

# תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on Parshas Vayeshev

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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## Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on פרשת וישב

### YOSEF'S ROLLERCOASTER RIDE

The end of this week's parsha treats us to the exhilarating roller coaster ride of Yosef Ha'tzadik's fortunes. Here we have a נער עברי, forever forgotten in the darkness of prison, and suddenly we see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Who doesn't know the story of Yosef's almost miraculous catapult from deep despair to the heights of success?! Yosef's interpretation of the dreams of the שר המשקים and the שר האופים, was his initial foray into the business of dream interpretation, and what a success it was! And at the most opportune moment, when פרעה was in despair of ever understanding the meaning of his dreams, he was made aware of the despised נער עברי in prison who had proven himself as an expert in the field. Yes, it seems as clear as day, that it was Yosef's success at interpreting dreams that was the catalyst of his good fortune that brought him out from the darkness and sorrow of prison and catapulted him into the palace of פרעה.

### EXTRA PESUKIM IN THE TORAH?!

However, looking at the pesukim, we find a few details that seem superfluous. And since we know that there is nothing extra in Hashem's Torah, let's pay careful attention to the following words: - ויבוא אליהם יוסף בבקר וירא אותם והנם זועפים

"And Yosef came to the cupbearer and the baker in the morning, and he saw that they were crestfallen." ... וישאל את סריסי פרעה - "And he asked the courtiers of Pharaoh, 'Why do you appear downcast today?' " (Bereishis 40:6-7).

Now, why is it important enough for Hakodosh Boruch Hu to relate to us such seemingly superfluous words? That Yosef noticed their despondent faces, and walked over to them to prod them to speak; is that what's important here? What matters to us is Yosef's uncanny ability to interpret dreams, and how that led to his freedom. He was able to interpret the dreams of these two well-connected palace courtiers, and soon he was standing in the palace in front of פרעה. Do we have to know the insignificant details of his approaching these two fellow prisoners, and what he said to them? The Torah doesn't let us know about all of the conversations that Yosef had. So what's so special about this encounter that we have to hear the pithy details?

And the answer is that what took place in these two short pesukim we quoted above, was the real beginning, the real cause of the turnabout. We're learning here that it wasn't merely the interpretation of the dreams that propelled Yosef out of prison and into greatness. It started before that; it was how Yosef went about his business in the prison, how he approached the two courtiers of פרעה; that's what saved him from prison and propelled him into the palace of פרעה. And that is our subject for this lecture.

#### WHITE TEETH ARE BETTER THAN MILK

The Gemara in Kesuvos (111b) quotes the possuk from Parshas Va'yechi ולבן שנים מחלב - "And white-toothed from milk" (Bereishis 49:12). The simple pshat of this posuk is that Yaakov blessed Yehuda that his land in Eretz Yisroel would be so abundant with grazing land, and healthy cattle, that his teeth would turn white from the abundance of milk. But the Gemara makes a play on words, and instead of reading it as white-toothed because of milk, we read it as "white teeth are better than milk."

Chazal say as follows: טוב המלבין שיניים לחבירו יותר ממשקהו חלב - "It is better when you show white teeth to a person - that means a smile - more than giving him a drink of milk." Now let's study this and you'll see that this subject will repay you in popularity, it'll repay you in business, and it'll repay you in good health. People don't realize how neglected this principle is and how very important it is what we are studying right now.

#### HANDING OUT CUPS OF MILK ON KINGS HIGHWAY

The Gemara is telling us that suppose you go out and buy a case of J&J milk, whatever it is, kosher milk. And one morning you drag that heavy crate of milk to the corner of Ocean Parkway and Kings Highway. And you stand there all morning at the corner waiting for people to come by. You have a handful of Dixie cups, and as each person passes by, you pour him a cup of milk and say "Here my friend, drink a cup of fresh milk." Now, this is an expensive project. Milk cost a lot of money nowadays, and kosher milk costs even more. And it's difficult to lug that case of milk to the street corner. Think what a benefactor to mankind you are!

#### GOT MILK? HEALTH BENEFITS OF MILK

And a glass of milk is a very healthy thing. It supplies a person with a lot of necessary material, a lot of vitamins and nutrients. It's a good idea to have a cup of milk every morning. It'll take you far. The calcium gives strength to your bones and your teeth. And it's full of protein, a vital source of energy. And the potassium?! It regulates your blood pressure. Milk is so important! It gives your whole body a lift!

And so, when you pour that cup of milk for your fellow man on Ocean Parkway, it goes into his blood, into his bones, and it lifts him up and gives him strength. And all day long that person is going to operate with the power of the milk that you poured into him. You're making him energetic and healthy and happy. We're not talking here about a man who just finished his

breakfast, and is burping from too much food. He's burping from his big meal, and he's waiting for dessert to come out. And now you're coming to offer him a glass of milk. No! In those days you didn't have that. It's a man with an empty stomach, a man who didn't eat or drink yet, and you're giving him a glass of fresh milk. You know what that does for him?! You're putting this man on his legs!

Let's say it was a yeshiva man passing by; then your glass of milk will engage in studying the sugya of the Gemara all day long. And if he's going to work, your glass of milk will help him earn his day's parnasa. There's so much energy and lift in that one cup of milk! It is a life saver. It can make a person's day.

#### THE MARBLE STATUE OF THE MILKMAN

And if you do it on a public scale, to very many people, that's a tremendous thing you are doing. You're a public benefactor, and after a hundred and twenty years when you leave this world, they should put up a statue for you on Ocean Parkway and Kings Highway. They should make a little park on the grass there, with a statue on a pedestal, and all the people will have to detour around it. It would be a marble statue of your likeness, standing proud, pouring out milk into a marble Dixie cup, for all generations to see. And there would be a brass plaque engraved as follows - "This Man Loved Mankind." And you deserve it. You deserve more than a marble statue. And you'll get it in the World to Come. Just for one Dixie cup you'll get reward in the World to Come, but if you do it for the public, you'll be rewarded forever and ever.

#### THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF A SMILE

But now the Gemara comes along and says: That's a great thing! Giving out milk to your fellow man is a tremendous thing! But there's something even better. If you stand on the corner of Ocean Parkway and Kings Highway, and you smile a friendly smile at people who pass by, it is better for them, it is better for

their health, than giving them a glass of milk. A smile gives a person a lift that even milk cannot give. It makes a person feel like he's somebody. The warmth of friendship gives such an energy, such a happiness, that it is a life saver.

A smile, a smile that has some sincerity to it, can give a person a whole new hold on life. You have no idea what you have done for him. His whole world becomes illuminated with sunlight. Now, you young fellows might think that I'm just exaggerating. But if you live a long time, you could look back and and see that a smile is sometimes the turning point. Do you know how much courage you get from a smile?! It's better than giving him something that will go into his stomach. You're giving him something that will go into his mind, into his soul, into his nerves. And the person is reactivated, revitalized. And that's the great achievement of a smile.

#### THE REAL CATALYST TO YOSEF'S FREEDOM

And Yosef knew all this. He knew very well that showing interest in a person, gives him a lift for the whole day. Milk goes into the stomach, into the bones, but a smile, an expression of interest and concern, goes all the way into the soul. It's a burst of sunshine on a cloudy day. Much more beneficial than sunshine, because it makes a person feel like he's on top of the world.

And so when Yosef saw someone who looked a little bit down, he was always the first to show his concern for that person. And that's exactly what Yosef was doing that morning in prison. **ויבוא אליהם יוסף בבקר**. The first thing in the morning, he didn't offer them a cup of milk; he showed concern for them. He didn't just walk past them and go about his business. Of course not! **וישאל... מדוע פניכם רעים היום** - "My friends, what's bothering you?" he inquired.

And it was Yosef's concern for others which was the catalyst that eventually gave him his freedom. Interpreting the dreams was merely the way that Hashem made it happen. But that wasn't the reason why it occurred. It was Yosef's way of

living; how he dealt with others, and how he treated those around him; that was the catalyst to his greatness. And because he was great with his fellow man, Hashem chose him for even further greatness.

And it wasn't only Yosef's personal freedom that we are talking about here. The whole future of the עם ישראל depended on that early morning when Yosef approached his fellow prisoners. The coming down of the children of Yaakov to מצרים, the birth our nation and its tremendous growth, as well as our eventual redemption as the holy nation of Hashem, all resulted from those caring words of Yosef.

Now, of course, all of Hashem's plans for the עם ישראל would have come to fruition in either case. Hashem doesn't need a certain man in order to accomplish His will. רווח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר. Hashem could have just as well used Yehuda to be a leader in מצרים. He would have been a fine candidate for vice-regent of Egypt. And he would have done a fine job of it. לא יסור שבט מיהודה. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu would have found a way to make Yehuda king of מצרים.

And so, the coming down of the בני ישראל to מצרים, the birth and development of our nation, and our eventual redemption would have surely occurred even had Yosef walked past the שר האופים and the שר המשקים with a stone face, and ignored their plight. But Hashem here reveals to us the greatness of Yosef's actions by linking his escape from prison and rise to greatness to his behavior with his fellow man. Hashem made Yosef great, because of the greatness he had already achieved. And that was the greatness of concern for others, and making others happy, the greatness of לחבירו שיניים.

#### סבר פנים יפות TO THE THREE PARTS

Now greeting people is something you do all the time. And it's your duty to make sure you do it properly. הוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות. "You must greet all men with a pleasant cast of countenance" (Avos 1:15). What did you think that mishna

is there for? Just to fill in the space?! Just to keep you busy on Shabbos afternoon?! It's a mitzvah, a command. And a careful reading of those words, will provide us with the guidelines, the details, for how to fulfill this mitzvah.

Now, what does it say there? It says three things: סבר and פנים and יפות. And each one of those words is a lesson on its own. You have to realize that this mishna is revealing to us the secret of how to become a success at this עבודה of uplifting everyone around you. In these few words we are being given the guidance needed for a lifetime of achievement.

### DON'T SHOW YOUR PROFILE

First of all, פנים. You have to greet your fellowman with your face. If you pass by somebody you know, show him your face. That's number one. So when you come into your house tonight after the lecture, and your mother is in the kitchen standing over the stove, show her your face. Don't show her the back of your haircut or your ear. And when your father walks in at night, after working all day for you - for you! - do him that benefit, that little favor of turning around and showing him your face. Not your profile; the front of your face!

When somebody passes by the place where you're working, if you're able to, show him your face. You walk into your office, and people are sitting here, and here, show your face to them. And keep that in mind all the time. Don't walk with your eyes in the ground. No, no; don't be such a tzadik. אל תהי צדיק. הרבה פנים! At least one word from the mishna you should fulfill!

### DON'T SHOW THE BOTTOM OF A PAN

And the second detail is סבר. The word סבר, from the word סברא, means thinking. סבר means that you have an expression on your face, an expression of interest. If you merely show a face, a deadpan face, that's not enough. Let's say you pick up a pan as someone goes by and you show him the bottom of the pan. Sometimes your face is not any more than the bottom of a

pan. You have to show that you're thinking about him. And you can do it. It's easy! The mishna is not asking you for much. Show that you have some interest in that person.

#### EVEN A RICH MAN NEEDS A SMILE

And the third thing is **יפות**. The expression should be a pleasant expression. It should show caring, concern. A smile! What's more pleasant than a warm smile?! Because when you look at somebody with a pleasant face, that is the biggest compliment. It shows that you take him seriously. He means something to you. And you don't have to wait for a person with a downcast face to work your wonders. Everyone can benefit from a smile and a good word. Even the happiest man, a person who has everything, is lifted up even higher from a smile.

#### YOSEF SPENDS TIME IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR

Now, if you're not sure if you're doing it right, I'll give you a heter to stand in front of a mirror and practice it till you get it right. What do you think Yosef was busy with when he was looking at himself in the mirror? (Bereishis Rabbah 84:7). Even at a young age, Yosef was preparing for this great avodah of making sure to make others happy with his facial expressions of warmth, and caring and concern. And you can practice on your poor wife, or your poor mother. Believe me, they could take a little bit of happiness from you once in a while. It's no great happiness to be living in the same house with a grouch.

#### CAREER IN LIFE - SMILING AT OTHERS

Don't think that this is a small thing. It's a career. If someone would ask us, "What career could I choose in life?" Not as a parnasa; but as a Jew. So we would tell him: Learning Torah is a wonderful career. And **תפילה**, davening, is another career of greatness. And those are great careers that all of you should strive for. But those need a certain amount of work, of concentration. They don't come easy. But here, I'm offering a career of greeting

people with a pleasant smile. It's so easy! It's an easy path to greatness. A career of making people happy with a brief encounter.

Now, a career means that it's your life. All day, all night, whenever you can, you're smiling at someone. adding a little more happiness to this world. And the opportunities are as endless as the people you meet. Each time you pass by someone, you have another opportunity to make progress in this important עבודה of סבר פנים יפות. And you'll be living successfully if you do that. All your life you'll be sowing seeds of happiness wherever you go.

In the beginning you might have to be artificial. And do that. Be artificial! Learn to be an actor. Even if you don't feel like smiling, do it anyhow. And as you practice this, after a while, you'll begin to feel some sincerity. And you'll be able to turn on the light, the pleasant smile on your face, whenever you want. And you'll feel good doing it.

#### THE SMILE SWITCH

And you're going to make people happy that way. Don't underestimate what a smile, what a pleasant face, can do for others. You're giving them a lift because a smile goes into the neshama of a person. And he's not going to be בודק your motives. All he wants is happiness, and you're giving it to him. And he loves you for it. He loves you. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu loves you even more, and He'll turn on His "light" for you. יאר השם פניו אליך.

That's one of the blessings that the Kohanim bless us with. "Hashem should make His face shine down upon you." Now what that means exactly, we don't know; we only know the results. When Hakodosh Boruch Hu smiles at us, then everything will be good. You're going to make money. You're going to be healthy. And you'll have peace and every kind of happiness.

## MIDAH K'NEGED MIDAH, HASHEM SMILES ON YOU

But you know when you get that? It says במידה שאדם מודד מודדין לו. The way a man behaves to others, that's the way Hashem behaves to him. And if you cause your countenance to shine on others, if you turn on the sunshine by smiling at other people, you have to know that above, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to turn on the sunshine on you as well.

He's going to smile on you, because you're doing exactly what He wants to be done in this world. You're making Hashem's children happy. And so, when you activate that middah of smiling at people down below, you're going to be rewarded in the same measure. Only that Hakodosh Boruch Hu's measure is much bigger than ours. And so, there's no easier and more productive career than smiling at everyone.

## SOME HOMEWORK - THREE SMILES

But you already know that in this place we like to work in small steps. And that's because we want it to stick. By making small consistent steps - and consistent is the key word here - a person can achieve greatness. And so, we'll start by working on the following program together. I'm giving you homework to do, but it'll pay off very well for you, if you keep to it.

All day long you have opportunities to work on this. But at least make sure to do it three times a day. Three times minimum, חוק ולא יעבור. Make sure to greet at least three people every day with a warm smile. It's not enough just to think about it. You have to start doing it.

Now, it goes without saying that we're talking about men to men, and women to women. אברהם מגייר את האנשים ושרה את הנשים. But for the opposite sex, there's no such thing as a warm smile. Of course, you could say "Good morning" or some other greeting - you don't have to ignore - but no warm smile. There are enough women for the women to practice on. And men will practice on men.

So when you see a neighbor coming down the block towards you, grab the chance. And remember all three parts of the mishnah. There's פנים; show him your face. And סבר; don't look at him with a blank face. You'll show him some expression, some feeling of sincerity. And יפות; you'll smile at him warmly. And you can even say a genuine word or two of greeting. Trust me, he won't disdain it. You'll make him feel important. That's all; you did it. And that's your first קרבן of the day.

#### ONCE YOU POP, YOU CAN'T STOP

And then you'll make sure to do the same two more times. At the bus stop, at work, in your own house; whatever it is, you're passing by people all day long. But it won't happen just by coming to these lectures. You have to start this program of smiling at the world. And once you see how easy it is to make people happy, and how you can light up a person's face, you'll start and never stop.

So make it your principle in life, that you're going to make everybody that you encounter impressed with your friendliness. A friendly smile, a face of שמחה is often the greatest gift you can bestow on someone else. You're showing an interest in somebody, some concern and caring, and that's the deepest desire of your fellowman. And it's so easy to do. You don't have to buy expensive milk. You don't have to drag the milk crates to the corner of Ocean Parkway.

#### BECOMING HASHEM'S HELPER

Everybody is rich when it comes to giving out smiles. And you can live a life of success with that alone. I'm not exaggerating; that's how important this is. Smiling at your fellow Jews is one of the greatest forms of גמילות חסדים available to you. And that's because the best, the easiest, the most frequent, and one of the most important forms of bestowing kindness is what you do with your own countenance. And then you'll become one of the great

forces in nature that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has enlisted in His remarkable plan of showering Mankind with His happiness.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.





## Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

**Q:** The Rav spoke tonight about becoming great through greeting our fellow Jews with a "*seiver panim yafos*." Should a woman also greet a man with "*seiver panim yafos*"?

**A:** The answer is that men should greet men and women should greet women. If a man sees a woman that he knows, he should be polite but he shouldn't go out of his way to make a very pleasant smile. "*Li'hisrachek min ha'nashim*," is an ideal. Keep away from women. And women keep away from men. It's a *klal gadol ba'torah*. No use starting up with nature. It will only get you in trouble.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu says that we should love all Jews. And we should! But men should show their love for men and women should show their love for women. Men should be polite to women. And women should be polite to men. No question about it! But to show love? To go out of your way to make a pleasant smile? Only men to men and women to women.

In our hearts we love all frum Jews. And that's because Hakodosh Boruch Hu loves all frum Jews. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "They are my sons and my daughters." Hashem calls us "*banav u'vinosav*" - "his sons and his daughters." (Devarim 32-19) Hashem loves all of us. And a bas Yisroel is no less beloved than a ben Yisroel. No question about it..

But we have to know that there is a certain geder of aloof politeness and tznus that we follow. Common sense says, don't mix. Don't mix! And you should know that people who think that they can get away with it, sometimes discover, *chalilah*, what happens as a result.

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