The Bais Yaakov schools are the best place for your girls. In the crowded and frum neighborhoods, you'll find the best institutions. So if you care about your family, then you should make sure to follow the advice that Hashem is giving you in these *pesukim*. And make sure to surround yourself on all sides with frum people and frum attitudes

And even in the same neighborhood, between one block and another, you must be careful to make the right choice. Because your entire future, and the entire future of your children, depends on that choice. Everything depends on who lives next door to you, and who your neighbors are; who davens in your shul and who plays with your children. If you move in next to the right person, he can change your life in this world and the next. Of course, not always can you choose, but to the best of your ability make sure that you get the most for your money.

This is a very important admonition you're hearing now. To try your best to always be in the company of the choicest of our people. Because something is sure to rub off on you. There's no question about it - it's going to affect your *neshamah*. All the things that you think and do will be different because of your association with good people.

CLING TO HASHEM

Of course, it takes time for people to understand that, to really understand the depth of this *yesod*. It takes time and effort. But once you do, you'll begin to love the crowded frum neighborhoods. And you'll want to live there forever and ever. It's *mamash* a pity to have to die and say farewell to such a good neighborhood where the frum Jews live all together.

And living in neighborhoods full of *frum* Jews is fulfilling a *mitzva* in the *Torah*. We find that Hashem commands us to cling to Him. וְבוֹ תִדְבֵּק - "And you should cling to Him" (Devarim 10:20). And the Rambam (Hilchos De'os 6:2) says: How does one fulfill the mitzvah of clinging to Hashem? You should eat with the *talmidei chachomim*, he says. You should drink with them. You should live among them. You should do business with them. לְהִתְחַבֵּר לָהֶן בְּכֹל מִינֵי חִיבוּר, he says. You should make sure to join them in every connection possible. And living among the *frummeh* - and the *frummer* the better - that's the best *chibur* possible. When you choose to live near good people, near the *frummeh*, you are clinging to Him. בּוֹ תִדְבֵּק refers to physical proximity. When one chooses to live next to a *talmid chochom*, when one chooses to live among the genuine Jews - those with true Torah attitudes whose lives exemplify the Torah ways - he thereby comes closer to Hashem.

MOVING FROM PUMBEDISA

Here's a man who lived in Pumbedisa in *Bavel*. Pumbedisa was a Torah-center; a Yeshiva town. And this man moved to *Bei-Kubi*. Now, *Bei-Kubi* was not too far away from Pumbedisa. It was a nearby city. But Rav Yosef put this man in *shamtah* - he excommunicated this man (Kesuvos 111a). Now, this man did not relinquish any *mitzvos*. He didn't stop eating kosher or davening

with a *minyan*. He was still a frum Jew! And yet Rav Yosef viewed his move as such a rebellion against Torah Judaism, such a *chutzpah*, that he excommunicated him. Because when one forsakes a strong Torah-center for another community - even though he may still be a meticulously pious man - but he already harbors in him the germs of defection! Physical proximity to a *ribui* of dedicated servants of Hashem is not only a symptom of the closeness of the mind to Hashem, but it is also a *cause* of closeness of mind to Him. The well-established and strong *kehillos* of the *Am Yisroel* are saturated with *yiras shamayim*. Sometimes, it may even be considerably inconvenient to dwell there, but to be close to the good people, is an achievement that cannot fail to mold your history and the history of your posterity.

And we pray for that every day. In the *shemonah esrei*, in *Al Hatzadikim*, we say וְשִׁים חֶלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם - "And put our lot with them!" Ribono Shel Olam, please let us be *zoicheh* to live as close as possible to the *tzadikim* and the *chassidim*. Now, where are you going to find the *tzadikim*? In Nebraska?! In Bayonne?! No, only by us. Only in the "walled cities" of the *Am Yisroel* all over the world. And so, when you say these words you should be thinking, "Hashem, please give me the opportunity to be with the *tzadikim* in this world. Help me live close to them, and learn from them."

So you'll tell me that you thought the *pshat* of וְתָן חֶלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם means "Hashem, put our lot with them in the *Next World*." That's true, that's true as well. But the only way to join the *tzadikim* in the *Next World* is by joining them as much as you can in this world. And therefore, wherever you go in this world, you must always make sure that the first and the most important question is: How could I best join myself, בכל מיני חיבור, in every way possible, to the *frummeh* who will be around forever and ever as loyal and dedicated servants of Hashem.

STROLLING WITH THE GEDOLIM

Now let's listen to the advice of a good counselor. Shlomo Hamelech tells us: הוֹלֵךְ אֶת חַכְמִים יִחְכֵּם - "The one who walks together with the *chachomim* will become wise" (Mishlei 13:20). It doesn't say, "If you go to his yeshiva and study his *shiurim* you'll become wise." No, it says, "If you *walk* with him," *p'shuto*

k'mashma'o. To acquaint yourself with the *chachomim*, to live among them, to eat where they eat, to walk where they walk, to shop where they shop.

So why forsake the best communities that we have, filled with idealism and *avodas Hashem*? Because if you do, Shlomo Hamelech tells you in that same *possuk* what will be the end: **ורועה כסילים ירוע** - "One who associates with the fools, the result will be that he'll be broken" (ibid.) At the end of his life, he'll look back and he'll see nothing but a shattered ruined life. And his children? He could have had children *bnei Torah*, and he could have had many of them too. But one of the first results of moving away is that your wife listens to the urgings of her foolish neighbors, "Don't have too many babies." And therefore, **ורועה כסילים ירוע**, the ones who forsakes the best communities in the world for the condominiums of Florida and small towns out west become ruined by the *kesilim*, the fools. Because if they're not from the *frummeh*, if they're not from the best, then they're already fools.

TALK TO THE KALLAH

And in *Shir Hashirim*, Shlomo Hamelech says as follows. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is talking to the *Am Yisroel*, His bride. It's a good *shidduch* and the *chosson*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is talking to His *kallah*. He talks to her about their future. It's a good thing by the way. If you're seeing your *kallah* anyhow, so talk about your future. Where do you want to live, what part of town do you want to settle in, what kind of family do you want to have, how your house will look. It's important. Get a picture, each one from the other one, what are your ideals. What's your plan for the way you'll spend the rest of your lives together. You have to do that. Don't just marry because she smells good, or because he puts on a good aftershave lotion. That's not enough to get married on. That's how many people get married by the way; they fall for a smell or a curl in the hair. He doesn't know that she spent two hours in front of the mirror making that curl. He thinks she was born that way and that it'll be there forever.

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to His *kallah*, the *Am Yisroel*: **איתי מלבנון כלה** - "My bride, come with me from *Levanon*" (*Shir Hashirim* 4:13). Hakodosh Boruch Hu is telling her what's going

to be. "It won't be all good times," He says. "But listen to Me anyhow. Because no matter what, it will always be with accomplishment in life. **אֵיתִי** - if you'll be with Me, if you're willing to stick with Me, and associate only with Me, then **תִּשְׁרִי מֵרֶאֶשׁ אֲמָנָה** - "You'll look down from the top of the Mount Amanah." Mount Amanah is a *mashal* for *emunah* which means loyalty and faithfulness. If we stick with Hashem and His people faithfully then we'll make great progress in life. We'll climb mountains with Hashem. We'll make great progress and reach the summit of all types of progress.

It won't always be easy; staying loyal to Me and My people. But come with Me always! **אֵיתִי** - Stick with Me and you'll succeed at your purpose in life. Our career together will be a career of greatness. That I promise you, says Hashem. We'll climb mountains together; we'll attain greatness walking together.

THE MOUNTAINS THAT WE CLIMBED

And we did! Hakodosh Boruch Hu's promise was fulfilled. We climbed - and continue to climb - the great mountains of perfection in *avodas Hashem* together with Him. We live holy lives, successful lives, beautiful lives, by walking with Him, by living with Him in the "walled cities."

But Hakodosh Boruch Hu's promise was fulfilled only for those who went **אֵיתִי**, for the ones who went together with Him. **אֵיתִי** means walk with Me, by walking with My people. But those who began to walk apart, those who leave the "walled cities" where Hashem resides most visibly, and most strongly, are getting lost.

And that's why in America they're going lost too. Do those Jews who moved out to the outskirts of Long Island have *nachas* from children? If they have any children at all, they're bums. The girls are I don't want to say the word, a filthy word, that's what they are today. Their parents' hearts hurt them when they see their children in insane asylums as a result of taking narcotics, and having nervous breakdowns. And many of them end up in the morgue at an early age. That's the *nachas* of those who forsook Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

But those people who walked with Hashem have gone to the *chasonos* of all their children, and the *chasonos* of their grandchildren. And they see generations growing up all around them, *frum* children with their *tzitzis* out, walking in the ways of the Torah; many of them are *talmidei chachomim*. So Hakodosh Boruch Hu didn't deceive us. אִתִּי, "Come with Me, my *kallah*," He said. And we'll walk with Him forever and ever in the "walled cities" of strong Torah communities, where we are forever inflamed with the desire to serve Him.

And that's why Hashem says to you: If you stay with My people then you're staying with Me. And when you stay with Me then I promise you success! When we understand what the Torah is trying to teach us in these *pesukim* of *batei arei chomah*, then we understand that our whole *Olam Haze*h and our whole *Olam Habah* depend on what the Rambam says, אַחֲרֵי רַעֲיוֹ וְחֻבְרָיו - A man is *pulled* after his friends and acquaintances. He's pulled! That's how it is and it can't be helped. And so, if someone is going to pull us, let's make sure that we're always being pulled by the right people, by the best of our people, into the welcoming arms of Hakodosh Boruch Hu!

HAVE A WONDERFUL SHABBOS

תורת אביגדור

"שאל אביד ויגדד זקניד ויאמרו לך"



Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

If a person has two subjects in Torah that he can learn, one he enjoys and one he doesn't, which one should he study?

A:

Everybody knows the answer. We have a rule: לעולם ילמוד אדם – "A man should always learn Torah in the subject that his heart desires" (Avodah Zara 19a). But suppose he's deciding between learning and not learning. Then he has no choice. It doesn't matter what his heart desires.

But let me tell you something. Suppose a person has a choice between learning Gemara and learning Chumash. Very often, that's also not a choice. And I'll tell you why. Because it's not that he desires Chumash; it's not that he desires to understand the Chumash and learn what Hashem is trying to tell him. No, it's just because he desires Gemara less. He's looking for an easy way out. He wants to be lazy; he doesn't want to put in the effort required for learning Gemara, so Chumash is his cop-out.

But if both are of equal difficulty, then he should use the principle of מה שלבו חפץ as his yardstick. He should choose the subject that interests him more. That's the rule of לעולם ילמוד אדם תורה במקום שלבו חפץ. And that's because a person will succeed more in the subject that interests him most. And nothing is as important as success in understanding the דבר השם.

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