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IN HONOR OF MY DEAR FRIENDS: AVRUMI & RIVKI ORATZ

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The Prince and The King

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פרשת לך לך

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

The Prince and The King

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Part I. The Prince Returns

The Great War

When Avrohom Avinu went to war in order to rescue his nephew, Lot, we can be sure it was a most remarkable military campaign. With a small force of only a few hundred men he went out to battle against an alliance of four powerful kings who had invaded Eretz Canaan and were vanquishing one city after the next, and he was victorious!

People don't know this but there's no question that Avrohom Avinu was a great general. He didn't have a large army but he was a brave and wise military strategist and he led his little band of soldiers many miles pursuing the enemy from the south up to Dan in the north of Eretz Canaan; he even chased them into Syria near Damesek routing them at every turn.

And so we can only imagine the mood in the land of Canaan when they heard that Avrohom was coming back. I'm much older than you – I remember when General Pershing came back from France. It's a long time now but I can't forget the excitement that was in the air. People lined the streets and showered him with flowers as he passed by; they were so excited they didn't know what to do for him.

The Great Tzaddik

And so we can picture the scene now: Avrohom and his handful of people have whipped the powerful enemy and they're bringing home all the captives – all of the fathers and brothers and sons – and they're bringing back their wealth too; all the booty that the kings had taken. I don't know if they were throwing flowers but certainly there must have been wild excitement all along the entire route as the people came out to greet Avrohom. Here comes our savior, the hero of the day!

Now, the Torah doesn't tell us all the details because they are unimportant; we don't have to know that Avrohom Avinu was a war hero who was adored by the public. But there's one incident that occurred along the route that the Torah does tell us and that's because it was an event that changed the course of history. **וּמַלְכֵי צָרָק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֹם. הוֹצִיא לְחֵם וְיִן וְהוּא כְהֵן לְאַ-ל עֲלִיּוֹן**. Among those who came out to greet Avrohom was Malkitzedek; that's Sheim, the great great grandfather of Avrohom.

Now, Sheim was a great *tzaddik*, one of the noblest men who ever lived. He was so great that the *gemara* (Nedarim 32b) tells us that **בְּקֶשׂ מִשָּׁם הָיָה לְהוֹצִיא כְהֵנָּה מִשָּׁם** – *Hakodosh Boruch Hu's intention had been to produce the Nation of Kohanim from Sheim*. We know now, in retrospect, that only the Bnei Yisroel were chosen to be the *mamleches Kohanim*, but the *gemara* is telling us here that the original plan was that the nation of *ovdei Hashem* was to include all of Sheim's descendants.

The Master Race

And that's what we see in the *chumash* when Noach gave his prophetic blessing to his sons after the *Mabul*; Yefes too will be great, said Noach: **יַפֶּת אֶלְקִים לְיִפֶּת** – *The Almighty will give Yefes wide dominion; his descendants will spread out everywhere*. Yefes, we know, spread all

over Europe, all over India. Even today it's the Caucasian race that is the forefront of mankind. It was from Yefes, from the Greeks, that all the achievements of technology and science and literature have come. The march forward towards progress and power in this world has been in their hands up to today.

So Yefes would conquer the world, that's true; however that was only the consolation prize. Because when Noach turned to his most important son, Sheim, he foretold that from this son would come forth the chosen people of all Mankind. **יִפֶּתְ אֱלֹקִים לְיִפֶּת** – Yes, *Elokim* will make Yefes succeed in this world, but **וַיִּשְׁכֵּן** – *Where will Elokim make His Presence dwell? Where will the Shechina be?* **וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּאֹהֲלֵי שָׁם** – *He'll dwell only in the tents of Sheim.*

City of Perfection

And you have to know that as soon as Sheim came out of the *teivah* after the Mabul and received that prophetic blessing he got busy because he knew that he had to make himself as fit as possible for it to come true. Sheim was a remarkably energetic man and he was filled with zeal to build a new kind of civilization; instead of **מְלֶאכֶה הָאָרֶץ** **הַקָּמָס**, a land filled with injustice between man and man, he wanted to rebuild a civilization of justice between man and man and perfection of character.

And so he got busy making **אֹהֲלֵי שָׁם**, tents of Sheim; it means *ohalei Torah*, places of study. And although we don't hear much about him – we'll see soon why not – he accomplished some very great things. That's how *Shaleim*, the original Yerushalayim, came into existence.

One of Sheim's greatest achievements was that he built a city founded on righteousness, a city that he hoped would become the ideal city-state; a model for the rest of Mankind. And he named his town *Shaleim* because *shaleim* means perfection and it was a place that was dedicated to teaching the ideals of *shleimus*.

He Lost It

Sheim was the father of that city – it was a family city; it was his progeny that increased there – so he was called Malkitzedek, the King of Righteousness. It was a holy community of *ovdei Hashem* because that was the life work of Malkitzedek – to create a city where everybody

would live on a very high level of *tzedek* and *yashrus* and *yiras Hashem*, and thereby bring to fruition the prophecy of his father Noach.

So now we understand at least a little bit who it was who came out to greet Avrohom. You know, when he came out to greet Avrohom he's described as the **בְּהוֹן לְאֵל-ל עֲלִיוֹן**, the *kohen* who served the Almighty One. The Torah gives him *smicha* with those three words – it's Hashem's stamp of approval so you understand already that he was a remarkable personality.

And yet the *gemara* (Nedarim 32b) makes an interesting remark on that Torah-given title: Malkitzedek came out to greet Avrohom, **וְהוּא בְּהוֹן לְאֵל-ל עֲלִיוֹן** – And He was a priest who served the Almighty One; it means *only* him. *Hu kohein v'ein zar'o kohanim* – Yes, *he's* a servant of Hashem but *only hu*, *only him*; his *zera* on the other hand, his descendants, *won't* be *kohanim*. The word *hu* is a sign that Hakodosh Boruch Hu was taking something away from him. *Hu v'lo zar'o* – your seed cannot be the nation chosen to serve Hashem. At that moment when Malkitzedek came out to greet Avrohom, the family of Sheim lost their privilege forever.

Beautiful Blessings

What happened on that fateful day in *Emek Shavei*, in that valley outside of the city of Sedom? What went wrong? So listen to the story: When Malkitzedek, Avrohom's old ancestor, came out to greet the victorious Avrohom, he brought with him offerings of bread and wine. And as everyone looked on, this old patriarch raised his hand and intoned a blessing; *and it was this blessing that ruined him*.

Here's what he said. He said, **בְּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל-ל עֲלִיוֹן קִנְיָה שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ** – “Blessed is Avrohom to the most High G-d who created heaven and earth.” A beautiful blessing! To this day we imitate these words. *Keil Elyon* – The Powerful One Who Is Most High. We adopted that phrase from Malkitzedek – as far as we know he was the first one who said these words. And *Konei shamayim va'aretz* – The one who created and owns everything. We say these words too; we repeat them always; beautiful words! And yet, it was with these words that Malkitzedek lost out.

What happened? Malkitzedek blessed Avrohom and then he continued with another *possuk*: **בְּרוּךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר מִגֵּן צָרִיד בִּיָּרֵךְ** – Blessed

is the Keil Elyon who handed over your enemies into your hands; and Chazal tell us that these two *pesukim* were his undoing. Now it could be that you're underwhelmed by such a statement; you don't see what's the terrible sin here – the truth is we don't see any sin at all! But we're learning now that it was such a big misstep that it caused Malkitzedek to lose the privilege of being the father of the *Kohanim l'Keil Elyon*.

Don't Forget!

What happened that was so terrible? Malkitzedek was so overwhelmed by the gigantic personality of Avrohom Avinu, that he lost himself. He blessed Avrohom before he blessed Hashem! *Boruch Avrohom*, and then *boruch Keil Elyon*.

Now he didn't actually lose himself because even even when he blessed Avrohom, he mentioned the Almighty. He said, "Blessed is Avrohom to the Most High." He mentioned the Most High! But he blessed Avrohom first! It's true, he he caught himself right away and said, "וְבָרַךְ אֶל-לְעֵלְיוֹן – Blessed is the most high as well." But no matter – it was too late. A man who forgets about the Keil Elyon, the Uppermost Power, even if it's just for a moment, defaults his privilege to be the progenitor of the Am Hashem! The Chosen People must have Hakodosh Boruch Hu uppermost in their thoughts always.

It means that even when you're talking to the biggest *tzaddik*; let's say you're going out to welcome the greatest *rosh yeshiva* and you're dancing around him and singing, if for a moment you forget about whom you're really dancing and you think you're dancing about this *tzaddik*, then you lose out! If you become bribed by his personality, if you become bewitched by this great man and for a moment you forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, it means that something is wrong.

And that was the error that Malkitzedek made on that day; for a moment he lost himself and he put Avrohom first. It was only for a moment – he caught himself right away, but for the one who wants to be the father of the Am Hashem, it's not good enough.

A Loyal Mind

Now, Avrohom, on the other hand, is a symbol of the nation that never forgets Hashem; Avrohom didn't forget for a second! That's what the *gemara* there says; Avrohom is pictured there as saying the

following – I prefer to think that he thought it, that he didn't say it, but we'll leave it up to you. וְכִי מִקִּדְיָמִין בְּרַבַּת עֵבֶד לְבְרַבַּת קוֹנּוֹ – “Is it proper to first say a *bracha* to me, and only afterwards to give a *bracha* to Keil Elyon?!” Avrohom didn't let that pass; he couldn't! “Is that proper – to bless a *basar v'dam*, to give a blessing to a human being before blessing the Almighty?”

You have to know that this was the greatness of Avrohom; he never was *masiach daas* from Hashem! You know, if someone would ask us “What's the greatness of Avrohom Avinu?”, so we think we know. We'd say, “Well look, the *asarah nisyonos*. He passed ten great ordeals! There were heroic things that Avrohom did!”

And the fact is, that it's true – no question they were great things. Avrohom went through terrible ordeals, וּמִצְאָתָּה אֶת לְבָבוֹ נִאֲמָן לְפָנָיִךְ – *Hashem found his mind to be loyal*. Very good! Excellent!

But there's a greater thing. I'll tell you what the Rambam says in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:51): Listen well because it's something that many people don't know. “I think,” – that's his *lashon*; “I think,” says the Rambam, “that the Avos stood before Hakodosh Boruch Hu without a *hesech hada'as* all their waking hours.” That was the greatness of the Avos! All their waking hours, they didn't for a moment forget that everything they did was because of the service of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Whatever Avrohom was doing; whether he was raising livestock or doing business, whether he was making deals or making war, whatever he did, he never forgot about Hakodosh Boruch Hu!

The Great Test

That's the great *nisayon* of this world – to not get lost; to never forget that Hakodosh Boruch Hu belongs in the forefront of our minds in everything we do and not to forget about Him no matter what! That's one of the most important tests of living in *Olam Hazeh*.

And we begin to see now that Hakodosh Boruch Hu had this in mind – that was part of the whole plan; the *milchama* with the kings of the north, and Avrohom's triumphant return and the *kabolas panim* when they all came out to greet him – everything that transpired was to test Malkitzedek and Avrohom.

Of course there are many other things Hashem had in mind, but the overall purpose was to be a test – would Malkitzedek lose himself in the greatness of a human being? And would Avrohom be sensitive to that mistake and make things right? Because that's the primary test of anyone who wants to be great in this world – will you get lost in the presence of others, in the presence of the distractions, and forget that Hashem always comes first?

Part II. One King

The Great Prince

Now, the truth is we shouldn't be surprised that Malkitzedek became excited over Avrohom Avinu. How could we blame him for being blinded by the greatness of Avrohom? I don't think we would pass such a test either. Avrohom Avinu, you have to know, was a highly respected person. It states in one place that the gentiles said to him, **נְשִׂיאַ אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ** – *You are a prince of Elokim among us*. They weren't just flattering him – the Torah wouldn't inscribe it then. That's how they felt about him; among us he is a prince of *Elokim*; not just a prince – a prince recognized by *Elokim*.

Avrohom was also a very wealthy man. **וְאֶבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד** – *He was very heavy with wealth*. Not just heavy; *me'od* means he was loaded down with heavy wealth. And he was very learned too. The Rambam in Hilchos Avodah Zarah, in the very beginning, states that Avrohom composed books which were studied. And he had tens of thousands of disciples who gathered around him. The Rambam says that. Not only the Rambam; Josephus quotes from ancient records, from Berossus the Akkadian, that Avrohom was one of the most learned men of antiquity. Berossus claims that when Avrohom sojourned in Egypt, he was the one who taught mathematics and astronomy to the Egyptian priests. That's our sole record among the *goyim* of Avrohom.

I cannot describe Avrohom to you but I'm sure he was a very handsome personality. **וְחָכְמַת אָרְם תְּאִיר פָּנָיו** – *A man's wisdom transforms his countenance*, and therefore Avrohom was a person with a magnetic personality. I'm sure if we could see him, we wouldn't be able to take

our eyes off of him. We'd look and look and we'd drink in the glory and nobility that graced his face just like we'd drink the best kind of wine.

A Fantasy Come True

So let's picture what was doing there. Here's a man who is considered a prince among his peers; he's wealthy and wise and a teacher of the masses; a glorious personality. Especially now that he's returning as the hero who saved the people of Canaan; and he did it almost without any kind of an army to help him. And so all the kings are standing there full of gratitude; they're bowing down to him and they're expressing how much they appreciate what he did for them and how much they admire his heroism.

Imagine the Satmerer Rov was coming back to America after a long visit to *Eretz Yisroel*. Who would be at the pier to greet him? Everybody! You wouldn't be able to get through the crowd. But suppose it wasn't only the Satmerer Rov. Suppose it happened to be that this same personage was the biggest *rosh yeshiva* too. So not only would the Satmerer *chassidim* all be there but the whole Mirrer Yeshiva and Lakewood and all the other *yeshivos* would be there too.

Now suppose that in addition to these qualities, this great *chassideshe rebbeh* and *rosh yeshiva* was also one of the wealthiest men in the world and also one of the most learned men in secular knowledge. And imagine now that he's not just returning from a visit abroad – he's coming back from a stunningly successful military expedition. Imagine that! Everybody else would be there too; the whole world would come out to greet him.

And it's not just imagination, a fantasy, because Avrohom actually had it all; he had everything wrapped up in one. And therefore it was a remarkable event when Avrohom returned to *Eretz Canaan*. And it was planned that way to be a test for Malkitzedek; it's the crucible of fire that makes a man great – remembering Hashem always.

The Test of Government

Actually it's a test that we all face as we make our way through life. Hashem is constantly testing us the same way he tested Malkitzedek and Avrohom; and although it's not written in the Torah but there's another Torah being written right now where all of the incidents of our lives are being transcribed forever. And the most

important test is this: Will you forget Hashem in the presence of people? Will you put a *basar v'dam* before Hakodosh Boruch Hu?

We're going to see now what the *chachomim* say about this subject. In *Pirkei Avos* (1:10) the *mishna* says like this: אַל תִּתְדַרַּע לְרִשׁוֹת – Do not let yourself be known to the government. It means don't come too close to the king; don't make yourself too familiar with officials, with big *machers* in the government.

Now, the Rambam in his *peirush* on *mishnayos* explains that when a person becomes close to a king he becomes mesmerized; he can't help it. And that's a very dangerous position to be in because when a human being becomes too important in your mind you could easily forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And that might cause you to do things to please the king that don't find favor in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Rejecting the Righteous

“Don't you see what happened to Doeg HaAdomi when he came close to Shaul HaMelech?!” says the Rambam. When Shaul suspected that Dovid was planning against him so he asked those around him, “Doesn't anybody have any pity on me to help me out?” And because Doeg wanted to show the king he sympathized with him, he started telling Shaul things about Dovid fanning the flames of Shaul's enmity.

It means that Doeg allowed himself to forget about Hashem when faced with a human being of importance. And that's a terrible failure because even though Shaul was appointed by the Almighty Himself and there was a *mitzvah* to honor him and fear him, that's only because Hashem said it's a *mitzvah*. And that was his big mistake. Because if it's done in a wrong way – like Shaul's campaign against Dovid – then it's no longer a *mitzvah*. Now you're serving somebody else other than Hashem.

And what happened to Doeg because of that? What happened as a result? He lost out! Just like Malkitzedek lost his privilege of being the progenitor of the *Am Hashem*, Doeg lost his *chelek l'Olam Habah!* (Sanhedrin 90a). They both lost out because they forgot Hashem when faced with a *basar v'dam*. That was their downfall.

That's why the Rambam warns us, “Don't be like Doeg!” Don't get lost in front of *anybody* except Hashem. Shaul was a big *tzadik*, a

tremendous *oived Hashem*, but you shouldn't fall under the spell of anybody's personality – even the greatest *tzaddik*! That's a *chiddush*, isn't it? You'd think that for a *tzadik* you're *batel*. In front of a *tzadik* your mind should capitulate completely! Oh no! Even when you're talking to the greatest *tzadik*, you're still responsible to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You're responsible *only* to Him.

The Basic Weakness

And so, let's say you're a *talmid* of a *rebbe* – the first thing to know is that your *rebbe* is important only because Hashem made him important. Don't get lost! Now, if you're *chassidim* then you're going to have to bear with me for a moment because I'm going to have to hurt your feelings. There is a basic weakness in all *chassidim* and that weakness is "My Rebbe!"

Before *chassidim*, all Jewish people said "My Hakodosh Boruch Hu!" and that's all. And the truth is that's how it's supposed to be. However, when the *Ba'al Shem Tov* saw that a lot of Jews had stopped saying that, he said that it's better to say "My Rebbe" than to not say anything at all. Because if you'll say "My Rebbe" long enough, then in the course of time you'll say "My Hakodosh Boruch Hu" too.

Ladders and Leaders

But there's a certain weakness in that attitude too because you must always remember that however important he is, he's only a ladder you're climbing up to reach Hakodosh Boruch Hu; only if you know he's a ladder, then he'll be able to lead you to success. But when people live with blind allegiance – that means by not thinking about Hakodosh Boruch Hu first – it can become the cause of their undoing; there have been very many plain people who never graduated past the "My Rebbe" stage. They forget that the *rebbe* is only a way to get to Hashem and then it becomes "My Rebbe" versus "Your Rebbe," and they're scratching out each other's eyes.

The truth is that you always must keep in mind that your Rebbe is only a ladder – the Rebbe is only there to make it easier to climb up to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. But if a man just stands on the ladder and never reaches the shelf, then we tell him, "What are you standing there for?!" There are a lot of people standing on ladders, and they're all yelling at each other. This one says, "My ladder is better," and this

one says, "My ladder is better than yours." So we tell them, "Get going already! Go higher!"

Once you understand that you're climbing a ladder, then all Rebbes become "My Rebbe." All Rebbes! The Satmerer Rebbe! Ahh! *Zol ehr lang leiben!* He's a wonderful man. A big warrior; and he accomplished for us so much. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zol ehr lang leiben!* He accomplished so much and he's still accomplishing. They should both be our Rebbes because they both can bring us to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and that's all that matters. That's the only thing *asei licha rav* is for, after all. Hashem comes first! Don't ever forget that Hashem comes first. You're in this world for Hakodosh Boruch Hu and nobody else.

The First Baal Shem

Once we begin to appreciate this principle it helps us understand a difficult *Gemara* in *Avoda Zarah* (18a-18b). The *Gemara* there tells us the story about the day that Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon was led out to be executed by the Romans and the question is asked: What did he do that Hakodosh Boruch Hu sentenced him to such a fate? After all, if a *tzaddik* is burned to death by the gentiles there's something there. And the *gemara* answers like this: *hayah hogeh es HaSheim* – In his *yeshiva*, among his *talmidim*, he pronounced the name of Hakodosh Boruch Hu exactly as it is written.

Now, I'm sure that when he did this it was with the greatest reverence. You can be sure, he did it *b'dechilu u'rechimu*, with the greatest fear and the greatest love. And he did it *l'sheim shamayim* too. You have to teach the secret to someone so that it shouldn't go lost. Especially in his time, when the Romans were about to begin one of the worst periods of oppression in history, closing the *yeshivos* and slaughtering *chachamim*; the secrets of the Torah could have been forgotten forever.

And so Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon took upon himself in his own *yeshiva* to teach his great *talmidim* the secret name of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. But because he did it in the *yeshiva*, because he said it publicly before his *talmidim* instead of doing it in front of one or two students or to small groups, he was punished. For a great man like that even a small sin was considered big enough to deserve punishment and he was burned to death by the Romans.

Rebellious Rebbetzin

But the Gemara there says that besides for executing Rabbi Chanina, the Romans also beheaded his wife. So the *gemara* asks, what did she do to deserve that fate? Rabbi Chanina we understand, but she wasn't involved with that; she wasn't in the *yeshiva*. And the *gemara* answers, *because she didn't protest against him*. She didn't prevent her husband from doing that.

Now, we know there's a very important rule – if you don't know it, now is the time to learn it: אִשָּׁה כְּשִׁרָה עוֹשֶׂה רְצוֹן בְּעֵלָהּ – A pious woman has an ideal of doing the will of her husband (Tanna D'bei Eliyahu 9). As much as possible, a pious Jewish woman tries to obey her husband. It's an ideal of hers to make her husband happy, to cooperate with him. And here, *kol shekein*, what's expected of the wife of Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon? That she should interfere when her husband is saying a *shiur* in the *yeshiva*?! What should she do? She should come into the *beis hamedrash* and say, “Chanina, what are you doing!?” It's his *hachra'ah*; it's his *psak halacha* that for a *tzorech hasha'ah* it's something that's necessary to do. After all, he's a great man, one of the greatest *gedolei hador*. What do you mean she should take action against her great husband, a *gadol hador*?

The answer is, that you should never forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu! Even the most pious wife who understands that a loyal wife bends to the will of her husband; and even when it concerns a great husband, a *gadol*, but still, he doesn't come before Hakodosh Boruch Hu! If something seems that it can be corrected, you shouldn't keep quiet because even your husband's great personality shouldn't cause you to forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And therefore, because his wife didn't say anything she was punished too. She heard; she was told what was happening, and she should have taken action. She was a great woman; she wasn't a plain person and she'd figure out a way to make a protest in the way that's fitting for a wife with such a great husband. Whatever it was, she'd have to do it, because it could be he's the greatest husband, the *gadol hador*; it could even be Avrohom Avinu, but no matter, Hakodosh Boruch Hu comes first.

Part III. The King Comes First

Keep Your Eye On the Ball

Now, once we get this idea into our heads it opens for us a new panorama of *avodas Hashem*; you begin to understand that our greatest test in this world is to maintain our focus on Hakodosh Boruch Hu no matter what. He's the one who deserves our undivided attention in this world.

That's why Dovid Hamelech calls Hashem the *Melech Hakavod* (Tehillim 24:7). What does it mean that He's the King of Honor? The *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that all *kovod* belongs only to Hashem. And if you give honor to someone without the permission of Hashem, or even with His permission but you forget that you're doing it because it's what He wants, so you're stealing from Hashem. If you forget about the *Melech Hakavod*, you're acting inappropriately.

Backyard Bomoh Building

Suppose you're walking to the *beis haknesses* in the morning and here comes a nice Jew walking out of his house; a big beard and *payos* and a *tallis* bag. Ah! A *frum* Jew. And so you want to go give him a *bracha*; a big *shalom aleichem*. To greet your fellow Jew is a big *mitzvah* after all!

So Hashem says, "Watch out! Don't do it! It's a sin to greet somebody before davening. So you'll say, what if the person coming out of his house is a great *rosh yeshiva*, so you have to say, "Shalom *aleichem rebbeh*." After all, this is already somebody more important. My neighbor maybe I could refrain but this is the *rosh yeshiva*, a *talmid chochom*; he's really important.

Nothing doing! "If you greet someone before davening – some say it's only if you say *shalom aleichem* – it's like making him into a *bomoh*" (Brachos 14a). A *possuk* is quoted there: הִדְלִי לְכֶם מִן הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאִפּוֹ – Refrain from man, כִּי בְמָה נִחָשֵׁב – what is a human being? All he is, is *נִשְׁמָה בְּאִפּוֹ*, some breath that I blew into him. And you'll put him before Me?!

So the *Gemara* there makes a play on words: אֵל תִּקְרֵי בְמָה אֶלָּא בְמָה – If you greet that man who is only 'bameh', so you're making a 'bomoh' out of him. What's a *bomoh*? A *bomoh* is not *avodah zara*. It's a *mizbeach*

for Hashem but you build it in the wrong place. You made an altar for Hashem in your backyard let's say instead of the Beis Hamikdash. A *mizbeach* is a *mitzvah*, but not in the backyard.

It's a good thing to greet a fellow Jew – a big *mitzvah!* – but here it's the wrong place. You didn't *daven* yet? Don't give anyone a *bracha* because the first *bracha* in the morning goes to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Even though honoring a fellow Jew is a *mitzvah*, nevertheless, not always did Hashem give you permission to do it. And so there's no *mitzvah*. Not only is it not a *mitzvah*, but it's a terrible sin because it means you forgot that Hashem comes first.

Greeting the Mechutan

Even not before prayers; imagine you're going to meet a *mechutan* of yours. He came to visit from California let's say, so you run out to give him a big *shalom aleichem*. "Ay, it's so good to see you again!" At that moment you're thinking only about your *mechutan!* It's a problem! Because you forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. He's the one who told you to be friendly to your *mechutan*. You're honoring Hakodosh Boruch Hu when you greet your *mechutan* because you're listening to Him.

You have to think that, otherwise you failed! You're going *meshugeh* over a *basar v'dam* and forget about Hashem?! **וְכִי מִקְרִימִין עָבְדוּ לְבַרְכַּת קוֹנוֹ** to greet the *gadol hador* who is coming from Eretz Yisroel and ten thousand people are standing there near the airport; you're very much impressed! Don't lose your head, however. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is the one that you came to honor.

Listening to the Real Father

I'll give you another example: The Torah says **וְאֵת אָבִיךָ וְאֵת אִמְךָ**, which means that every child must obey the requests of his parents; it's a tremendous *mitzvah*. If your mother says, "Chaim, carry out the garbage can outside," it's like putting on *tefillin*. Don't say, "I'll do it tomorrow," or "Let somebody else do it." You should seize the *mitzvah!* It's not less than *tefillin!* A glorious opportunity!

And yet, listen to what the *gemara* (Bava Metzia 32) says: **אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ** – Fear your father your mother! And right away it says, "I am Hashem Elokeichem" (Vayikra 19:3). Hashem is saying, "Always be sure

to listen to your father and mother; but if it's something I don't want you to do, then it's no *mitzvah* anymore.

Focus!

What are we learning here? We see that the words of the father and mother are nothing in themselves – it's only because Hakodosh Boruch Hu told you to obey your father and mother, that's why you're doing it. That's why when you give honor to your father and mother, the *gemara* (*ibid.*) says it's like you're honoring Hashem.

And that's because a true servant of Hashem, everything he does is only *lechabdo levado*, to Honor Hashem alone. The *Chovos Halvovos* says that. When he speaks about the qualities of a true servant of Hashem, he says that the focus of an *eved Hashem* is always to honor Hashem *alone!*

Oh, but it says **כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ** – *you have to honor your father and mother?!* The answer is that your mind is always focused. You only do it because Hashem tells you to honor them. Hashem is everything to you and that's why when Hashem says no, then forget about it – there's no *mitzvah* at all to honor them.

Shlep the Sheep!

Here's a father whose sheep strayed out of the stable and wandered off into the cemetery. So he tells his son, "Chaim'll. Please hurry up please and get the sheep because somebody might come along and steal them. Run into the cemetery and bring the sheep home!"

But the son says, "I can't; it's *ossur* for a *kohen* to enter a cemetery. How can I go?!" The father and mother are both begging him, "Chaim! Hurry up! The sheep will be stolen!" but the boy stands still. He doesn't move a muscle because he knows that "*Ani Hashem Elokecha!*" It's only Hashem that matters. The son can say some words of *piyus*; he can tell his parents, "Father, Mother, I'm so sorry," but whatever it is, he can't go.

Are You My Mother?

That's why the Torah says that a mother or a father, if they are disloyal to the Torah, if they reject Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so there's no obligation to honor them at all; we honor parents only because

Hashem commanded us to. We're giving Him honor when we obey Him and honor our parents.

A woman called me up once and she said she has a mother out of town and she's the only child; she asked me if I would recommend that she go visit her mother. So I was thinking why not. Of course she should visit her mother. So I asked her, "What type of life does your mother live?" So she tells me that her mother lives with a gentile. She's married to a gentile. So I told her, "She's not your mother anymore. You have to choose between Hashem and your mother and you cannot have both." It's not an easy choice but there's no question about it.

Hang Up the Phone

And even if a mother is Orthodox; she's a loyal servant of Hashem, but sometimes it happens that she'll call her daughter up on the telephone to complain about the neighbor. Oh yes, your mother is very important but the daughter has to remember that Hashem comes first. You can't listen to *lashon hara*! Something you'll have to do to get off the phone. "Ma, I have to go; the cake is burning." Some excuse you'll have to come up with because you're thinking, "My mother is very important, but Hashem, You come first."

Instead, what happens? The daughter listens. Yes, she listens; all the *loshon hara* that the mother says, she's listening. It's *maasim bichol yom* – it happens every day. And it's happening because we are so bewitched by people that we forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

A Righteous Man's Praise

Rav Naftoli Amsterdam used to relate about his *rebbe*, Reb Yisroel Salanter *zichrono livracha*, that "He didn't remove his mind from the service of Hashem, even when he was talking to people."

Now, *l'choirah*, at first sight, we would say that he could have said something more – he could have said maybe that even when he was eating he didn't forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Eating is *gashmiyus*; it's a physical thing, so to think about Hashem while you eat, that's something special.

But Reb Naftoli knew what he was saying and if he chose to stress this *shevach* about his *rebbe*, then we understand that he considered it a remarkable feat that even when speaking with a fellowman you should not forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And that's because the most distracting thing, the most interesting phenomenon in the whole universe is a fellow human being. There's nothing in the whole world as striking and as impressive as another person and that's why when Reb Naftoli wanted to praise his teacher Reb Yisroel Salanter, he chose this. Reb Yisroel would converse with another person and as he spoke he was able to overcome the distraction and he didn't forget for a moment that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is listening and He is the one who I must please. And if you think it's an easy thing, then try it.

Stop Being So Accepting

If you listen in on conversations, you can see how each one, how each party is spellbound by his fellow and how he tries to please him. Every conversation, if you notice, is an attempt to find favor with the other party. He's accommodating himself to his fellowman. He agrees with him. He flatters him. Of course when you talk to someone who is more important, then it is certainly so; you melt before the personality of the important man. But to a certain extent it's true with anyone.

Watch people sitting in company talking. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." He could be saying the worst things and the other one is pouring oil on his fire! It could be *loshon hara*, wickedness, *leitzanus*, foolishness, it could be anything but you nod your head because there's no Hashem in your head. A woman goes and tells the neighbors about the fight she had with the grocer and they're all ears. People talk against their bosses and others are listening. It's all because they never learned this lesson of Hashem first; we are so bewitched by people that we forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Get Off That Bus

It's something that everyone must keep in mind always. Next time you're sitting on a bus and your good friend who works in the same office as you is telling you about his troubles with the boss and you're entranced by his personality, so you're in the mood to say, "Yes, yes." No! Remember this lesson: Hashem is number one! Don't say, "Yes, yes." It means you're encouraging him; you're agreeing with him. Maybe he's wrong! Maybe the boss is right! Is the employer present to deny this man's arguments? So you're *mekabel loshon hara*. You're listening to one side of the story and you're yessing him and

encouraging him. It means you forgot about Hakodosh Boruch Hu entirely under the spell of this man.

So if it's possible, gather your strength and tell your fellowman, "Look, maybe you were wrong." Could be he was wrong, no? Or you can tell him, "Look, I wasn't present so how can I know whether your side of the story is true or not." That's a man who remembers Hashem when he speaks to others! And if you're not able to say it, so there are other ways to put Hashem first. Get off the bus and take the next bus. It only costs 35 cents. It's a very good investment because it means you remember Hakodosh Boruch Hu. But if you'll forget about Hakodosh Boruch Hu, if you're entranced by your fellow man, then you're making for yourself a lot of trouble.

Fateful Encounters

Now, this subject that we spoke about tonight, that was the crux of that fateful meeting between the two great personalities on that field outside of Sedom. On one side stood the great Malkitzedek, the *kohen l'Keil Elyon* who could have been the progenitor of the *Am Hashem*; and standing across from him was Avrohom Avinu, the one who eventually took that role.

And it was at that moment, when these two great men faced each other, that the history of the world changed forever. "Blessed is Avrohom" said Malkitzedek in his enthusiasm over this great man Avrohom. Avrohom was put first! And then he caught himself and said, "And blessed is the Keil Elyon who handed over your enemies into your hands."

At that time, Sheim ben Noach lost the opportunity to be the ancestor of the nation of priests. The prophecy came true; it was still in the family of Sheim, but now it was limited to the *zera Avrohom*. And Malkitzedek's ancient city of Shaleim became Yerushalayim, the future city of Avrohom's children. You know, the name Yerushalayim is a composite word. *Yeru* in the old language of the Canaanim means an *ir*, a city, and *Shaleim* is perfection. Yerushalayim means *Ir Shaleim*, the City of Perfection.

Rebuilding Yerushalayim

Many years later Avrohom's children conquered Eretz Canaan and in the days of Dovid they built up Yerushalayim and and it became

immensely more ennobled in *shleimus* than it had ever been before; because now it was settled by the *zera Avrohom* who make Hashem the *Keil Elyon*, the One who is always uppermost in their minds.

And that's why the *Navi Yeshaya* promises us that one day the nation that says *Boruch Keil Elyon* before everything else will be gathered together once again to the City of Perfection. And there we will return to our old standards and walk in the footsteps of *Avrohom Avinu* who never forgot *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*: אֲחֵרֵי בֵן יִקְרָא לֵיה עִיר הַצְדֵק - *Once again it will be called by the old name of Ir Hatzedek, the City of Righteousness (Yeshaya 1:26)*, because there is nothing more righteous than remembering always that you're standing in the presence of *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL!

All The Time In His Presence

We have hundreds of interactions with a wide variety of people every day and each one is an opportunity to practice this subject. Each time you speak with someone, you're being tested: Are you remembering that you're standing in front of Hashem and that no matter what He comes first?

Two times a day, when speaking with someone, I will try to think about the fact that I'm standing in the Presence of Hashem. And I will make sure that at least in these two interactions, everything I say and do, will be according to the will of Hashem.

— This week's booklet is based on tapes: —

3 - Avrohom and Malkitzedek | 596 - Coming Close to Hashem | 358 - Searching One's Ways | 376 - Counsel of Torah | E-65 - The World Diverts the Mind

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

Who should we vote for for President in the upcoming elections?

A:

America today you have to know is in very great danger. And don't say it's something they always say. No, it's not what they always say. Today there's an adversarial attitude taught in all the colleges; the youth are being taught to hate America, to hate authority, to hate police, to hate anything that's established and to fight the establishment. They don't even know what they're talking about, but anything of authority they want to hate.

And therefore if we could get somebody in charge who is even a little bit conservative, who tries to stand up for the family, who tries to fight back against the destruction of moral values, that's who we want. Even though we don't believe him entirely – it's election talk. It's campaign talk, but if at least he talks the right kind of words so that's the man that we have to vote for. We're in a great *sakanah* in America. Don't think America is always going to be. America is at the crossroads and it's up to us to help out as much as we can.

We should vote for the one who appears to us to be the most conservative. Now, I can't tell you who that is but there's no question that the conservatives of today are extremely more liberal than the liberals of thirty years ago. And therefore, today there's no such thing as too much conservatism. You have to vote for conservative candidates on every level – on national, state and city levels. That's my opinion. By the way, nobody here has to agree with me – on anything. Only, I don't have to agree with you either.

Sources: TAPE # 890 (September 1992), TAPE # 133 (July 1976)

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