

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

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

פרשת נצבים

Mishpachat Levy
Edition 

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת נצבים

THE GREAT TRANSITION

In this week's *parsha*, Hashem warns the Am Yisroel about the terrible consequences of having been brought into the land of Eretz Yisroel, and then turning away from Hashem to walk in the materialistic ways of the nations inhabiting the land. **פן יש בכם איש או אשה או משפחה או שבט אשר לבבו פונה היום מעם השם אלקינו ללכת לעבד את אלהי הגוים ההם** – “Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, a family or a tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem our G-d, to go and serve the gods of those nations” (D’varim 29:17).

After having lived for forty years in the wilderness, with the bare necessities needed to survive, the *Am Yisroel* was now about to enter a land that would stand in sharp contrast to these forty years. It was a land that flowed with milk and honey, a land filled with all good things, and Hakodosh Boruch Hu was warning them to beware of making use of the *tuv ha'aretz* in the wrong way.

THE STERN WARNING

And Hashem, knowing the subconscious thoughts of men, warns us that even when we will hear these words of warning, there will be some who will imagine in their hearts that all the

good of the land will continue forever - what's going to change after all - and that the curses of Hashem will not reach them. "Nothing's going to happen; we're not doing anything wrong. Is it a sin to enjoy the gift of *Eretz Yisroel* that was promised to us?" "The sinner will think in his heart a blessing of peace to himself, saying, 'These curses will not come upon me; rather I will continue to enjoy the good land in peace' " (ibid. 29:18, and Rashi there).

And so Hashem delivers a striking warning and tells us that just the opposite is true. Not only will I not forgive the materialist for misusing My gifts; but I will bring the most terrible destruction and desolation upon the land of My people if they become like the *mishpechos ha'adamah*, the nations of the world who live for the pleasures of the earth. "I'll destroy you," Hashem warns, "The same way I wiped out those who lived here before you." - כמהפכת סדום ועמורה אדמה וצבויים אשר הפך השם באפו ובחמתו - "Like the overturning of Sedom and Amorrhah, Admah and Tzivoyim, which Hashem overturned in His wrath and in His anger" (ibid. 22).

SEDOM IS OUR MODEL?!

Hakodosh Boruch Hu here uses the model of the destruction of *Sedom*, as a warning forever to the *Am Yisroel*, "Don't misuse My world or you'll suffer the same fate as the wicked cities of *Sedom*." And that needs an explanation - why is *Sedom*, of all places, chosen as the model forever for the *Am Yisroel*?

Now, you know that the *מהפכת סדום ועמורה*, the overturning of Sedom and Amorrhah, was quite a remarkable event, and one that is still visible today, thousands of years later. Today, if you visit *Eretz Yisroel*, you can still see one of the most desolate places in the world; the plain where these cities formerly existed. Now, there was a time when the Bible critics denied there ever were any such cities, and they said the stories were invented to explain the desolation. Unfortunately for them, it has recently been discovered from the unearthed archives of Ebla - Ebla was a thriving city in ancient times - that the traders of Ebla were doing big business with the cities of Sedom. They found tablets, letters written on clay tablets, back and forth from Sedom to Ebla,

negotiations about merchandise and trade. They were big thriving centers, these cities of Sedom.

GAN EDEN IS FOSSILIZED

And so, contrary to the fairy tales of the *shakranim*, we see a remarkable phenomenon, that what today is a wasteland, one of the most desolate places on earth, was once one of the most flourishing places in the world. It was *k'gan Hashem*, like the Garden of Hashem, which means that it was *gan eden* in this world. Now whether it was exactly like Gan Eden, probably not. But it was certainly something extraordinary. It certainly was as close to *Gan Eden* as you'll find in this world. And to go from one extreme to the other, this remarkable change from a flourishing garden to a place of desolation, needs explanation.

And it was no accident; it was planned that way by Hakodosh Boruch Hu, it was intended to be a shocking sight, one that would always be remembered. The Torah explains that it was *vayahafoch*, Hashem overturned these cities - it didn't happen gradually. It wasn't due to a slow erosion of the soil, or some other gradual process; it took place instantaneously. The Torah describes a hail of chemicals, ignited sulfur together with salts, that rained down in enormous abundance, and everything became mineralized. You know that fossils are the results of the exchange of minerals for proteins. If something is in a place, let's say, where there is a flow of water, so the water will gradually carry away the proteins and in its place minerals are deposited; and in the course of time the object becomes petrified or fossilized. Sometimes this can happen quite quickly, if there's a sufficient supply of minerals, and as the proteins are carried away, they are thoroughly replenished by minerals over a short period of time.

And that's exactly what happened to Sedom. That's really what happened to the wife of *Lot*. She was immediately paralyzed by this hail of chemicals. She was petrified in her tracks, and in a short time, perhaps in the course of some few hours, she became petrified and changed into stone. *Netziv melach* means a pillar of chemicals. *Lot's* wife became a monument for posterity - just like *Sedom* - a monument of horrible destruction.

THE BEAUTY OF ERETZ YISROEL

Now, the land of *Eretz Yisroel* is a land that is praised for its beauty and abundance of material wealth, and it is the last

place we would expect to find the desolation of *Sedom*. Luscious and productive fields, beautiful orchards of various fruit, flowing streams of fresh water, and actual rivers of sweet date honey, mixed with fresh goat milk dotted the beautiful land. ארץ זבת חלב ודבש, a land flowing with milk and honey, was not only a literal description of the land, but a symbol for a land that was filled with all forms of good.

כי השם אלקיך מביאך אל ארץ טובה, ארץ נחלי מים עינות ותהומות יוצאים בבקעה ובהר. ארץ חטה ושעורה וגפן ותאינה ורימון ארץ זית שמן ודבש. ארץ אשר לא במסכנות תאכל בה לחם, לא תחסר כל בה, ארץ אשר "For Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land: a land with streams of water, of springs and underground water coming forth in the valley and mountain. A land of wheat, barley, grape, fig and pomegranate; a land of oil-olives and honey. A land where you will eat bread without poverty, you will lack nothing there; a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper" (ibid. 8: 7-9). And Chazal tell us (Sukkah 35a) that *Eretz Yisroel* "lacked nothing" in the most literal sense. Any good of this world - the *gashmiyus* - was available for the *Am Yisroel* in *Eretz Yisroel*.

GROUND ZERO IN ERETZ YISROEL

And yet, paradoxically, in the midst of this most beautiful land, is found one of the most desolate and seemingly G-d forsaken places on the earth. And this terrible sight of desolation, still today, marrs *Eretz Yisroel* and it stands in sharp contrast to the beautiful land. And that's not an accident. It was planned that way by Hashem to be the place that Hashem points at when he wants to warn the *Am Yisroel* about what could be coming to them as well, chas v'shalom. "And Hashem will separate you to do bad to you...like the overturning of *Sedom*...which He overturned in His wrath and His anger" (ibid. 29: 20-22).

And the *nevi'im* as well spoke about *Sedom*. Later in our history, when the *navi* wanted to warn of a destruction that the *Am Yisroel* would bring on themselves, a total ruin, he quoted the example of *Sedom*: הנה זה היה עון סדום אחותך גאון שבעת לחם ושלות - "Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and careless ease was there and in her daughter-towns, and she did

not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy” (Yechezkel 16:49). This meant, if you follow their ways, you’ll also suffer their fate. The image of the smoldering Sedom was engraved forever on the minds of the *Am Yisroel*.

THE UNIQUENESS OF SEDOM

Now, this needs an explanation. Why *Sedom* of all places? There were many nations who lived lives of sin and immorality. There’s no shortage of gentile nations who rebelled against Hashem. What was it about *Sedom* that it was to remain the model of destruction forever in our minds? Many towns, cities and even countries have been destroyed by war, famine and natural disasters in the history of the world. And yet, the cities and countries are not left desolate forever. Time passes and new nations, new cultures, and new cities arise from the ashes of the destruction. Time and rebuilding heals the wounds of destruction, and life flourishes again.

And yet, the destruction of *Sedom*, *Amorah* and their sister-cities are a queer exception to this rule. They were destroyed in such a manner as to preclude any rebuilding. The sulphur and fire were meant to desolate the area in the center of Eretz Yisroel so that it should remain a permanent monument of destruction. גפרית ומלח שריפה כל ארצה לא תזרע ולא תצמיח ולא יעלה בה כל עשב – “Sulphur and salt, a conflagration of its entire land; it cannot be sown and it cannot sprout, and no grass shall rise up on it again” (ibid 29:22).

Why would Hashem bring forth a destruction of such permanence, such horrible permanence, especially in the land that “lacked nothing,” the good land set aside for His beloved children? Why would Hashem choose *Eretz Yisroel*, as the place to establish this wasteland?

WHAT IS ERETZ YISROEL?

Now, in order to understand the answer to this question, we will first have to understand the significance altogether of Hashem giving us a land of luscious goodness, a land that flowed with milk and honey. The *pesukim* tell us that Hashem promised the land of *Eretz Yisroel* to our *Avos* because of their perfection in their service to Him. As a reward for their virtuous living and

their superhuman efforts in establishing the foundation for the *greatest nation* the world ever beheld, Hashem rewarded them with the *greatest land* that the world ever beheld. The most perfect land for the most perfect people! It was a land above all others, not only in a spiritual sense, but in a most material, in the most *gashmiyus* sense as well. The nation of *ovdei Hashem* were rewarded with the greatest material benefits.

However, if you think a little bit, you'll see that this answer is not so simple. The one nation in the world, the children of Hashem, who were created to live on a completely *spiritual* plane, should be *far removed* from the pleasures of flowing milk and honey, and a land that is described with the words **לא תחסר כל בה**, with lacking nothing at all. The nation that lives a life of virtuous dedication to Hashem and His Torah, the Nation that desires closeness to Hashem as its highest desire, won't be satisfied by a reward of a fruitful land and flowing rivers. For the nation that called out **רצוננו לראות את מלכינו**, milk and honey, representative of all the material pleasures of life, are a cheap substitute for the reward of *Olam Habah*.

VODKA FOR THE BUM?

Now, for the **גויי הארצות ומשפחות האדמה**, “nations of the land and families of the earth” who live for the base pleasures of the earth, the land of *Eretz Yisroel* would be the perfect reward. For the Russian bum, wonderful! What could be better for a Russian or Lithuanian *goy* than another bottle of vodka? If you would tell a Lithuanian *goy* that he will have an **ארץ זבת חלב ודבש**, luscious barley and wheat fields for producing vodka and beer, he would be a happy man forever. He'd be in *Olam Habah* in this world!

For the *mishpechos ha'adamah* another bottle of whiskey is Gan Eden. That's what a *goy* is, a man of the earth, a man who lives for the pleasures of this world. And therefore material pleasures are the perfect reward for the nations of the world. But for the *Avos* and their descendants, the only reward possible would be the closeness to Hashem in the Next World. What does a land of material pleasures have to do with the nation that desires to be close to Hashem?

WE DONT WANT RAIN; WE WANT OLAM HABAH

And actually this is a question that is pertinent to more than just the reward of *Eretz Yisroel* given to the Avos and their descendants. The Rambam in his *Hilchos Teshuva* (9:1) asks a question that is important for all of us sitting right here. We the *Am Yisroel* are of clear belief that all of our toil in the service of Hashem in this world, will be rewarded by Hashem in the only world where it will be possible for us to receive our true and befitting reward – the World to Come. It is only after our deaths, that we will receive our eternal reward. And yet, when the Torah promises us reward for our proper service of Hashem, we are guaranteed physical rewards in this world. והיה אם שמוע תשמעו אל מצותי... ונתתי מטר ארצכם. Plentiful food, and peace in the land. Good health and long happy lives. Wealth, nice homes, and many children. No troubles from the gentile nations and control of our own land. All rewards in *this world!*

But we know that שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא, even one solitary mitzvah is too big, too valuable, to be rewarded in *this world* (39b). The coin of this world is too small to pay for the endless merit of serving the infinite Hashem. And yet, the Torah only mentions rewards in *this world*, with no mention of the true rewards which we know will come in the World to Come?! And therefore, the Rambam asks, “What is meant by this promise “If you listen...I shall give you rain”?

SCHAR MITZVAH, MITZVAH

And the Rambam answers as follows. There is no question that the reward of this world is nothing. Nothing at all! Our reward can *only* be the reward of *Olam Habah*. And therefore, all these promises of reward, although they will come true for the servant of Hashem, *are not given as reward* but merely as *aid and encouragement to continue and to succeed in His service*. Our place in *Olam Habah* depends solely on our ability to live in *olam hazeh* and do *mitzvos*. And if one can not dedicate himself fully to the service of Hashem because of famine, sickness, war, or any other distractions, then those troubles become the worst problem for him, because they impede his service of Hashem. The troubles that he is busy with, make the full-hearted dedication to Hashem difficult. And therefore, for the person who wants to serve

Hashem with every fiber of his being, these rewards that Hashem promises us in this world, are the most precious gifts.

And therefore, Hashem promises us that if we do the *razon Hashem*, He will provide us with the reward of long healthy lives, peaceful circumstances, and abundance of *parnasa*. And the purpose of all these benefits is to provide us with the opportunity for greater service of Him. Chazal tell us that **שכר מצוה מצוה** - “The reward for a *mitzvah* is the opportunity to do another *mitzvah*” (Avos 4:2). That’s our greatest reward in this world - *the opportunities that Hashem provides us to continue serving Him*. The prosperity and good times in this world facilitate one’s progress in his service of Hashem and in acquiring perfection, in order to be so much more worthy of the *true reward* in the World to Come.

THIS WORLD IS ONE BIG WATER COOLER

I’ll tell you a *mashal* that I’ve told you many times before, but it’s important, so I’ll repeat it again. Here you have a boss who installs a water cooler in the office for all of his employees. Do you think his intention is to reward you for the work you’re doing with cold spring water? No, you can’t see the reward, that’s somewhere in an envelope, maybe on Friday you’ll see the envelope. But the water is certainly not the reward; what he wants from the water is *better workers*. He made a calculation that everyone would be more productive if they had refreshing water to drink during the day. A refreshed worker, a person in a good mood, is a better worker. And instead of running out to the corner grocery to buy a bottle of water, in the middle of work, now the employees have more time to accomplish. And that’s what all of the good in this world is meant for. It’s the water cooler in the office, that Hashem is providing, to encourage you in your *avodas Hashem*. He’ll give a paycheck too of course, a big fat paycheck is awaiting those who are loyal and dedicated to the service of Hashem, but meanwhile, all we see is the water cooler.

And now you understand why the land of milk and honey, the land that lacks nothing, is the reward that Hashem promised the Avos for their dedication to serving Him. Eretz Yisroel is a land of the greatest opportunity because if used properly, it is the key to attaining more and more *olam haboh*. And that is the greatest gift possible in this world, a land that provides His nation

with all the physical amenities needed to grow in His service. Dovid Hamelech told us ויתן להם ארצות גוים ועמל לאומים יירשו - Hashem gave to the בני ישראל the lands of the nations, and they inherited the efforts that the nations had put in to building up Eretz Yisroel. And why? Why the gift of Eretz Yisroel? בעבור ישמרו - In order that the *Bnei Yisroel* should find a land of endless opportunities to keep His Torah and serve Him.

THEY DIDN'T LEARN RAMBAM IN SEDOM

And so we come back to *Sedom*. The Torah is not interested in telling us mere history, and yet the lessons of the destruction of *Sedom* are not only being taught to us, but they're being emphasized. Not only emphasized but used as a model, as *the* model, to warn us against materialism. However, even though the Torah tell us ונאנשי סדם רעים וחטאים להשם מאד, they were wicked and very sinful to Hashem, we still need some details to fill in the picture. What was the reason that the punishment was so severe? What was the underlying cause that earned *Sedom* such a fate?

Although the affluence of *Sedom* was well-known in the ancient world, it didn't last too long. And that's because the people of *Sedom* never learned this principle of the Rambam. They didn't understand, or didn't want to understand, the purpose of all of their success. The wealth they enjoyed, brought them to selfishness, decadence, and eventually destruction. The Sodomites practiced various forms of wicked behavior and abominations, with the purpose of discouraging any help to wayfarers and those in need, only because they lost sight of the purpose of the abundance. They didn't understand that the purpose of all their abundance was for the purpose of becoming better people.

YOUR SISTER HAD BREAD

If we look through the *kisvei hakodesh*, we're going to come across one *passuk* that stands out prominently, and it answers the question. זה היה עוון סדום אחותך. Yechezkel Hanavi says this was the sin of *Sedom*, your sister. He's saying that to the *aseres hashevotim*. He said this was the sin of *Sedom*, your sister. It means if you continue your ways, so you'll have the same fate as your sister, *Sedom*. Again, this was the sin of *Sedom*. Now let's pay attention to the next words. גאון שבעת לחם, the arrogance of being

satiated with bread. That's the reason for the destruction of Sedom. They were arrogant because they had enough to eat.

In *Eretz Canaan*, we have to know that the abundance was a source of corruption for the people. These seven nations were running wild and becoming more and more wicked. However, we're going back now to the beginning. Long before the people of Canaan had become corrupt, in one corner the corruption had already set in with full force. That was in the *gan Hashem*, in that garden. In the garden where the five cities, Sedom, Amarah, Admah, Tzvayim and Tzoar, were situated, there the corruption already had begun long before the rest of Canaan. And the reason they were the first ones where the rot set in is because *they had the most to eat*. Now that's what the Navi Yechezkel said: *זֶה הָיָה עוֹוֹן סְדוֹם אֲחוֹתְךָ*, this was the sin of *Sedom* your sister. *גֵּאוֹן שְׁבַעַת לֶחֶם*, the arrogance of being satiated with bread. The arrogance of having enough bread. Now that's the words of Yechezkel Hanavi. Hashem is speaking, and we have to listen to that. Filling yourself up on bread - even without a shmeer of cream cheese causes arrogance.

Now that's not such a simple statement, and we'll have to put some thought to it. What the Navi is telling us here is that if you see a ragged fellow in jeans walking in the streets, looking for good times, looking for trouble, you have to know he's arrogant *because he's not hungry*. The fact that he's eaten so much, that he already had breakfast and has money in his pocket for lunch, he is surfeited with food and also with *nosherei*, and he is already tired of eating and now he's looking for other things. He's looking for wicked lusts, for unnatural things to do.

A DIVORCE OF WICKEDNESS

I read a story recently. Somebody sent me a story; people send me these things. A man was married to a beautiful young wife, and she was a good cook too, but he was tired of her. He said I have nothing against you, but I'm just tired of you. That's how the story goes. And he threw her away, and he divorced her. It's one of the most wicked stories you can imagine. There's nothing immoral there, just a wicked man. A man who has just too much in this world. He says: "To come home every night just

to good wife, a nice home and a good supper. I don't like it. I want more.”

What kind of wickedness is that?! A man like that should come home to a prison. He should have to work on the rocks like the good old days in America. These type of people worked on the rock pile all day long. Oh yes, then he'd learn to enjoy life. At night he comes home to his prison cell, and he rests his aching bones, and he'd enjoy life. He appreciates a bed to rest his tired body. He is grateful for a baked potato for supper. To have a wife, a home, that would be out of the question - he would go *meshugah* with happiness. But the problem is that this man has everything, he has breakfast and supper, and he even has a wonderful wife. And he doesn't enjoy it anymore. That's a wickedness of wickedness, and that's what's happening today. That's why they're thinking of unnatural lusts, because they just have too much.

EATING UP OLAM HABOH

And that's what happened in *Sedom*. *Sedom* also did these wicked things because they had too much. Now that's a great problem, and we're going to study a little more to understand actually how deep, how profound, is this wickedness. And it's much more, much worse than we imagined, because misusing the good of this world, using the pleasures of this world as a reward instead of as encouragement means *that you're eating up your Olam Habah while still in this world*. And there is no bigger tragedy than exchanging your Olam Habah for a bowl of lentils, or for that matter, a bowl of cereal and a cup of milk.

Now we begin to understand the great crime of **גאון שבעת לחם**. They should have been the greatest servants of Hashem because He let them live in His garden. They had everything for which to be grateful, and as a result they should have become more and more pious. And yet despite the fact that they lived in a *gan Hashem*, didn't use their material benefits to be submissive to Hashem and to serve Him. And that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu decided that they have no place on this earth anymore, and that's why *Sedom* was destroyed.

ENJOY LIFE BUT WATCH YOUR STEP

I'm not saying you don't have the right to enjoy life. A Jew has a right to enjoy this world. In this place we always speak

about enjoying life - no reason why a Jew shouldn't live happily in this world. But you always must be on guard; are you taking too much from this world just for the sake of this world? Do you need such an expensive home, with furniture and drapes that cost so much money? I don't want to make judgements about anyone, but you have to think about it all the time, because it's a very dangerous mistake.

The *gemara* says: **לא נברא יין בעולם הזה** - "Why was wine created in this world?" You hear such a question?! We wouldn't even bother to ask such a question, but the *gemara* understood that there's a purpose for everything in this world - and if you're not aware of the purpose then you'll pass through life in this world misusing what you have and failing at your purpose. If you're living in this world, you'd better be sure to know how to use it. Now when we say wine, anywhere wine is mentioned, it's only a figure of speech. Wine doesn't mean merely that. Wine means any form of material happiness in this world. And so now we can rephrase the question in the *gemara*: Why was happiness in this world - we're talking physical happiness, *gashmiyus*, material fun - why was it created?

WHY HASHEM CREATED BARS

So the *gemara* tells us that wine, the pleasures of this world, have two separate purposes. And although they seem to be as wide apart as could be, we'll see now that it's merely two sides of the same coin. The first reason given that wine was created **לנחם אבליים**, to cheer up sad people. The primary purpose of good times in this world is to give encouragement to people. People call me up sometimes - I received a call yesterday, a long distance call, he's tense, upset, he's having a hard time concentrating in davening, and in learning in the *kollel*. "What should I do," he wants to know. He wanted a quicky because it costs good money to speak long distance from England on the telephone. So I said, "Go out for a long walk, and enjoy the good weather. Don't think about anything; just enjoy the world." "You have ice-cream in the house," I asked him. Yes, he has a lot of ice cream in the house he tells me. So I told him, "Sit down, eat a lot of ice cream, enjoy it to no end, and then get into your comfortable bed and get a good nights sleep." For one day forget about the poundage, because you need a lift.

And the truth is that we are all sad. All of us, we need something to cheer us up, to keep us moving forward. So Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives us the wine of *Olam Hazeh*, all kinds of wine to console us. That's the principle we're being taught in this gemara: לֹא נִבְרָא יֵין אֱלֹהִים לְנַחֵם אֲבֵלִים. The function of good times in this world is to cheer up mourners. And that's all of us! Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants to give people strength and encouragement. We want people to accomplish here in this world, and for that, life can't be morose and morbid. You need good times to be a successful *eved Hashem*. Only that some people, those who are wise, have sense enough to get along with a little sip of wine. A little bit of happiness is enough; they cheer up and get back to work, back to *avodas Hashem*. And they live a happy life that way. There are a lot of kosher ways to enjoy life; you just have to know how and when.

WE NEED ROOFERS AND FIREMEN

That's one purpose of wine in this world. And the second purpose? The *gemara* says that the second purpose of good times is לִישְׁלֵם שְׂכָר לְרֹשְׁעִים. The pleasures of this world are for the purpose of paying off the reward of the wicked in this world. You know that wicked do some good things in this world; and it's a problem. Even that wicked fellow, a *rasha*, as he drives by in his truck. He's a roofer, let's say, and he throws a stone at you as he drives by, so you think the world would be better off without him. You think how good it would be if he would crash into a telegraph pole down the block. But you're making a mistake. It would be good for him but not for you. We need Italian roofers in the world. For you it's better he should continue to put on roofs because the fact that he's around causes competition, it causes the price to go down. The Jewish roofers would make a lot of money if the Italians weren't around. We need everybody in the roofing profession. Now for him, it might be the best thing if there would be a crash up next block. There's no question for him that if he would stop existing, it's the best prescription you could give for his happiness. But not for us. Italian roofers do us good in this world.

So you see that these people, you understand that they certainly fulfill a purpose in this world. Look, he's putting on roofs on people's homes. He can sometimes be a fireman too. This

same bum who was a bully when you were in your school years, and he bothered you on the street so much that you wished he had disintegrated long ago; but the time may come when he becomes a fireman and you need him. And here comes Tony speeding through the streets with the siren screaming; Tony is coming to the rescue. He's coming to rescue you! Now, who is this fireman after all? Where did he come from? A *yeshivah*?! No! He's a bum. But now he puts on a uniform and he is now the *moshia*. He's coming to rescue you. Certainly you need him! We need the *goyim*. We need roofers and firemen and policeman. They're doing a great service for the *Am Yisroel*.

And so, there's a second purpose of wine, and that is to pay off all of the wicked. For whatever small virtues they achieved in this world, you have to pay them off too. After all the firemen, they need some reward. When a fireman is running through the streets, he's risking his life, and don't say "it's merely his job. He must do it." No. It's a fact mentioned here before more than once that when they put on a uniform of duty that awakens within them a certain sense of duty **ע"י תורת אביגדור פרשת ויקרא**. It's a fact. He sincerely wants to save you. When he takes off his uniform and he goes home to his neighborhood at night and he's full of wine and you're passing by, it could be that he'll treat you differently. But when he's wearing his uniform, it brings forth from him the better elements of mankind. He's responsible and he's even willing to risk his life for you to some extent.

TONY MALPERGI IN OLAM HABAH WITH RAV MILLER

Policemen too. I don't know how it is nowadays, but in the good old days, a policeman used to rush in with his club swinging to save somebody. Even though he knew he might get a black eye, but he tried it anyhow. There's a lot of good in policeman. I was in a police station many years ago. They asked me to come in and testify against some boys who broke into our synagogue in the old place. When I came into the hall where the police station was, the policeman, Tony Malpergi, asked me to stand on the side so those boys, the bums, shouldn't see me. They shouldn't see who their accuser is. The policeman was nice enough to lead me aside because when the door opens where the boys were sitting, they might see who was accusing them. I'll always remember him with gratitude, this Italian policeman. I remember him to this day. His

name starts with an M and ends with an I. In between I invented. A good-looking young Italian policeman. I'll never forget him. He took the trouble of leading me aside. He said the door might open up, and they might see you. A gang of boys from that neighborhood. The neighborhood was deteriorating and they were bums. He didn't want them to see me. Certainly, there's kindness in the nations! There's virtue in a lot of them. Every man has something in him. No question about that. A human being is great. And therefore what are you going to do with him? אין הקדוש ברוך מקפח שכר כל בריה - Anybody who does any good in this world will be rewarded sooner or later (Bava Kama 38b).

And that means that if I'll ever get to Olam Habah he'll be coming along with me. It's going to be a big embarrassment if Tony Malpergi comes along. Police officer Tony Malpergi comes along, and he says "Look here Rabbi. Remember what I did for you? I asked you to press charges. I was making sure to have them taken care of. I wanted that they should end up in prison. And I protected you when you walked in. I told you to stand aside so they shouldn't see you." Whatever it is, it's a big embarrassment when Tony Malpergi comes along. It will be embarrassing for the *malachei hasheres*. "Tony in Olam Habah?! It says כל ישראל יש להם חלק, so you, Miller, maybe you could come in, but what's he doing here? What did he do?"

SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO MAKE YOUR OWN VINO

So let me tell you what they're going to tell this Tony. They're going to say to him, "Look; didn't we give you good health? We gave you a wife. You had a home. You had a little bank account. You had a little car. You ate suppers. You drank wine. So what do you want? We paid you off. You want to be paid more, *forever*? There's no promise to mankind to be paid forever. Hakadosh Baruch Hu owes nobody anything. Happiness is in this world. You had health for a certain time; you were paid off already."

So we can't let this man get out of the world without getting some reward for the good he did in this world. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "I have to get busy paying him in this world. I don't want to have to deal with him in the Next World - Olam Habah is for My people, not for the Tonys and Ginos." So

Hakadosh Baruch Hu puts on every two blocks big liquor stores where you can get wine. Or a lot of fruit stores where there are baskets of grapes, and he goes and buys baskets of grapes and puts them in his basement. He knows how to make vino, and in the evenings he gets drunk, and he's sitting around the house, and he's "living" a little bit. That's his payment! Hashem is paying off Tony in this world so that He won't have to see him in the Next.

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu created wine for the purpose of giving some measure of reward for those people whom he doesn't want to reward in the world to come. After all if Tony would come to the next world, and "Look here," he says, "I put a roof on synagogues too. I put a roof on the *yeshivah*. I did this and I did that. I put out the fire when they called me in this and this *yeshivah*." So he deserves something. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu will be very much embarrassed *kaviyachol* because he doesn't want him around that place. And so He pays him off in this world. It's a pity. For him it's a pity to be paid off in this world, but that's the purpose of wine; that's the purpose of good times, roller coasters and expensive cars, and steak and a good piece of herring. Hashem is cashing in people's paychecks all the time in this world.

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu has found a way of handling that so wine was created to pay them off in this world. That's the purpose of wine. That's the purpose of happiness in this world. That's why you have cars, and that's why you have televisions, and that's why you have big pastry shops in Italian neighborhoods. You see twenty three kinds of bread in the windows. Not just one kind, twenty three kinds of bread! That's an understatement by the way. I once stopped and counted. It's fun. You never get tired of eating. Every day you can have different kinds of bread and everything else. That's what it's for. They deserve it. They're doing good things in this world. It doesn't mean they *only* do good things. Maybe they're doing more things that are not good too, could be, but they have to be paid off for the things they're doing; trucking, bus driving, policing. They're fighting in the army. That's also something, to fight in the American army, to defend our country. They've done a lot of things. Street cleaning, garbage collecting. Do you want to do that yourself?!

And therefore they deserve something so Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees to it that they get. You see fat garbage men wobbling around. A big fat man. Fat doesn't come from breathing air. Their wives are also big and fat women waddling with great big bags from the supermarkets. *Kol tuv*, all good things they eat, and that's what it's for. To pay them off in this world.

WHERE IS SEDOM TODAY?

And now we come to the big problem that *we* are facing today. Because we have it too good. We have too much to eat! And *chas v'shalom, chas v'shalom*, we should find out that we were also wobbling around like the garbage man, and taking all of our reward in this world. And that's why Hashem warns us in the beginning of our parsha: Be careful not to end up like *Sedom* ended up: the model of *Sedom* must always remain before our eyes. That's an example of people who failed in their purpose in this world. Instead of taking the gifts of Hashem and using them to improve, they made a churban. And that's why it's in *Eretz Yisroel*. Why is this most desolate place, the area of the Dead Sea, in *Eretz Yisroel*? So that the holy nation, the nation that matters most to Hashem should look at it all the time, and see what happens when people make the big mistake of how to use the *gashmiyus* of this world. Because many people are failing in their career in this world. Your purpose is not merely to use this world. You came here to use the gifts of Hashem in order achieve greater and greater perfection in *avodas Hashem*.

And many people have lost sight of why they're here, what their purpose in this world is. Even the *frummeh*, the Orthodox, are eating and eating and enjoying and enjoying, and they're losing out. They're selling out their reward in *Olam Habah* almost nothing. And that's why the story of *Sedom* is inscribed nowhere other than in our Torah. Because we are the people that matter most to Hashem, and we are the sole beneficiaries of the lesson of *Sedom*. The most important purpose of the destruction was to provide a lesson for the *Am Yisroel* forever and ever. And that is the vital importance of utilizing Hashem's gifts of life and peace and *parnasa* and family and so many other endless gifts, for the sole purpose of serving the Benefactor, and not *chas v'shalom* eating up your *zechusim* in this world.

ROSH HASHANA PREP

And now we come to Rosh Hashanah. In the coming days we will put a lot of time into asking Hashem to decree upon us health, peace, and all the comforts that we so desperately need and desire. But what do we desire it for? What are you going to use it for? We ask Hashem זכרנו לחיים... וכתבנו בספר החיים – “Hashem, please remember us for life, and write us in the Book of Life.” And for what purpose? למענך אלקים חיים – “Do it for Your sake Hashem.” Give us all that we need, not for our sake, but so that we will have all the opportunities needed to grow more perfect in our service of You.

Like a soldier who is inducted into the army, and on his first day he is given a new uniform, strong boots, a rifle and a hearty breakfast. And he thanks his commander for the wonderful gifts. But the commander tells him, “No, no. You’re misunderstanding what’s going on here. These aren’t gifts. These are simply tools for you to serve us. We’re giving you these tools so that you will have the best opportunity to be a loyal and successful soldier. And if you don’t use what we’re giving you to be a an accomplished soldier, then you’re misusing the gifts, and they don’t belong to you.”

You’re sitting down to eat supper. Your wife is not putting down a plate with some dry bread, a cup of water. You’re eating good food, and a lot of it, just like Tony the fireman, the policeman, the sanitation man. And therefore, you’d better decide on which side you’re on. It’s a big question! Are you eating up your reward in this world like *Sedom* did, like all the Tonys of this world? Are you being paid off for your *mitzvos* in this world? Or for you is it *s’char mitzvah b’hai almah leikah*, and you using the pleasures of this world to serve Hashem and you’ll take your *s’char mitzvah* in the Next World. It’s a big question, and I’ll have to leave that to individuals to resolve that puzzle.

BEING MAMLICH HASHEM

And therefore, when you stand before Hashem during these *Yomim Nora'im* asking for life – and don’t think it’s so simple; many people who asked last year are now in the cemetery. When you beg Hashem for life, and for all of your needs – peace in the home, shidduchim, parnasa, health, good children – beg

למענך השם. "I want everything that I need to serve You, Hashem." You're not merely asking for good times. And you're not just asking for what you need to survive another year - just to pay the bills and have some peace and quiet for another year. Everything you ask for is because you want the tools to serve Hashem better. And if you're asking Hashem for everything in order to serve Him better, if you mean it sincerely, then that's how you're being *mamlich* Hashem on Rosh Hashana. "Hashem, You are my King, and I want to dedicate everything that You give me for serving You."

Now, do you mean it? No, absolutely not. But say it anyhow. Say it anyhow! Hakodosh Boruch Hu, I want to use everything that I have in Your service. And don't only say these words on Rosh Hashanah. Practice up all year long. As much as you can, keep in mind that your career in this world is a preparation for the World to Come. And all the good times in this world are being given to you for one purpose only.

And when we spend our lives using the benefits of this world to serve ourselves instead of to serve Hashem, what we are doing is taking these opportunities for gaining *Olam Habah*, and using them as our compensation for our good deeds. We are exchanging our deserved reward of the Next World for the cheap thrills and pleasures of this world. And there is nothing more sad and pathetic than exchanging your eternal reward in the Next World for a bowl of lentils in this world.

And therefore, when you ask Hashem for another year of prosperity and health for the purpose of serving Him and not yourself, then you have used the lesson of *Sedom* for the purpose that Hashem intended. Hashem intended that you should keep before your eyes always that vision of the smoldering cities of *Sedom*, the fire, sulphur and salt that rained down upon the people that didn't learn the lesson of how to use the gifts of Hashem. And with that vision, and that understanding in your mind, you should call out to Hashem in truth, telling Him with sincerity that this coming year you want to use the gifts that He will provide - and what better gift is there than life itself - only to grow greater and greater in His service, by using all the details of your happiness only to facilitate your *avodas Hashem*.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ttz"l

Q:

If our fate is decided between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, why do we pray the rest of the year?

A:

And the answer is that at every moment a man can reverse the decision. Everything that Hakadosh Baruch Hu decides on Yom Kippur is decided conditionally.

For instance, a man is inscribed for life until next year. But suppose he decides that he wants to jump off the roof. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says "Go ahead and do it". Everything is on condition that you don't choose to frustrate it. If a man wants to lose what he would have gained by the decision on Yom Kippur, it is his privilege to forfeit it.

Now of course that's limited in certain ways, but in general we have to know that's the truth. All the *gezeiros* are subject to certain restrictions. Even a *gezeira* for evil *chalilah*, if a man does real *teshuva* and he cries out with all his heart, in some cases it can help. Because the *gezeira* is made conditionally, unless he does *teshuva*.

And therefore it always pays for a person to utilize the situation properly. It could be that what was decreed for him was merely conditional and his prayer will overturn it.

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