

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

פרשת כי תצא

Mishpachat Levy
Edition 

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת כי תצא

THE MITZVAH TO FORGET

In *Parshas Ki Seitzei*, we learn about the *mitzva* of *shikcha* when Hashem tells us that we are forbidden to collect a forgotten bundle when we harvest our fields. כי תקצור קצירך בשדך ושכחת. עומר בשדה לא תשוב לקחתו לגר ליתום ולא למנה יהיה למען יברכך השם וידך - "When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a bundle in the field, you shall not go back to take it; it shall be for the convert, the orphan and the widow, so that Hashem will bless you in all your handiwork" (D'varim 24:19).

Here we have a farmer sweating through a long day of backbreaking labor. It's not easy working in the fields. And now he accidentally leaves over some wheat; a bundle of wheat is worth good money and he would have liked to have collected that bundle as well. He has children to feed, bills to pay, and workers who need their wages. But what could he do? Accidents happen; he's a *frum* man and the Torah is forbidding him from returning to collect that forgotten bundle. לא תשוב לקחתו, he cannot return to take it. Instead, he must leave it in his field for the needy to find and bring home to their own families.

THE MITZVAH OF LOSING MONEY

Now, let's listen to a remarkable statement in the Sifra (12:13) because it is the introduction to our subject for tonight. The Sifra quotes our *possuk* which tells of the blessings that Hashem will bestow on the farmer whose forgotten bundle in the field has been found by the poor man: *ושכחת עומר בשדה... לגר ליתום ולאמנה* - "And you forget a bundle in the field...it shall be for the convert, for the orphan and for the widow, in order that Hashem your G-d shall bless you" (ibid.) And the Sifra makes the following deduction: "We see from here that if a man has a coin wrapped in his money pouch, and it falls from him, and a poor man finds it and uses it for his sustenance, the Torah here establishes for us, that the one who lost his coin will receive blessings from Hashem." When a man loses money and a poor man finds it, the one who lost his money gets a certain *s'char* for the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka* - even though it was an accident.

That's a principle of the Torah - the man who lost his money is getting a *mitzvah*. But the question begs to be asked: Why should this man receive any blessing, any reward at all, for what has happened? He didn't intentionally leave the bundle or the coin for the poor man. And he would have been happy to retrieve them. But he couldn't. There was no point going back in any case. It was taken already. So in what sense does this man deserve any reward?! How can a person receive a reward for an action and resulting benefit that seemingly has no connection to him? How could that be?

THE GREAT BIG CHIDDUSH

Hashem is teaching us here a very big *chiddush*, a novel concept, that can transform your life. It's a bigger *chiddush* than you'll find in some of the best *seforim*. But like many *chiddushim*, it will take some explanation, so pay attention well. There is a hidden lesson in this *possuk*, that if understood well, and applied to your daily life, will transform some of the most plain and inconspicuous moments of your life into moments of greatness.

And this lesson, unknown to many, is the lesson of **בחירה** - **למפרע** - the retroactive choosing of good deeds. A person can be standing after the fact, long after the *maaseh*, and continue to become greater and greater because of a deed from long ago.

If this farmer who forgot his stalks of wheat and this Jew who lost his money is thinking, "If an *adam hagun*, a worthy person, comes by and finds my wheat or my ten dollar bill and he needs it, so then I'm satisfied that he should use it." *If you're thinking that*, then you get *s'char* for the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka*. Of course, it won't be the same as if you did it *lichatchila*, it's not as good as when you choose to hand him your ten dollar bill, but it's still an important opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka* and receive *brachos* from Hashem.

REBBI'S LAST DAY

It's a new idea that you're hearing now, so we'll take it slow. There's a *gemara* that brings out this lesson. Everybody who learned *gemara* knows this little story: *Mesichta Kesubos* (103b) tells us what it was like when Rabeinu Hakadosh, Rebbi, was on his deathbed. Oh, was that a sad day for the *Am Yisroel*! Rebbi was about to leave this world. Everybody came and gathered outside of his house. Many were able to squeeze their way in, but not everybody got inside. So there were crowds of people standing outside. The street was jammed with people! Of course, they were all very grieved. Everybody was weeping, they were praying, calling out to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "Save Rabeinu Hakodosh! Please, don't take him away!"

All day long they wept and cried out to Hashem. And finally the terrible moment came; Rebbi had passed away. Oh, what a terrible moment it was! When the report went out there was a roar of anguish from the whole *klal*. Everybody cried out!

THE PROPHETIC VOICE

And the *Gemara* says that at that moment, **יצא בת קול**, a *bas kol* came out; something happened, I can't explain it exactly but a prophetic voice came out from *shamayim* and said, "Everybody who was present at the *ashkavta*, the passing, of Rebbi **הרי הם**

מזומנין לחיי העולם הבא - Whoever is here at this moment when Rebbi passed away will be welcomed into *Olam Habah*." When the time comes, when they leave this world, they are all guaranteed *Olam Habah*.

A guarantee of *Olam Habah*! So great was the *zchus* of trying to save Rebbi's life! Rebbi was the greatest *talmid chochom* in those days, and had he continued to live even one day, it would have been extremely valuable for the *Am Yisroel*. And therefore, all those who came and demonstrated with all their hearts that they appreciated the remarkable Torah greatness of Rebbi - even though they didn't accomplish anything with their prayers; Hakodosh Boruch Hu didn't yield to them because Rebbi's time was up - but just for their *good intentions* they are *mezumanin l'chayei ha'olam habah*.

THE WRONG DAY TO DO LAUNDRY

Now, the *gemara* tells that here was one man, a laundry man. In those days a laundry man was the poorest of people, a poor plain man. This poor man used to come every day to the *mesivta* to hear Rebbi's *shiurim*. I cannot guarantee that he understood it, but he came every day. He couldn't come and sit down, he wasn't from the *talmidim*, but he stood in the back near the door and he listened in. Every day! But this one day, the day Rebbi passed away, he wasn't there; for some reason he couldn't come.

Now when he heard about that announcement, the *bas kol*, that all who were present at Rebbi's *petirah* were *mezuman l'chayei Olam Habah*, he became *meshuga* with *tza'ar*. He went wild with grief at what he had lost. "Why did I miss such an opportunity?! I wish I could have been there!" He was terribly anguished and ran up on the roof, leaped off and killed himself! And suddenly a second *bas kol* rang out: אף ההוא כובס מזומן הוא לחיי העולם הבא - "Him also, this laundry man gets in to *Olam Habah* as well."

RETROACTIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

So you'll say, why should he get in? He certainly didn't contribute anything; he wasn't there! And the answer is this. What

did he contribute? Just one thing - *he chose to be there!* He wanted to be there! The *tza'ar* that this laundry man felt, his desire to have been there and his regret that he wasn't there, is *the same as if he had been there*. Even though he wasn't there, *but his bechira l'mafreyah made it as if he had been there!* It's remarkable!

We're learning now is that *bechirah l'mafreyah*, retroactive choice, is not a small thing. A person has the opportunity to revisit his past, and transform it into greatness. The choosing in the mind, even after the fact, "Why couldn't I have been present at such a good thing", is considered a great choice in the service of Hashem. Many people say, "Well, I wasn't present. I couldn't help myself. **אונס רחמנא פטריה**, I'm finished." No, don't say that, because you're losing an opportunity. You have to actually choose in your mind that you wish you could have been there.

THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING MITZVOS

Now, the Gemara in Kiddushin (40b) tells us the following: **רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר, אפילו צדיק גמור כל ימיו, ומרד באחרונה, איבד את** - "R' Shimon bar Yochai says: Even if one was an absolutely righteous man all his life, but then he rebelled against Hashem in the last moments of his life, *he has lost all of his earlier good deeds* and he is judged as a completely wicked person." And the Gemara asks: Could it be that an act of rebellion at the end of one's life, has the ability to wipe away a hundred and twenty years of Torah, *mitzvos*, and acts of kindness?! And Chazal answer: **בתוהא על הראשונות** - We are discussing a person who in his final moments *regrets* all of his previous meritorious deeds that he performed during his life. And these thoughts of regret in the final moments of his life, *erase a whole lifetime of service of Hashem*. All gone, because of his thoughts at the end. He enters the Next World empty-handed.

It's even hard to say it! A man spent all his life in the service of Hashem: working, doing, learning, and serving Hashem with all that he has. And then in one moment of weakness of the mind, it's gone. **איבד את הראשונות**! Everything that he has accomplished throughout his entire life has disappeared into thin

air! And because of what?! בתוהא על הראשונות. Because of thoughts in his mind! In his mind, he regrets his previous good deeds, and they disappear.

I'M SORRY I WAS ONCE YOUNG AND STUPID

Here's a former yeshiva man who is working at his business. And he's making a good *parnasa* - he's living in the "real world" now. So he thinks, "I'm sorry I was once such a *chanyuk*. I was young and innocent, what did I know? I sat and learned in the *yeshiva* and I thought the whole world was nothing but *toireh*." Oh no! Don't say that! You're wiping out all your learning; your whole career as an idealistic *yeshiva bochur* is being ruined with those words, those thoughts. No, don't weaken! You have to hold on tight to all those good things you once had. Because with a thought of regret like that, all of it disappears. It's a dangerous business, this business of regretting your good deeds.

But within that danger lies a big *yeshua* as well. Because like we have said here more than once, מדה טובה מרובה ממדת פורעניות. Hashem's trait of goodness is much stronger than His trait of punishment (Sotah 11a). And therefore, the same way you can be תוהא על הראשונות and erase your good deeds, you can also be תוהא על הראשונות and *recreate your empty deeds* of the past. If a person can erase his good deeds with thoughts of regret, then he surely can *recreate his empty deeds* by infusing them with thoughts of willing consent.

THE HIDDEN WELLSPRINGS OF ENDLESS GREATNESS

This new principle of *bechirah l'mafreyah*, the ability to use your thoughts to go back in time and create greatness, opens up for us endless opportunities in our day to day life. Some of us are so busy with life, and we sometimes find ourselves in situations where we feel incapable of creating new deeds in the service of Hashem. But the truth is that your past deeds can be a source of continuous greatness, if you learn to use this *avodah* of *bechirah l'mafreyah*.

Let's take an example: A *bris* is taking place. Everybody is happy, saying *mazel tov*, smiling. Only one person present is very

unhappy. And he's a very important personage, he's the one whom everyone has come to honor. The little baby is unhappy and he's crying out in protest against the whole thing. If it was up to him, he would call it off. If you ever were a *sandek* you'd see how hard it is to hold on to that child. That little baby is so desperate - he's fighting to get loose. You have to hold on very tight. That poor little fellow, lying on the pillow on the knees of the *sandak*, he's kicking and crying out. He's screaming, it hurts terribly. If he could get out of there at that time, he would stand up and run out of the *beis haknesses*.

THE BAR MITZVAH BACHUR RUNS AND HIDES

You know, the Rambam asks the question: Why do you make *milah* at eight days? Why don't you make it when a boy is *bar mitzvoah*? So the Rambam says because he wouldn't be around anymore when you're looking for him. You invited everybody to his *bris*. Everyone is waiting but the *kvatter* can't find him. He won't be there. He'll be hiding in the basement some place, or outside in the bushes.

So the question is, was that little boy *mikayeim* the *mitzvoah* of *milah*? He didn't choose it at all! Actually, he protested mightily! The fact that you will be *mal* your children, alright, that's good. But what about *your own bris*? What an opportunity it would have been for you to go willingly, like Yitzchok Avinu went to the *akeidah*.

YOU PROTESTED AGAINST WHAT?!

And it's not just *any* mitzvah that you protested against. You have to know that the *mitzvah* of *milah* is one of the only two *mitzvoos* in the Torah for which you get *kareis* for not doing. It's a very important *mitzvoas asei* - If he refuses to let himself be *gemalt*, then he's *chayav kareis*. And here you *were* refusing it; you didn't want any part of it. And all your life it remains one of the most important *mitzvoos*, that *you didn't* want to do! Is that a way for a man to live? To have on his record that he did not want to do one of the most important *mitzvoos*?! It's a big question - don't think it's a small problem. And it's a sad thing that people live all their lives

without ever making up for what they missed out on. How does one fill in that lack of *bechira*, the lack of free will and choice?

So we're learning now, that *now* is the time. You have to look back and say to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "I thank You for the *bris*." But don't just say it. Being *boicher l'mafreyah* means putting into it as much as you can. So as you're saying the words, you're thinking back and you *choose*, "I am happy to have this *mitzvah* done on me. I'm *מקבל ברצון* with my full good will all that was done. I'm sorry that I kicked and cried. I should have been so full of *simchah* if I had *seichel*, but I didn't have any *seichel*. It was a tremendous opportunity once in my life to enter into the *בריתו של אברהם אבינו*."

And you're going to get a certain reward for that *bechirah l'mafreyah*. What you're hearing now is a big *chiddush*! Because at the time you did not exercise your free will to choose, you didn't choose. But that's *bechirah l'mafreya*, that's the *chiddush* you're hearing now. You can choose free will *l'mafreyah*, retroactively.

THE BRIS IN MIDDLE OF BENTCHING

And now we come to an *eitzah tovah* that is offered to us every day, an opportunity to make up for the lack of *bechira* that you had on that *mitzvah*. Every day, you have that opportunity - even a few times a day. In *birkas hamazon* we say *נודה לך השם* - *אלוקינו* - "We thank You Hashem," and one of the things we thank You is *על בריתך שחתמת בבשרנו* - "for the *bris* that You stamped in our bodies." How could you waste that golden opportunity? You're thanking Hashem for the *bris* that once was made on you! If you were ready for it, if you would think about this even a little bit, you would stop for a moment and imagine that you're being *nimol* right now. They're holding you down - *you asked them* to hold you down, because even though you're willing, you know that you might kick, you might twist yourself; it really hurts after all. Blood is flowing, it's a painful thing. But you're accepting upon yourself what was done already.

And if you're afraid to push it off till tomorrow; you might forget, or maybe you'll cool off a little bit, so as you walk out of

here tonight, you could say, "I thank You Hashem for making this *bris* on me." Even if you won't do it every day, maybe you won't make it a habit, but at least once in a while you can use the words of *birkas hamazon*, ועל בריתך שחתמת בבשרינו, or any free moment that you have and be a *boicher ba'tov*. You imagine that you're lying on the sandek's lap and he's holding your little feet tight. And it hurts like anything! Imagine yourself, picture it! "I thank You Hashem for that. I'm so happy that you did this to me." Now, in the beginning you don't mean it. But if you're smart, you'll keep it up, and little by little it gets into your head and you actually become grateful for it. But you have to picture it, you have to imagine the pain that you had.

YOU'RE HAPPY THAT IT HURT!

Of course, it's not the same as choosing it beforehand. No, no; but there's something there. It's an opportunity for *bechirah l'mafreyah*. And that's called ובהרת בחיים - You're consciously choosing to succeed with the life that Hashem had given you. You have chosen right! To choose to accept what has already been done is also called choosing, and you get a certain reward for that. Isn't it a pity that most people are unaware of this opportunity that is offered by *birkas hamazon*? It's a pity to miss such an opportunity. על בריתך שחתמת בבשרינו, every day you can experience it again and again. Not just once in a lifetime. You're happy to have had a *bris*. You're happy that it hurt you. Of course it's easy to say it *now*, but still, you're choosing to experience it again, you're choosing to accept it again, and that is the perfection available to all of us that the *possuk* of *shik'cha* is teaching us.

Now, this way of thinking, using *bechirah l'mafreyah*, opens up for us a horizon of a tremendous opportunities. Because what else do we thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for in the *bracha* of נודה לך? We say, "על תורתך שלמדתנו ועל חקיך שהודעתנו" - We thank you Hashem for giving us the Torah.

WE WEREN'T ALL PRESENT AT HAR SINAI

Now, everybody knows that at *Matan Torah* Hakadosh Baruch Hu said ולא אתכם לבדכם אני כורת את הברית הזאת "Not

only with you who are here today did I make the *bris* of Torah, כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עומד היום לפני ה' אלוקינו, ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום - "I made this covenant of the Torah even with those who are not here today" (Devarim 29:14). So we all learned that *Chazal* say, this means that we were present at *Kabolas Hatorah*. We were all present and we all swore to keep the Torah. מושבע ועומד הוא מהר (Nedarim 8a). But did *we* swear? We weren't there! So you'll tell me your *neshamah* was there! A *neshamah* doesn't have any *bechirah*, any free will. The *neshamah* became obligated, but we didn't participate by choice, with our *bechirah*. And that means that we lost out on the great opportunity of *Kabolas Hatorah*! If we weren't present at מעמד הר סיני with our bodies - and we weren't - so we lost that great opportunity.

Those who were present, our forefathers, they were *bocher*, they chose and said *na'aseh v'nishma*. And it was such a tremendous achievement that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was so happy, and He said "I hope that this *yirah* that they have today should remain with them forever." מי יתן והיה לבבם זה להם ליראה - "Halevai it should be forever like they stand today." (Devarim 5:26). It was a tremendous moment! The whole nation chose to accept the Torah together and they became elevated forever. The whole *Am Yisroel* was there together for the greatest day in history. But *we* were missing! We weren't there; We lost out!

YOU CAN ACCEPT THE TORAH EVERY DAY

And so now we're going to learn how to utilize the opportunity of life, the gift of *bechirah l'mafreyah*, to go back to *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and to be *mikabeil* the Torah. You have to say to yourself, "I want to be there, standing with the rest of the *Am Yisroel*, and accept the Torah *b'leiv shalem*." When do you say it? Every day! It's an important opportunity that's usually overlooked. Every day after you finish *krias shema*, you say: אמת ויציב ונכון וקים וישר ונאמן ואהוב ונחמד עלינו - "It's true and firm and established and enduring and right and trustworthy. It is beloved and cherished and desired by us." When you say these words, you're accepting the entire Torah as if you were present at *Har*

Sinai. People don't know what it means when they're saying these words. All these words are expressions of satisfaction with *Kabbolas Hatorah* - you didn't realize that, did you?

And so, if you're saying the words anyway, try to picture yourself now. You're standing around *Har Sinai*, and you're concurring with the whole Klal Yisrael, and you're calling out together with them *b'leiv shalem*, "I accept the Torah." *Na'aseh v'nishma!* You're accepting the Torah with such a *hislahavus*, such a desire, that it resembles the *na'aseh v'nishma* of our forefathers. If utilized properly, you have the important opportunity to live through *Ma'amad Har Sinai* every day. Every day you can do that! Men and women, boys and girls! And you don't have to wait for *kriyas shema* - you can think those same thoughts right outside of here on Ocean Parkway, or in your kitchen at home. And it's considered as if you're accepting the Torah right now, *because you're using your free will to think these thoughts*.

This is not a small thing you're hearing now. And it's not merely poetic words. It's an actual *eitzah tovah*, a very important form of *avodas Hashem* to use your free will for the things that took place in the past in which you did not participate physically. And if you do it, even once, it is considered as if you stood at *Har Sinai* with your body and you shouted with your mouth, "*Na'aseh v'nishma!*" along with the rest of the *Am Yisroel*.

IT'S TIME TO GET REMARRIED

And if you can be *mikabeil* the Torah again, then why not get married again as well? When that exciting day of your wedding finally arrived, it was such a *bilbul*, so hectic. Such a busy day: the preparations, the hall, the guests, the *kibudim*, the place cards, the photographer. It was non-stop. At the end, *boruch Hashem*, everything worked out, and now you're married. But really that great day in your life *didn't* work out! You were so busy getting married; you forgot that you were getting married for the purpose of serving Hashem. And the truth is that some of you still haven't realized that. Before you even knew it, you were walking down to the *chuppah*. You didn't realize what you were

getting into. And you didn't take the time to appreciate that you were getting married as another important step in the service of Hashem. Yes, the purpose of marriage is so that you'd be able to make something out of yourself.

I know that you might have *davened* under the *chuppah*, and maybe even before and after as well, but you didn't spend the day with the realization that you were starting a great career of serving Hashem in marriage. And you lost that opportunity to get married *l'sheim shamayim*, in order to serve Hashem. A once in a lifetime opportunity and now it's too late. You missed it.

MAKE MARRIAGE GREAT AGAIN!

But it's not too late! Any time you wish, you can revisit your wedding day, and make it great again. When you look out the window and you see your wife walking down the block with her shopping bags, or your husband coming down the street towards you, you should remind yourself of the *chuppah*. Think back to the day of the *chasuna*, and choose retroactively to get married *l'sheim shamayim*. Say it out loud, "Hashem, I married my wife in order to serve You, to build a *frum* family, to raise a home of boys and girls who make *brachos* and *daven* and are *ovdei Hashem*. I married my wife, not because of romance. Not because of her looks. No, I married her because I wanted to build a home for You Hashem."

Now, don't let your wife hear you. Your wife should always know that you married her because in your eyes she is the most perfect woman in the world. And the truth is that you *should* always think that she's the most beautiful, and the best mother. And of course, you should love her and be loyal to her always.

But now you can go back in time with your thoughts, and get married to your spouse again, this time *l'sheim shamayim*. Now you have a family, little children running around with *tzitzis* and *payos*. Your girls are preparing to build their own homes of *ovdei Hashem*. Maybe you already have *eidimer* and grandchildren. But it's not too late!

Now, you young men and women who aren't married yet, don't forget what I'm telling you, because you still have the opportunity to choose greatness on your wedding day. But for many people, all of the results of their *chasuna* came *b'hesech ha'daas*, with no thought at all. And therefore your only remedy is to go back in time *today*, and use your thoughts to make your wedding day, a day of greatness in *avodas Hashem*.

SHE'D RATHER BE LEARNING IN KOLLEL

A mother spends many long hours in the kitchen peeling potatoes for her husband and children. She's slaving away over the stove. And many more hours cleaning the house and doing laundry. What a dreary task that is. She would like maybe to sit in the kollel and learn. So Hashem says, "Your opportunities are better than a kollel man. A kollel man doesn't produce any children in this world, not one. You're *creating* children! To produce children is an unequalled privilege! Your husband maybe is producing *chiddushim*, maybe he even puts together a *sefer*, but that's nothing compared to what you're producing. A *sefer* will sit on a shelf, but you're creating the *Am Yisroel*! And when you're peeling the potatoes, you're serving Hashem no less than anyone else. That's what you should be thinking about. It would be worth it to come to this world just to peel potatoes for the *Am Yisroel* - just for that it would be worth it! Your children won't grow without potatoes! You can't just water them once a day like a rose bush. You have to feed them and bathe them - it's a full-time job to create a nation.

But what happens? It's hard work and it keeps her very busy, and so this overworked poor woman forgets to think! She doesn't think about why she's doing all this work and she spent twenty years of her life peeling potatoes just like her Italian neighbor peeled potatoes for her children. Just to feed the children, the same as an Italian?! A tragedy!

CARING FOR YOUR BABY WITH THE LONG BEARD

But now we have our remedy! All is not lost. You can use your mind to revisit those endless hours in the kitchen, and

choose retroactively to have been cooking because you want your children to be happy and healthy, so that they can serve Hashem. You're a *bubby* already! Your son might already have a long beard and children of his own; but it's not too late for you to go back in time and add thoughts of Hashem to all of those hours, all of those diapers and potatoes.

Think about those hours you spent in the hot kitchen and decide that you were cooking to give your husband the strength to provide for the family and to grow in service of Hashem. And to give your children the strength to spend long hours in the yeshiva. Think these thoughts; "I'm so happy that I spent those hours doing *chesed* for my family, the children of Hashem, and creating a family of servants of Hashem." You have this opportunity to recreate your empty and hollow deeds, and gain eternal *zchusim*!

You must understand that it is primarily the thoughts of a man that make him great in the eyes of Hashem. Our actions, which we had always perceived as the *ikar*, as the primary function of our lives are actually only a *small* part of our *avodah*. It is the *machshavos*, the thoughts, nourished and developed in your mind that are your primary function in this world.

And therefore, it is understandable why one can achieve greatness with *bechirah l'mafreyah* as well. Since your service of Hashem is actually taking place primarily in your thoughts, then you should certainly be able to understand that even thoughts pertaining to something that occurred in the past can become a valuable part of your *avodas Hashem*. You have the capacity to go back to the past events of your life and transform them, and thereby transform your future in *Olam Habah*.

STOP DOING, START THINKING

There are so many *mitzvos* that you've done with almost no thought at all. Do you ever think about how many times you put on your *Tallis* and *Tefillin* by rote, without thinking, and they were worthless - not worthless, but they are nothing at all when compared to what they should be.

You put on your *sheitel* every day; you make sure that you're dressed like a *bas Yisroel* must dress. But you're too busy to think. You're giving the children breakfast, wrapping up their snacks, getting them on the bus. You're so busy that you forget to think about what you're doing. And a mitzvah without thought is almost worthless.

But we're learning now that you can still go back in time, and make all those moments great. It will take a little bit of work, but it can be done. You have to use your thoughts to retrace your steps. "Hashem, when I put on tefillin this morning, I was doing it because I wanted to show You that I'm Your servant; that I want to serve You all the time. למען תהיה תורת השם בפניך.

"Hashem, I was in such a rush this morning when I put on my sheitel. I forgot to think about You. Hashem, I covered my hair because I am Your child, and I have to dress as befits a *bas melech*, a daughter of a King. I make sure to be properly dressed because I know that You are always watching me." Those thoughts, and many others like that, are your ticket to *Gan Eden*.

WHO WANTS TO GO TO CHEDER?

Here's a five year-old little boy and you're taking him to the *cheder*. He's not happy with it. In some places they dress him up, they give him some candy and put him on a chair. Whatever it is, a ceremony. His mother and father might be happy, but he's not happy at all. He's nervous, to leave his home, his mother. He doesn't want it, but what can he do? Nobody asked him! He has to go.

And that's how it is for many, many years "Good morning!" The mother wakes him up, "You have to go to *cheder*." *Cheder*?! "I don't want it!" Maybe he's too tired. Sometimes there are rough boys in the *cheder*, and it's not so easy. The *rebbe* might give *petch* sometimes too and he wants to stay home. "Nothing doing!" his mother says, "You have to go!"

BEIS YAAKOV IS NOT EASY...

And the girls too. You didn't choose with your own free-will to go every day. Nobody asked you. It's not easy in the *Beis*

Yaakovs. It's hard work sometimes, and you would rather be at home relaxing in your bed, instead of sitting in the classroom learning *Rambans* and taking notes.

But you had to go; you were forced. Against your will, you went. Day in, day out, week after week, month after month, for years and years, such a great benefit was being given to you, and you never were able to appreciate that great opportunity. You were being introduced to the world of *avodas Hashem*, the world of Torah, *and you didn't choose any of it!*

Now of course when you open a *gemara* today, so you have a *geshmak* in it. And if not, then at least you understand that Torah is a big *mitzvah*. You're willing to learn Torah so there's a certain amount of *bechirah*, yes. But at that time, when you were a little boy, and even later when you were a *bar-mitzvah bochur*, or a young girl, you had no *bechirah* at all! Your career in Torah, in *avodas Hashem*, was begun *bal korchacha*, against your will, *and that's how it might remain all your life, unchanged.*

THE SIXTY YEAR OLD GOES BACK TO FIRST GRADE

And so, now is your chance! Right now, when you leave here tonight, you can choose to go back and say "I'm so grateful to my parents that they forced me every morning to get up and go to the *cheder*. I'm accepting it now *b'leiv shalem*. I wanted to sleep; I didn't want to go. But they said, 'Nothing doing. You have to go to *cheder*.'" When the boy said, "I don't want to go to *cheder* anymore," his father gave him a *potch*. "What do you mean you're not going to *cheder*?! You want to remain an *am ha'aretz* your whole life?!"

So now you look back and say, "I thank You for that *potch*, Hashem. It saved my life. If I would have had enough sense, I would have told him, 'Hit me. Force me. Don't let me stay home!'" And it won't hurt to pick up the phone and tell your parents, "Thank you Aba, thank you Ema for forcing me. I'm so grateful that it happened.

THE DUKE BEATS THE CROWN PRINCE

You know, when the Crown Prince of Bavaria was appointed King, so he called in a certain duke who had been his tutor. He had tutored him when he was still a young prince. And he elevated his tutor to a high position in the palace and he said, "I am thankful to you because you beat me!" You hear that? A goy! The crown prince was grateful that he was beaten by his tutor. "What would have become of me, if you hadn't done that?!"

Now you've grown up, you're an adult. Think about all the occasions when you were reprimanded by your parents. They scolded you, sometimes they slapped you. It wasn't with happiness that you received those reprimands and those blows. But now you can look back and say "*Boruch Hashem*, I am grateful that it happened to me. Thank You Hashem for those *potches*. Whatever they did was for my benefit." Do you know what it means when you say that?! It's as if you were standing there and being *boicher batov*, you were telling your father, "Aba, give me a *potch*. I deserve it."

You have to thank the rebbe in the *cheder* for the slap he gave you. If your mother and father hit you, you have to thank them. You couldn't thank them then, but now is your opportunity to accept and to choose with your own free will what they were doing when they tried to guide you towards what you became today.

RABBI MILLER GOES TO SLABODKA

You know, when I went to Slabodka, I didn't choose to go; I went, but it wasn't really my choice. I had *chaveirim* and we were sitting together. I remember, we were sitting somewhere in Manhattan outside of the *yeshivah* on the lawn. Today there's no lawn there anymore. And we were talking. My *chaveirim* said that they were going to Slabodka. "Come along with us." I was happy learning in the Yeshiva here in America. I didn't want to leave. But they were good *chaveirim*, they were my *chabura*, so I went along with them. *B'al korchi*, I went along. I did not choose of my own free will to go to Slabodka!

I look back now. What a *hatzlacha* it was for me! It was the highest point in my life! To learn in an old-time European *yeshivah* - the *ruach* I experienced in that *yeshivah* is not to be found anywhere today. Besides for the *milchemes hatorah* that went on day and night, the fighting in Torah, there was also the *ruach hamussar*. There was a remarkable spirit of respect for our great *roshei yeshiva*, men with brilliant minds, teaching *Slabodka derachim*. Brilliant minds they had! And all that, everything that I became, was not because I chose to do it! It wasn't me! Is that the *derech* of gratitude for one of the biggest benefits you received in life? You must think about that and go back and say "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I'm so grateful to You for all that You did for me."

SUFFERING IMPROVES EVERYONE

Even *yissurim* can make a person great with *bechirah l'mafreyah*. You have to know that *yissurim* are a benefit. They are a gift from heaven. Only that at that time you don't appreciate it. But when it's all over and now it's easier to think about it, you can use your free will to look back and say *אודך השם כי אנפת בי*, I thank You Hashem that You were angry at me. I thank You Hashem that You brought the difficulties upon me because I'm a changedan now. Difficulties change a person. Everybody gets better as a result of *yissurim*, and some people became great *tzaddikim* because of the difficulties they encountered in life. But even those who didn't become big *tzaddikim*, nobody becomes worse because of *yissurim*. Only that at the time, they are difficult to appreciate.

Here's a man who suffers a setback in life. It happens to all of us. He lost his job. A *shidduch* fell through. His car was stolen. The boiler broke down. Whatever it is, we look in the *Gemara*: *חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה* - A person is obligated to bless Hashem for the bad, in the same manner as he blesses Hashem for the good". And the *Gemara* says that what that means is: *לקבלינהו בשמחה* - "To accept it with happiness" (*Brachos 60b*). It's not enough to merely bless Hashem for these "setbacks," but Hashem requires from us that we *thank Him with a leivav shaleim*, with a full heart; meaning with a mind that is completely at ease

and accepting of the will of Hashem - no doubts, no questions (Rashi ibid.).

OVERCOMING THE DIFFICULT TEST

Now this is very hard for us simple people. Especially *בשעת מעשה*, in the heat of the moment. When you just lost your job, or you can't find your car because the man in Bedford Stuyvesant is driving it around. Or when the plumber tells you that you'll need a new boiler. Some *tzadikim* are able to overcome this *nisayon*, this test, and accept it with a *leivav shaleim*, but for us it is a very difficult test.

But all hope is not lost because the principle of *bechirah l'mafreyah* is a life-saver for us. *It will save you in the life that matters most, the Afterlife.* So now, it's a few hours later. A week later. It could be months or years later. Now, your mind is more settled. Time heals all wounds. Maybe you've even realized by now that it wasn't as bad as you first imagined. And sometimes, you may have already seen with your own eyes the benefit of the *yissurim*.

THANKS FOR STEALING MY CAR

Either way, you now have the great opportunity to go back in time to that *nisayon* and use *bechirah l'mafreyah* to become great. "Hashem, I love you. I love you for firing me from my job." "I love you Hashem for sending that *sheigitz* to steal my car. I accept with a *leiv shaleim* what you decreed for me!" "Hashem, I love you for making my boiler break down." Long after the fact, it's much easier to say. And, even though it may be easier, it is still a greatness - and people aren't doing it.

WHAT HAPPENED TO MY WALLET?!

You're like Rebbe Elazar bar Rebbe Shimon who accepted upon himself *yissurim* every night before he went to sleep. He didn't ask for *yissurim* during the day because it would have made his learning difficult. But before he went to bed, he would ask for *yissurim*, and all night he suffered willingly. In the morning he told the *yissurim*, "Go away, because now I have to get busy studying Torah."

Now to be *mikabeil yissurim* willingly like he did, that's a *madreigah*, a level, that none of us will be ever be able to do. But if it happened already, let's say that you put your hand in your pocket, and your wallet is missing. If you go on the crowded subway you have to keep your hands on your wallet all the time. But suppose you didn't, "Ah yah yay! My wallet was stolen!" That's *yissurim*. "What happened to my wallet?!" So you could be *mikabeil* the *g'zeiras Hashem* - now you won't do it *lichatchila*; you won't take your wallet and throw it away - but *b'dieved*, it happened already, so there's still room for you to be *mikayeim* **ובהרת בחיים**. The question is, are you utilizing that opportunity?

THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY OF LIFE

The opportunity to choose greatness in your thoughts, with your *haskamah b'leiv*, is a very great subject. We can utilize our lives, it's the *avodah* of utilizing certain things that happened already and going back in time *in your mind*, and saying, "Yes, I am *maskim*. I agree to what happened and I accept it *b'leiv shalem*."

When you begin this career of utilizing your ability to choose even retroactively, a new world opens up to us. The few examples given above were just that - examples. The opportunities are as endless as the days of your life gone past. It's a surprising panorama of great choices, remarkable opportunities, that you never imagined existed.

I'M NOT BEING RIDICULOUS!

This *avodah* is rarely mentioned in other places, but it is a very important opportunity for greatness. The truth is that I have much more to say on this subject but I'm afraid that too much will seem ridiculous in the eyes of people. Some might ridicule this *avodah* and therefore don't tell this to the people outside. **באזני כסיל** - **פן ישים לאל מילתיך**, אל תדבר - "Don't speak into the ears of a fool, lest he make your words into nothing" (Mishlei 23:9). Not only will he ridicule you, but he'll make you lose your inspiration too. **מילתיך** - "Your own words" will be made into nothing. You'll be cooled off because of him. So **יהיו לך לבריך** - "Let these words be for you alone, **ואין לזרים אתך** - and don't share it with strangers"

(ibid. 5:17). Sometimes, the secrets of how to live life successfully cannot be shared with others, even with your own wife or husband.

But I'll take my chances with you, because here I do the talking, not you. And I'll tell you that life is a wealth of opportunities, and every single one of you can choose how to use your mind in a way that will make you a success in this world. It's good you came tonight because you heard something very important. And if you will utilize it, you'll become someone; you'll make something from yourself.

A NEW PANORAMA OF AVODAS HASHEM

And so, this single *possuk* in our *parsha* teaching us the mitzvah of *shikcha*, opens for us a whole new panorama in the service of Hashem. It opens our minds to endless opportunities. Being a true servant of Hashem, and becoming great in His eyes is something that is open to everyone. Even you. It is not especially reserved for those sitting in the *yeshiva* all day. Every single one of you have the opportunity to grow great in service of Hashem. But it takes some effort, some willingness to remove the shackles of laziness from your minds. And this *possuk* is one of the important lesson of how to do that.

The greatest gift that Hashem could give us is the opportunity to choose. The great gift of life is the ability to choose to use your time in this world successfully. And that's why this subject of *bechirah l'mafreyah* is so important - because it opens to us new vistas for perfection. Every second of your day becomes another opportunity for fulfilling the *mitzvah* of **ובחרת בחיים**, choosing to use life as Hakodosh Boruch Hu intended.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu says **ובחרת בחיים**, I'm commanding you to choose life. What does it mean to choose life? Choosing to make use of the gift of life means making use of the time you have here to achieve more perfection and more merit. And it also includes the the infinite happiness of the endless Afterlife. Thus Hashem commands "You shall choose life," for your own benefit; and to neglect or waste this opportunity to gain life in this world

and the next is one of the great catastrophes that could happen to a man.

GREATNESS AT THE GROCERY STORE

And once you appreciate the possibilities, some of which we spoke about tonight, you won't waste all of those "free" moments in his day. Waiting on line in the grocery. Sitting at a red light. Waiting at the bus stop. Walking up a flight of stairs. You will use your thoughts to "choose life" whenever you have a moment to think. You can revisit so much of your life, so many *mitzvos*, so many of the setbacks you've suffered, *kabolas hatorah* and your *bris milah*, and use your *בחירה למפרע*, your ability to post-facto choose greatness, just as the farmer in this week's *parsha* had his opportunity to do so. And every time you consciously make that retroactive choice, Hashem recognizes that choice of yours, and you are thereby taking another step forward towards perfection in the eyes of Hashem.

Everyone here must know that all of these words, all of these good *eitzos*, that we said here tonight apply to them specifically. And if you think about these ideas, and review them again and again, it will be the beginning of a great career of *bechirah l'mafreyah* that will last a lifetime. But you must begin, even with a small beginning, no matter how small it is. *פתחו לי* *פתח כפתחו של מחט* - "You open up a small hole, even just the size of a needle-hole," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "and I'll open for you a door bigger than you can imagine." (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:3).

THE BEST REASON TO GET UP IN THE MORNING

And you have to know, that this principle, that *bechirah* is our purpose in life, will make life the sweetest possible thing. Because your opportunities become endless - besides for growing great in the present, you can continue to grow even greater from your past. Otherwise, a man opens his eyes, "Ooh, another boring day!" But the one who learns how to be a *boicher*, someone who is choosing to think what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants him to think all day long, so when you open your eyes in the morning, you're

so happy! *Modeh ani lifanecha*, I thank You Hashem! Another day of life, another day of *bechira*. And the more a person puts his mind to it, the more he'll be rewarded, not only in the future, *but right now*, he knows that he's living life to its fullest, squeezing out *bechirah* from every moment, by recreating all the events of his past. And the *eved Hashem* who knows how to live in the present, and at the same time he is *boicher ba'chaim* and recreates his past, that person is actually creating for himself the great future awaiting him in the World to Come.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

If Hashem knows everything that's going to happen, isn't that a contradiction to bechira?

A:

This question was asked a thousand times here. The Rambam in his Hilchos Teshuva (5-5) explains the following: **כי לא מחשבותי** מחשבותיכם. I know things, not the way you know things. "Don't use your understanding of how the world runs and try to apply it to how I see things," says Hashem. You know things through cause and effect.

Therefore, if you know something is going to happen, you know it because of certain laws of nature, certain laws of cause and effect. But Hashem knows things differently than that. He's not limited to the laws of nature that He created for you in this world. He can look ahead into the future because He is above time. Hashem is way above your thoughts. He can see the future not because it has to happen but because He knows what's going to happen. Free will is not a contradiction to Hashem's knowledge at all.

How does He know? The answer is **כי לא מחשבותי** מחשבותיכם. I know things in different ways than you know things. Don't try to understand My ways through your thoughts, through your ways of thinking. And therefore, Hashem's ways of knowing things is not for us to explain. **כי גבהו שמים** מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם. ממחשבותיכם ומחשבותי. It's not a contradiction at all.

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