

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

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

Sefer Devarim
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בעזרה ש״ת

פרשת וילך

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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נא לא לקרוא בעת התפלה וקריאת התורה

Part I. A Menace to The Nations

THE DANGER OF ERETZ YISROEL

In *Parshas Vayeilech*, Hashem warns the *Am Yisroel* about a great danger facing them as they enter into *Eretz Cana'an*; a peril that could easily lead to the destruction of the nation. There were many dangers they would now be facing – the Seven Nations were preparing to rise up and defend their homes and many battles would have to be waged. But that wasn't the danger that Hashem chose to warn His children about. There was something much more perilous about settling in *Eretz Yisroel* and that's what we'll be studying now.

In *Tehillim*, at the end of *kepital* 105, Dovid Hamelech states, וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲרָצוֹת גּוֹיִם – Hashem gave to the *Am Yisroel* the lands of the nations, וַעֲמַל לְאֲמִים יִירְשׁוּ – and they inherited the labor of people. For hundreds of years the land of *Cana'an* was being prepared for the *Am Yisroel* by the Seven Nations and they were doing an excellent job. They were *mishpechos ha'adomah* in the most literal sense of the word. They were land nations, people who specialized in soil, agriculture, gardens, and fruit trees, and they were putting in their best efforts to beautify the land.

Parshas Vayeilech | 1

THE SNAKE-PEOPLE PREPARE THE LAND

You know, the *gemara* says that the *Chivi* – that’s one of the seven nations – had the ability to know what to plant in every plot of land. *Chivi* is from the word snake – in Aramaic *chivya* is a snake. Like it says, וְנָחֵשׁ עֹפֵר לְחֶמוֹ – *The snake’s food is the earth*. The *Chivi* were the snake people; they used to taste the earth to see what kind of things to plant there. They would pick up a little bit of dirt and lick it, and just by the taste on their tongues they would know what would best grow in that dirt.

Some earth has more alkaline while other areas might have higher levels of acid, and it’s those ingredients that determine what crops grow best in that earth. Olives for example won’t grow well in soil with high levels of alkaline; they require moderate levels of acid. Wheat on the other hand requires more loamy soil. The *Chivi* would taste the earth and make the best use out of every piece of land.

And so, in *Cana’an* were found the biggest agricultural experts that ever lived. And because they put everything they had into beautifying the land, the whole land became like one big garden. They terraced every hill, every mountainside, in Eretz Yisroel. There wasn’t a span of earth that was uncultivated. And the very best produce grew there. It was a remarkable thing what they made from that land. If we could take a look at the land as it was when the *Bnei Yisroel* entered, we would have gasped in amazement at the remarkable fertility of that land.

THE DANGER OF MILK AND HONEY

And what Hashem tells us in *Parshas Va’yeyelech* is that it was this abundance, this beautiful and fertile land, that would be the real danger that awaited them in the land. כִּי אֲבִיאֲנֹוּ אֶל הָאָדָמָה – *When I bring the nation to the land that I swore to their forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey,* וְאָכַל וְשָׂבַע וְדִשְׁן וּפָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיִם וְעִבְדוּם וְנִאֲצוּנִי וְהִפְרֹאת בְּרִיתִי – *You will eat, and be satiated and grow fat, and you will turn to the gods of others and serve them; and you will anger me and annul my covenant* (D’varim 31:20).

The biggest *sakanah* wasn’t the Seven Nations defending their homes and fields – that Hashem took care of. You know

what the danger was? It was the homes and the fields themselves! The beautiful homes and the fertile fields posed a bigger danger than the fight to conquer them.

Streams of milk and honey, large and beautiful fruit, and the homes filled with all good things, those were the seeds that could sprout into rebellion against Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Having too much, that was the danger of *Eretz Yisroel*. **וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ** – *You will eat and be satiated*. And what are the next words? **הִשָּׁמְרוּ לְבַבְכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם** – *Watch out! Lest your minds will be led astray*. When there's plenty to eat, that's when people have to watch out.

Now, that's hard to understand because we do it every day! And the truth is that we don't really understand what is so bad about eating bread to fill our stomachs. "You will eat and be satiated ... and you will turn to other gods"?! Is it so terrible? If someone will eat to his heart's content – even if he burps when he gets up from the table; it's not such a nice thing, but a danger?! What's to beware of? That's what we think. But Hashem says otherwise: You're eating My food now, and you're getting full, so watch out! You're treading on thin ice.

THE RICHES BURIED UNDERGROUND

If you study history, you'll see that it happened that way again and again. Prosperity *always* brings with it selfishness, arrogance and pride. We see it in the rise and fall of every society in history – it's happened to one nation after another. First they lived in poverty; they were a plain agricultural people. Every nation began like that. And gradually they began to build themselves up build cities; an urban civilization with luxuries. Some even began conquering other countries and bringing in the wealth of others into their own land. And always, the more wealthy they became, the more corrupt and decayed they became. If you look through the histories of ancient nations, it was always after they reached the peak of their prosperity that they began to decay; and then came the blow and Hashem buried them – literally.

You know, if you would take a trip to Central America, so you'll take a machete and a guide, and you'll begin to chop your

way through the thick rainforests. It looks like humans never set foot there before. But you have to know that underfoot, ancient cities that were once teeming with a big population are buried there. Those seemingly primitive forests actually grew over what was once roads and cities – they were wealthy! It’s remarkable how affluent they once were, and now the only way to see them is by means of a bulldozer. They slowly grew fat with luxuries and soon after that they went lost and were buried forever.

Bavel once had the biggest city, the most advanced city in the world. The city of Babylon is called one of the seven wonders of the world by the ancient writers; and today you won't see it unless you have a spade – you have to dig in the dirt to see the great palaces. What happened? They too became wealthy and corrupt, and they went lost.

It’s like that everywhere. Where is Ancient Greece now? Where is Ancient Rome? Ancient Egypt? All gone! They grew fat and arrogant and then went lost. And it’s happening to the Western countries today. It’s going to happen in the course of time to Russia. It’ll happen to China too – right now they’re on the way up, but it’ll happen to China too sooner or later. They’re trying hard to get as spoiled as America; it’s a race to see who can self-destruct first.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF AMERICA

Now, once upon a time America was also on the rise. But today they’re heading quickly down the path that every society in history has taken. Everyone sees that America is disintegrating as the affluence and materialism permeates society. Things that were never possible, things that were never heard of before are taking place today. All societal norms are being broken down. The whole country is going rotten. Crime, *arayos*, youth suicide. There's a tremendous drug population among youth. Murder is at an all-time high. America is going *meshuga!*

Now, we have to study that because it’s no accident. It’s important that we understand the reason for all this – why is there so much unrest and revolt against normal behavior? What’s the cause for this breakdown in society?

LIBERAL BALONEY

We have to realize that the great problem of the Western countries today is that there is too much to eat! Never before was there so much food, so many luxuries and conveniences like we have today. And that's the cause of all this trouble, the reason for the corruption of society. הַשְׁמֵרוּ לָכֶם – be careful! Affluence – that's the great *sakanah*. All of the Western countries are flowing with milk and honey and it's because of this abundance that people are becoming wild with *rishus*.

Don't pay attention to the liberals who tell you it's because there are people, minorities, who don't have equal opportunities; that they have too little to eat and therefore they are driven to do extreme acts. Baloney! Because fifty years ago there were a lot of people who didn't have much to eat; people went to sleep hungry. And there was much less crime, much less wickedness and corruption than today.

All the liberal baloney is just a smokescreen; a smoke barrage to cover up the truth. The fact is that to find a hungry man today you'd have to take a candle and make *bedikas chametz b'chorim u'sedakim*. Where is there anybody who doesn't have enough to eat? Of course, there are still some poor people. They don't have cars. Some people don't have money to go on summer vacations and of course there's a lot of resentment because of that. They're very angry at the government for not giving them more; they want to rebel and make trouble. But it has nothing to do with needs. It's only because they have too much to eat – that's why they're fighting for more.

If everybody had to work long days for a living just to get by, the homes would be full of happy people. A person would come home at night and his wife would put some bread and soup on the table and he would be so happy and grateful. He'd eat and go to sleep weary from a heavy day's work and the next day he'd get up early in the morning and get back to work again. Nobody would think about mischief; about rebelling and fighting for more. They'd be satisfied that they're able to fill their bellies with the minimum to keep them going.

And that's how it was in the good old days. Their parents came over from Europe and worked in sweatshops and they were happy that they were able to make ends meet; if they were able to eat and pay their rent it was the greatest *simcha*. And that's why they weren't looking for ways and means of ruining themselves. But their children - their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren - are busy looking for kicks. And what that means is that they're kicking themselves off the precipice into the abyss of destruction.

IGNORING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

But we're not going to point fingers at America - America has been very good to us and we're *makir toivah* for that. *Baruch Hashem*. America has allowed us to make our own schools for our children, *yeshivos* and *Beis Yankios*. We have been treated very well in America, *baruch Hashem*. We've been given all kinds of freedom and opportunities to take advantage of the affluence that Western society has to offer. Nowadays, *boruch Hashem*, we have everything!

But our *parsha* is telling us that having everything is a *sakanah gedolah* - a terrible danger! And not just for the *resha'im*, the assimilationists; it's a *sakanah gedolah* for the *frum* Jews. We have to know that the decay we see around us, the rot that materialism causes, has entered into the orthodox camp too. The *avir*, the atmosphere of America, is luxuries and good times - the pursuit of happiness, that's what it's all about. It's *b'feirush* in the Declaration of Independence. And it's seeping into *our* lives.

When you walk on the streets of America and breathe the air, you're breathing the pursuit of happiness, the desire for affluence into yourself. And what that means is that the pursuit of perfection is being ignored. No matter how *frum* you are - it doesn't matter how long your beard is, how long of a coat you wear - you're changing. Even without thinking about it, all day long you are breathing in the air of אֵבֶל וְשֶׁן, of eating and growing fat. That's why people today are going wild. *Frum* Jews are going wild from luxuries. Even the best, the most Orthodox, have to know that their feet are walking on slippery ground just because they're having it too good.

Part II. A Menace to You

HAY IS HEALTHIER THAN MEAT

Now we're going to study it a little more to understand actually how deep, how profound is this danger. Don't think it's a small thing. *אין ארי נוהם מתוך קפה של תבן* - A lion, if you give him a big box of hay, he doesn't roar when he eats the hay, *אלא מתוך קפה* - but if you give him a big box of meat, the lion becomes wild with happiness and he roars (Brachos 32a). He's dangerous then.

It's much more than we think. When people have too much to eat, when they have everything they need, they become arrogant. Now you might think it's an exaggeration, but it's not so - it's serious. Very serious! That's what the *navi* Yechezkel says: *הנה זה היה עון סדם אחותך* - *this was the sin of Sdom, your sister*, *גאון שבעת* - *the arrogance of being satiated with bread*. The arrogance of having enough bread! Now, those are the words of Yechezkel HaNavi. Hashem is speaking and we have to listen to that.

I read a story recently; people send me these things to read. A man was married to an excellent young wife - she was a good cook too - but he grew tired of her. He said, "I have nothing against you but I'm just tired of you." That's how the story goes. And he threw her away; he divorced her. That's one of the most wicked stories you can imagine. There was nothing immoral there - just plain wickedness! The wickedness of a man who has just too much in this world! "I don't like it. I want more. I want something else." I, I, I. It's all about I.

A man like that should come home to a prison! People like that worked on the rock pile all day long. That man should have to work on the rocks like the good old days in America. Then he'd enjoy life. At night, he comes home to his prison cell and appreciates his hard mattress where he can rest his aching bones. A man like that doesn't feel so arrogant anymore.

But this man has everything, even a beautiful bride, and he doesn't enjoy it anymore. He has too much and that's why he acts with such wickedness. When people are poor, you should know that they are much better in character. An *anav* is certainly more

able to be *mikabeil shleimus*. And therefore it's a tragedy today that we have too much abundance. We're suffering from it; we're much further away from *shleimus* just because of this abundance; and if we're not careful, then sooner or later indulgence leads to destruction.

THE FAT MAN KICKS HARDER

Satiation causes arrogance and there's no two ways about it. If you see someone walking down the street, and he's doing whatever he wants, you have to know that he's arrogant because he's not hungry. The fact that he's eaten so much, he's surfeited with food and *nosherei*, so now he's a *gavra* already – that's what's going on in his mind. He's self-sufficient; he doesn't need anyone now, and no matter how much he'll deny it, he's thinking that he doesn't need Hashem either.

Even *yeshurun*, the righteous nation, if they have good things to eat they start kicking. That's what it says in *Parshas Haazinu*: וַיִּשְׂמַן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְעַט – *Yeshurun grew fat, and began kicking* (Devarim 32:15). Like the lion, if you feed it too much it starts to kick. That's what good times do to a person. All forms of prosperity bring along with it the danger of selfishness and arrogance; when a person is settled and satisfied it's that much easier to live a life of *Olam Hazeh*. You forget about your true purpose in life – there's no reason to think about *Olam Haba* when life is so good. "Who needs it?" he thinks deep in the recesses of his heart. "I'm good on my own; I'm happy and don't need You Hashem." That's how it is – the gifts of Hashem can cause one to forget Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Good times, affluence and too much to eat are a very slippery slope; and it's a downward slope that leads to plain wickedness.

IT SEEPS IN

You'll have to excuse me; people who do these things will have to excuse me for saying this, but I must. I'm not blaming people right now; but I'm pointing out that the attitude of "let's eat and be merry" has seeped into our homes.

Today a boy has to have a new bike and maybe a radio too; all kinds of expensive toys he must have. *Boruch Hashem*,

when I was a boy, I never had a bike. I was such a poor boy that when I wanted to buy a little hammer - it cost twenty five cents in those days - I couldn't afford it! It took me a long time but finally I saved up twenty five cents and I bought the hammer. That was a big thing for me! We didn't have any toys. And that was the best thing for me. But today, it's good food and vacations and concerts- it's candies and ice-cream wherever you go.

And where are the children learning it from? From their parents; from the frum Jews around them. He sees that his father is not satisfied with a piece of bread. No, he wants a bagels. And not just a bagel - cream cheese and lox too. And then a piece of chocolate cake with cream inside. And expensive homes, expensive installations in the house, special tiles and carpets. Expensive trips, traveling, luxurious food - all types of glatt kosher foods and restaurants.

IT'S NOT A SIN; IT'S A CHEIT

Now, some people don't like what I'm saying. I get letters from people: "Why are you making such a big deal about luxuries? There's no *cheit* here. The food on the plane is glatt kosher. The hotels have *minyanim* three times a day, and *shiurim* too. And even the entertainment today is good kosher entertainment. Kosher concerts, and glatt kosher Chinese restaurants. What's the *cheit*?"

And that's because most people don't understand what the word *cheit* really means. You remember at the beginning of the history of the world when Hakodosh Boruch Hu spoke to *Kayin*; it was the beginning of time and Hakodosh Boruch Hu was teaching us an important lesson: לְפֶתַח הַטָּאָת רֹבֵץ - *At the entrance, as soon as you come into the world, chatas is crouching in ambush for you.* You come into this world and the *yetzer hara* is already working on you. Now, there's a lot to say about that, but we'll put that on the side for now and we'll talk about the name that Hashem chose for the *yetzer harah*.

You know, there are many names for the *yetzer harah*; if you look in the *gemara* (Sukkah 52a) you'll find that he has seven different names. There's *ra*, and *tzefoni*, and *areil* - other names too. But in the *chumash*, he's given the name '*Chatas*.' And if that's

Hashem's name for the *yetzer hara*, we should understand what it means.

MISSING OUT ON LIFE

Now, pay good attention because you're going to hear a *chiddush* now. It's not what we think, that *chatas* means to go and do a sin; you go and look where you shouldn't have looked, and now you've done a *cheit*. No; it's a sin, it's wrong, but when we call that a *cheit* it's only because we're borrowing the language. What *chatas* really means is "to miss out" – to not utilize the opportunity of life to become something.

How do I know that? You remember when Dovid Hamelech was on his deathbed, so Bas-Sheva came him and said, "Look, you told me that you decided that Shlomo would be your successor, that he would be the next king; but now, Adoniyahu ben Chagis, one of your other sons, is proclaiming himself the future king. He's gathering a great assembly of people and he's announcing himself king." And what did Bas-Sheva say? She said, "If you don't do anything about it, then וְהָיִיתִי אֵינִי וּבְנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה חַטָּאִים – *Shlomo and I will be the chato'im*. What does *chato'im* mean? Not sinners; what does sinners have to do with it? *Chato'im* means "the losers". Shlomo and I will be the ones who *miss out* if you don't deal with it now. That's what *cheit* means – to miss out.

You know, it states by the *milchemes b'givah* about the *bnei binyamin* that they had expert archers who knew how to aim with their slingshots: קָלַע בְּאֶבֶן אֶל הַשְּׁעָרָה – *They could aim at their target, which was a hairsbreadth וְלֹא יָחֲטֵא – and they wouldn't miss*. They wouldn't be *choiteh* means they wouldn't miss. They were were able to shoot stones with their slingshots and hit a target with great precision. *V'lo yachti*, they wouldn't miss.

IT'S WORSE THAN AN AVEIRAH

So וְיָחֲטֵא means to miss. And that's what a *cheit* really is, to miss out. Of course nobody should do any *aveiros*, absolutely not. But that's not the real failure, the real tragedy of life. To make your way through this world and not step on booby-traps, very good, very good. But that's not the great achievement of life! To not utilize the opportunities that life provides for greatness, that's

the real *cheit*! To miss out on achieving perfection of character and Awareness of Hashem and *da'as Hashem*, that's the real tragedy. If you're not aiming for achieving *shleimus* while you're here, then you're missing out.

So you'll tell me, "Well, we're just normal people. OK, so maybe we're not *tzadikim*, but we're not sinners. We're not *Michalilei Shabbos*. We eat only kosher, our children all go to *yeshiva*; we keep everything. Everything! We're orthodox, ultra-orthodox!" And it's true - *boruch Hashem*, the *frummeh* are succeeding today. *Boruch Hashem, boruch Hashem*, the *frummeh* are *midakdeik b'mitzvos*. And it's beautiful. יָפָה אֵת רַעֲיָתִי - *You are beautiful, my bride* (Shir Hashirim 6:4), Hashem says to His people. It's remarkable how beautiful we are in the eyes of Hashem.

GEHENIM WON'T MAKE YOU GREAT

But it's not enough. Being *frum*, keeping everything, is just the foundation, the basics. It's like wearing trousers when you go out in the street. Does wearing pants in the street make you a success?! No, it makes you a *mentch*; it means that you're normal. But you won't glorify yourself with that! You won't consider yourself a success because of that. And avoiding sin is like wearing clothes; it's very important, but it's not enough to make you a success.

Sins are terrible, but if a person does a sin, he can atone for that. He has Yom Kippur for that! And even if you don't do *teshuva* in this world, so in *gehenim*, you'll have the opportunity for atonement. You go to the laundry place, where they have good machines to remove stains, and you get everything clean. It might take some time, and it's not easy - there's hot water and strong cleansers, and you have to agitate and shake, but *sof kol sof* you get cleaned. That's what *gehenim* is. But it won't give you any *mitzvos*. *Gehenim* will wash off the stains of *aveiros* that you picked up in this world but it will not give you any reason to go to *Gan Eden*.

To live in the World to Come you must have accomplishment. And that's the big test, the most important test in this world - are you making something from yourself? If a person fails to accomplish, for that he can never atone! מְעֵת לֹא יִכַּל

לִּתְקוּן - *It's a twisted thing that can never be straightened* (Koheles 1:15). Not accomplishing, that's an opportunity that goes lost forever.

THE REAL AL CHEIT

And that's why of all the names of the *yetzer hara*, Hashem chose the name *Chatas*. Because the biggest sin of all is to be a *choiteh*, to miss out on your purpose in life. Life means opportunities. People could have spent their free time, their evenings going to *shiurim*, listening to *mussar*, learning *halachos*; gaining more *da'as*, more Torah, and more *yiras shamayim*. Thinking about Hakodosh Boruch Hu takes time; it takes work! If a person would spend time learning even the simple things, even to learn *chumash* properly, to learn *mishnayos* properly, a little bit of the *gemara*, he'd become a success. You could have spent the time thinking! Thinking about all of the great principles of life, creating for yourself a Torah mind, that's what life is for.

Women too! Don't think women don't have what to do; there are many things women can do. It's remarkable today how many good *seforim* women can read. Important lessons in *Tanach*, in history, in *yiras shamayim*. The Gra told his daughters to learn *mussar seforim*. Absolutely; it's very important. A girl, a woman can become very great in acquiring a Torah mentality, a Torah mind, no less than a man.

And that's one of the mistakes people make when they go into Yom Kippur. Because what is it really that we should go into Yom Kippur crying about, that we should be most concerned about? It's not like what people think, that we do certain sins - maybe we said a sharp word to our wives or we forgot *ya'aleh v'yavo* on Rosh Chodesh. Of course, that's also wrong, and we have to ask Hashem to forgive us for that - every second is a precious opportunity to do *teshuva* for what you did wrong. But that's not the great *cheit* of life; it's not what should concern you most. Because no matter how many Yom Kippurs you spend in the *beis knesses*; even if you stand on your feet all day, and cry genuine tears, nothing will help to bring back what you could have accomplished.

THE LUXURY TEST

And because accomplishing, making something out of yourself, is the real purpose of life, that's why Hakodosh Boruch Hu made this world a world of tests; so that the greatest achievement shouldn't come easy. Hashem makes this great test of utilizing life for achievement even more difficult by giving us a society of *וְאָכַל וְשָׂבַע וְדָשַׁן*, eating to satisfaction and growing fat with pleasure.

That's why He invents more and more things; automobiles for traveling on Sundays, fishing rods for Mondays, bowling alleys for Tuesdays and restaurants for the rest of the week – it's *בְּתֵימִים מְלֵאִים כָּל טוֹב*. And even on Shabbos, people loaf around. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is testing you with comfortable couches and kosher magazines and Orthodox newspapers that are offering you all the good things of this world – everything is on sale! It's nothing at all; it's just a test, a way of tempting you to be a *choiteh*, to waste your life.

When you see a place that sells sailboats, it's attractive and you think of sailing the river on Sunday morning. "Ah, to be able to afford a sailboat like that," you're thinking. It's a test. Nothing wrong; there's no *sin* in going fishing. But it's a *cheit*; it's way of wasting our life. It's a complete ruination. You have one day in the week besides Shabbos when you can accomplish something, and you're sitting in a sailboat, fishing your life away. You want exercise?! Take a walk for an hour, and then utilize the rest of your day. There's so much to do!

SIMCHA WITHOUT BIDUR

Today, everyone wants to be entertained! You know, the word entertainment has no equal in *lashon hakodesh*. Today they call it *bidur*, a new modern word, but in the language of Torah there's no word for entertainment because Jews didn't even think of entertainment. Jews had *simchah*, yes, but not entertainment. Entertainment means something that tickles your nerves. It excites you. No; Jews don't have entertainment. For a Jew, when he has spare time, he knows what to do.

There are *frum* schools who take their girls out on a trip to climb mountains. You have to teach girls how to climb

mountains?! Girls need to climb mountains like you need a hole in the shoe! It's only because we have so much that we forget about Hashem, we forget about our purpose in *Olam Hazeh*.

People are wasting their spare time visiting others, going to shows and concerts, playing ball, and busy with their hobbies. Talking to relatives, talking on the telephone, shopping and shopping and more shopping. People are constantly getting in their cars - traveling back and forth, back and forth. Even to go to *Eretz Yisroel* is a waste. What are you going there for? Who needs you there?! Nobody! Stay here and send the money that it costs. They could use your money over there, in the *yeshivos*, for the poor *talmidei chachamim*.

Here's a very *frum* family. I love that family; I admire them very much. They have a girl about seventeen years old and she made a visit to *Eretz Yisroel*. A seventeen year old girl should spend so much money on a trip to *Eretz Yisroel*?! Traveling is very expensive! It's a luxury! Think of all the money you could have given for *tzedakah* or maybe for even a *shidduch*. Taking good money and spending it for a trip to *Eretz Yisroel*? Stay here, and instead of traveling utilize the time for achievement - for developing a relationship with Hashem.

WHAT WILL YOUR EXCUSE BE?

In order to make something out of yourself, you need time; you need a mind, you need to be free to work on thinking about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, thinking about all of the great Torah principles we talk about in this place. And if you're too busy with the unnecessary luxuries of this world so you become arrogant with satiation and it's impossible to succeed. You might be *frum*, very *frum*, even very very *frum*, but a success you won't be.

The comforts and luxuries we have easily distract us from our true purpose in this world - the achievement of *yiras Shomayim*, of *emunah*, of believing in Hashem and becoming aware of Him. The achievement of always being grateful to Him is a very, very necessary function. And you can't dodge it. The time will come, when our days will be over, and we're going to come before the great tribunal, and they'll ask us, "Did you engage in this study? Did you learn about Me? Did you use your gift of free-

will when you had before you such a wonderful world of lessons, lessons in the sky, lessons on the earth, and lessons in the Torah? Did you utilize them?"

So you'll say, "I was busy driving my family around in the car. For my vacation I was in the country, and I did this and I did that. I was traveling, and I was on the phone, and I had no time. I was so busy shopping for a new suit, a new outfit for Yomtiv, I didn't have the time to utilize life properly!" He wasted his time in this world with all of the luxuries that were provided to him and he leaves this world an empty fellow.

THE HUSTLER SUCCEEDS

Shlomo Hamelech teaches us that in Mishlei (21:17): אִישׁ מְחַסֵּר אֵהָב שְׂמֵחָה – "Who is it that becomes an empty person? The one who loves *simchah*." It means like this. Here's a man who has a store, a business, but he's always going out to restaurants to eat lunch. He puts up a sign - WILL BE BACK IN FIFTEEN MINUTES. So customers come and the place is closed. An hour later they come back and the place is still closed. He's sitting in a pizza store reading a newspaper. So what happens? Sooner or later his customers give up on him. Instead they'll go to the Chinese shoe repair man who eats lunch in his store.

And now the man's business goes to ruin because of that. The Chinese man doesn't need pizza stores; he packs up a sandwich and he eats lunch behind the counter. You have to be a worker, a hustler to make a living. And if you're a person who looks for good times, you won't succeed. אִישׁ מְחַסֵּר – *Why is the person losing out?* אֵהָב שְׂמֵחָה – *Because he's looking for good times.*

Now, all this is true. And there's no question that Shlomo Hamelech meant this too, but it's also a *mashal* for what we're talking about now. Because the same is also if a person is looking for good times in this world; he's not going to succeed in *avodas Hashem*. He'll remain an אִישׁ מְחַסֵּר, a man empty of Torah accomplishments. It's a tragedy. Don't think it's a small thing. To be a *choiteh* who doesn't accomplish in life is a tremendous *bizayon*. Even if you're not ashamed in this world, it's a guarantee that you'll be ashamed in the Next World.

Part III. Fighting the Menace

THE EXTREMIST SAYS NO TO HIMSELF

Now, you can't succeed at overcoming this test of prosperity by just sitting back and ignoring the problem – you have to fight it. There was a *talmid chochom* I knew from Slabodka, and when he arrived in America, he put his daughters in a *Satmar* school, a *Beis Rochel* school. I remarked to him, "You, a *litvishe*, you're putting your daughters in a *chassidische* school?!" And he told me something that I remember to this day. He said, "In this wicked country a person has to go to extremes." To travel down the middle of the road nowadays is no longer safe. One must be an extremist to survive.

And therefore I will tell you my private opinion - I don't say you have to agree with me, but I don't have to agree with you either. Anything that you could do without, it's a *mitzvah* to accustom yourself to not have it. It's a *mitzvah* to train yourself to do without all the excessive things. Traveling, and restaurants, and cars, and telephones, magazines and newspapers, and beautiful homes, chandeliers and carpets, dining room tables and couches, and all types of foods. If you don't need it, then make do without it.

HOW TO RUIN YOUR CHILDREN

Your children too. I don't think that children should become accustomed to unnecessary and superfluous things. Don't train children to be accustomed to going places that cost money. They don't need it and you're ruining them in the process. Today they take out girls to the woods. Remember that girl who was lost in the woods some years ago? Girls have no business in the woods! Girls in the woods?! What kind of *meshugas* is that?!

You can train them to take walks. They can take walks and get fresh air. They could play a little in the street with a ball and get some exercise but don't take them to concerts and things like that. I don't believe in that at all. I don't believe in taking children to travel at all. Don't get them accustomed to luxuries. A child should be taught to how to live a frugal life and to desire only what is necessary. Teach your children to save their money.

They'll need it someday. A bank account is better than travelling - a savings account in a bank.

Today, I see that people are feeding children all kinds of ideas - all kinds of wrong ideas. No. I disapprove of that. They're training their children to be failures in life. Now, the child might seem to you a success. He has everything he needs, he's satisfied. But Hashem says: Watch out! It's a danger! As much as possible, run away from the luxuries of America!

However, it's important to recognize that no matter how much we buck the trend, no matter how much we turn our backs to the *אֲבֵל וְשָׁבַע וְדָשַׁן* of Western society today, we're still living like kings. That's what we are - kings; we have everything! We have things today that our great grandparents never even dreamt of. I remember when I was in Europe, if you wanted a bath, there was no bathtub in the house. You went to the sweat bath. You had to go to a certain place, and you paid something; but even that wasn't a bathtub. Bathtubs were for kings.

BATHTUBS AND BREAD MAKE YOU A KING

Queen Elizabeth had a bathtub. Once a year, they gave her a bath. It was a big job, a big ceremony. They had to heat up water in buckets and pour it into the Queen's bathtub. But other people had to stand and pour water from buckets of hot water over their heads. That's how you took a bath in those days. But today the poorest people have bathtubs in their homes.

I remember when I was in Europe over sixty years ago, a man told me - this was in a small town in Europe - he said that when he was a boy he used to ask his mother for another piece of bread. "No," she said, "We can't afford to give you a second piece of bread." He told me that! Two pieces of bread she couldn't give; that's how poor the people were. When they praised the richest man of that place, how did they glorify his wealth? "It's amazing how much *challah* in milk he eats. On weekdays, he dips *challah* in milk!" That was the *guzmah* of wealth in those days. He had so much *challah* that he had extra to dip in milk!

In the olden days people didn't have anything close to what we live with. They simply didn't have. But today it's

different. I always tell you that when I came back to America from Slabodka that was the first time I saw poor people who were fat, *dashein*. There were corpulent men and women waddling down the street who were poor.

THE HUMBLE MAYONNAISE EATER

Which means that when you sit down at your supper table and you have as much bread as you wish, you should understand that you're a high roller – and every high roller is standing on the precipice of arrogance and forgetting Hashem. And therefore, the only way we can succeed is by humbling ourselves before Hashem.

You have more than enough on your table; much more than you need. You're not going to eat all that bread! Your wife says to you, "Chaim, don't eat so many pieces of bread – it's not good for you. Did you weigh yourself recently?!" So what do you have to do? Even if you'll listen to your wife and you'll eat only half of a thin slice, just enough to make a *birchas hamazon* afterwards, but you should make sure to thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for all the bread in the basket.

Don't be skippy about it. You have to thank Him for every one of the different dishes served. And the condiments too. "Thank You Hashem for the mayonnaise." And don't stop there. Thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for all the food in the refrigerator. Thank Him for the refrigerator too! If you have a refrigerator in your home, you're already fat with good things!

For all the trappings of affluence you must thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You have to look at your table, your refrigerator, your pantry, your cabinets, and give heartfelt thanks, "Thank You Hashem for this and that." We have to learn to humble ourselves before Hashem because our refrigerators are full of food, just because of the prosperity that He gives us. And once a person recognizes that everything he has is from Hashem, he begins using the luxuries and comforts of life to remember the one who gave them and he increases his service to Him.

DID HE BLESS THE CAMELS?

And therefore, we can understand what the *gemara* says (Brachos 34b). It says there that when you begin *shmoneh esrei*, you have to bend your knees, and then you bend your body over. Why do you bend over when you say *baruch*? What's it about? A formality?

The word *bracha* is derived from the word *berech*, the knee. *Boruch* means, "We bend the knee to You." Some people think that *boruch* means 'to bless.' Like וַיְבָרֵךְ הַגְּמָלִים – *And Eliezer blessed the camels*. No! "He made the camels kneel," that's what it means. *Boruch* means "I bend my knees to you, Hashem." We translate it as "We bless You," but that's only a secondary meaning. Originally, it means, "You are the One to whom our knees our bent in humility." I am so grateful, but I can't pay it back. I am indebted to you, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Now, I know that you'll hear people telling you all types of different things, but this is the real meaning, this is the real *peirush*, without any *pshetlech*. So '*boruch*' means, 'I bend my knee to You Hashem. Only that when somebody gives you gifts so what do you do? You bless him; you wish him well.' So we translate *boruch* as we bless Hashem. But that's not the original meaning.

THE KOHEN GADOL'S EIGHTEEN BOWS

Now the *gemara* goes on and says that a *Kohen Gadol*, he bends over at the beginning and the end of every *bracha* of *shmoneh esrei*. Why is that? So you'll say, "Well, he's a more pious man." Not true – that's not the reason. The *Kohen Gadol*, unlike us, bends over by every *bracha* because he has more to thank for. The more you have, the more you have to be bent over before Hashem. Instead of being arrogant, like fools – that's us; the more we eat, the more we're conceited, the more we're arrogant, and the more we're rebellious. Instead of that, it should be that the more we get, the more humble we become. The more you have, the more you have to feel that you're low and humbled before Hashem because you can not even begin to pay back for what He is giving you.

Now the *gemara* says there that when a king starts *shmonah esrei*, he bends over and he doesn't straighten up even once. כִּיִּן שָׁפָרַע שׁוֹב אֵינוֹ זֹקֵף – He bends over at the first word, *boruch*, and he doesn't straighten up until he finishes davening. A king has so much to thank for that he's weighed down. He can't stand up. He has such a big load of debts to Hashem on his head that he just can not straighten up.

NEVER STRAIGHTEN UP!

Now, when we recognize that in America we're *dashein v'sava*, that we're overfed and satiated with all good things – that we're living like kings, that means that we have to spend our days humbling ourselves before Hashem. Once you sit down to eat at a table and there's enough food for you to eat a few meals, or as soon as you step into your bathroom that has indoor plumbing, then you have to be כִּיִּן שָׁפָרַע וְאֵינוֹ זֹקֵף – you have to bend over in humility before your benefactor and never straighten up again.

Why are we humble towards You, Hashem? Out of gratitude because of everything that You're giving us. We're indebted to Hashem for everything. I'm bent over before You Hashem for my wristwatch. And I can't straighten up yet because I'm bent over in gratitude for my car, and my fridge that's full with all types of foods, and my telephone, and my bathtub and toilet and my carpet and my tiles and my chandelier.

Even if we avoid sins and do good deeds, it's not enough. We have to learn the humility of having too much. כִּיִּן שָׁפָרַע שׁוֹב אֵינוֹ זֹקֵף – We have to feel ourselves bent over before Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Now, this is very serious because if people don't listen to these words now, someday it's going to be demanded of them. Hakodosh Boruch Hu will say, "Why didn't you listen at that time when you heard about this obligation? Why didn't you humble yourselves for the piece of bread that I was giving you? Why didn't you bend over before Me for the millions of other things that you're getting; for being able to live like a king?"

CHASMEINU B'SEFER CHAYIM TOVIM

Always, always a person should feel humble to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and express his humble gratitude always without end.

There's nothing worse than to have plenty and instead of being humble, to be arrogant as a result. And that means that you have to fight back by filling your mind with thoughts of Hashem. Always, always, you have to fill your mind with Awareness of Hashem - always thanking Him for the comforts and luxuries you have.

Because if a person is busy with this world and he doesn't feel humbled before the One who is giving him this world, then he has to know that he is destroying himself. He'll never be able to achieve success because his satiation with all of the affluence won't allow him to be humbled enough to be an *eved Hashem*. And therefore, your only hope is to think about Hashem always. And the more you think about Him, the more that your *bakashah* הַתְּמַנִּי בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים means something. Because you're not merely asking for *chayim* to go traveling, and to eat bagels, and drive down Ocean Parkway in your new car. You're asking for *chayim tovim*, the good life, a life full of opportunities to think about Hashem - appreciating and thanking Hashem for the good He's bestowing on us. That's the *chayim tovim* for a man who wants to make something from himself. He enjoys this world to no end while becoming more and more humbled before the One who gave him this world. And that's the greatest success of a person - to enjoy the gifts of Hashem in this world and using *Olam Hazei* as a preparation for enjoying even more in the World to Come.

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקינד ויאמרו לך

Q&A

With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

How does one avoid getting cancer?

A:

Every day one should do what the Gemara says: **בְּקֶשׂ אָדָם רַחֲמִים** לְעוֹלָם וְלָעוֹלָם וְלָעוֹלָם “A person should always plead for mercy from Hashem that he shouldn’t get sick” (Shabbos 32a). Which means that every day you should pray for good health. I know you won’t do it, but listen to me anyhow.

Every single day of your life! Don’t rely on *shemonah esrei* – you don’t even think what you’re saying. It can be done outside of *shemonah esrei*, or if you wish, you can add it when you finish *shemonah esrei*, before you take three steps back. Beg Hakodosh Boruch Hu! Although you’ve prayed all your prayers by rote, by stereotype, like a record; but when you’ve finished, at least one little thing say with *kavanah*.

Say, **רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שֶׁתִּשְׁמַר בְּרִיאוֹתַי וְשְׁלוֹמִי** – “Please guard my health and my well-being.” **שְׁלוֹמִי** means, “Guard me against automobile accidents and other accidents.” You have to always pray to be saved from accidents.

What do people expect, that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to protect them for nothing? The reason there are accidents in the world is to be a spur, to incite people to pray. But if you don’t pray, so what can Hakodosh Boruch Hu do? He might have to send an accident, *chalilah*, to make you aware.

So therefore, **לְעוֹלָם**, always! **בְּקֶשׂ אָדָם רַחֲמִים** – a man should always seek mercy from Hashem, **שֶׁלֹא יִחָלֶה**, not to be sick. And that’s one of the most important pieces of counsel you will ever hear.

TAPE #613

This week’s Q&A sponsored:

***Dedicated in honor of my dear wife, Victoria,
for all her hard work and dedication.***