

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת לך לך

LOT FOLLOWS AVRAHAM INTO DANGEROUS TERRITORY

In *Parshas Lech L'cha* we read about the greatness of *Lot*, the nephew of Avraham Avinu. You'll remember that when Avraham was told by Hakodosh Boruch Hu to forsake his home to go to Eretz Canaan, that *Lot* was willing to undertake that long journey with him. Now, that was an exceptional thing that *Lot* did. *Lot* didn't have to go with him; he could have stayed back in Charan with his family. You know, what he did was a big sacrifice in ancient times because it entailed very great ordeals. In those days, a man had only family rights, and a stranger in a new land could be misused and abused at will. It was only the extended family, the tribe, that afforded protection. And therefore for *Lot* to become a *ger*, a stranger, in a foreign country, when he had his own extended family in Charan, was a great sacrifice. But he made this sacrifice because of his loyalty to his teacher. "Where my *rebbe* goes, that's where I'm going to go as well." *Lot* the loyal disciple wouldn't forsake his *rebbe* even under the most difficult of circumstances. It was a tremendous thing; don't think it was a small thing.

And we know that *Lot* became a great man. Contrary to what some people think, *Lot* became an exceptionally great man

under Avraham. *Lot* wasn't like some people think, a mere nobody, a *shikker*. He was a somebody – a somebody with a big S. You should know that *Lot* was chosen to be the *zeidah* of Moshiach, on the mother's side. Don't downplay the greatness of *Lot*. He listened carefully to the teachings of Avraham for many years and he could repeat all of the lectures, all his *shiurim*. Like even today in some places, in some *yeshivos*, after the Rosh *Yeshiva* finishes the *shiur*, so the outstanding disciple speaks out the whole *shiur* again to the other *talmidim*, the *iberzuger* it was called. That was *Lot*; he listened carefully and made sure to always be close to his rebbe.

And because he needed Avraham to guide him, he was *moser nefesh*, he was willing to go to the greatest extremes, to remain close to his rebbe. And it was just because of that, just because of his virtue, that he was soon to make the biggest mistake of his life. He mislead himself into thinking that *he was able to be on his own*; he began to think that he didn't need his rebbe anymore.

THE CANAANIM RUIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

So what happened? We are told the following: **ויהי ריב בין רועי מקנה אברם ובין רועי מקנה לוט** - “And there arose a dissension between the shepherds of Avram's livestock, and the shepherds of *Lot's* livestock” (Bereishis 13:7). Now what was the dissension about? The end of that *possuk* tells us: **והכנעני והפריזי אז בארץ** - “Because at that time the Canaanites were then settling in the land.” What does that mean that they were “then in the land”? What has that got to do with this dissension between the shepherds?

And the answer is that the Canaanim were settling into this land that didn't belong to them. This land of Canaan actually was the land of *bnei Shem*, the descendants of Shem. It was allotted to Shem's family, the most virtuous of Noach's children. And therefore, the Torah is telling us that at this time, when Avraham had entered Eretz Canaan, **הכנעני והפריזי אז בארץ**, the Canaanites were in the process of settling the land; they were usurping a land that didn't belong to them.

And this was a great disappointment to the children of Shem. You know Cham was *avi Canaan*, the father of the Canaanites; they were a degenerate people. And the children of Shem looked down on the Canaanites. It's like when an inferior people are moving into a neighborhood. They're ruining the neighborhood and pushing out the original superior residents whose neighborhood it really is. And so the people of Shem were terribly disappointed at what was taking place and they looked with displeasure at the usurpers, the new conquerors of the land, who were taking over - they were low, they were very depraved this people. They had wicked practices, disgusting practices of immorality and murder, and they were wicked enough to be sentenced to extinction eventually. And therefore, the children of Shem despised them, they hated them.

AVRAHAM IS MACHMIR

Now when *Lot's* shepherds saw these low tribes of Canaanites infiltrating, when they saw how these low people were taking over the land, they got together and said among themselves, "From now on we're going to disregard one of the precepts that Avraham has commanded us." Because when leading the cattle to the pasture - you know there are public pasture places like forests that belong to nobody - on the way there they would have to pass through fields that belong to local people. And Avraham didn't want the cattle to graze in other people's fields. So he had given instructions that you must muzzle every animal before setting out. So all of the cattle, whether sheep, goats, oxen or cows, all had to have muzzles put on their mouths. Now, that was some job! A muzzle was placed on each one before they passed through the fields. And when they came to their destination in the forests, the public pasture ground, the muzzles had to be removed from each one. And then, at the end of the day, when they finished grazing, the muzzles had to be replaced and they were taken home again. And finally when they came home the muzzles had to be taken off again.

It was quite a job! That's four times to be muzzling and unmuzzling! And they didn't like that extra labor. So now, when *Lot's* shepherds saw that the fields that had once belonged to the family of Shem were now being usurped by these interlopers, the

family of Canaan who had no right to the land, so *Lot's* shepherds decided that it's a waste of time to muzzle the cattle. "We'll let the cattle walk through the fields," they said. "And if they take a bite of grass on the way, no harm."

And they gave a good argument. "Look; Hakodosh Boruch Hu promised the land to Avraham. And Avraham has no heir except for *Lot*. Our master, *Lot*, is the eventual heir. So eventually it's his anyway. And right now these degenerates have no right to the fields anyhow, all these people really have no right to the land. So why should be bother with all this muzzling." So they disregarded Avraham's injunction; they felt they had a good *tainah* and they said, "Not *all* the time do we have to listen to Avraham. We also know how to think."

LOT PASKENS: GEZEL AKUM IS MUTAR

And this was the quarrel that we read about in the *pesukim*. Because Avraham's shepherds said, "This is not right. Avraham is our teacher and he gave instructions that we *must* muzzle all the cattle. It's *gezel*, it's dishonest to let the cattle graze on foreign fields while passing through." Avraham's shepherds weren't interested in the *cheshbonos*, the *teirutzim*, of *Lot's chevrah*. "The rebbi said no, and that's all." And *Lot*, the great student of Avraham, now made the the most tragic mistake of his life - he stood behind his shepherds; he supported them in their dispute with the shepherds of Avraham.

Now we have a rule, an important rule: לעולם ידור אדם במקום רבו - "A man should always dwell in the place where his teacher is" (Brachos 8a). A man should try to be as close as possible in order to seem him always, and to be with him always. Does his wife has something to say about it?! No; that's it, the Torah already laid down the law. לעולם, always! And it's even when you are older and have grown independent. You're already a גברא רבה, a great man - at least you think you are. Maybe you're married, you have children already, even grandchildren, so you think you're something. No, לעולם means always. You should be as close as possible in order that you should see your teacher always, and so that he should see you always. You always must remain under the constant watch of somebody else.

And it's not just a *middas chassidus*, it's a mitzvah of the Torah. The Torah says, וּלְדַבֵּק בּוֹ - "And to cling to Hashem" (D'varim 30:20). So the question is, how can you cling to Hakodosh Boruch Hu? How is it possible? To go up to heaven and cling to Hakodosh Boruch Hu? Are you going to climb into the aron kodesh and stay there? And the *chachomim* tell us as follows: הַדְּבֵק בַּחֲכָמִים וּבְתַלְמִידֵיהֶם - "Cling to the Sages and to their disciples" (Sifrei ibid). "It is a positive commandment to associate with *chachomim*, and to be one with them, and to remain constantly near them" (Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos: Mitzvos Asei # 6). That's the explanation of this mitzvah.

IF YOU'RE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE BORN A WOMAN...

So if you're a woman, a young woman, see to it that you marry a talmid chochom. Start saving up! And if he's not a big talmid chochom yet, make it your business to make him as big as you can. Because that's the real *dibuk talmidei chachomim*. You marry a young man, and you inspire him and push him, until he becomes a great talmid chochom, and then you'll be "clinging to Hakodosh Boruch Hu" all your life. That's *k'pshuto*. Like we read last week, וּדְבֵק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, a husband and wife, that's called the real *dibuk*. And that's the best way. And if you're married a long time already, you can still do whatever you can to inspire your husband and your children.

But if you were not fortunate enough to have been born a woman, so all you can do is make yourself into a *talmid chochom*. And you'll cling to yourself. But in any case, in order to do that, you will have to cling to *chachomim*. You must join the company of *chachomim* and stick with them. You have to stick to them - and not let go. And that's the mitzvah, וּלְדַבֵּק בּוֹ - that's how you'll cling to Hashem.

DON'T FAIL AT YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

But there's one important condition. And that is דְּבִיף לֵיהּ - "That he subjugates himself to his *rebbe*" (Brachos 8a). He has to feel humbled towards his teacher. He must get along with his teacher and he must be willing to accept his criticism. Because that's why he's living near him; so that he can learn about himself, to hear criticism and improve. But suppose he feels equal? Or

Don't throw away a *rebbe*. Sometimes I had *talmidim* of mine who because of one little word I said they went away from me! There was a man who once came to me; he always used to sit together with me and walk with me. Once he said to me, "Maybe I can make an appeal in the *shul* for a certain good cause." It was a certain good cause. I said, "Well, we make appeals for the *yeshivos* frequently, and we can't change for something else." He heard that and I never saw him again. I never saw him again! He always went walking with me in the streets, and he sat together with me. And then he heard that word, and I never saw him again. For one word?! That's called loyalty?! You have to overlook small things! When people go away because they are offended, and they stop seeing you, that's a sign of disloyalty. And disloyalty to a *rebbe* you should know is the same a single being disloyal to Hashem.

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enough of an equal that he's not **כִּיִּי לַרְבִּיָּה** anymore? Suppose he's not willing to accept the criticism and the guidance of someone else? That's already the beginning of failing in his purpose in life.

I can tell you all about it from my own experience - I've been in this business a long time. There was once a man who came here and I was *mikareiv* him. I was friendly to him - I went out of my way to be friendly to him. At his *sheva brachos* I danced up and down, up and down, for a long time. Then finally his wife came and told me that he punishes her by refusing to give her money - whenever he is cross, he doesn't give her money. For five dollars she has to come and beg him - that's his way of punishing her. So I called him! I spoke to him and he told me that the law of the Torah is that the money belongs to the husband. He's telling *me* the law of the Torah! And he became so disillusioned with me that he stopped coming. He wasn't **כִּיִּי** in the least; he heard some truth about himself that he didn't want to hear and he ran away. It's a tragedy! Not for us; for *him* it was a tragedy. It's a pity on that man because he's not headed for happiness.

MUSSAR THAT YOU WON'T HEAR ANYWHERE ELSE!

It's a great pity that people don't really want guidance. They want to be coddled, they want to be handled with silk gloves; they don't want to be

כִּיִּי, they don't want to be subjugated to someone who is going to talk the truth. Look; last year, or maybe it was two years ago, I had a group of young men who visited me for a certain reason. They came to me, someone brought them to see me. Now I knew that some of them were a little lax in morality. So I told them, I said, "The time will come when, for what you're doing, blood will come out of places in your body that you didn't imagine blood could come out of." Their eyes popped out of their heads. And they never came again.

And that's a pity for them. Because the greatest benefit of being around *chachomim* is that the *chachomim* have different eyes than you do. They see your behavior through the lens of Torah attitudes. And they're not impartial like you are. You think you're something special, you think you're a good fellow. Of course, "I know I'm not perfect," you'll say. But you're pretty close to it. That's what you're thinking! You're pretty good, you think. And therefore it's only others, people with sharp eyes and a sharp tongue, who can guide you by watching over all of your actions. And they'll criticise, and even berate you, when needed. That's what you need a rebbe for - to tell you you're wrong, and to scold you as well. And if you're not willing to bow your head in submission and listen, then you're throwing away one of the great opportunities in life.

LOT STRIKES OUT ON HIS OWN

Now I'm not saying that *Lot* wasn't כִּיִּי at all. And it could very well be that *Lot* instructed his shepherds to try to prevent the animals from grazing on strangers' lands. But to be so extreme, to muzzle every animal?! That's four times to muzzle and unmuzzle the animals. That's some job! "Why is my rebbi being so extreme?" *Lot* thought. "I don't need Avraham's criticism. What am I, a milktoast? I can make decisions on my own as well. I can figure out right from wrong."

Now Avraham saw what was going on - he saw that *Lot* didn't say a word of rebuke. And he understood that *Lot* was now no longer a loyal disciple. He saw that *Lot* was already independent and that he considered himself important enough to think for himself. *Lot* had begun to chafe under the watchful eyes

of Avraham. He mistakenly began to feel that he had grown enough and was ready to be on his own. And once that pernicious thought entered his mind, he began to perceive many of his *rebbe's* teachings and criticisms as unnecessary and extreme. He began to feel uncomfortable under the authority of Avraham. And he convinced himself that he didn't need it anymore. And by ignoring some of the restrictions that Avraham had imposed upon his own shepherds, *Lot* demonstrated his subconscious belief that Avraham's authority was irrelevant to him.

THE BIG TEST

And it was at this moment, when *Lot* displayed too much independence from his rebbe - "I don't need to listen to him all the time," said *Lot* - that's when Avraham decided that *Lot* should not remain anymore in his company. But before Avraham did anything he decided to put his nephew to a test. He put him to a test to see if he would, in the last moment, change this attitude and decide to become a loyal disciple once more: ויאמר אברם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני ובינך - "And Avram said to *Lot*: 'Let there not be any dissension between me and you.'" Now, there was no dissension yet between them, but what had occurred with the shepherds was already the symptom of a man not willing to subjugate himself, to want to hear criticism. ובין רועי ובין רועיך - "If it's already between our shepherds, if you haven't opened your mouth to tell your shepherds that *what I say is what goes*, then it's already a sign that all is not well between us."

"And I see that אנשים אחים אנחנו," said Avraham. "We are men who are brothers." "אחים" *chazal* say means "We are equals. You are just as good as I am." That was the test - he put *Lot* to the test to see what *Lot* would answer to that. Avraham said, "You don't need me anymore. I see you're a good man; you don't need me standing over your shoulder all the time." Like it states in Mishlei תן לחכם ויחכם עוד - when you give to a wise man he adds his own wisdom. He utilizes what you give him and he improves on it. "So I taught you and you outgrew my tutelage - you don't need me any further. We are now אנשים אחים, we are just as good as brothers."

LOT'S MESIRAS NEFESH

“And therefore I'm giving you the choice, הפרד נא מעלי אם השמאל ואימנה ואם הימין ואשמאילה - Wherever you decide to settle, I'll go elsewhere (ibid. 13:9). Because you're good to go, you're an *adam shaleim* now. You don't need me.” And that was the ordeal with which *Lot* was confronted. Had *Lot* in the last moments chosen correctly he would have fallen at the feet of his mentor, his great teacher Avraham and he would have said like Rabbi Tarfon said to Rabbi Akiva: עקיבא כל הפורש ממך כפורש מן החיים - “Akiva, anybody who separates from you is like separating from life itself” (Kiddushin 66b). “You're my life; I can't leave you.” *Lot* should have thrown himself down on the ground before Avraham and cried out, “Avraham my *rebbe*, I would never leave you!”

But *Lot* fell into the trap. In his mind he thought “Look, Avraham is saying that I'm his equal. That's what I suspected! I've grown enough to not need a *rebbe*.” And so he agreed - he agreed to leave Avraham. ויסע לוט מקדם - “And *Lot* journeyed away from the east” (ibid. 13:11). And our Sages say that מקדם means הסייע. עצמו מקדמונו של עולם. “He made himself travel away from the First One of the world.” (Bereishis Rabbah ibid.) *Lot* travelled away from Hakodosh Boruch Hu at that time. Now some people think that it means that *Lot* became an atheist, an *oived avodah zarah*. No, that's impossible. *Lot* didn't worship idols. *Lot* remained a great man. We know that in Sedom he was *moser nefesh* to keep the teachings he learned in Avraham's home; he put his life in danger *all the time* to invite guests into his home. It wasn't for nothing that he had spent all those years in Avraham's home.

SAYING GOODBYE TO HASHEM

But no matter how great *Lot* was, by forsaking his *rebbe*, by parting ways with the critical eye of Avraham, he had forsaken Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Because when *Lot* left his great teacher, he lost the opportunity to realize the potentialities within him. The true greatness that a man has can only be brought to the fore, his hidden perfection can only be achieved by being in the company of tzadikim and *talmidei chachomim*. And that's why when *Lot* consented to forsake his Master, the Torah hints: ויסע לוט מקדם - When *Lot* went away from the east, he forsook also the קדמונו של

עולם, he forsook Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And that was a great tragedy.

And this tragedy is repeated again and again, all the time, by *us*, by the best of *our* people. People being ruined because they're not under anybody's jurisdiction. People think, "It's good enough that I'm an Orthodox Jew." They think that's already enough. "I volunteer," he thinks. "I'm a frum person. I keep everything! You mean to say I'm going to have somebody tell me what to do? What am I a little child?!" And the answer is, yes, absolutely. I don't care how old you are. How can you make progress if you don't know what's wrong with you? If you don't have somebody to set you straight you'll be a failure. Not you'll be - you *are* a failure!

1-800-HALACHA

You have to know that we are all commanded: עשה לך רב - Make for yourself a Rav" (Avos). Now, that doesn't only mean only someone who you can call on the telephone when you put your *milchigeh* spoon into the *chulent*. No, that's not what עשה לך רב means. "Make for *yourself*," means for *you*, someone who cares enough about *you* to set *you* straight; someone who knows you and knows your faults. You need to have someone who is available to guide you, to criticize you; someone to be a thorn in your side. You must go and seek, you must look for a place, or look for people who are going to tell you what's wrong with you.

And I'm not talking about a boy of twelve years old. Him too, but I'm talking to a man even in his fifties. Even if you're a scholar in your own right. Boys and girls, men and women, *everyone* must have somebody standing over them. Because there's no end to the amount of information that you require to walk successfully on the *derech Hashem*, on the path that leads to Hashem in the Next World. And if you don't have anybody telling you anything wrong about yourself, that's a big problem. Because what that means is that you think you're OK, you think that you are walking on the *derech Hashem*, but really you're headed in the opposite direction.

IT'S A VERY DARK WORLD

A person walks in blindness all his life. Actually his eyes are wide open when it comes to the faults of others. Oh yes, he's eagle-eyed when it comes to others. But to see himself?! Never; not a chance. And the truth is, that you're sitting here and thinking, "It's true, it's true, but not me. I criticize myself, and I know my own faults." Many people think that they recognize their flaws. *Ah nechtigeh tug!* You don't recognize anything! You don't begin to know how many faults you have!

We are living in a world of darkness. Dovid Hamelech said, תשת חשך ויהי לילה - "You Hashem have set down darkness, and it becomes night" (Tehillim 104:20). And Chazal tell us the following: זה העולם הזה הדומה ללילה - "This *possuk* is speaking of this world, which is similar to the heavy darkness of night" (Bava Metziah 83b). Even when the sun is shining outside, we're walking around in *a darkness of the mind*. We're blind to the truths of life. And only if someone is teaching you, guiding you, can you make your way through the darkness without falling down. You have to have someone to tell you what's doing, to give you some kind of instruction. How else will you know the truth?

SADDUCEE SHECHITA: CHOP THE TAIL OFF

And that's one of the great reasons that the תורה שבעל פה is an integral part of Judaism. You know that most of the Torah is *not* written down. A small part, an important part, is written down; but if we would try to live only with the written Torah, we wouldn't have the faintest idea how to execute the Torah, how to carry it out.

You don't know how to slaughter a *beheima* from the Chumash. The *possuk* says וזבחת כאשר צויתך - "Slaughter the animal like I commanded you" (Devarim 12:21). So here's a man and he sharpens his knife, he's all ready to shecht. But he has no idea what to do; how, when, where. Maybe you slaughter from the tail? That's the gemaras question! We don't find the slightest hint in the תורה שנכתב. We need the Oral Law to teach us. And here's another example. The Torah says יום תרועה יהיה לכם - "A day of blowing it should be for you" (Bamidbar 29:1). That's all it says about Rosh Hashanah! Go keep Rosh Hashanah with these words,

“It's a day of blowing.” Blow what, how? We don't get any hints. The answers are only in the תורה שבעל פה.

DOING HAGBAH ON A SET OF SHAS

So the question is why did Hakodosh Boruch Hu give the Torah in such a way that we can't understand it from the written Torah alone? Now, one answer is that *hagbah* would be very hard! To lift up a sefer torah that has in it the whole Shas and all the *mefarshim*, that would be very heavy. You'd need a crane every time to do *hagbah*. But that's not such a good answer - so we wouldn't do *hagbah*, not so terrible.

And the answer is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wanted you to have to go to a live teacher - to understand the Torah, you would have go and sit in front of an *actual human being*. Unfortunately they finally had to give permission to write down the תורה שבעל פה. So today people learn from dead teachers. They learn from the gemara, from Rav Ashi. He's in the *Olam Ha'emes* - he's not here. You learn from Rashi! Rashi passed on already. His words are there, but Rashi himself is not there to tell you, “Don't put your finger in your nose while you're learning!” That's what a live teacher would say. A *talmid* coughs and doesn't cover his mouth so the *rebbe* tells him, “Don't cough in people's faces. You have to cover up when you cough.”

THE MAHARSHA WON'T TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR BAD BREATH

Here's a man, he's studying a Tosfos. So while he's thinking, he puts his hand in his bosom, and he picks under his arm, his armpit. Tosfos doesn't answer back and tell him, “Feh!” But a *rebbe* will say it. A *good rebbi* will say it; like we find in the *gemara* (Sanhedrin 11a) Rebbi smelled that one of the *talmidim* had eaten garlic. So he said, “Someone here has garlic breath and I won't continue.” Ahh, *that's a rebbi!* But Tosfos can't tell you that. And even if you turn to the back of the *gemara*, to the Maharsha, he says a lot, a lot of important information, but he wouldn't mention anything about your breath. And that's the real reason why the Torah wasn't given in writing; so you should have to come to a living teacher. And while you're learning Torah from a human being, you'll also learn *how to be a human being*, and how to *practice* the Torah.

And that brings us to our subject for tonight. Because the lesson we're learning now is the great benefit of having a mean rabbi, a tough *talmid chochom* who is willing to stand over you, and supervise, and criticize, and scold. Someone who will tell you *the truth*; to be a thorn in your side and tell you what he thinks. And even more important, we're learning how important it is to not follow the path that *Lot* took of thinking that you can make it on your own. And instead, to stick tight to a rebbi - לדבקה בו - and to not forsake the קדמונו של עולם by forsaking the criticism of a rebbe.

RABBIS TODAY ARE JUST TOO NICE

Now, the truth is that I don't know where you'll find a mean rabbi today. You'll have to search very far, because the rabbis today are too nice. They're kind and very polite, and they won't tell you what they're really thinking about you. And that's because they want to keep you around. There's too much competition and you can always run to the other rabbi down the block if the current one even looks at you the wrong way. *Chas v'shalom*, he should criticize you! *Chas v'shalom*!

But I have to tell you - if you can find a mean rabbi, a tough fellow who will smooth out your rough edges, then he's worth his weight in gold! If you can find someone who's willing to tell you your flaws, then you're a lucky man. So let's "light our lantern" and go out into the world and try to find a mean rabbi. Because if you look, if you want it, you could find the right person! And it would be a salvation for you. The problem is you're not looking, you're not really interested in having somebody breathe down your back. And if you even would suspect that somebody is being mean to you, he would never see you again.

USING A SNAKE FOR YOUR BELT!

Now let's imagine that someone would leave this lecture tonight and decide that he wants to help himself, that it's time to begin making headway in life, time to make something of himself. So the *gemara* says, suppose you find a mean rabbi, a תלמיד חכם נוקם ונוטר כנחש; he's as mean as a snake. Imagine such a thing. He's נוקם, he takes revenge, and he's נוטר, he bears a grudge, כנחש, like

a snake. You know, a snake in his little brain, he remembers things. He doesn't forget what he sees. And he bites.

So here you have a *talmid chacham* who bears a grudge, and he bites like a snake. Who would have any business with him?! So the *gemara* says (Shabbos 63a) תלמיד חכם נוקם ונוטר כנחש, if you'll meet a *talmid chacham*, a rabbi, who is as mean as a snake, then חגריהו על מתניך, make a belt of him around your loins. You know, a snake can be used as a belt! It's uncomfortable, but at least it will keep your pants from falling down. If you need a belt, it comes in quite handy. So take this snake and gird him around your loins. It's uncomfortable but it serves a purpose.

DO YOU THINK ONLY A PLUMBER NEEDS SUPERVISION?

Because the only way to achieve anything in this world is with guidance, with someone who will tell you that you do this and that wrong, and that you're mistaken about this and that. You have to hear, "No, no and no." Look, in every field of life you must have instruction, that everyone understands. To be a doctor or a plumber or an accountant, that you need guidance for, that your *maskim* to. To know the best place to buy a dress, or how to bake a chocolate cake, that you understand requires someone's advice. But when it comes to the most important field of life, Torah living, for that you don't need any supervision?! You think that to live a successful Torah life, you don't need anybody to counsel you, to scold you?! You think that all is well, that pretty much you're a really decent fellow. That's what everyone thinks. And that's the surest path to living a long life of nothing at all.

And that's why the happiness of life, the success of life, is if you would find a *talmid chochom* who is נוקם ונוטר כנחש. And even though he's spiny, he has thorns all over him, חגריהו על מתניך, tie him around your loins - keep him as close as you can - because that's going to be your success in life.

WE WANT THE CANDYMAN AS OUR RABBI

The problem is that we live only with taste. We don't live with brains; we live with taste. So when we "taste somebody" and he tastes sweet, that's the one we want! "That's my *rebbe!*" But if he tastes bitter, nothing doing! Now suppose that was your criteria

for medicines. Let's say you judged a medicine *by its taste*. So all day long you'd be eating candy drops. You wouldn't take medicines and you'd be as sick as I don't know what. And that's why so many people are sick today, spiritually sick. Because they're not willing to swallow the bitter pill of a rebbi who is like a *nachash*. And so, if somebody doesn't cause pleasurable sensations, he doesn't "taste so good," that should be disregarded because the only purpose that we're here for is to improve. It doesn't pay to find a *rebbe* who makes you *feel* good. You should be looking for a man who *makes* you good.

But the great tragedy of life is that people just want to be told about how good they are. They don't think they need to be helped much. And that's because we live among the gentiles and so in many ways we think like gentiles. We're merely living for three meals a day like our gentile neighbors and wasting our lives away. We're not accustomed to the important principle of *shleimus*, of seeking perfection, perfection of character, of Torah attitudes, and all good things. And therefore we go around shopping for a kind-hearted rabbi. Now don't come to me either; I'm also a kind-hearted rabbi. It's only here that I talk like this. You have to find somebody who is going to prepare you for the Next World, no matter how mean he is, and no matter how much it hurts.

THE SMARTPHONE POURS SEWER WATER INTO YOUR HEAD

So here's a man who goes to a big synagogue someplace out in Queens where five hundred people come Shabbos morning. Why do they come? Because the man who speaks is not thorny; he's a pleasant kind of personality, he's sweet tasting and affable, no thorns on him. Everything is falsehood and flattery. He'll never tell you that you must get rid of your television set, and your other machines, through which a torrent of bilge water pours into your home and head. He won't tell you that you might as well forget about having a Jewish home if you keep such things in your home. It's just as possible to have a Jewish home with that machine in it, as having a clean home with a pipe from your toilet bowl leading directly into your dining room. Every time you flush, the contents empty out on your dining room floor. And that's an understatement! And this rabbi in Queens, he won't tell

you the truth, that besides for not having a Jewish home, you might as well forget about Olam Habah as well! Nobody ever told you that did they they? If you have a television set, or any such machine in your house, then אין לו חלק לעולם הבא. And if you came here tonight just to hear that, it was well worth your time. I'm doing my little part; I just gave a lot of people sitting here a little thorn prick!

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE!

Now, if you come to my synagogue you'll hear it often enough. I told you, I'm a kind-hearted fellow but like every *shul*, we also have a membership drive. Only that the way it works by us is that once in a while, I say what I really think, and I *drive the members* out of our *shul*!

And that's what you need. What you really need is somebody who is thorny to prick you. If you go only to places where there are smooth people, rabbis who don't have thorns on them, so you'll live your whole life thinking that all is well with you, and you won't realize the truth until it's too late.

LET YOUR RABBI GIVE YOU AN INJECTION

So you'll tell me, why does he have to be mean? Why does he have to be נוקם ונוטר כנחש? Shouldn't the *talmid chochom* be a sweeter fellow? And the answer is that he could be the nicest fellow in the world; a beautiful sweet man. But he has to be mean to you. And that means that as far as you're concerned he's a tough fellow. Someone with eagle eyes who's not afraid to open his mouth to you. He'll tell you what's wrong with you. He'll scold you. "Why are you coming late to *shul* so often?! Where are you at night that you're never in the *beis knesses*? You think they need you at every *chasuna*?! Nobody needs you there." He won't be afraid to tell you, to hurt you. He's not so nice that he'll hold back. He's strong enough to open his mouth and criticize you.

And what you have to do is wrap that man around yourself like a belt. Which means that when a criticism is offered by the *talmid chochom*, the people are expected not only to tolerate it, not only to be generous and forgive the *talmid chochom*. No, that's a very wrong attitude. Because when a person goes to a

physician, and the physician says, "Roll up your sleeve," and he prepares the hypodermic to make some injection, so does the patient merely smile kindly to the physician? Does he just give a generous smile, but then refuse to roll up his sleeve? No! If he wants to get better, he rolls up his sleeve and he suffers through it. And therefore someone who wants to be healed while he's still in this world, he wants to make something of himself, so he doesn't just tolerate his *rebbe*; but he allows the *rebbe* to make the injection - and he wants to get the full benefit of it. And he's happy about it, he relishes it.

THE CURTAINS OR THE SYNAGOGUE?

You know, when a man moves today, usually the last thought is about which synagogue he's going to attend. He and his wife confer about what neighborhood and what type of house, even what color curtains; and after they're settled, that's when they go shopping for a synagogue. That's the last thing on the agenda! The very last worry in life is a man's spiritual concern! That means we're living life like a gentile lives his life! We're just plodding our way through life without realizing that we're here only to make progress! Life has settled down into a meaningless stereotype of what the gentiles do. What are you going to do if the *talmid chochom* you moved next to is sweet and won't tell you a thing? It's a tragedy!

The first thing, the most important thing on the agenda is where can I find a rabbi who will tell me off, someone who will finally tell me the truth? And once you find that *talmid chochom* who is peeking into your life all the time, a *talmid chochom* who bites and holds a grudge like a snake, grab onto him and don't let go. Wrap him around your loins like a belt. And he'll save you from much worse things than just your pants falling down.

IS THE RABBI TALKING TO ME?

Here's a man who davens *vasikin* every morning. And even on Shabbos, he wakes up early to daven with the sunrise. It's a beautiful thing; he's a *tzadik*. But just to come together for a minyan, and then daven and go home?! What about finding a place where there is a *rav* who will speak some *יראת שמים*, some

words of fear of Hashem?! Hearing words of *mussar* is a valuable opportunity. And it's more important than *vasikin*.

And even that is not enough. It's not enough to hear some *diorei mussar* from the Rav once a week. If he's not talking to you, *if you don't understand that he's telling you off*, then what good is it?! You know, a man once approached me, and he says, "Rabbi, I want you to criticize me. Tell me what's wrong with me." And he said it with such a happy smile that I saw already that he had discharged his obligation! He did his duty of asking and now he was finished; he was ready to close his ears from now on. He had read someplace that it's a good thing to go and ask for criticism, and now he did it, he turned around, and it's all over.

Really, he didn't want to hear anything. You know how I know that? *Because I had been speaking to him for weeks and weeks publicly right here*. I had spoken from the bima to him for weeks and weeks. It was with him in mind that I spoke. But this man didn't dream that it was him. Because he wasn't looking for it; he thought maybe I meant his neighbor, or the man who sits over there, or his wife. Other people, yes! But not him. You have to be listening to people and realize that it's *you* that they're talking about!

PICK UP AS MANY DIAMONDS AS YOU CAN

And the truth is that criticism from *anybody* is a gift. If someone happens to hurl a diamond at you, and it hurts - it pokes you - you're not going to be angry at him; you'll grab it and pocket it. And so, if it happens that somebody will give you some criticism that you understand is sensible, you have to seize it like a diamond. Because you won't get many such diamonds in your life. All you'll get is perfumed spitballs; flattery and *sh'karim*, and you'll never discover the truth. You'll walk in darkness all your life. Once for a moment the heavens opened up and there was a flash of lightning - your wife said something to you - and you saw a little spark of truth. So you'd better treasure that moment. Not like people think today, that if someone criticizes you then he's already your enemy. No! He's your best friend. That's the one to love and listen to, because that's the person who's going to bring you to *Olam Habah*.

So if you come home and your wife criticizes you because of something you did, you didn't behave properly, don't huff and puff and make excuses, because she's your best friend. And if your husband criticizes you because of something wrong that you did, that's your friend. If a father slaps a child, that father is a real friend. Because you'd have to search far and wide to find somebody who's interested enough in you to criticize you. It's a rare diamond to find such a person, so you have to treasure it.

GET YOURSELF A PERSONAL TRAINER

And so, if you have any mettle to you, if you're a real man, you'll find someone, you'll appoint someone to look over your shoulder. You need someone who is going to watch over your behavior constantly. Someone who is going to watch you and call you over. So you'll say, "But I'm an adult already. I'm a family man, a successful person. Am I going to have someone looking over my shoulder all the time?!" So we tell him "Yes, if you want to make something out of yourself, then you'll need somebody looking over your shoulder all the time."

I've dealt with many people over the years. And in my whole career, only one time did the following occur. A yeshiva man in a certain institution where I was employed approached me in earnest and said to me, "I would like you to please point out to me anything that I do wrong. Any flaw that you see in me, let me know." And I could tell, he was serious. I was floored. I almost fainted. In all my years, of all the people I've dealt with, there was only one person! *That's* a man who wants to grow great. *That's* a man who knows that this world is a פרוזודור לפני העולם הבא, merely a hallway before the Next World.

THE GREAT ORPHAN CRISIS

Now this whole concept of having somebody over you, you have to know is falling on deaf ears. Like I told you in the beginning of the hour, the concept is so foreign to our minds that it doesn't even register. And it's such a tragedy. It's one of the major problems of living a successful Jewish life today. Because everybody is like an orphan. I look around and I see "orphans" everywhere. Imagine a young couple moves into Flatbush. You see them walking in the street together, window shopping,

whatever; a young Orthodox couple. Where do they belong? Which *kehillah* are they part of? They don't belong anyplace. They're "orphans." Sometimes they go to this synagogue, sometimes to this synagogue. But nobody has any jurisdiction over them. How can people live successfully if there's nobody to tell them what to do?! Nobody ever told them that they're wrong, nobody ever said "no" to them, and therefore they'll walk through this life in darkness, thinking that all is well; they're good, they're frum. What could be wrong already?

Here's a woman who calls me up on the telephone. A lady from Boro Park who wants me to speak with her husband. But I had no influence over him so I asked, "Where does he daven?" She says, "He davens in fifteen places." He's davening in different places during the week. Then Friday night in one place, Shabbos morning in another place. He hasn't even said "Good Shabbos" to the Rav ever; and even if he did, he doesn't *know* the Rav, and more importantly, the Rav doesn't *know* him. "What about his old Rosh Yeshiva," I asked. He once went to yeshiva, didn't he? No, he has no contact with him. No contact with a rebbi?! No rebbi, no Rav, no connection to the Rosh Yeshiva. Of course he's out of control. There's no hope.

VISITING THE DEAD REBBI

A woman tells me, "Yes, my husband has a *rebbe*." "Where is his *rebbe*?" "Oh, he's in Eretz Yisroel." A *rebbe* in Eretz Yisroel?! A *meshugas*. Another woman calls me on the telephone and tells me, "My husband has a *rebbe*." But the *rebbe* has been dead for a hundred and fifty years already! A dead Rebbe? Of course her husband is satisfied with a dead *rebbe*. A dead *rebbe* will never tell him he's wrong. Ok; Very good, you go to his grave once in a while in Russia, very good. But he won't be able to point out your faults and guide you to be a better person. He won't come back from the dead to intervene, to speak to you when you're causing trouble. You need a live *rebbe*, a *rebbe* of flesh and blood, a *rebbe* who has eyes, who will call you out, and put you on the carpet. Somebody who you're afraid of. A husband has to be afraid of someone who will tell him that he's wrong. That's what restrains him from doing certain things.

It makes no difference whether it's Boro Park or any part of the world. The people who don't have someone who is authorized to give them guidance with firm words are the people that remain nothing. You say, what do you mean nothing?! Boro Park Jews are nothing?! The answer is they are *less than nothing*. Because whatever they are, they are less than they were before. They're deteriorating. From week to week they're becoming worse. Unless there's somebody over you to point out to you that you're doing this wrong and that wrong, then there's only one alternative; there's no question that you're becoming worse.

A 'TZENTER' WILL NEVER BE TOLD THE TRUTH

And that's what Shlomo explains in *Mishlei*: לֹא יֵאָהֵב לֵץ אֶל חֲכָמִים הוֹכֵחַ לוֹ, the scoffer does not want anyone to criticize him. לֹא יֵלֵךְ, that's why he doesn't go to the wise man. He doesn't go to listen to the wise men because he's afraid they'll tell him something he doesn't want to hear. So where does he go? He goes to the big shul where he's not noticed. Or to the little *shteibel* where the *rebbeh* doesn't open his mouth because he needs a minyan. So he hears what he wants to hear, which is nothing at all. Zero. That's exactly what he wants to hear, and that's what he becomes. A big fat zero.

And the results prove this to us. You see what happens; look around. That's why practically all the Jews in America are failures as Jews. Whether they're Boro Park Jews or Flatbush Jews, they're failures. I'm talking about the Orthodox! They're all failures because they have nobody to tell them what to do. Nobody ever tells them that they're failures. And if they do have rabbis, they're the kind, or they're trained to be the kind that don't tell anybody what to do. I don't know what they're telling them, but they're definitely *not* telling them what they have to hear.

STAY IN YESHIVA UNTIL YOU'RE THIRTY ONE!

Baruch Hashem, I grew up in the *yeshivah*. And I didn't leave until I was thirty-one years old. Up till thirty-one I had somebody over me all the time. All the time, every day. The only trouble is I left too early. That's why I didn't turn out, I didn't amount to much. But if I had an mean friend looking over my

shoulder, or if my *rebbe* was still here, things would have been different.

Now what I'm telling you now is our life! It's so serious that it's a question of our life. Who knows what's going to happen in the years to come? If we would be able to listen now to somebody, it could save us untold misery, untold unhappiness. There are so many great issues of life, so many Torah ideals that must be developed, and how can you take a step forward without a teacher?! I think it's so crucial, it's so vital, it should have been the first in the whole series of these talks. I know these words will fall flat but I'm saying it in spite of that. Because no matter how many people will disregard it, maybe sometimes there is one, even one person, and that one is good enough.

WE MUST LEARN FROM LOT'S MISTAKE

Now those people who listen to the tapes - if you have nothing better - so that's my humble contribution. Listen to them again. And again and again. Let them sink in, let the criticisms permeate your mind, and they'll become part of your way of thinking. Now, if you find someone better, so go there. But whoever it is, you have to find *somebody*. Somebody who will stand by you and help you achieve the *shleimus* that Hakodosh Boruch Hu brought you into this world for.

And that's what we are expected to learn from the mistake of *Lot*. He was a great man, but he gave up the benefit of having a *mashgiach* watching over him. And this means that he gave up the great opportunity of becoming better and better. All of us have faults; all of us have rough edges, flaws and imperfections that must be dealt with. And the only opportunity that you will have to work on them, is while you are still breathing in this world. And so, Avraham, the quintessential servant of Hashem, went on to his destiny, to reach greater and greater heights, and to become the progenitor of the Chosen People. And *Lot*, by forsaking the sharp eyes and supervision of Avraham, went on to his destiny. He spiraled downwards and went on to lose his family in Sedom, and the remnants that remained are the two forbidden nations, the two despised nations of Amon and Moav. *Lot* forever remained in the background of history, acting as scenery for the

main actors on the world stage, the Am Yisroel. And so too, anyone who follows the example of *Lot*, and avoids the great achievement afforded by supervision and criticism in this world, will forever suffer the consequences by being relegated to acting as mere scenery to the main actors on the eternal stage in the Next World.

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מנוחה חיה בת דליה טובה

In honor of my wife, **Temima**.

May we continue growing together,
guided by the light of Rav Miller Z"L

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אהובה בת מרים

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כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו את דרך השם

May you see much *nachas* from him and all the others!

Amichai, Simcha, Pinchas, Duvid, Moishe, Samuel

FREE!

TAKE ME
HOME!

תורת אביגדור
"שאל אביד ויגד זקניך ויאמרו לך"



Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Does the Rav think that it's a good idea to try to *daven* at a *minyan* that has *Birchas Kohanim* every day?

A:

That depends on where you come from and who you are.

I want to make a remark, however. A remark about something else. There are *tzadikim* who daven *Vasikin* – very early. Now it's excellent but I must make one remark. On Shabbos they also *daven Vasikin* – and they miss the opportunity to hear a little bit of *yiras shamayim* from somebody who speaks. They come together for a *minyan*, they *daven* fast and they go home. Instead of davening in a place where there is a Rav and sometimes he'll speak a few words of *divrei mussar*. It's a valuable opportunity. And it's more important than *Vasikin*.

"*Asei li'cha Rav*," means: Always be in a place where there is a Rav. Somebody who will tell you something. Don't think that you know everything. There's no end to the amount of information that we require to know the *derech Hashem*. But the people who go early Shabbos morning to *Vasikin* – they're so proud and happy when they come out early. And they come out without any kind of lesson. They're not any better than they were last week. Nobody is telling them anything wrong about themselves and that's a problem.

A person walks in blindness all his life. Do you know how many faults people have?! Somebody has to criticize you. Your wife is not enough. You need some kind of instruction. How else will you know the truth? We are living in a world of darkness. "*Hi'nei choshech yi'chaseh aretz*." The world is covered with darkness. We are walking in darkness and we're blind to the truths. Only if someone is teaching you can you see through the darkness. You have to have someone to tell you.

There's nobody to tell you at *Vasikin*. *Vasikin*- they probably think it's the very best thing. No, I don't think it's the very best thing. TAPE #E-231

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