

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Bamidbar The Chopp Holdings Edition

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With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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Part I. Reward for Regret

COMPLAINING ABOUT MITZVOS

On the day that Moshe Rabeinu spoke to the *Am Yisroel* and commanded them to bring the first *korban pesach* in the *midbar*, there was a small group of people who were left out of this mitzvah. וַיְהִי אֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ טְמֵאִים לְנֶפֶשׁ אָדָם - "And there were men who had become contaminated by a human corpse, וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת, וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת - and they couldn't bring the *korban pesach* on that day along with the rest of the *Am Yisroel*" (B'ha'aloscha 9:6).

So what did these people do? They sighed and said, "OK, we'll do it next year"? No! That's not what they did. They came to Moshe Rabeinu and they complained: לָמָּה נִגְרַע לְבַלְתִּי הַקָּרֵב... בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - "Why should we be left out from bringing the *korban pesach* just like the rest of the people?"

Now, that's a strange question to ask Moshe Rabeinu. Hashem had established the rules for bringing the *korban pesach* and included in the myriad of laws was that a *tamei* can't take part in this mitzvah. They had done nothing wrong and were blameless! They should have been satisfied. *Oness Rachmana patri*

- "The Torah absolves you from all blame in unavoidable circumstances" (Bava Kama 28b). The same One who said they should do the *mitzvah* of *korban pesach* said that this year they wouldn't have to do it. So why were they so worried that they couldn't participate?

THE REWARD OF THE REGRETTERS

But first, another question. Why didn't Hashem teach the law of *pesach sheini* to Moshe Rabeinu immediately when He taught all the laws of Pesach? Why is this *mitzvah* given in response to an incident?

And the answer is that this whole episode was contrived by Hashem to teach us the great lesson of *לָמָּה נִגְרַע*; of "Why should we miss out?". Hashem intentionally omitted any mention of the Pesach Sheini in order to teach us how we should approach the missed opportunity to do a *mitzvah* - even when it's not our fault. Because it's not sufficient to be absolved - the loss of serving Hashem should in itself cause an intense regret in the minds of *ovdei Hashem*.

And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave *Pesach Sheini* as compensation for those who desired to do more than they were capable of: "If you're regretting it so much," says Hashem, "then I'm going to give you another chance, you'll be able to fulfill the *korban pesach* thirty days later." And the eternal lesson of this episode is that even where you're blameless, when nothing could be held against you at all, nevertheless to miss out on a *mitzvah* is a sadness; it's something that deserves much regret. *לָמָּה נִגְרַע* - "Why should we be left out?"

A NEW KIND OF LIFE

Now to better understand the lesson of *לָמָּה נִגְרַע*, of the achievement that one can attain by means of regret, we'll first quote from the Chovos Halevavos who teaches us an important lesson, a very great lesson that opens up new doors, and makes a new kind of life for us, if we'll learn properly what he's saying.

The Chovos Halevavos (Cheshbon Hanefesh 2) says as follows: *מֵה שֶׁלֹּא יוּכַל לְהַשִּׁיגוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה* - "Whatever you're not able to reach in actual practice" - you won't be able to attain everything in this world; not everything you want are you going to

accomplish. Some things are too exalted for you, too high for you to reach. You can't finish all of Shas right now. You can't build yeshivos and hospitals for frum Jews. You can't even spend your evenings visiting the sick. Even more difficult - you'd like the Beis Hamikdash; you'd like to bring a *korban* in the Beis Hamikdash. Wouldn't you like to bring a *korban shelamim* or a *korban pesach*? But you can't - there's no way for you to do that. You can't attain everything in this world no matter how good your heart is.

But the Chovos Halevavos says that you can - *everything* is possible. Now, pay attention to his words: **מִה שְׁלֵא יוּכַל לְהַשִּׁיגוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה** - whatever you're not able to reach in actual deeds, **יִשְׁגְּהוּ בִּידְעָה** - he should attain it by knowing about it, **וְיִתְאַוְוֶה**, and by desiring it. You hear that? Most people don't even know what there is to desire. So the first thing is to learn what there is to long for. **יִשְׁגְּהוּ בִּידְעָה** - You learn about those deeds as much as possible, to think about them and understand them. And once you do that, **וְיִתְאַוְוֶה** - you can desire it.

And he's not saying that you should just desire it for nothing. He's saying that **יִשְׁגְּהוּ** - you will reach it, you will actually attain it by desiring it. As long as you regret missing the opportunity to do a *mitzva* - if you're actually disappointed that you can't attain it, **יִשְׁגְּהוּ** - it's the same merit as if you did it.

HOW TO LEARN PESACHIM THE CHOVOS HALEVAVOS WAY

So therefore, let's say you learned *Mesichta Pesachim* in the yeshiva. Most *yeshivos* skip *Perek Tamid Nishchat*, about *hilchos korban pesach*. But let's say you're older, or you learned up till *Tamid Nishchat* with the yeshiva and now, on your own, you're going to learn the *perakim* of the *korban pesach*. And as you're reviewing the gemara - you're saying over the Rashi and the Tosofos - and you start thinking, "Ah, if I could practice this for real; if I could bring the *korban pesach*; how happy I would be." Now, there's no *mikdash* today and we're all *t'mei meis* - you're not going to bring any *korban* right now, not on *pesach rishon* and not on *pesach sheini* either. But you're *learning* all about it, and you're taking it a step further - you begin to *long* for the great institution of *korbanos*.

The fact that the *korbanos* take up such a large part of the Torah is a demonstration of how greatly Hakodosh Boruch Hu values this form of service. And yet, today we don't have it - it's lost to us. But it doesn't have to be lost. We can still use the opportunity of the *korbanos* to gain some form of greatness. And how is that? We have to *long* for *korbanos*; don't say *baruch she'patrani* and forget about it. Instead you say "*lama nigora*", and you *yearn* for it.

THE VALUE OF A GOOD KRECHTZ

I remember when I was in the Slabodka yeshiva, there was an old *mashgiach*, R' Hirsch Ber z"l, who used to daven at the *amud* on *yomtiv*. And when he came to the words in *mussaf*, אֵין אֲנַחְנוּ יְכוּלִים - "We can't go up to the *mikdash* and bring *korbanos* today," he said it like this: "Oy! Oy! אֵין אֲנַחְנוּ יְכוּלִים." He *krechted* when he said these words: "We can't do it anymore - *ay yah yay*." And I learned a lesson then - that you have to *krechtz*! אֵין אֲנַחְנוּ יְכוּלִים - "*Oy vey*; We're not able!" It's very important to *krechtz*, to be sorry that you can't do something good, because that means you're actually feeling regret - you wish you could do it.

And that's why Hakodosh Boruch Hu teaches us the great principle of *lama nigora* - by knowing about it and yearning for it, it's going to be considered as if you did it. You hear that?! That's the great and eternal lesson of Pesach Sheini - that even when a person is absolved from an obligation to perform a mitzvah, he should desire the opportunity to be obligated - and the yearning itself is an achievement.

THE YOM TEFILAH FOR REBBI

In *Masichta Kesubos* (103b) the *gemara* tells a little story as follows. When Rabbeinu Hakadosh, Rabbi, was lying on his deathbed, so everyone who could, came and stood in the courtyard of his home to daven for him. Those who could get in, went in, but not everybody could get inside; so there were throngs of people standing outside. The street was jammed with people. Of course, they were all weeping and praying. Thousands and thousands of people, all day long, were asking Hakodosh Boruch Hu, "Save our Nasi; save Rabeinu Hakodosh."

But finally, Rebbi passed away. And when the bad news made its way to the crowd outside a roar of anguish arose from the whole *klal*. Everybody was crying because Rebbe had left this world. And at that time, a *bas kol* - a prophetic voice - came out from the heavens and said, "Everybody that was present at the *ashkavta d'Rebbi*, at the passing of Rebbe, is *m'zuman l'chayei ha'olam Haba* - that means that when the time comes, when they die, they're guaranteed to be welcomed into *Olam Haba*. That's how great was the *zchus* of trying to save Rebbi's life. They were demonstrating with all their heart that they wanted Rebbi to continue to lead them, and just for their good intentions, because they *attempted* to save Rebbi's life, they would get *Olam Haba*.

THE LAUNDRYMAN GOES LOST

There was one man however, a laundry man, who wasn't there. In those days the laundry man was a very poor, plain man, many times an *am ha'aretz*. And this man, he used to come every day to the *mesivta* to listen to Rebbi. He couldn't sit down in the *beis medrash*, but he stood in the back near the door and he listened in to the Torah discussions as much as he could. But this one day he couldn't come; something came up and he wasn't present when Rebbi passed away.

Now, when this laundryman heard about the *bas kol*, the prophetic words that guaranteed that all present were *mezumen l'chayei olam haba*, he became *meshuge* with regret. He became crazy with grief that he had missed the opportunity to take part in that unique *kiddush Hashem* - that great outpouring of *tefilah* to Hashem on behalf of a *tzadik*. And in his grief he ran up to the roof and he jumped off - maybe he fell off, I can't tell you exactly what happened, but he died. And the *gemara* says that as soon as that happened a *bas kol* came forth again and said, אַף הָהוּא בּוֹבֵם מְזֻמָּן לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא - "This laundryman also will be welcomed into *Olam Haba*."

REGRET IS GREAT

Now this laundryman certainly didn't contribute anything to that tremendous day of *tefilah* - he wasn't even there. So why should he get the same reward as those who were there? Just

because he regretted not being there, does that mean anything? And the answer is yes. Because the *tza'ar* that he wasn't able to come, the sincere regret at having missed out on the opportunity to participate in such an event, is as if he had been there. He wanted to be there; he was in pain: לָמָּה נִגְרַע - "Why did I miss out on that?! I wanted to be there too!" He regretted, he had *charata* and *tza'ar*, and just for that, he too was *mezuman l'chayei olam haba*.

That's a tremendous lesson you're hearing right now - regret is not a small thing. A lot of people say, "Well, I wasn't present, I couldn't help myself. אִינְס רְחֻמָּנָא פְּטִירִיהּ and finished." No! Don't say that! You're losing an opportunity. You have to have *tza'ar* that you weren't able to be there. "Why couldn't I have been present at such a good thing?"

The distress - "I wish I could have been a part of that" - is equal to being present. And when somebody has *tza'ar* that he wasn't able to do a good thing, Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives him reward just as if he had done it.

VISITING AN EMPTY ROOM

And that's what the gemara in Brachos (6a) teaches us: הָשִׁב אָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת מִצְוָה וְנִאָּנֵס וְלֹא עָשָׂאָה מִעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב בְּאֵלוּ עָשָׂאָה - "If a person intended to do a mitzvah, and for some reason that was beyond his control, he couldn't do it, the Torah credits him as if he had fulfilled it." Let's say, this man wanted to be *mivakeir choleh*, so he bought a basket of fruit to the hospital for a *choleh*. He climbs the six flights of stairs to the patient's room, וְנִאָּנֵס וְלֹא עָשָׂאָה - And then something happened that prevented him from doing the mitzvah. When he came there, they told him that the patient had recovered and had gone home already. So did he come for nothing? Did he walk up all those flights of stairs in vain? So מִעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב בְּאֵלוּ עָשָׂאָה. Chazal tell us that it's considered by the Torah as if he had done the mitzvah.

Now, there's no question that there is a certain degree of *shleimus*, of perfection, that you achieve when you actually go and stand by the bed of the *choleh*. When you hand the food to him, and speak to him, and encourage him, you're achieving something very important by your action, no question about it. But the *mitzvah* is accomplished either way. There's no question

that the mitzvah is accomplished even if the *choleh* is not there anymore. Because *מַעֲלָה עָלַי הַפְּתוּיב כְּאִלּוּ עָשָׂהָ* - Hashem considers it as if you had done it - because you wanted to do it and you regret not being able to fulfill the mitzvah.

Part II. Creating Greatness

THE POOR MAN OPENS A KOLLEL

I told you this story once. Reb Yisroel Salanter was once talking to an old man on the street; he was haranguing and exhorting this old man for a long time! About what? He was speaking to this man about the importance of supporting a kollel. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, you know, was the one who founded the whole business of kollelim - he started the kollel idea.

Not like today, when a kollel man is twenty three, twenty four years old. Rav Yisroel wanted that old *talmidei chachomim*; forty, fifty years old should be supported, and that each one should specialize in a specific branch of Torah, so that we should have *gedolim* who are experts. This one in *Kodshim*, this one in *Nezikin*, and so on.

So Rav Yisroel was speaking with this old man for a long time and urging him how important it is to make a kollel. After the conversation, when the old man went away, so Rav Yisroel's talmidim approached their rebbi, "Rebbi, who's that old man? Is he a millionaire?" So Rav Yisroel said, "No, he's a very poor old man." "A poor man," they said, "What are you wasting time talking to him about a kollel for?" So Rav Yisroel said - now listen to the words of a *gaon* - "*Und ehr darf nisht vellen ah kollel? - Doesn't he also need to want a kollel?*" You hear that? That's a *gadol* speaking - it's a *gaonus*. You're not able to support a kollel? You should *want* a kollel! The poor man should *also* want a kollel. He can't afford it? Let him at least *want* it.

So Rav Yisroel was giving this old poor man a gift; that he should want to build a kollel - that he should go to the next world desiring a kollel. *לְמָה נִגְרַע*, this old man is thinking. "Why should I be left out from spreading Torah in the world?!"

BUILDING YESHIVOS FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

So therefore, just because you can't support the *yeshivos*, just because you can't build big *yeshivos*, you're *patur*? No; you have to *want* it! "If I was able, if I could afford it, if I had the money, I'd build *yeshivos* all over. In Los Angeles I'd build a *mesivota*. In Staten Island I would build a few *yeshivos*, in Bensonhurst also I would build." And Flatbush could stand another hundred *yeshivos* too. There are plenty of Jews around who should be going to *yeshivos*.

And when a person really thinks about it, when he really desires it and in his head he experiences those two tremendous words in our *parsha*, לָמָּה נִגְרַע, so Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "If that's the case, so it's הֲרִינִי בְּאֵילֵי הַתְּקַבְּלָתִי, *it's as if I received it from you*.

A NEW LAKEWOOD

Now, not everyone has a Rav Yisroel to stop him on the street and help him desire to build a kollel, and so you'll have to start talking to yourself if you want to accomplish great things in your mind. Suppose you would like to fulfill the mitzvah of founding a great yeshivah, maybe in New York or Yerushalayim. You want to bring many people there and support them while they're learning. Boruch Hashem, we have big places, but you want to build a still bigger place. You'd like to bring people from England, from America, from Argentina, from wherever people are willing to come, and settle them in a new Torah community in Eretz Yisroel or maybe in New York, and to support them and their families. You have a dream, a desire, to make a great Torah center, even bigger than Lakewood, let's say.

But what are you, who are you?! You're nobody; you have no money at all. You're just dreaming. It seems so unreal that it even seems silly. But now we're learning that it's very far from silly. If a person can generate in his heart a sincere desire to do great things, and a regret that he can't do them, that itself is a tremendous achievement.

And so, the first thing is that you should begin by saying it with your mouth. Say it! "I wish I could establish another Lakewood. I desire to build a city that runs only according to the

ratzon Hashem." Now, just saying it doesn't mean that it's in your heart already. And if you don't spend time thinking about these ideas, then you can't desire these things - you'll just think like the people in the street. You'll have a *gashmiyusdikeh* head - you can be a frum Jew, but your head might be no different than the head of the people outside.

YOU WON THE LOTTERY!

So tonight, on the way home, start thinking about it. "Ah! If I had the money to open up a kollel, I'd build a tremendous kollel community. And what a *makom Torah* I would build!" Say, "It's my hope, my sincere hope." And the more you think these thoughts, the more you fill your head with Torah ideals so you begin to feel a fiery enthusiasm for this ideal of building a new Lakewood; and now you can really say, "*Lamah nigora?* Why should I miss out on the opportunity to do it? Just because I don't have the money?"

"Oh," Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "Here is a Jew who's hoping to do great things for me. He can't do a thing, but at least he's hoping. And if that's the case, then this man will be rewarded as if he built a great Torah center in the world. Yes!! To Me, it's like he did it already!"

Now it has to be sincere; so sincere that when you get home and you find the whole house is lit up - everybody's singing and your wife comes to the door, and she's crying with happiness: "You know what happened?! A telegram came from Albany; we won the million dollar lottery!" And it hits you like a thunderbolt over the head! Because you just said you're going to build a big yeshivah with the money. So you say, "I'll think about the yeshivah a little later. Right now, I have more important things to do."

And that shows that it's not so easy to make such a decision - it's easier before you have the money. It has to be such a sincere desire that when you get home and your wife tells you the news, you say, "Is that so?! We won the lottery?! Forget about ordering anything from the furrier or the jeweler. Forget about that, because this money is already spent." "What do you mean already spent?" she says. "Are you out of your head? You didn't

spend anything; it's all right here." And so you tell her: "No, it's all spent already. I spent it on the way home." "What do you mean you spent it on the way home?" And so you give her the good news: "On the way home I was thinking what I heard in the Achiezer, from Rabbi Miller, and I decided that I want to build a kollel. And that's what the money is going to be used for."

CREATING PERSPECTIVES

Now you try to push that through at home! It won't be easy. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu looks into your heart and He sees, if this man would suddenly become wealthy - you're wealthy now; will you build a yeshiva with your money? And if it's true that he would absolutely do what he claims he wants to do, then he gets credit right now as if he did it.

What we're learning now is how important it is to create attitudes, Torah perspectives, in the mind. Because how you think and what you want is magnified a thousand times over by Hakodosh Boruch Hu who is looking into your mind. And He is judging you not only according to what you do, but according to your thoughts and your desires - everything that you could have done had you had the capabilities to accomplish. Your desires become a reality.

THE MASS MURDERER

I'll explain that. In *Mesichta Gittin* (6b) it says: המַטִּיל אֵימָה יִתְרָה בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֵלוֹ הַפִּיל, בְּמָה רַבּוֹת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, it's as if killed many ten thousands of Jews." Just because he's a tyrant in his house, it's like he killed tens of thousands of Jews. And to explain what that means, the *gemara* brings a story that happened once in the time of the *Shoftim*.

There was one man who was very angry at his wife; he was a tyrant, and his wife was afraid of his outbursts. And because she was afraid, she ran out of the house. She was afraid to come home so she was walking the streets at night. What happened? There were some bums who found her and they attacked her; they molested her and left her to die in the street. And when her husband went looking for her in the morning she

was found dead. Now, what did he do? He was so angry about what happened - he was an angry man - so he cut her up in to ten pieces and sent one piece to each one of the *shvatim*. Each *sheivet* had its own Beis Din and to each one he sent a part of her body. A package arrived in the Sanhedrin and when they opened it, "What's this?! A part of a body cut up?! What happened?!"

And now the whole nation became embroiled in a terrible war. All the *shevatim* got up in arms to take revenge on the people of that town in *Sheivet Binyomin* where the atrocity was committed. And a civil war between the *shevatim* was waged and 75,000 Jews were killed in that war.

WE TREAT YOU LIKE A KING

Now, what do we see here. Here's a man, an angry fellow who drove his wife out of the house. And because of his anger, one thing led to another, and it cascaded into battles in which tens of thousands of Jews were killed. And on that story Chazal say that, כָּל הַמְטִיל אֵימָה יְתֵרָה בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הִפִּיל בְּמָה רַבּוֹת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל - "If a person is a tyrant in his house, it's like he killed many tens of thousands."

Now, to our ears, that sounds very queer, very exaggerated. How does that follow logically? He never learned how to behave, he never understood what a *cheit* it is to get angry, so that means he killed thousands of Jews?! It just so happened that way one time. What does that have to do with me being overly angry in my home?

The answer is that Chazal want you to know that it has *everything* to do with you. Because we're learning a tremendous lesson here - that Hakodosh Boruch Hu judges you based on what *could* be, on what you *could* do if you had the opportunity. If a person has in himself a *ka'as*, then Hashem judges him as if he had been a king with tremendous power - because that's exactly what would have happened! If he had been a king he would have killed thousands and thousands of people. If a man has a wickedness in himself, bad *middos*, even though it's only against his wife, still Hakadosh Baruch Hu judges him as if he were a king who utilized all of his *rishus* against thousands and thousands of subjects whom he put to death.

So this man didn't do anything. He didn't want to kill anybody. And still because he has that attitude of being excited and angry, he's being judged by what could come out of it - even though in reality it's beyond his capabilities.

A CURE FOR CANCER

Now we can learn the opposite too. A person will be judged for all of his *good* ideals, all of the positive attitudes of his mind, even though he can't do anything about it. Here is a philanthropist, a wealthy Jew who built a hospital. His name is everywhere in the hospital. Now, why he built it, I don't know exactly the motives, but he did it - he built something tremendous for the Jewish community. Rooms for the patients, laboratories, operating rooms, everything. It's a tremendous *zechus*.

And the years go by, thousands and thousands of people go through his hospital. Even one *choleh*, if he's *oisek* in *bikur cholim*, he gets a tremendous reward. And here, it's generations who go through his hospital. How great of an accomplishment that is, it's impossible to measure.

Now, here you'd like to do the same thing. You also want to build a hospital - maybe a special hospital where you'll pay people to study various illnesses and to find cures for them. A special laboratory to cure cancer! You want to save Jewish children, adults, the whole Am Yisroel you want to help. You'll fly in patients from Eretz Yisroel and England, from everywhere, to cure them. That's what you want to do! Only that you don't have the opportunity - you don't know anything about building hospitals; and even if you did, you don't have the money to do it.

DO WHAT YOU CAN

Now pay attention; you'll laugh at me, but listen to me anyhow. You can build a hospital; yes! You have to think of the mitzvah however - you'll have to appreciate how big it is a mitzvah to heal your fellow Jew. Of course, if you can heal a fellow Jew around the corner and bring him some medicines; maybe he's too poor to buy medicines, that's one opportunity. That shows you really mean it.

But let's say you do whatever you can. You try to help your fellow Jews. You're *mevaker cholim*, you come to visit them. You try to do things to help them get well, but you're limited - you're a poor man and medicines are very expensive today. So you say to Hakodosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam, if You would give me the opportunity, I'd build hospitals for the poor - frum hospitals. I'd heal generations and generations of people. I'd *really* do it, Hashem." And Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens to you and He sees inside your heart as well and He says, "Because you're a man who developed within himself the attitude of *wanting* to heal the *Am Yisroel*, so even though the most you can do is bring some medicine to your neighbor, in My eyes it's as if you've healed tens of thousands of Jews."

Don't think it's a small thing you're hearing now. In your own mind - between you and Hakodosh Boruch Hu - the opportunities are unlimited. Of course, a person can deceive himself, but once a man embarks on this course and he tries to think what he would do if he had the opportunity, little by little it settles into his mind and it becomes genuine feelings of desire to accomplish great things and sincere regret for not being able to actually carry out the plans.

Now all this seems unreal to us - it's very far away from us , and therefore I must give many different examples again and again. It's such an important subject because we're learning now that we can utilize our lives in ways that we never imagined. A man should always do whatever he can; try to fulfill all that he can, but *מה שלא יוכל להשיגו במעשה* - what he cannot do, what's beyond his ability, *יתאווהו* - he should desire it.

HOW TO BECOME A KETZOS HA'CHOSHEN

Let's say, you're working man, or even a working boy. You'd like to be a big *talmid chacham* though. Now, the truth is you still could be. If you keep on going to shiurim, utilize every Shabbos, there's plenty of time to learn if you really look for it.

I recall once - it was at a melave malkah in the old building and I said over from the Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:13): *הרוצה לזכות בכתר של תורה* - "Anybody who wants to earn the crown of Torah, *אל יאבד אחת מלילותיו* - he shouldn't waste even

one of his nights." He has to work by day, what could he do? But he shouldn't waste even one of his nights. That's what Rambam says. And a man who was sitting there heard that. And I saw that it went into his ears and he changed his way of life. He became great subsequently. He was a working man and he became great in Torah. And once his wife had to attend a wedding in Riverside Plaza uptown, but that night was a shiur. So he took his wife by car to Riverside Plaza and left her there and he came back to attend the shiur. Then he went all the way back to the hall to bring her home. That's dedication!

But let's say you don't have the best head - you think you'll never be like the Ktzos Hachoshen, like the Nesivos, or the Minchas Chinuch. You'd like to be like them, however. So it depends - how much do you really want it? Not that he *says* he wants; he has real *cheishek*, a sincere desire, "I would love to be a *gadol b'Torah*." And that wanting, you should know, is already a big success - don't think it's a small thing.

So first of all, in many cases, Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps you become something. But even if the circumstances won't allow that, just by being tremendously involved in the desire - you want to be a *gadol b'Torah*; not because you want to become famous, not because you want *kavod* but because you love Torah. You're thinking, "If I could be a *gadol b'Torah*, if I knew, let's say, all the *mesichtas*, if I could run up and down through Shas without having to stop and think in the *pshat* because I know it so well already, ooh wah, would that be a pleasure." Imagine you can daven through Shas like saying Tehillim, "Oh, is that a *ta'anug*. If I knew all the Tosfos in Shas, how happy I would be."

WHAT A LITTLE KISS CAN MEAN

There are so many seforim, good *seforim*, important *chiburim* that you would love to learn - to take the ideas out from the *seforim* and put them into your head! But you gave up on it already. Even in the time that you do spend learning, you don't have the extra minute to look at the Ibn Ezra on *chumash*. It takes a lot of time to go through a *sugya* with *rashi* and *tosofos*. And therefore, you don't have the time to go through the *Ibn Ezra*, or the whole *Ktzos* and the *Shmaytsa*, and to know it all. You're

consigned to the idea that it's beyond your reach. You gave up on it already.

So you know what a man like that has to do? He has to pick up the *Ktzos* and kiss it. All the time! Pick up the *Ktzos*, and say, "Ribono Shel Olam, how I wish I could sit down with this sefer all day today, and spend hours plumbing the depths of the Torah. I hope, I wish, I desire to learn everything!"

And Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking down at you and He says, "There's a man who loves Me; a man who knows what לְמַה נִּרְעָה means." And the more you desire it sincerely, the more you can manufacture a genuine desire, that's already a very big *shleimus*. I'm not saying it's easy, but that's what *ratzon* can actually accomplish. To gain a *ratzon* for good things means that you're a person who has accomplished a tremendous amount already.

Part III. Living in the Past

WALKING WITH THE MAHARAL

Suppose you could be, let's say, in old time Prague when the Maharal was there. Prague was an *ir v'eim b'Yisrael*. Everybody was a *shomer mitzvos* in Prague. Everybody had big beards and *payos*. Everybody! Women were all *tzidkaniyos*. Everybody kept everything. If we could visit such a Prague, even for just one day, we would come back entirely different people, no question about it. It would have a tremendous effect on us. Children in that generation played in the streets and they babbled *divrei Torah* while they played. There's a certain historian, Gretz, a *rasha*, and he writes that children of that generation when they played in the streets they babbled in *divrei Torah*. In those days the *Am Yisroel* was the *Am Hatorah*.

I once passed by on the street here, a little girl sitting on the steps. And the little girl was saying to her friend, "A bas Yisrael doesn't do that!" A little girl said that. "A bas Yisrael shouldn't do that." It was a beautiful thing to hear from a little girl in Flatbush. But in Prague it wasn't out of the ordinary -

everybody was saturated with Torah. Every child knew what it meant to be a bas Yisroel and a ben Yisroel.

THE TIME MACHINE ON KINGS HIGHWAY

So here's a mother and she's walking, let's say on Broadway in Williamsburg or on Kings Highway and she's thinking, "Look where I am now, a land of *tumah*, among atheists." Most of the Jews today are not even thinking about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Most of the people in the street are up atheists; Russians and Israelis and so many others. Ruined people! "It's a *makom tuma*," she's thinking, "and my mind is full of foolishness from the outside world. If only I lived in Prague four hundred years ago."

Now, she can't accomplish turning back the clock right now. But what can she do? First she should know about it - יְשִׁיבָה בְּיַד יְעָהּ. Know about your past; think about the greatness we once had. Know about it and be convinced about the greatness of the Am Yisroel. There are all kinds of lies from the false historians who try to confuse people. Know the truth, what the *Am Yisroel* was *biyemei kedem*, and get an understanding of what we once were. And then desire it! That's the second thing. "I wish I lived with the *tzadikim* of yesteryear." That's a tremendous achievement. Picture yourself - you could press a button and be transported back in time, a hundred years ago.

So some people will think, "What?! To go back to Europe?! There were no automobiles. No refrigerators. I don't want that." And so you're going to have to work on knowing what's important in life, in order to desire the right things. And the more you desire, the more you can say לְקַח בְּנֶגְעָה with sincerity, the greater you become.

BUILDING THE THIRD BEIS HAMIKDASH TODAY

And that's why it's so important, says the Chovos Halevavos, to ask for the *binyan beis hamikdash*. וְהָשִׁב אֶת הָעֲבוּדָה - "Bring back the service *l'doir beisecha*." We have to say that with our hearts - with regret. Of course, we don't really want it - it's just talk; we're not really interested. But if you really think about it - if you put time into it and you put your heart into it - if יְשִׁיבָה

בְּדִיּוּעָה, if you attain it by means of your mind, וְיִתְאַוּוּ, and you learn how to desire it, then Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, “If that’s the case, I’ll consider it like you already did it; as if you succeeded in building the Beis Hamikdash.” And what that means is that we have the opportunity to rebuild Yerushalayim and to bring it all back.

But it has to be genuine! And therefore it says (Yeshaya 66:10), שִׂמְחוּ אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם כֹּל אֹהֲבֶיהָ – “Rejoice with Yerushalayim all those who love Yerushalayim.” You have to fall in love with Yerushalayim by thinking what Yerushalayim once was. You think back and see what Yerushalayim possessed long ago and you begin to feel, “Oh, what happiness it was then. How glorious was the life in Yerushalayim in the time of the Beis Hamikdash.” You have to think what Yerushalayim used to be in order to love it. You have to love the *shleimus* of old Yerushalayim. You have to love the *kedusha* and the *tzaddikim* of old Yerushalayim. You have to love *limud haTorah*. Yerushalayim was a place of *limud haTorah* on a very great scale. Josephus - he was a politician and a writer - describes legions of Jews in Yerushalayim who came together; tremendous crowds learning Torah together. Thousands of people stood in the streets and listened to the shiur. They didn’t sit down. Up until Reb Gamliel Hazakein’s time, הָיוּ לִזְמָדִים תּוֹרָה בְּעִמּוּדָה - they wouldn’t even sit down while learning Torah (Megillah 21a) - that’s how much esteem there was for Hashem’s word. The streets were soaked with *kedusha*.

THE MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR YIRAS HASHEM

Merely coming to look at the Beis Hamikdash left an effect on that person that lasted all his life. The *possuk* (Devarim 14:23) says that everyone comes to Yerushalayim to eat *ma’aser sheini*, לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לְיִרְאָה אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל הַיָּמִים - “In order so that you should learn to fear Hashem all your life.” A visit to ancient Yerushalayim was a lesson in *yiras Hashem*. When you saw *kohanim b’avodosom*, you heard the *shira* of the *levi’im*, you became so inspired. A visit to the Beis Hamikdash made you a new person.

Not only in the Beis Hamikdash - even just walking in the streets of ancient Yerushalayim was an experience of Awareness

of Hashem. You saw hundreds of *nezirim* dressed in white *begadim* walking the streets, *kedoshim* who devoted part of their lives to Hashem. Even in *bayis sheini*, we know the streets were full of *nezirim*. Hundreds of young men and young women - they didn't mix, of course - who were *nezirim*, *kodesh l'Hashem*. And the plain people were all *kedoshim* too; you have no idea how intense was the devotion to Hashem in Yerushalayim. You can visit good places today too, maybe in Meah Shearim, but it's not what it used to be. No, it's nothing like it once was.

What I'm telling you is not a *guzmah*; actually it's not enough. I never saw it and therefore, I'm very far away from appreciating it, but if we knew what old Yerushalayim was, then we'd see what a tremendous loss the world suffered. When you look back and think, "What a great loss it is that I'm not able to visit ancient Yerushalayim," that *tza'ar* is very important because that's our opportunity today. If you don't have the money or the power or the permission of the *halacha*, so all you can do is wait for *moshiach* to come - you can't do more than that; it's not your fault. But you can still say, לָמָּה נִגְרַע, - "Why should I miss out on ancient Yerushalayim?"

LIEBER'S CHOCOLATES AND THE BEIS HAMIKDASH

You have no idea what we're missing nowadays. Such inspiration, such greatness of spirit, such *kirvas Hashem* and *middos tovos*, we're missing out on and we can't do any more than regret the missed opportunity. But what we're learning now is that the regretting is very important - it's important but it's not easy. Let's say you're sitting at your table eating a good meal; you have delicacies and compote and you're enjoying life in New York City. Hadar cookies and Lieber's chocolates and all kinds of good things you're eating now - everything perfectly kosher. Life in New York is good and therefore you have to know that it's not easy to be sorry. You can say it, but you have to train yourself to mean it too.

And once you have that desire, a genuine desire: "I would like to rebuild Yerushalayim," Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees into your heart that if you had the money, the power and the reshuf of the halacha, you would actually do it, and you receive credit as if

you built Yerushalayim. And don't say, "It's just an exaggeration." No, it's the open truth.

STOP BEFORE YOU TAKE THOSE THREE STEPS

Here's a man that wants to embark on this course; he wants to listen to my advice. So when he finishes *shmone esrei*, he says יהי רצון מלפניך ה' שם אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שיבנה בית המקדש במהרה בימינו he's weeping: "Please, Hashem, bring back the Beis Hamikdash." וְשָׁם נַעֲבֹדְךָ בִּירֵאָה בְּיָמֵי עוֹלָם וּבְשָׁנִים קְדָמוֹנִיּוֹת – And there we will serve You like in the days of old." And he's saying it with a full heart. Those last words are overlooked by people, and yet they are a very big opportunity, an opportunity for achievement that shouldn't be missed. "Ah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if we could do that again!

But what do we do instead? We're in a hurry to eat breakfast so we step back and it's all over. No, it's not all over. Those three lines are so important and they shouldn't be overlooked. Take your time. Say these words slowly with your full heart. Of course, it's not sincere; it's only talk, but train yourself to that idea. "Ay yah yay, Ribono Shel Olam, give me a Beis Hamikdash once more."

HOMEWORK FROM THE RAV

Now listen to me; I'm giving you homework. And don't say it's silly. If you want to be silly, then don't do it. Now, the first fifty times you don't mean it. You don't mean it all. But one thing you do mean – you want to mean it! "I hope that someday I'll mean it." So Hakadosh Boruch Hu says: הָבֵא לְטֹהַר מַסְעִיָּין לוֹ – "If you're taking the first step, then I'm going to help you."

Not only by *shemonah esrei*. Let's say you're walking on Rutledge Avenue in Williamsburg, or you're walking on Thirteenth Avenue; as you walk, all around you, *apikorsim*, atheists, nobodies, secular Jews; you're one Jew walking alone in the street and you say, "Ribono Shel Olam, please rebuild the Beis Hamikdash." In English, in Yiddish, it makes no difference – say it. You know what an accomplishment that is! Just to say that, "Hashem, please rebuild the Beis Hamikdash." "Oh, that's what I say every day," you'll tell me. But you say like a person who is

fast sleep – he doesn't know what he's saying. Say it with regret, with desire - and that's one of the means of accomplishing a tremendous achievement.

FINDING YERUSHALAYIM IN MANHATTAN

Here's a man walking in the streets in Manhattan looking up at the tall skyscrapers and he's thinking, "Manhattan is nothing at all. How I wish I could be walking the streets of Yerushalayim right now." He's thinking that he's so sorry that he missed out on the *shleimus*, the perfection, that was available in those days. How much easier it was to in those days to come closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. There was no New York Times in those days. There was no TV, no radio. Even if you don't have it in your house, but the fact that it's in the air, is a ruination. The air is *tamei* with all these things; it's in the atmosphere - you can't help yourself. The streets are soaking in *shtus*, atheism, *ta'avah* and immorality and therefore even the frum Jews, you have to know, are not immune from that. Even though we don't read their books and newspapers, but the *avirah* of the land seeps into your head.

And so this man in Manhattan is thinking: "I would love to be in Yerushalayim in the days of old! Ah, if I could be there once more! I would give up my refrigerator, my telephone, I would give up my gas range - all the conveniences of modern life I'd give up to live in Yerushalayim in the days of old." And the more a person puts his mind on it, the more he's going to be rewarded right now.

And therefore, if you're a poor man, you have no money, you're walking in the street and you're saying יהי רצון מלפניך שיבנה בית המקדש so Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks at you, "I'm surprised! Here's a real *mentch*. He's hoping for the Beis Hamikdash." And he gets reward באילו נבנה בית המקדש בימי, as if the Mikdash was built in his days. You think that's a small thing? No. It's a very great thing you heard just now. "Oh," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "You really want it? So you'll get a certain amount of reward for that." If a person yearns for the Beis Hamikdash with his full heart, so that sincere regret, that sincere למה נגרע, means that he already has the Beis Hamikdash.

THE SHULCHAN ARUCH EXPANDS

Now this subject that we touched on tonight is tremendous because it means that opportunities in life are endless. But the very first thing is, the first step is to attain that feeling that those who missed the *pesach rishon* expressed: לָמָּה נִגְרַעַע - "Why should we be held back from the achievement of serving You Hashem." You have to yearn for *korbanos*. Don't say, "We have a big enough Shulchan Aruch as it is. We have to worry about *korbanos* also?!" Yes; we have to be so sorry that we cannot bring *korbanos*. We would like to bring the *korban pesach*. And we'd like to bring *bikkurim* and *challah* to the *kohen* as well.

There are so many *mitzvos* - not only ones that are dependent on living in Eretz Yisroel during the time of the Beis Hamikdash - but even others that are inaccessible to us. *Shiluach Hakein* when you don't have a mother bird available. What could you do; you didn't happen upon a nest. Or *petter chamor*; if your donkey gives birth to a first born you have a mitzvah of redeeming the baby donkey. But you don't have a donkey. Your wife won't let you bring a donkey into the back yard. You're an *oness*.

You desire your children should be *tzaddikim*. You desire your grandchildren and great-grandchildren should be all *tzaddikim*. You wish you could give them all money so they could stay in kollel, so that they could buy homes in the frummost neighborhoods. You desire it! Many times, you won't live to see the children of your great-grandchildren but you desire to do everything possible so that they should all be *tzaddikim*.

THE PERFECTION OF REGRET

When you take advantage of regret, of your ability to have a fiery desire for the word of Hashem, then even the things you can't actually do, it's considered as if you did it. This is a tremendous lesson and it pays to study it well because if we follow it to its conclusion, we can acquire merit, we can get *zechusim*, way beyond our actual abilities. Once you understand the secret of *lama nigora* you'll realize the importance of filling your head with Torah ideals that you sincerely believe in and desire.

And so, you'll always be doing whatever you can. That's what the Chovos Halvovos said, *מה שיוכל עשות* - what you're able to do, go ahead and do it. But what you cannot do, *יתאווהו* - let him learn to desire it. You have to be a *rotzeh* - you must create attitudes of desiring the mitzvos. And that ratzon, those grand dreams in your head, "I'd like to do it. I really want to do it," are very valuable. You want to do it only that you can't. And so, you turn to Hashem and you call out to Him: *למה נגרע* - "I wish I could fulfill my dreams of serving You in every way possible!" And when you understand the importance of yearning, of desiring, to do these things, you can fill your days with thoughts of the greatest accomplishments, accomplishments that in Hashem's eyes are *כאילו עשה*, as if they were actually done.

HAVE A WONDERFUL SHABBOS

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לע"נ רבינו אביגדור ב"ר ישראל זצ"ל Mr. & Mrs. Moishy Wolhendler

Rabbi & Mrs. Yaakov Shapiro

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

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

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Q&A

With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

If oneg Shabbos is so important, why don't we find it mentioned in the Torah itself? Why is it only a mitzvah m'drabanan?

A:

Certainly oneg Shabbos is written in the Torah! ויברך אלוקים את יום - "השביעי" And Hashem blessed the seventh day" (Bereishis 2:3). And He wants us to bless it too. When we see that Hashem rested on the seventh day we understand the important principle that Hashem is described as doing something for the purpose that we should emulate Him. He said it should be a day of menucha, of rest. He said you should rest. He said that your children should rest and your servants should rest - even your donkey should rest. Everybody has to rest from doing work. Isn't that an oneg? Resting is oneg Shabbos - certainly it's oneg Shabbos!

Now, once Hashem said that, so along came Yeshaya Hanavi and he said: - וקראת לשבת עונג - "You should proclaim the day of Shabbos for delight" (Yeshaya 58). Those words of Yeshaya are a peirush, an explanation on the words of the Torah. The navi is just saying b'feirush, openly, what Hashem already said in the Torah. And so we understand that it is Hashem who wants us to delight in the day of Shabbos in order to commemorate the creation of a world of kindness.

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