

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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————— This week's booklet based on Tapes: —————

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פרשת שמ׳ני

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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Part I. Purpose of Sorrow

THE DAY OF TEN CROWNS

ויהי ביום השמיני – “And it was on the eighth day” (Shemini 9:1). In the beginning of *Parshas Shemini*, we come to that glorious day of the *hakamas hamishkan*, when the Sanctuary, the Home of Hashem, was finally erected in this world. And the *Am Yisroel* would now claim the exclusive glory of having Hashem reside among them. They would be the ones privileged to approach the home of Hashem and worship Him.

Now, it’s important to understand that the *Yom Hashemini* was a most majestic and joyful day for the *Am Yisroel*. There were very few days - we could even say no day ever - in the history of the world when there was so much rejoicing. And the *Gemara* (Shabbos 87b) tells us that נטל עשר עטרות, it was a day crowned with ten crowns of glory; an exalted day like no other in our history. The *Shechina*, the Presence of Hashem, was now coming down to rest among them - and they went *wild* with happiness. וירא כבוד השם אל כל העם ותצא אש מלפני השם... וירא כל העם וירונו ויפלו על פניהם – “And the Glory of Hashem appeared to all the people, and a fire came forth from before Hashem...and all the people saw, and they shouted in joy, and they fell down on their faces” (Shemini 9:23-24).

Imagine that! A whole nation; millions of men, women and children shouting in great ecstasy at the sight of the *Shechina*. All together they stood and witnessed this momentous event, and they were electrified by what they saw! It was the thing that they desired more than anything else – to see with their own eyes that Hashem had chosen to reside among them forever. And they were thrilled down to their marrow. It was a remarkable experience – a happiness and a thrill that was never to be repeated. That was the great day of **וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׂמִינִי**, one of the most joyous days in the history of our people.

THE HAPPIEST WOMAN EVER

Now, the *medrash* (Tanchuma, Shemini: 2) points out that there was one person who was reveling in happiness more than anyone else; there was nobody happier than her - ever! And that lucky person was Elisheva bas Aminadav, the wife of Aharon HaKohen. For her it was the most special of all days, *mamish me'ein Olam Habo*. She was privileged to be the wife of the *Kohen Gadol*, and she saw success that no other woman ever saw, before or after. Her husband was the High Priest who put on the glorious gold vestments, garments studded with gems and jewels, to serve Hashem *lifnei u'lifnim*. And not only that, but he was a *navi* as well, a prophet of Hashem.

And her sons? Ahh, what *nachas* from her sons! She had four sons, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Isamar, and all of them were chosen to work in the Mishkan, assisting their father. A mother's dream! And not only was she glorying in the greatness of her husband and her sons but it was only the beginning; because she knew that *her* descendents forever would enjoy this privilege. The family of *kohanim* would descend from her for eternity. And that was a success that no other woman was ever given the privilege to enjoy.

HAPPINESS ON ALL SIDES

The truth is that Elisheva bas Aminadav had even more than that. In addition to the greatness of her husband, her brother-in-law was the king of the Jewish nation. That itself is an honor and a greatness. "My husband's brother is Moshe Rabeinu, the

leader of our nation. And he speaks to Hashem face to face." Her brother-in-law was the greatest prophet that ever lived. And in addition to that was her illustrious brother, Nachshon ben Aminadav, the leader of the twelve princes of the *Am Yisroel*.

And on this *Yom Hashemini*, all of this pride and joy was coming together before her eyes. It was being encapsulated on the day of the *hashra'as hashechina*; when the Presence of Hashem entered into the Mishkan; and her husband and sons would be the ones officiating in the place that Hashem has designated as His home. And it was all taking place under the direction of her brother-in-law, the King, as well as her brother Nachshon, the leader of the *nesi'im*. And so while the *Yom Hashemini* was a day of great happiness for everyone, this most fortunate woman was reveling in joy more than all others.

THE PARTY'S OVER!

And yet it wasn't to last. Her joy – not only her joy, but the joy of the whole nation – was about to be marred by the worst of misfortunes a mother could ever suffer through. Because on that day, *ויהי ביום השמיני*, when two of her sons went in to officiate in the *kodesh*, they were struck dead by a fire that came forth from Hashem and consumed them. *ותצא אש מלפני השם ותאכל אותם וימתו* – "And a fire went forth from Hashem and devoured them and they perished there before Hashem" (Shemini 10:2). *Ay yah yay!* What a terrible sadness! A most unfortunate event that will forever spoil the memory of this great day.

Now most of us, when we study this terrible event, we regard it as a debacle, an unfortunate mishap that came at a most inopportune moment. We shrug our shoulders and commiserate. "It's hard for us to understand the *darchei Hashem*; that such a beautiful day, a most glorious day, should be ruined by a tragedy like that." That's how we think. But we're going to learn now that it wasn't a chance mishap, that it wasn't an accident at all.

To this tragic day of *Yom Hashemini*, the *Midrash Tanchuma* (Shemini 9:2) applies the following *possuk*, and we should pay attention very well now because it's Hashem talking to us, and

He's revealing to us one of the fundamental ways He deals with us in this world: אמרתי להוללים אל תהולו - "I said," proclaims Hashem, "to those who are revelling, 'Do not be too merry'" (Tehillim 75:5). Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives an order here, an order for how this world should run; He says, "I don't want people to be *too* happy."

And that means that anybody, even the most virtuous man or woman - Elsheva and Aharon were virtuous after all - Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants to make sure that a certain element enters into their life, an element that is essential to the success of their career. And that one ingredient that is necessary for success in this world, in addition to all the other components of life, is sadness. Yes, sadness! Sadness is essential in life. And therefore: "I say to the merry, 'Don't be too merry.'"

A STIRAH TO WHAT WE LEARN HERE?

Now for us that's a big question, a very big question. Because you know, especially if you come here, you already know that in this place we try to live according to the true principle that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is עולם חסד יבנה (Tehillim 89:3), that Hashem made a world of kindness. After all, we know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a *tov u'meitiv*. That's number one! It's fundamental, and we are required to assimilate the idea into our bones that Hashem created everything for the purpose of kindness.

I say "number one" because it's something we learned way back in Bereishis: וירא אלוקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד - "And Hashem saw everything that He made, and behold it was very good" (Bereishis 1:31). Not only *tov*! *Tov me'od*. And when Hashem says *me'od*, it means *me'oooooooooooooooooooooooood*! It means an endless good! It's extremely extremely extremely good. We know it's a very good world because Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't give His seal of approval "very good" unless it is very, very, very - and forever we won't stop saying very - good. That's how good it must be if Hashem says it's "*tov meod*."

So on the one hand we're saying that Hashem is all kindness, that He's good, that He's very good, and very very

good. And yet this great goodness is not always readily apparent to us. Because Elisheva the wife of Aharon did not see the *tov me'od* she expected. And most of us don't see it either because Hashem is always tempering our happiness with some sadness. Our successes in life are almost always sobered by the hand of Hashem one way or another. We don't have all the wealth we'd like to have. We're not having the fun in life we'd like to have. We feel that we're being deprived. There's always some unhappiness that creeps into our lives. We have grudges against people, we feel we've been wronged. People don't appreciate us, we're rejected and so on and so forth, all the things that make a person unhappy. And don't think it's only you, that it's only certain people. No; everybody has unhappiness like that. And so, it's a good question: What happened to the *tov me'od* of Hashem?

OLAM HAZEH IS FAKE NEWS

In order to understand this subject we'll read a selection from our *rebbe*, the Mesillas Yesharim. The Mesillas Yesharim, in the first chapter, wishes to impress upon us the importance of directing our thoughts towards the World to Come. And he begins as follows: ותראה באמת שכבר לא יוכל שום בעל שכל להאמין שתכלית הויה - "Nobody who has any *seichel* at all could believe that the creation of man was for his situation in this world." The Mesillas Yesharim is warning us here: Take note, this world is not your purpose. You hear this? This world is so good that the Mesillas Yesharim has to warn you not to get too caught up in it! There is so much happiness in life, there is so much joy in life, there is so much zest and fun in life, that it's enough to deceive anybody into thinking that this world is it! And so the Mesillas Yesharim makes sure that you know that it's not real, that it's illusory and fleeting.

And he explains it like this: כי מה הם חיי האדם בעולם הזה, או מי הוא ששמח ושלו ממש בעולם הזה - "Because what is the life of a man in this world? And who is there who is actually completely happy and who really has tranquility and peace in this world? ימי שנותינו - בהם שבעים שנה ואם בגבורות שמונים שנה ורהבם עמל ואון - Our days are only seventy years, and *b'gouros*, if a man has strength and a healthy

constitution, then he can live maybe eighty years. But a great part of these years is filled with difficulties and toil. בכמה מיני צער וחולאים - A great part is sadness; various kinds of vicissitudes, pain, illness, troubles and worries. And after everything, comes death."

RAV MILLER KNOWS ALL ABOUT IT

Find me someone whose life is not visited with disturbances! There is no such thing! The disappointments; the troubles and turbulence are constant. Every family, every individual, suffers in various ways in this world and I know all about it. I get the phone calls all the time. People are ringing my bell constantly. I know much more than you do. Trouble with *parnassah*, *shalom bayis*, *shidduchim*, sicknesses, fighting with neighbors and mothers-in-law, debts and everything you could imagine - and more. Life is full of difficulties for everyone - even the "fortunate" ones suffer in this world.

And even if one would live a long life, peacefully, without any disturbances, the end is almost always filled with *tzaros*. Before death there is infirmity and sickness. Almost everybody eventually ends up in a home for the aged. Many of those who imagine and hope that they will forever make their way merrily through life, will most likely find themselves one day lying in a bed wearing diapers. Some of them will be laying for years in a bed unable to move and unable to perform their functions without the help of a nurse. You imagined yourself to be a happy success in this world and now you find yourself in a nursing home and an apathetic woman is changing your diapers five times a day. "Made in your pants again? So soon?! I just changed you two hours ago!" It's no longer fun, I imagine, when you get up to there. Could that be the *tov me'od* that you pursued all the days of your life?

NO NEED TO SIGN UP!

And after all of those "pleasures", what is waiting for him? The cold clammy clay of the grave. *Ay yah yay*, the grave! The thought that we push away and hope to ignore forever. Because, of course, only *other* people die. There's a "*chevrah shtarbers*," a

club for people who die, and people imagine they'll be able to say, "I never signed up for that!" That's how we think.

And the truth is that even if you would live a thousand years, and it would be a life of no disturbances at all, OK, so now you're a thousand years old and it's coming to an end. So what good is it all now? Those thousand years are not enough when the last day comes. A thousand years is not terribly long. It might be long when you're starting it, but when you come to the end it doesn't seem long at all. Now begins sadness. And to a certain extent this sadness pervades the entire life. No matter how jolly a group of revelers seem to be; they're jumping around, blowing horns, and drinking. It looks like they're living it up, but they're not living it up, they're covering it up. Because all of them have at the bottom of their heart - no matter how much they try to cover it up with good times - laying there is the awareness that eventually there will be death.

WHAT HAPPENED TO *TOV ME'O*OOOOOOOD?!

And so the Mesillas Yesharim tells us that this proves that Hakodosh Boruch Hu must have intended for a different existence where that promise of *tov me'od* will be fully fulfilled. Because this world may be *tov*, and it may be *tov me'od*, and it may be *tov me'od me'od*, and with another thousand *me'ods* - but that's where it stops. It will always come to an end. And the ultimate promise of *tov me'od* will only be fulfilled in the Next World. It's only the happiness of *Olam Habo* that will never end, and that's where your *neshamah* will finally be satisfied.

Now we must know that the Mesillas Yesharim is not talking to people who have to be convinced about *Olam Habo*. His words are directed to *bnei Torah*, to *ma'aminim* who already believe in the Next World. He's talking to people who are born into an environment - this was two hundred years ago or more - an environment where the entire world, even gentiles, all subscribed to the principle of the Afterlife, the Hereafter.

But belief is not enough! You don't just sign on the dotted line **הריני מאמין באמונה שלימה בעולם הבא** and finished. No! That's only

the first step. And so the Mesillas Yesharim wasn't writing this to convince us about the *existence* of *Olam Haba* per se, but to emphasize that *Olam Haba* is the *sole purpose* of our stay in this world. Because even a *ma'amin* who believes implicitly in *Olam Haba* could think that maybe this world is *also* an end in itself.

THE SECRET TO ALL DISSATISFACTION

And that's one of the most important explanations for all the disappointment and unhappiness we see in this world; because this world is not the final goal and we have to be reminded of that. We need to be reminded that there's another place where the enjoyment will continue forever. And there, the enjoyment will take place in such a manner that we will never tire from it; we'll always be happy with that pleasure and it will continue forever.

And so what happened on that *Yom Hashemini* was part of the eternal plan of Hashem in this world, to interject sadness into the midst of great joy. And the purpose of that was to teach them, during their great joy, that you must always remain focused on the principle that true unadulterated joy will only come in the Afterlife. Whatever sin the two sons of Aharon may have committed, the severity of their fate and the sadness it brought upon the people was decreed beforehand, to teach the *Am Yisroel* forever and ever the lesson of supreme importance, the great fundamental lesson of *Olam Haba*.

It was no accident; it wasn't something that just *happened* to have taken place during a moment of great happiness. It was the plan of Hashem that especially on this great day of joy, the *Am Yisroel* should be reminded of the true joy that they live for, their true purpose in life. And it is *da'ava* sadness that comes about during moments of great joy that accentuates most effectively this great teaching of *Olam Haba*. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is talking to the *hollilim* - that's us - He's talking to us all the time, and He's saying *אל תהוילי* - "Do not lose yourself in the addictive happiness of this world. Remember that you are here only to prepare for the World to Come."

TOO MUCH GOOD IS NO GOOD

And that's what our *Medrash Tanchuma* means when it describes the happy day that turned tragic with these four important words: שאין שמחה ממתנת לאדם - "Happiness does not last in permanence for anybody." Joy in this world will not continue forever and the one who rejoices today is not necessarily rejoicing tomorrow. Like the *possuk* in Koheles says (2:2): לשחוק אמרתי מהולל - "About laughter I said 'It is wild, it is too much'". מהולל means gaiety, happiness. And Hashem says, "If someone is reveling in this world, if he's making his way merrily through *Olam Hazeih*, getting entangled and absorbed in the success of this world, then I say to him: 'That's too much, it's not good for you. I can't let a person get lost in his happiness, in his desire to achieve satisfaction in this world, because that's how a person squanders his life away.'"

You're here for seventy, eighty years after all; it seems so permanent, and you begin to feel that it's an end in itself, and that's how a person misses out on the opportunity of life. And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu sends reminders. He gives His order of אל תהולל and He introduces into your life an element of sadness.

And so when we study our *parsha* and read about the great tragedy that took place on this happy day we understand that it was Hashem's plan to inject sadness into the happiest day in the history of the world. Hakodosh Boruch Hu *always* brings into people's lives experiences that are meant to sober them. And He has in mind this general principle of tempering the happiness and success of life so that a person will be encouraged to keep his focus on the Next World.

Part II. The Great Consolation

WHAT'S WRONG WITH A LUXURIOUS HOTEL?

If life was merely one thing after another, one joy following the next one, people would get lost in this world. Like a man we once had in our congregation. A true story! In our shul! He and his wife lived in a beautiful home on a tree-lined street

with gardens. It was a beautiful street and an expensive home. But they had to go for vacation to the country. I don't know if the country was any better than their home, but they went to an expensive hotel in the country for the summer.

The truth is that I didn't understand the necessity at all. She didn't overwork herself here in the city, and they didn't lack anything in their spacious and luxurious home. But they went to the country to spend the summer in an expensive hotel. A luxurious hotel where they could find "happiness". But *then*, they left the hotel for a vacation to Switzerland for two weeks. Imagine people who lived that way constantly. They thought that maybe in Switzerland they'd find the satisfaction they were yearning for. But the truth is that they would never find true happiness in this world. Because they were looking in all the wrong places - *because they were looking in this world*.

So what happened eventually? Unfortunately she suddenly contracted cancer. She was quite young and after a long and painful illness she finally had to leave this world. And she didn't leave as a satisfied and happy woman. Now we understand that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has many purposes; and I'm not the one to interpret any purpose. I'm just saying an illustration. Because even if people have everything in this world, they will keep on looking for other things. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants to remind them: "*Kinderlach!*" He says. "Children! Don't get lost in this world. Because your appetite for *Olam Haba* is going to be dulled. And I want you to prepare a big lusty appetite for things of the spirit."

HASHEM TAKES AWAY YOUR LOLLIPOP

You know, one of the surprises that little children get is when they discover how "mean" their mothers are. Here's a little boy who was given, let's say, a quarter. A whole quarter! He's on top of the world now! So he goes to the store and buys two lollipops. He comes home so happy, and as soon as he comes home, his mother snatches them out of his hand. And he can't understand why his mother who is always so considerate and so kind is now so mean to him. His mother can't explain to him that

it's just before mealtime and she doesn't want him to spoil his appetite for nourishing food, and therefore she deprived him of his *nosherai*.

And so too, Hakodosh Boruch Hu sometimes takes away happiness from people in order that they should not lose their appetite for what's coming later; to keep them focused on the great happiness they should always be anticipating, and that's the World to Come.

THE BOOK RAV MILLER NEVER WROTE

Too much success is unhealthy. It's like too much sweets in your diet. You can't live on sugar; you need proteins and other nutrients and vitamins too. And you need a little bit of bitterness in life too. And that's what the *medrash* is teaching us - it's an illustration of the lesson that nobody should expect that this life will be nothing but pleasure and good times.

You know, many times I was thinking about writing a book. I wanted to write a book called *The Pursuit of Happiness*. I have a lot of material on the subject and I knew that it would be a successful book because this world is a very happy place. But I didn't write it because I didn't want to mislead people. Because this world is *not* for the pursuit of happiness. Although this world is full of happiness, but people would read that title and think that happiness is a purpose in itself. No, it's the pursuit of achievement, the pursuit of perfection, that's what we're here for in this world.

THERE'S A LOT OF FUN IN THIS WORLD BUT...

And therefore, Hashem has in store a lot of these treatments for everybody; it can't be helped. Because the treatment of *tzaros* is the biggest *tovah* possible when it causes a person to think of *Olam Habah*. When people see that there is no complete happiness in this world, and they understand why that is so, that's already a perfection of character. And therefore it's important that Hashem remind people that this world is not for enjoyment and pleasure; although there's a lot of fun in this world, but there's a special world that was made for enjoyment.

The Next World is especially set up for pleasure - it's a world of happiness. And this world is not the place for that; this world is set up especially for achievement. And that's the great consolation of this world - *that this world is not it!*

Like Dovid Hamelech said when he saw that difficulties were coming upon him: **אם אמרתי מטה רגלי** - "When I thought that my foot was slipping," **חסדך השם יסעדני** - Hashem, it was Your kindness that supported me" (Tehillim 94:18-19). That means that I cried out to You that Your kindness should help me. And many times it did. And then Dovid continues: **ברוב שרעפי בקרבי** - "In the multitude of my thoughts in my midst." Dovid had thoughts, worries, of what was going to happen. He was confronted with peril at every footstep. Shaul was seeking Dovid with armed men; he was ambushing him and Dovid was hiding like an animal in caves and thickets. He was constantly beset with worries. And what did he say? **ברוב שרעפי בקרבי** - "Because of the many worries within me, **תנחומיך ישעשעו נפשי** - Your consolations were the delight of my soul." Which consolations? What consolations?

THE ONLY TRUE NECHAMA

Dovid was thinking about *Olam Haba!* Because he knew how to utilize his troubles in this world. He knew that one of the most important functions of sadness is to loosen your grasp on this world a little bit. So he made use of his troubles to create for himself a mind that was an *Olam Haba'dikeh* mind. And it's only the man with an *Olam Haba'dikeh* mind who can weather the storms of this world.

Somebody called me up now; he lost his son. A couple lost a son and they wanted to talk to me. Now, if they want to come sit with me, I could speak to them various words of consolation, I could do that. But the only true consolation is the words that we're speaking here tonight. This world is a place where everybody loses something. But your world shouldn't collapse for you because of what happened. When you concentrate your life on *this* world, even if you believe superficially in *Olam Haba*, but you live here with a feeling of permanence, that's when the world

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turns out to be not what you wanted. Everything turns dark and it all collapses into nothing.

THE BEREAVED FATHER

Here's another man who lost his son; this man was a *mispallel* here in our shul. And his son was a *tachshit*; a sweet and brilliant man. He was married with a big family and he was eminently successful; successful in the Torah world and in the scholastic world as well. I still remember how the parents were having from this son a tremendous *nachas*. He really was an example of success and everything was the best that could be. And then suddenly in the midst of *Yomtiv* rejoicing he died. An unexpected tragedy!

And the father took it to heart; it broke him and he never really recovered. He didn't live long after that. He was a healthy man but he left this world soon after that. And that's because this father made a fundamental error. He was a good father, a *frum* man, but he made a mistake. The father had concentrated too much of his hopes on this world. And when this world collapsed, he collapsed with it.

WEATHERING THE STORMS OF LIFE

But Aharon Hakohen and Elisheva, when their two beloved sons perished on the *Yom Hashmini*, they didn't collapse. And that's because they understood the nature of this world; they understood that it's a world of disappointments. And they concentrated on the thought that they would see their sons again. They would continue making their way successfully through the hallway of this world – what is it after all except for a hallway of seventy, eighty years – and then they would meet their sons again in the world of eternity.

And that's what everyone has to know. You can't expect to be able to weather the difficulties of life, the small disappointments or the tragedies *chas v'shalom*, if you're not prepared beforehand with the proper Torah attitudes. It's the person who lives with *Olam Haba* on his mind who is able to make his way successfully through everything that life brings his way.

Because he knows that he will see his family again and rejoice with them in the Next World. And he knows that he will receive his just and everlasting reward there, no matter what type of *tzaros* – big or small – he undergoes here.

THE SNEAK ATTACK

And that's why the Chovos Halevavos tells us that of all the principles the *yetzer hara* tries to weaken in a man, it is this one, the belief in the next world, that he attacks first and foremost. Because he knows that *Olam Haba* is the *yesod* of our lives. It's our purpose here. So all the other things the *yetzer hara* can ignore – believe in Hashem, good; believe in *Mattan Torah*, good; believe in *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, good; believe in *Torah she'bal peh*, good; believe in the whole *gemara*, believe in everything! You can even believe in a *rebbeh*, a *tzadik*! But be weak in just one thing; just be weak when it comes to *Olam Haba*.

“Be weak in that,” says the *yetzer hara*. “Don't talk about it; soft-peddle it. Be embarrassed to mention it.” Because *Olam Haba* is everything! If the *yetzer hara* can weaken your awareness of *Olam Haba* then everything else falls away. If your *Olam Haba* is weak, then your Torah is weak, your *mitzvos* are weak. Everything else is weakened if *Olam Haba* is not constantly at the forefront of your thoughts.

THE THOUSAND YEAR PHONE CONVERSATION

And let me tell you something - the *yetzer hara* is doing a good job on us. There are plenty of frum people who are very weak in this principle. Now you may argue with me but I'm telling you that very many of us have succumbed almost entirely to the *yetzer hara*. And I can prove it to you immediately by a simple experiment. Let's listen in to the conversations in an Orthodox home.

All they talk about is this world. And they talk about it a lot! With details; all the *olamhazedikeh* details. The little girl listens to her mother on the telephone. What does she hear already?! Sheitels! This kind of *sheitel*, that kind of *sheitel*. And dresses! The mother is complaining about how hard it was to buy a dress. “I

couldn't get a dress anywhere. I went all over town to find a dress." Finally she found it in a "special" place - around the corner. This is an Orthodox mother?! And that's all the child hears. Sometimes recipes, and maybe makeup. All things from *this* world. She can sit next to her mother for *a thousand years* while her mother talks on the telephone, and she won't hear *Olam Haba* mentioned even once.

And I'm afraid next to the father is no better. I'm not talking now about the father who is a connoisseur of wines, of bourbons. He has a cabinet filled with all different types of wine *and he knows their names!* That man I'm not speaking about now. He's already sold out to *Olam Hazeh* completely. He's already sinking in quicksand; he's in grave danger and he has to take emergency precautions to save himself.

WHERE IS ZEIDY?

I'm talking now to the *frummeh*, the best. Here's a father, and his children, all with black hats, sitting around the table talking *divrei Torah*. Maybe the father will say over *pilpulim* if he's a *talmid chochom*; if not he'll say over some *gutta verter*, some comments on the *sedrah*. But *Olam Habah*? It's a rare bird. You can sit sometimes for twenty years at a table and not hear even once *Olam Habah* mentioned! Little children growing up don't even know there's such a thing. Unless someone dies and so they tell the child that "*Zeideh* is in *Olam Habah* now." But even then, the child is thinking, "What? Where?" Because nobody is talking about it. And there's a good reason for that. Because the *yetzer harah* is most interested that it shouldn't be mentioned.

And so we have to do whatever we can that we shouldn't fall into the trap of the *yetzer hara!* We should make it a point to speak about *Olam Haba* at the table. You have to plan ahead, with wisdom, with cunning. "How am I going to sneak in the subject of *Olam Haba* today?" And when you succeed, so you start making plans for the next meal. And even more than that - how long will we have to wait to hear them talk about *gehenim* at the Jewish table? Now that would be a Jewish table! The father and his family discuss *Gan Eden* and *gehenim*. And the father is always

pointing out that למחר לקבל שכרם, in the Next World, that's where we'll be rewarded for our life's work. "Chaim'll, in the Next World Hashem is going to give you everything! Only Hashem can make you truly happy. And you should know, Chaim'll, it's not *stam* a reward. A person won't be able to handle the *simcha*! Hashem is going to have to revive you again and again in order to continue bestowing His goodness upon you." Now that's table-talk for the Jewish home!

YOUNG ISRAEL OF SLABODKA

The truth is that even in the shuls there's nobody talking about it! How long will we have to sit in the shul and listen to the rabbi's speeches before we hear a dissertation on the great subject of *Olam Haba*? I remember when the Slobodka Rosh Yeshiva once came to America and they invited him to a Young Israel convention – it used to be held here in a hotel in New York City. He didn't know what Young Israel means; he didn't know, otherwise he would have surely not gone. So he went and they asked him to speak. Speak?! What is the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva going to say to them already? Which subject should he speak about? He thought, "I should speak about what the Jews of America need to hear most." And so he spoke on the subject of *gehenim*.

But you won't always have the Slobodka Rosh Yeshiva to tell you those things. And there aren't too many rabbis who are willing to tell you the truth. First of all, many of them are themselves weak in the *emunah* of *Olam Habah*. And even if not, he can't tell you the truth. You'll run to the other shul down the block, and your rabbi will lose all of his congregants. I told you once that in my shul we make a "membership drive" once in a while. I tell the shul members the truth, and I drive them out to all the other shuls in the neighborhood. That's why the other *rabbonim* in my neighborhood love me.

IT'S NOT JUST THE OLD PEOPLE

Now I know that many people don't like to hear about this subject and I don't blame them. You might think, "That's all Rabbi Miller is going to tell me?! That this world is not a happy place?!"

I know some people don't want to hear about the Next World; it makes them sad when I talk about it. They want to imagine that they'll live forever and ever.

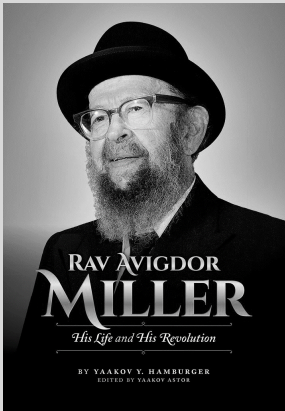
But what can I do, my friends? It's so important to internalize that this world is not forever; that everybody will die sooner or later. So a man comes back to the house after the *levayah*; the mother of the house is now gone and he's going to her home now to sit *shivah*. He sees a nice quiet home; it's very neat because last week she was still cleaning up. And now she's gone. What a pity! What a pity! The *alter* mother or the *alter* father is gone. They always said such good words to us; it's such a pity they're gone now. But he has to know however that someday he'll be gone too. Everybody must *know* that he won't live forever. And therefore we're in this world only for the purpose of preparing.

And the truth is that it shouldn't make you sad; because when you know you're living for a purpose, so every moment in this world becomes more precious to you. You enjoy this world even more because of the opportunities it provides for achieving the eternal *tov me'od*. And so the wise man, the *chochom* who is *ro'eh es ha'nolad*, doesn't invest his hopes in this world. Because he knows that if he puts his hopes into *Olam Hazei* so he's going to be terribly disappointed. And that's why you find a lot of old people are very soured on *Olam Hazei*; because that's all they were concerned about and now they see that it turned into nothing.

THE HAPPY OLD MAN

I once visited a home for the aged and I was looking around at the old people. It was filled with American style old Jews, *burim*, *amei ha'aretz*, and it was a pity to see them. They were sitting around, staring. Life had turned out to be a disappointment. "This hurts me," "I have none of my own teeth left," "I can't go here, I can't do this or that." It was nothing but disappointment. Only complaints, that's all you could hear.

And in the corner I saw an old man with a white beard, sitting at a table with a *gemara* open. And he was busy getting



“When Rav Miller turned seventy, he changed his schedule. He began to cut back on the hours he slept at night and instead took a few short naps during the day. When his grandson asked him why he was doing this, he answered, “Now, I need to prepare for the great bechinah. I don’t sleep because I like to sleep, but rather in order to get strength to serve Hashem. Now, this is what I have to do.”

It was time to prepare for the great “test” that he would be given upon arriving in Olam Haba, and during the last years of his life Rav Miller fully immersed himself in preparations. Whenever he needed to excuse himself for not attending a simcha or function, he said that he as preparing for the “great bechinah,” which was in addition to his constant preparation for his shiurim. He participated less and less in simchos, and stayed only for a short time at those he did attend, such as family simchos. When at simchos, he often carried his coat in his hand (over his arm). “It reminds me to leave as soon as I can,” he once explained.”

Rav Avigdor Miller - His Life and His Revolution p. 529

ready for the next world. He was reviewing everything he had learned in his lifetime. And he was the happiest man in the place! He was busy, he was accomplishing, because he knew that he had a purpose. You know why he was happy. Because none of the disappointments in life had disappointed him! Everything was turning out exactly as expected and now he was getting ready now to cash in. He was busy counting all of his bonds before going to the bank, making sure he wouldn’t leave anything over. He was a happy man!

WE DON’T LIKE TRAGEDIES

And it wasn’t because he searched for happiness his whole life - it was because he recognized all the bumps of life for what Hashem intended them, as reminders from Hashem to remain focused on the true goal. Because he understood the important lesson *al taholu*, he knew not to get lost in the happiness of this world, *and he therefore was the happiest man in this world.*

How can you be preparing for *Olam Haba* if you never even think about it, no less mention it? Isn’t that a tragedy? So we’re not going to let that happen to us because we don’t like tragedies. And so, we’re going to have to muster our resources, all of our energy, to fight this battle: Like the Rambam (Teshuva 8:7) says, “A person should always yearn for *Olam Haba*; he should

always think about *Olam Haba*. Like Dovid Hamelech did. כמה כמה כמא, דוד לעולם הבא, How greatly did Dovid yearn for *Olam Habah*, כאיל תערוג על אפיקי מים, like a deer thirsting for drink.” (Tehillim 42:2)

THE OLAM HABA PROGRAM - ONLY THIRTY SECONDS A DAY

So instead of just talking about becoming great, we'll actually do something about it. Instead of being like the people who just talk about doing things, we're going to get busy immediately thinking about the World to Come. Together we'll start an *Olam Haba* program. We're going to spend at least thirty seconds every day thinking about *Olam Haba*, reminding ourselves that we're in this world only as a preparation for the World to Come. For one half a minute, remind yourself that this world is just a vestibule, a place to put your things in order, before the World to Come.

Every day at least thirty seconds on the clock, we're going to think about *Olam Haba*. Whether you're hanging on a strap on the subway, or driving to work; maybe you're waiting to see the doctor, or even if you're standing on the corner waiting for the light to change – whatever it is – look at your watch and let it tick off thirty seconds while you are now in the World to Come, thinking about the purpose of life.

THE SWEETEST SHALOM ALEICHEM YOU'LL EVER HEAR

And then, when we come into the Next World so they'll ask you, “What do you want here?” And you'll say, “I prepared; I thought about *Olam Habah* in the world where I'm coming from. I worked on it!” “Oh!” they'll say, “Shalom Aleichem! Welcome!” Because you're superior to everybody else. You're a *dagul mei'rivavah*, you're one in ten thousand. You're a head taller than everybody else because you understood the lessons of what happened on *Yom Hashmini* and you're thinking every day about the World to Come. Now, whether they'll give you a front seat, or a middle seat or a back seat, that will depend on how much effort you put into the things we speak about here. But they are going to welcome you; that's guaranteed.

And so, if anyone asks you what you are doing in the world – whether you can tell him or not – you at least have to know for yourself that we’re here to prepare for the great career of everlasting happiness in the Next World. That is the foundation upon which we build everything in this world. It’s the *yesod hachasidus v’shoresh ha’avodah*, and if you have this before your eyes then you can build. But if not, or even if you do but it’s weak, then you’re building without a foundation. The whole foundation of being a Jew is the clear conviction that our purpose is *Olam Habah*, the Afterlife. Not that the Afterlife is an annex, something that is *also* going to be given to us. No – *the Afterlife is it!*

It’s only *Olam Habah* that counts! That’s your great joy! And do you know what’s going to happen when you train yourself to think this way? It’s going to illuminate your life. It will put a *simcha*, a deep and profound happiness, into your life. Because no matter what happens, from the smallest bumps of daily life, to *chas v’shalom* the most terrible of tragedies, you know that you are being reminded by Hashem of your purpose in this world, and you know that you’re headed for success. And once you assimilate this idea of *Olam Habah* into your bones, then you’ll be capable of weathering all of the turbulence that life brings. And you’ll grow even greater from the constant lessons of אל תהולו that Hashem brings upon you as He prepares you for the great day when you will finally leave this *prozdor*, the hallway that this world is, and you’ll enter into the טרקלין, the great palace of the World to Come.

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*"Thank you so much for the amazing work you do in spreading the **life-changing teachings** of Rav Avigdor Miller. The weekly booklets are pounced on as soon as they hit the bimah and there aren't enough to go around. **The lessons each week have a profound impact** on everyone in our community. You have a tremendous zechus and may you continue in your avodas hakodesh for many years to come."*

A.G., Yerushalayim

*"To the wonderful team that puts out these beautiful divrei torah. My family is so grateful to you for the time that you put into this. Rav Millers torah has **transformed my family's outlook on life!**"*

Y.L. Manchester

*"I had a big Hashkacha Pratit today with big credit to you. I had a client that had a big weight on her heart. I read to her from Rav Miller, and this long term psychiatric client had tears in her eyes for the first time. **It was so healing, that was her medicine.***

Thank you for being a shaliach of Hashem! You should be blessed greatly!"

Z.S. Brooklyn

*"About a year ago I hosted my brother for Shabbos and he didn't stop talking about Rav Miller, so I asked him what got into him. He told me **'Rabbi Miller changed my life'**. I thought it was strange at the time, reading a few books and listening to a few tapes changes your life? Really? But then I started getting Toras Avigdor and reading it every week, **what can I say? It's life-changing!**"*

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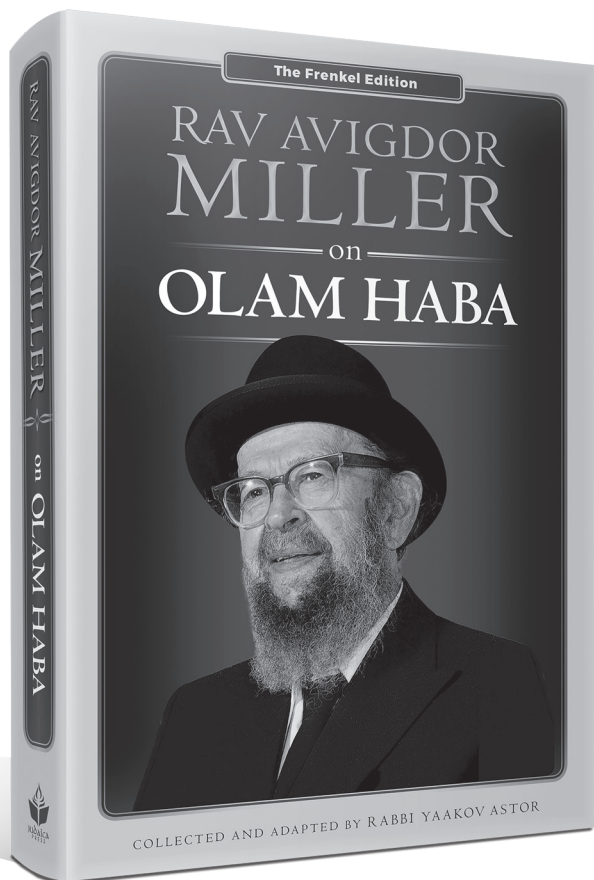
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יה"ר שחפץ ה' בידינו יצליח להתקדש ולהתרומם
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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:
If there's a *halacha* not to think Torah in the bathroom, so what should we think about?

A:
What should you think about in the bathroom? You should think what a *chessed* it is that you're able to go to the bathroom. Think about that. It's *chasdei Hashem*; yes, that's what you should be thinking about. It's a tremendous *chessed* to be able to eliminate successfully. רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות –It's all miracles. It's a miracle! You're able to expel the waste, and that's a lifesaver for you! So now you should leave the bathroom so happy that Ha-kodosh Boruch Hu did this miracle for you, so when you go out to make the *bracha*, you put into the *bracha* all the thoughts that you had in the bathroom just now.

TAPE E-247 (September 2000)

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