

Sefer Devarim

THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE MERON AND SURFSIDE TRAGEDIES,
AND AS A ZECHUS FOR THE YESHUA OF KLAL YISROEL

פרשת עקב

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

The Good Life

Contents:

Part I. The Good Land - 1

Part II. Good Consolations - 4

Part III. Tempered Good - 7

Part I. The Good Land

Dream Destination

When the Am Yisroel finally passed over the Yarden into Eretz Canaan, we can't imagine how great was their happiness at the sight of such a beautiful land. Especially for a nation that had been traveling in the desert wilderness it was an enthralling sight: "Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land ... a land of wheat, barley, grape, fig and pomegranate; a land of oil-olives and honey-dates (Eikev 8:7-8). They had just entered into the most delightful country in the world.

Imagine you would read the literature of a travel agency that's describing the attractions of a

certain country: "Enjoy the shade of the beautiful palm trees and delightful beaches while basking in the perfect weather," and whatever else it is that they write there. Of course, it's all garbage; everything is exaggerated so that you'll be fooled into parting with your hard earned money. When you get there you find that they have the biggest mosquitoes and the ugliest bed bugs too.

But let's imagine for a moment that the description is true – you must know that whatever you'll find in that place, it still wouldn't equal the virtues of Eretz Yisroel when the Am Yisroel entered in the days of Yehoshua.

Milk And Honey

You have to understand what Eretz Yisroel was! Don't judge by what you see today even in the most cultivated place – that's nothing compared to what it was in the days of old. The dates and figs were so large and luscious and bursting with honey that all over the land, wherever you walked, you had to be careful not to step into pools of date and fig honey. And the land was crisscrossed with grazing flocks whose udders were dripping milk – there weren't enough hands to milk them – and the overflowing milk mingled with the pools of honey everywhere. It was literally a land flowing with milk and honey.

It was a remarkable thing that lasted for many years! Even in the latter days, long after the *churban* of the second Beis Hamikdash this was still a phenomenon in Eretz Yisroel (Kesubos 111b). But when they first came to the land, when it was at its best, it was unimaginable. It was truly the Eretz *Chemdah*, the land of delight.

And that's what Hashem told the Am Yisroel as they were about to enter into the land: וּבָאתֶם וַיִּרְשֶׁתֶּם - אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה ... אֶרֶץ זֵבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ

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You will come now and inherit the land that you are passing into ... a land flowing with milk and honey (ibid.11: 8–9).

The Fly In The Ointment

But then, right away, Hashem added one thing – He explained that there’s one difference between Eretz Yisroel and other lands: **כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה בָּא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ** – But this land where you’re coming to inherit now, **לֹא כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם** – it’s not like Eretz Mitzrayim; **לְמַטֵּר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתֶּה מֵיָם** – because here you’re going to drink water from the rain of the heaven.

What is He saying? That Eretz Yisroel is different from other lands. You know, in Mitzrayim they didn’t need rain. The Nile river flowed all year round and it was distributed by irrigation canals to all the rest of the country – all the water you wanted you had. In Bavel too, they didn’t need rain; *al naharos Bavel sham yashavnu*. They had the Tigris and the Euphrates, great rivers that supplied their abundance all year round.

But Eretz Yisroel didn’t have that. There were some rivers, but it wasn’t nearly enough; they needed rain from heaven in order to survive. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu made sure they knew that as soon as they came into the land. “Eretz Yisroel is going to be different than Egypt,” He said to them, “Here you won’t have the luxury of an abundant river – instead you’ll be dependent on the unpredictable rain of the heavens.”

Amazon in Eretz Yisroel

Now, that’s a big *kasheh*. Hakodosh Boruch Hu planned Eretz Yisroel for our people after all, so why didn’t He supply a huge river with an abundance of water? It’s not like we think, that it was an accident; that it just turned out that there’s no big river in Eretz Yisroel. Oh no! It was the Hand of Hashem that created the Amazon, the Mississippi, the Nile and the Euphrates. Hashem made those rivers; He decided where to place them and He could have done the same thing in Eretz Yisroel. He could have made it that the Yarden flowed from a

tremendous drainage basin and it would have been a powerhouse like the Nile. Why not?

And the answer is right there in the words of Hashem: **לְמַטֵּר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתֶּה מֵיָם** – You’ll drink from the rain of Shomayim.” It means you’ll have to raise your eyes to the Heavens and beg for rain. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wanted us always to be reminded of *shomayim*, of the necessity to raise our eyes to Him.

Benefit of Poverty

Farmers, you know, are always looking up at the sky. They need rain and that’s one of the things that can’t be supplied by the government; you can’t order clouds from Washington. Sometimes they have artesian wells or irrigation ditches, but in most cases the farmer turns his eyes up to the clouds, “Will it rain?”

And as he looks out and sees a cloud coming, it’s not always the kind of cloud he wanted. A cloud of locusts are coming. Ooh! All the months of hard work in the fields might go to feed the locusts! And so the wise farmer is always looking higher than the clouds. He falls down on his knees and he entreats Hakodosh Boruch Hu for help. The farmer thinks more about Hashem than a city worker because he is subject to forces that are in most cases beyond his control (See Kiddushin 82a).

And that’s why there was no great river in Eretz Yisroel – Hakodosh Boruch Hu created the features of the land for the perfection of the people that would dwell there and a huge river would be too much of a test because they’d forget about Hashem. And that’s why Eretz Yisroel with all of its *maalos*, all of the benefits it had, it also had this disadvantage. Even the most delightful land, the *eretz chemda tova u’rechava* was measured out with an exactitude in order to benefit the Am Yisroel.

Eretz Yisroel Was Prescribed

Just like when a doctor prescribes a medical prescription or a special diet, so some of the things don’t taste good and some have after effects; but each one has its purpose. Eretz Yisroel was a

prescription for the benefit of those who were there – it was for the purpose of making them the very best that they could become.

Not having a river and having to always look up to the heavens made them more aware of Hashem. From time to time when there was no rain, they had to fast. Sometimes they had to fast and fast and fast, like the Gemara says in Mesichta Taanis. Days of fasting and praying. And it was a very big thing for them because they were reminded of Hashem! Ahh, the great achievement of life! And finally when their prayers were answered and rain came down, it was a tremendous *simcha* of thanksgiving to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Piety and Happiness

And all those rains that fell was the great reward for the piety of the Am Yisroel; it says so in our *parsha* and we repeat it again and again every day. וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ – “If you will listen to My commandments, says Hashem, to love Me and to serve Me with all your hearts, so what am I going to do? וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר מְטֵר אֶרְצְכֶם – I will give rain; early rains and late rains and I will give you abundance, וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ – I will give you to eat and you will be satiated.” That’s the blessing Hakodosh Boruch Hu promises us for praying to Him and serving Him loyally throughout the long autumn and winter months.

That’s why Sukkos was such a happiness – after a long season of sowing and tending the fields and reaping, the Chag Ha’asif was finally the time of gathering. Across the land, the nation celebrated the abundance that the winter rains had brought. The Am Yisroel “ate and were satiated.”

The Food Warning

And then a surprise; what does Hashem say right away? הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם – *Be on guard*, פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם – *lest your hearts turn foolish*, וְסִרְתֶּם – *and you will turn away*, וְעִבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים – *you will serve other gods*. It seems like a *non sequitur* – it doesn’t belong. We’re talking now about the pious nation, the people who spent the rainy season in prayer with their eyes looking upwards at Hashem and they’re eating now

from the abundance provided by Hashem. What is this sudden warning, “Guard yourselves lest your hearts turn away from Me”?

The answer is that it’s not easy for a person to maintain his balance once he has enough to eat. When the blessings come, character problems come right on their heels. A full stomach causes rebellion in the heart. אֵין אָרִי נוֹהֵם מִתּוֹךְ קֶפֶה שֶׁל תָּבָן – *When does a lion become arrogant and raise his voice? Not when you feed him straw*. A lion who is fed a diet of hay is going to be a pretty humble lion. He’ll walk around with his head down – if he’ll walk at all. אֶלֶּא מִתּוֹךְ קֶפֶה שֶׁל בָּשָׂר – *It’s only if you feed him barrels full of meat then he becomes arrogant and cocky* (Brachos 32a).

When Atheism Flourishes

And human beings also become cocky from eating too much. That’s why you have evolutionists by the way. Evolution didn’t arise, you know, in South America where people don’t have shoes, where people were happy to have enough food to make it through the day. Evolution arose in England. England was then the most prosperous nation. There was plenty to eat; *veachalta vesavata* and therefore there was *va’avaditem elohim acheirim*.

Atheism flourishes when there’s abundance because a man whose stomach is full doesn’t want to have competition in the world. He becomes arrogant and he wants to be all alone; Hakodosh Boruch Hu is making it too crowded for him. “There’s just not enough room in this universe for me and Him” (Sotah 5a). Whether you like it or not that’s what you’re thinking – that’s the result of being overfed.

So here’s a *tzadik*. He must be a *tzadik* – after all, it says in the *possuk* that the timely rains and the abundant crops are a reward for loving Hashem and serving Him “with all his heart.” And if it’s a reward, then what harm can come from the rains and the crops?

A lot! Even when a person is righteous and Hakodosh Boruch Hu rewards him with success,

with prosperity and happiness, he'd better watch out. He's already treading on thin ice and Hashem warns him, **הַשְׁמֵרוּ לָכֶם** – Watch out!

The Wealthy Poor

Now before we start the subject let no one say that this doesn't apply to him because he doesn't have his first million or half million yet. The *possuk* says *v'achalta v'savata*, you will eat and be satiated, that's all. So let's immediately disillusion ourselves of excuses and understand that this applies to everyone in America; it's all summed up in the words, *v'achalta v'savata*, and everybody in America is eating well.

The big worry in America is how to watch the weight. There are clubs organized in order to avoid eating too much. Even the poor people in America are fat! They're walking in the streets licking ice cream cones, chewing gum, eating candy and that's after a full meal at home. They're walking and burping on the streets.

Even the boy who is going out in the morning to *yeshiva*, but he's holding an ice cream in one hand and a chocolate bar in the other hand, that boy is starting out on the wrong foot. He's the one the *possuk* in our *parsha* is talking to: "Be on guard lest your heart turn away..."

Part II. Good Consolations

Why Fatten Us?

Now, **הַשְׁמֵרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶּם** is not the only warning we were given. The Torah constantly repeats the warning against too much prosperity; again and again you'll find it repeated (Devarim 8:11, 11:16, 32:15). And so the question arises: Why did Hakodosh Boruch Hu bring our forefathers into a land that was capable of giving them so much happiness? If Hakodosh Boruch Hu foresaw that too much happiness, too much abundance, is a very great *sakanah*, so why did He give them such a land? He could have made it a lean land where they could barely make a living, where they would constantly

have to look for a *yeshua* and more easily live lives of righteousness.

Of course, if you think that this world is what's important then it's not such a big question because how can you live in *Olam Hazeh* without a full stomach; without ice cream and chocolate cake? But once you understand that Hakodosh Boruch Hu put us here only as a place of preparation for the next world, it's a question that registers right away: Wouldn't it be better for us to live most leanly with just enough food to hold the body and the soul together? Why give us such an abundance?

Studying The Haftorahs

Now, as an introduction to the answer, we'll consider the *minhag Yisroel* in these summer weeks. When it comes to the sad part of the year that we just passed through, the Three Weeks, we have three *haftorahs*, *shalosh d'paranusa*. It's three selections from the *nevi'im* that we read, that warn of impending disaster, of tribulations for the Am Yisroel.

And then, after Tisha B'Av, they're followed by *shivah d'nechmasa*, by seven *haftorahs* of consolation. From Shabbos Nachamu on, there are seven weeks of *haftorahs* that are intended to console our people by speaking about the good times and happiness that are our future.

So why is it that there are only three for *paranusa*, three that foretell stern warnings and disaster, but there are seven of consolation? It should be three weeks of consolation to offset the three weeks of sadness; that's enough. Why seven? We have to study such a thing; after all it's not for nothing that our sages established this pattern.

The Plan of Happiness

And the answer is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wishes for us to succeed in this world and the way that we will be most successful is from happiness. Not from sadness! *Atzvus*; even if it's *atzvus* of *mitzvah*, like *aveilus* for the *churban* – no, that's not the way to succeed. You need it of course; it's one ingredient. Life is a concoction of very many

ingredients but what's most essential for a man to live successfully is the ingredient of **שְׂמֵחוּ צְדִיקִים בְּהַשֵּׁם** – All of you who want to be righteous, you must rejoice in Hashem (Tehillim 97:12).

Happiness is the most important ingredient in life. Yes, it's necessary to add a little bit of salt sometimes, maybe a little bit of pepper too, but it can't be *all* salt and pepper. The majority of our fare has to be *simcha*.

That's the lesson of three *paranusa* but seven of *nechmasa*. Hakodosh Boruch Hu's plan for us to succeed in life is not *merirus*; it's not from the bitterness that we see in our lives or what happened to our people in the past, the disappointments. No, the great success of the *ovdei Hashem* is in the things that He gave them to enjoy!

True Service

Now it's a big *chiddush* what I'm telling you now. It's such a *chiddush* that most *frum* Jews will not accept it, but listen anyhow because actually it's the most important element of *avodas Hashem*. More than anything else, the foundation of *kol hatorah kulah* is **הוֹדוּ לַהֲשֵׁם כִּי טוֹב**. *Avodas Hashem* means to think of what He's doing for you and to serve Him in terms of gratitude. True *avodas Hashem* is **מָה אֲשִׁיב לַהֲשֵׁם כָּל תַּגְמוּלוֹהִי עָלַי**, the feeling of gratitude to Hashem that is engendered by happiness.

You have to know that a person who is unhappy, he's not going to serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu. He'll *daven* but he's not thinking what he's saying – he can't think; he's just going through the motions and that means he's not an *oived Hashem*.

What does it mean **מִגֵּן אֲבִרָהֶם**? You're thanking for something; for what?! What does it mean **מִחְיָה הַמֵּתִים**? You have to thank Hashem for *techiyas hameisim*! You ever think about that? You never thought about it! **בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַשֵּׁם מִחְיָה הַמֵּתִים**. It's the last thing that's in his mind that he's thanking Hashem for the revival of the dead. Ah *nechtige tog*! He never thought about it once. The whole *shmoneh esrei* is empty. Is that called a life of *avodas Hashem*?

The Sinful Grouch

When a person is not filled with happiness so his whole *avodas Hashem* is empty. He passes by a *mezuzah*. Does he think what's inside the *mezuzah*? He puts on *tefillin*. Does he think what the *tefillin* teach us? When he puts on *tzitzis* or when he sees someone else wearing *tzitzis*, does he think anything? A gloomy man doesn't think about Hashem; he's too consumed with his own unhappiness.

He sits in the *sukkah* and not once is he thinking **לִמְעַן יֵרְעוּ דִרְתִּיכֶם כִּי בְּסֻכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**. You have to sit in the *sukkah* and think about the *nissim* that happened in the *midbar*; the *poskim* say that (OC 625). But without the fuel of happiness and gratitude it doesn't happen; he'll never think about it, not even once in his life. You can say the *ushpizin* and make *kiddush* and everything else but never think what the *sukkah* is there to teach you.

All the *mitzvos* are meaningless to a man who is not filled with happiness. And so, that's the most important element in *avodas Hashem*! Don't think it's exaggerated. Happiness is the fuel that fires the *avodas Hashem* of a Jew!

Songs of Gratitude

To serve Hashem means **שִׁירוּ לוֹ זָמְרוּ לוֹ**! You have to sing to Hashem! Everything you do should be a song of gratitude to Him. When you go to *shul* it's a way of singing to Hashem. When you put on *tzitzis* or cook for Shabbos it's singing to Hashem. The Torah is a wonderful song! *Perek Keitzad Haregel* in Bava Kama is a beautiful song. *Perek Hameniyach* is a beautiful song. The *Chovos Halvovos* is a beautiful song and so is the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Magen Avrohom* and the *Shach* and the *Mishne Berura* and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. *Avodas Hashem* is one long song of gratitude.

And that's why Hashem says, **נִחֲמוּ נִחֲמוּ עַמִּי**. Hashem is commanding the *nevi'im* to console the *Am Yisroel* because our consolation and satisfaction, our happiness, is the foundation of everything. But He's not telling us merely that the *navi* should do it.

“Console My People” means *we* have to do it too. We have to get busy consoling! And who is the most important of His People that we should talk to? Ourselves first of all. Every person should get busy making sure he’s full of *nechama*.

We’re The Happiest

Of course, he should know that the best is yet to come. The future is ours! No question about it! But besides that, we should realize how fortunate our lot is in this world right now. Who lives a happier life than the *frum* Jew today? You think the Italians in Bensonhurst are better off? Don’t deceive yourself. They carry knives. They’re afraid of each other. The Italians kill Italians more than they kill anybody else. You think the blacks are happier? *Chas v’shalom!* They’re living in despair! And who caused the despair? Not because of discrimination. They’re ruining themselves by violence, by drugs, by alcohol, by laziness. They’re ruining their lives and they’re getting what they deserve!

Even the best *goyim*, the most civilized *goyim* are living lives of comparative unhappiness. Don’t deceive yourself. The *yetzer hora* makes you think that it’s better outside but you must know that the happiest place in the world is a *frum* Jewish home. You should realize how fortunate you are that you live in a house that’s protected by Hakodosh Boruch Hu’s *chukim* and *mishpatim*. And unless we spend time consoling ourselves, we’ll never understand that. And so, *nachamu nachamu ami*, be happy with what you possess!

Fake History

The *frum* Jew in this world, in most instances, is superior in happiness to anybody else. When we read Jewish history, we have to beware of a general error. The historians depict the history of the Jews in the darkest most pitiful terms, as if they suffered all the time. It’s not true. The Jews always lived on a higher scale than the gentiles. The Kuzari says that. He says that in our exile we’re always a little lower than aristocracy but we’re always higher than the people of the land. It’s a fact. We always live better.

We’re the most successful financially – at least the middle class we are. More or less, the Jews make *parnassah*. They’re not the bums on the street. They’re not the homeless. You ever find homeless *frum* Jews? No! So we have to spend time seeing how fortunate we are.

Who works in the homes of Jews as maids? Jews? No. In most cases gentiles work as maids. Gentiles are the cleaning people. Jews don’t work to clean in the houses of *goyim*. When I was in Europe even poor Jews had gentile servants. I remember the Polish and Lithuanian servants used to say, “You Jews should have your own country so we could come there and you should work for us!” And so wherever the Jews went, they were above the people of the land. Jews always lived more successfully and happily.

It’s All Good

A Jew has Shabbos. He has vacation every week. Even while he’s still young, he retires. One day every week he enjoys early retirement. *בְּלֵךְ יִשְׁבְּעוּ וְיִתְעַנְּגוּ* – they enjoy the Shabbos! We all take hot baths *l’kovod Shabbos*. We put on clean garments once a week – maybe more – and we sit together, the whole family, and we eat *challos* and chicken and *cholent* and all good things. That’s all part of the *nachamu nachamu ami*, the consolation of our nation.

But don’t just console the nation. Console yourself! You can hear me, can’t you? Isn’t that a happiness, to hear? And to see! Ho, ho, what a happiness it is to look with your eyes and see the world. And you ate breakfast today, didn’t you? Probably lunch and supper too. Are you surviving on just bread and water? And you didn’t sleep on the floor last night. You slept in a bed, didn’t you? And the night before too. Do you have running water in your home? You have indoor plumbing and a toilet? Some of you have more than one bathroom in your home! You’re richer than kings were a hundred years ago!

And so *nachamu nachamu ami* means we must spend some time studying our happiness in this

world. Our lives are filled with good things and good times, and that's a big consolation; whatever salt and pepper you have sprinkled into your life, you also have great happiness, much more than sadness. An important part of the *nachamu* is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving us good times all the time.

Part III. Tempered Good

Hashem's Superstore

Now, in Pirkei Avos (3:16) it states *hachanus pesuchah*, the store is open. Hakodosh Boruch Hu's business is open seven days a week. What does this mean that the store is open? This whole world is a great shop. You can come in from Sunday to Shabbos, inclusive, and take whatever you wish. And the fact is you do. Everyone is taking all the time – everyone is enjoying *Olam Hazeh*.

And that means we can never forget the Torah's warning: if you're taking and taking and taking, you're "eating and being satiated" so you have to be on guard, *hishamru lachem pen yifteh livavchem*. Hashem isn't giving us hay after all, he's feeding us with barrels of meat, and so it seems we're doomed to forgetting Hashem. But actually it's not so.

When a person gets busy thanking Hakodosh Boruch Hu for everything he has, that's the solution. The best medication is to always look up in gratitude at the Giver because otherwise you're borrowing and borrowing and it doesn't even enter your mind that you have to pay.

The Checkout Counter

It's not a free world! **לְהֵשִׁים הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ** – to Hashem belongs the earth. So where do we get the permission to take from this world and enjoy it? How are we allowed to enjoy a breeze and the sun and our families and our homes and our refrigerators filled with food and everything else that we're borrowing day and night from Hashem?

And the *gemara* answers, **בְּאֵן קִדְּם בְּרַכָּה בְּאֵן לְאַחֵר** **בְּרַכָּה**. After you thank Him, that's when you have

permission to enjoy because now you paid up; you're recognizing the owner of the store. There's no such thing as taking and not paying – that's a juvenile concept. When you walk with your little child into the five and ten, you have a big job keeping his hands off things. Everything he wants. You ever tried it? Walk with a little child into a five and ten and he's pulling everything off the counters; you have to grab his hands and teach him, "You can't take!"

He looks at you, "Ta, what do you mean you can't take?"

"You can't take unless you pay."

"What do you mean, pay?"

He doesn't understand! You have to pay? It's a big lesson for a little child to learn. You have to pay! You can't just take because it appeals to your eyes.

What's A Bracha

And that's what people have to learn. When you enter this world it's a department store, a *chanus pesuchah* full of all good things. But it's not free. *Hachenvani makif* – it's the kind of a store where they write everything down; even on Shabbos they write down everything you take. *Hapinkas pasuach* – the ledger is open, *veyad koseves* – and it's being written down, whatever you take. And the only way to stay out of debt, the only way to take and not go lost is *kan l'achar bracha*; when you say *brachos* for everything you take.

Now, if you're going to get the benefit of this idea, you must act like you never heard of the term *brachos* before. Because if you're going to hark back to your concept of what a *bracha* is, then our whole talk will have been in vain. You'll have to act like you just became *geirim*, and now for the first time in your lives you're hearing there's such a thing as *brachos*.

A *bracha* doesn't mean only the template, some words that you say when you eat something. A *bracha* means that you're enjoying what He's giving you and you're thanking Him for it. You're looking up at Him and saying *boruch*, "I bend my knees in gratitude to you."

The word *boruch*, you have to know, comes from 'berech' which means a knee; *boruch* means the One to whom our knees are bent. "I'm humbled before you; I'm loaded down with so much good that I'll serve You in gratitude. I'll do *mitzvos*, I'll learn Torah, I'll send my children to the best *yeshivos*, the best Beis Yaakovs." That's what *brachos* means – it means that you're bent down in gratitude before Hashem because you owe Him so much.

Banking For Dummies

Here's a man who enters a bank for a conference with the vice president to see how much money he could borrow. So he sells the vice president a bill of goods; he convinces him and the vice president is so enthusiastic about him that he's willing to give him as much as he asks.

Now this man, if he is prudent, will call a halt and say to himself, "How much can I really take? After all, I have to pay back." And so he calculates in his mind and he limits his request because he knows that the bank will force him to repay. It's not beneficial to just borrow as much as you wish. You need a plan, "How am I going to make these payments?"

And therefore in this world too much happiness – it means happiness that's not being used as a fuel for gratitude to Hashem – is a very dangerous thing. Because the more you're getting from Hashem, the more you should be remembering Him; the more you owe Him in *avodas Hashem*.

The Expensive Life

People are spending today tremendously! You move into a new home and you spend on rugs. You spend on expensive furniture. On colored faucets and fancy curtains. Now what people call not-expensive today is expensive. The fact that you don't call it expensive is not going to help you. People spend tremendous sums furnishing their home, or on vacations, and they have to know that they are being mortgaged over their ears. Not only to the installment dealers, but Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to demand payment for everything.

Which means for the sake of expensive rugs you'll have to study Torah day and night in your new home. For the sake of expensive furniture, you're going to have to sit on that dining room chair and sign checks at that table for *tzedakah* without end. If nobody is ringing your bell so you'll have to roam the streets looking for *meshulachim*. You'll have to pay and pay. What you paid in the store is just the beginning. You're deeply in debt because you're taking all the time.

Yeshiva Food

So what can you do? One of two things. Either you cut down on the *v'achalta v'savata* tremendously and you're like an old time *yeshivah bachur*. I had a roommate in Slabodka. I saw what it meant to eat like a *yeshivah* man. In the morning he ate one piece of bread and drank a cup of tea with half a cube of sugar. He couldn't afford a whole cube. A half cube! And he wrapped it with his tongue so it shouldn't melt quickly; he kept it out of the current of the hot tea. And at night the same. I was there. Lunch he ate something more but it was on the strength of that meager diet he studied Torah from early in the morning until late at night.

So the question is how many times more abundant is our diet than his? Now we have to start doing some mathematics! We're getting so and so much more, so how many times more do we produce for Hakodosh Boruch Hu than my roommate in Slabodka produced? Could very well be that we're in heavy debt – we're borrowing and borrowing and we're making payments for pennies on the dollar.

The Raging Czar

I told you once the story the Chafetz Chaim told. Once the Czar announced that he's coming the next day to witness the maneuvers in a certain army camp. He wants to see the maneuvers taking place. So the generals quickly practiced all the maneuvers with the soldiers, and they were ready.

The next morning early in the morning the generals are all together in the mess hall; they're being served, they're eating. There's plenty of time

anyhow. The Czar doesn't come that early. But all the soldiers were lined up already.

So who came galloping up on a white horse? No one but the Czar himself. He looked around, no officers present.

So the Czar is raging and he said to the privates, he said, "Is there any one of you who knows how to conduct maneuvers?!" Out stepped a Jewish boy and he volunteered. He said, "I can do it – I know all the maneuvers."

The General Gets Fired

And so the Czar said, "Go ahead," and the boy started telling them to pivot and to wheel and present arms. And it was going *geshmiert*. But in the middle of all the action the generals heard what was doing and they came running out to the place where the soldiers were lined up. But the Czar waved them away. And they were all watching while this boy, the private, carried out all the maneuvers.

When it was all over, the Czar turned to the chief general and he said, "How much does this private cost me a day to support?" So the general said, "He costs five kopecks." That means five pennies a day. So the Czar said, "How much does it cost me a day to support you? If I can get the same out of him, why should I waste it on you?!"

The Greats of Eretz Yisroel

And Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to us, "What am I getting out of you?!" In Eretz Yisrael people are sitting in the *yeshivos* and *kollelim* all day long, eating nothing, living in cramped quarters and raising big families by the way; they all have big families. They're taking very little and they're paying back a lot! And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu might have an argument against us.

So the first alternative is to cut down on *v'achalta v'savata*. And that's one of the reasons why the *tzaddikim* chose a frugal existence, so they shouldn't be mortgaged beyond their abilities to pay.

Have Your Cake And Eat It Too

But that's a difficult option. So because I'm kind hearted, I'm going to give you an easy alternative. The easy alternative is *hishamru lachem*! *Hishamru lachem* means to be on guard. So keep on eating, *gezunteheit*; keep on enjoying, keep on spending – not too much though and remember to give *tzedakah* too; there are a lot of people who can use some of your charity money – but where should you get busy increasing? Increase on *hishamru lachem*!

Hishamru lachem means you have to learn more *yiras shamayim*, more *mussar*, more fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu than the Jews in Yerushalayim have to learn. Because they eat less, they need less *hishamru lachem*. But we who eat more, we have to beef up on the *hishamru lachem*.

Frum Atheism

Otherwise you're in trouble; *pen yifteh levavchem vesartem* – you'll turn away, *chas v'shalom*. It doesn't mean you'll go to India and join the Hare Krishna *chas v'shalom*. It doesn't mean you'll become a 'Jew for Cheeses'. You'll still do everything! You'll go to the synagogue three times a day and you'll *bentch* after every *seudah* and you'll keep Shabbos too. But you'll turn away from Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Because how much are you thinking about Hashem?! How much are you thanking Him? How much are you looking up to the heavens for your daily needs? And if you're not thinking about Hashem, that's already atheism; it's *frum* atheism but it's atheism nonetheless.

And so we who hope to be *ovdei Hashem*, we have to know that we stand in dire peril because we are busy eating. We're busy enjoying. We're busy spending. So therefore for the fact that you have a big breakfast and a big supper besides a good lunch, make sure that you get busy with *Mesillas Yesharim*, with *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, with *Chovos Halevavos*, with all the wonderful seforim. Whenever you learn a piece of *gemara* with *aggadata*, with *yiras shamayim*, concentrate on it. Go to places where you hear *yiras shamayim*. Add to your diet so much

hishamru lachem that it should be at least commensurate with the *v'achalta v'savata*.

Justify Your Existence

And don't ever forget that the best form of *hishamru* is thanking Hashem. If you thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for everything He gives you then you justify your existence. Without a *bracha*, you have no place on this earth. Gratitude, humility to Hakadosh Boruch Hu, and serving Him because of that gratitude, that's our function. That's the reason for our existence. Actually it justifies his entire existence – otherwise, he has no place in the world.

And therefore, we always keep in mind what we say everyday in *kriyas shema* in the morning and the evening, **וְאַכְלֵתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ ... הִשְׁמָרוּ לָכֶם** – You're eating? You're enjoying life? Very good! *Nachamu nachamu ami!* But be on guard. Always, always a person should be humble to Hakadosh Boruch Hu and express his gratitude to Him without end.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Living The Good Life

Hashem showers me with much more *Nechmasa* than *Puranusa*; I recognize that I'm living the good life. And so, as the *possuk* warns in this week's *parsha*, I must be on guard not to forget Hashem.

This week I will *bli neder* take two actions every day in order to remember Hashem's beneficence towards me. I will either forgo some luxury such as sugar in my coffee or tea, and perhaps I will even skip the drink entirely in order to remember Hashem. Or I will study some *mussar* as I partake in the enjoyment of This World.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

58 - Borrowing and Not Repaying | 316 - The Righteous Rich

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What is one supposed to think when he cries out to Hashem and Hashem doesn't answer?

A:

We are supposed to think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to cry out even more. And suppose you cried out even more – let's say a man is on his deathbed. He's an old man, he's 119 years old. Look, he can't expect to live much more. But he cries out anyway on his deathbed, he wants to live. And finally he passes away. Did he waste his time? No! He achieved maybe in his last minutes more than he did all of his life. Because he's thinking about Hashem.

Here's an old man who's crying out on his deathbed. He says "Hashem heal me". "Oh that's so silly!" you say. The bystanders think it's ridiculous. He wants to be healed! How long do you want to hang around here? 119 years is not enough? And the answer is, it's not enough. He wants to live a thousand years. Why shouldn't he? He had a grandfather who lived a thousand years. Mesushelach lived almost a thousand years, so why shouldn't he? So he's crying out; he's allowed to cry out. And don't say that he didn't accomplish what he wanted. He did accomplish! The crying out is the purpose of the deathbed – so that he should cry out to Hashem and become more and more aware of Him. That's the biggest achievement there is. So nobody should ever be frustrated in crying out, because you are achieving. You are gaining more awareness of Hashem.

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