

# תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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בעזרה ש״ת

## פרשת כי תבא

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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### *Serving Hashem with Joy*

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נא לא לקרוא בעת התפלה וקריאת התורה

## Part I. Happy Reminders

### THE SCARY PARSHA

Everyone knows that in *Parshas Ki Savo* the Torah foretells what's going to happen to the *Am Yisroel* when we fail to live up to the standards that Hakodosh Boruch Hu demands of us. We're warned about the many troubles that will befall our nation throughout our history. There's a long list there; in *possuk* after *possuk* calamities are enumerated.

It's not a pleasant experience to read those *pesukim* and that's why nobody wants an *aliyah* for the *tochacha*. It's the one *kavod* that everybody runs away from. In our shul, sometimes there's a man who is *mishnadev*, he volunteers for the job. "Take me," he says reluctantly, "I'll do it." So when we finish, I give him a special *bracha*. I make a special *mi shebeirach* for the man that volunteered for the *tochacha aliyah*, the *aliyah* that everyone is afraid of.

It's such a frightening experience that when the *ba'al korei* comes to these *pesukim*, he makes sure to lower his voice; he reads it under his breath so that *chas v'shalom* he shouldn't frighten you

too much. At least that's how it was in the ancient times when people were more aware of the lessons of the *tochacha* – just reading the words created a very great anxiety and depression.

Now, I'm not going to change any customs, but the benefit of the *tochacha* is going lost today. Back then people were more aware of the lessons intended – when they read the Torah they felt it was Hakodosh Boruch Hu speaking to them – and so it was sufficient to read it quietly; everyone was impressed by the lesson anyhow. But today, when it's read merely as a formality, it wouldn't be such a bad idea if the *tochacha* was read aloud – even louder than usual.

#### HAPPY TOCHACHA LESSONS

Now, if you come here, you already know that in this place we like to talk about happy things. And so, even when we talk about the *tochacha* of *Parshas Ki Savo* we're going to understand it in a way that will bring happiness; we'll focus on one of the happy lessons of the *tochacha* – maybe the one that deserves our attention more than all the others.

The first thing we're going to do is listen to the explanation that the Torah gives there for most of our troubles. There's no secret – Hashem explains why all of this happens: תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ – “And all this will befall you because you did not serve Hashem your G-d, *with joy and with a merry heart, from an abundance of everything*” (ibid. 28:47).

Now, we should pay attention to those words because it's remarkable what the Torah is emphasizing here. If it were us, we would have said “It's simple why the punishments come. It's because we didn't keep the Torah”, that's all. That's what it *should* have said: “I'm punishing you because you didn't serve Me.” But it doesn't say that – it says that we didn't serve Him “with joy and a merry heart.”

#### THE PUNISHMENT PUZZLE

And that's a big puzzle for us. Because we didn't serve Him with a merry heart, is that a reason to suffer the terrible punishments?! We weren't happy, so what? We're Orthodox Jews! We put on *tefillin*, we keep *Shabbos* and we learn Torah. It doesn't

say, “You didn’t keep my Torah.” We were very *frum* – we kept everything!

And still, you’ll go into exile and you’ll suffer all these consequences because you didn’t serve Hashem *b’simcha*, in joy, *u’otuv leivav*, with a merry heart, *mei’rov kol*, when you had everything. Of course, a man must serve Hashem in any circumstances; but the Torah is teaching us here that the most important *avodas Hashem* consists of appreciating the *chesed Hashem*, and thanking Him *mei’rov kol*, because we have so much. That’s the one thing the *possuk* makes note of.

#### THE REAL REASON YOU HAVE LUNGS

Now, there are thousands and thousands of kindnesses that Hashem is doing for us every day. He is the *gomeil chasadim tovim* and we could spend years enumerating them. I say ‘we could’ – we *should!* We should do it, *bli neder*, because that’s why we came to this world – to become more and more aware of Hashem by means of the kindness He’s showering on us.

I’ll tell you a *chiddush* right now; it’s very important, so listen well. Why do you think you have lungs? Just to breathe, to oxygenate your cells?! What about your legs? You think your legs are just for walking?! Your teeth are for chewing? No; Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave you lungs and legs and teeth so that you should remember Him.

It’s fun to have lungs that work! Teeth are a pleasure! Legs? Nothing is better than two legs! Legs make living a joy! And that’s why Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave you all of these gifts; for enjoying and thanking. Your lungs are for thanking, and your legs are for thanking; and your teeth and your fingers, and your house and your children, *your everything* is to bring you to more happiness and more gratitude to the *Gomeil chasadim tovim* who is giving everything to you.

And when you use all of these gifts for thanking Hashem, that’s when you’re succeeding in your career in life. But if you ignore them – if you use your legs only for walking and your lungs only for breathing and your teeth only for chewing – then you’re missing out on the purpose of life.

## WE ARE GIVEN A CHOICE

And that brings us to the subject of tonight's lecture - because there's a word in our *possuk* תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב that needs explanation: "All of this came upon you *because* you didn't serve Hashem with joy and a merry heart." But the word תַּחַת in the *possuk* actually implies something more than "because." Translated properly תַּחַת means "instead of." And so we read the *possuk* as follows: "All this will befall you, *instead of* you serving Hashem in joy and with a merry heart."

What we're learning now is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu reminds men of Himself in two ways. He uses these two methods; one is the system of showering us with happiness, and the other is the way of *tochacha*. And in this *possuk*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is telling us that the choice is ours.

Now, the first thing we have to get into our heads is that there's nothing better for an *eved Hashem* than the first method. And therefore when people get busy saying *Boruch Atah* for this and *Boruch Atah* for that; when they thank Him constantly - when they are constantly thinking of Him and expressing their gratitude, that's the best way of serving Hashem.

When someone is able to appreciate the fact, when he thanks Hashem that he doesn't even *know* that he has a liver, he doesn't *know* that he has a heart; *because they are functioning so smoothly*, that's a man who is making use of Hashem's gifts to him. He has a solid state construction and nothing goes out of order; and instead of ignoring it, he says, "*Boruch Atah Hashem* for my heart. *Boruch Atah Hashem* for my liver." The same for his lungs and his kidneys; that's the man who is making use of the first method - he is serving Hashem בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרַב כָּל.

## DON'T WALK! THINK!

He's waiting to cross at a red light and instead of wasting his time, he's thinking, "*Boruch Atah Hashem* for all the things that are functioning so normally that I'm unaware that they even exist. Thank You Hashem for my eyes. Thank You for my warm apartment. Thank You for my children." There are a lot of things you can thank for while you're on the corner waiting for the light to turn green!

And he doesn't say it merely because it's a *frum* thing to say. He thinks about it again and again – he's thinking about the details – until a fountain of happiness begins to gush forth from his heart and he actually rejoices in his health. When Hakodosh Boruch Hu sees that, He says, "I don't have to send this man any reminders about Me because he's accomplishing everything on his own. He remembers Me. When things are going well – when his stomach is working so efficiently that he doesn't even know he has a stomach, and when his brain is functioning so perfectly that others would forget they have a brain – he remembers Me and thanks Me."

## Part II. Painful Reminders

### THE SECOND METHOD

But sometimes, after a while, people become accustomed to their happiness and they begin to forget who the author of that happiness is. And because the purpose of happiness is only to remind you that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is around, so in case one forgets, Hakodosh Boruch Hu has to help this man in another way.

Here's a man who walks into his house and it's warm. It's cold outside and inside it's warm. Did he ever once say, "Thank You Hashem for a warm house"? He never even thought about it! So Hashem waits. And He waits. He continues to give you the *rov kol*. But finally He says, "Look, you're not keeping your side of the deal. I'm giving you a warm house, but you're forgetting about Me." And so one night you come home and find out that the furnace is not working. The boiler is broken and it's cold in the house and the children are shivering. So your wife says, "What should we do? We'll freeze like this; we'll all get sick."

So you run out to Uncle Chaim and you borrow a heater from him. And everybody is sleeping in one room now, the room with the heater, trying to stay warm. And you have to be very careful with the heater. You're nervous the whole night; you can't sleep because you know that sometimes there could be a fire

*chalilah*. An electric heater can set the entire house on fire. The whole night you're thinking about Hakodosh Boruch Hu: "Ribono Shel Olam, please send us a plumber tomorrow morning who can fix the furnace. It was so nice, so much fun, when we had a working furnace!"

#### WAKEUP CALLS

When the *mei'rov kol* doesn't work; when Hashem sees that there's a hardening of the faculties and now you're ignoring Him because of the happiness He has bestowed upon you, so what else could He do?! When He sees that you never think about Him, you never thank Him for everything, so He says, "It's a big problem what to do with you." And so He takes away the happiness. *Oooh ah!* It's gone now! When *chas v'shalom* something happens, that's when a person thinks about Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

So here we have two ways before us. If a man gets busy when things are going well and he is always busy remembering Hashem, very good; he's accomplishing in life. But if not, if he just sits there with his thick head and sleeps through life so then Hashem uses the other expedient to wake him up.

It's like a man who's asleep in bed and his house is burning, so you run in to him, if he listens then it's good enough. But if not, then you have to use emergency measures. The house is burning after all! The house is on fire. So you pull the pillow out. If that doesn't help you throw him out of bed onto the floor. If that doesn't help you take a pail of cold water and pour it on him. And if that doesn't help, you take a stick and you beat him until he gets up. You have to save his life!

#### THE DANGER OF SLEEPWALKING

That's all of us. We're sleepwalking through life, not thinking about our *rov kol*, all of the good we have. You have teeth. *Ah, ah, ah*, it's a pleasure! I once spoke to a dentist. I had a problem with my tooth so I asked him, "Maybe you should put in an artificial tooth, a replacement." "No," he said. "There's nothing like your own teeth". You hear that?! There's nothing like your own teeth! But what are they for after all? Just for chewing? For

biting, for cutting? No, your teeth are there so that you should think about Hashem; for thinking and thanking.

But you're not thinking at all; you never thanked Hashem for your teeth. Imagine that! A person who never thanked Hashem for his teeth. And not just for teeth in general; in the front you have the incisors for cutting, and in the back you have something altogether different; molars, grinding teeth. But who thinks about it?! And that means that you're not "serving Hashem *b'simcha u'otuv leivav mei'rov kol.*"

Because teeth are an important part of the *mei'rov kol* and you're ignoring that reminder to think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֵלֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כָּל - "All this, even a toothache, will befall you because you did not serve Hashem your G-d, with joy and with a merry heart, from an abundance of everything, an abundance of healthy teeth" (ibid.).

So one night, late at night, Hashem sends you a reminder. And the next morning you're waiting outside of the dentist office before he opens up - you're the first one there - because Hashem sent you a reminder that is not so easy to ignore.

#### SOME THINGS ARE HARD TO OVERLOOK

And now he looks back and see what he once possessed and he therefore remembers what Hashem had given him. הַשֵּׁם נָתַן - Hashem gave, and now that Hashem took it away, he's reminded - at least *now* he remembers what he once had, and that causes him to bless Hashem. The happiness of life might be easy to overlook but *tzaros* are difficult to disdain.

Here's a man that never appreciated his eyes before. Every day he said the words, *pokeiach ivrim, pokeiach ivrim*; but it doesn't mean a thing; he's not thinking at all! And now he discovers that something is wrong. He has a pain in his eye and he's afraid. Who knows what it is?! *Chas v'shalom*, it might *chalila* be that sickness that begins with a G - I don't want to say the word. And now he's worried.

And finally he has an appointment with a big specialist in Manhattan. It costs a lot of money to see him and when he comes there he's told, "You have to have treatment. You need an

operation on the eye.” *Oy vey!* An operation on the eye! He has to go to the hospital – it costs plenty of money and it’s uncomfortable too. His eyes are bandaged for some time. For two weeks he walks in the street with his eyes partially bandaged. And finally he takes off the bandages and he’s back to normal again. *Ooh ah*, is it fun to see! From now on, when he says *pokeiach ivrim*, he says it with *aza geshmak*, with such a *kavanah*, such gratitude for the rest of his life. *Now* he begins to enjoy his eyes.

#### DON'T BE OBTUSE

One of the very great problems we face today is that because of our desire for luxuries and “good times” people are forgetting constantly about the countless *chasdei Hashem* in our normal day to day lives. How can people so obtuse, so ungrateful? Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives and He gives and He gives, and *toch kdei dibur* we forget the One who is giving.

And don’t be thick skinned and say, “I’m different. I’m *born* with a *mazal*. I have strong teeth and healthy kidneys.” That’s what people are thinking – maybe he’s too ashamed to say it, but he’s thinking, “I’m *supposed* to have good luck and nothing but good luck all my life.” “Ohhh,” Hakodosh Boruch Hu says. “I might have to remind you.”

And so if your good luck stops, *chalilah*, for a little while, that’s Hashem talking to you. And that’s why *tzaros* come. *Tzaros* come to remind people what they forgot when they were living *b’shalom v’shalvah*. He wants you to look back at the good old days. “*Ay yah yay!* Where was my head? What was I thinking? I didn’t enjoy life when I had it. I didn’t say thank you when my head didn’t hurt, and when my eyes were healthy.”

#### UNHAPPY MARRIAGES

Some people go through their entire lives not appreciating. Did you ever thank Hashem that you have a wife? Not even once?! Every day you should thank Hashem for that! Every day! How many old *bochurim* waited too long and now nobody will marry them? And you have that gift and you don’t appreciate it.

And that’s the great problem of marriage – nobody is *b’simcha v’tov leiv*. Every woman thinks that she could have done

better. Every man thinks that he could have found a better deal somewhere else.

Now at the beginning, everything is beautiful – they break the glass, and there's singing. *Mazel tov!* The band is playing and it's all happiness. It's a nice young *kallah*, they just got married, and they didn't have any fights yet. But later, they have to live together and all types of things happen among human beings. After a while there's a certain dissatisfaction; she has certain grudges and he has certain complaints.

#### THE QUIET HOME

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "Look; someday you're going to walk into your apartment." A man, let's say, he's a hundred and nineteen years old. Someone has to go first, so let's say his wife went first. And so in the evening, after *ma'ariv*, he walks into his apartment and he says, "Sarah? Sarah, where are you?" No answer. And he remembers; his Sarah is not here anymore. There's nobody to answer. In the old days he heard his wife's voice. It was like music; his wife's words were like music to him. But now it's quiet. "Where are you Saraleh?"

Now he begins to look back. How good it was when Sarah was there. So Hashem says, "*Tachas!* I hold this against you – why didn't you appreciate Sarah while you had her? Then, you didn't say her voice was like music. You complained, "She speaks too much; it's grating on my ears."

Or Sarah, let's say. She's a hundred and nineteen years old and Chaim was already buried. So she walks into an empty house. "Chaim, *vu bistdu.*" No answer. "Oh no, my Chaim's is gone. His voice was a pleasure to hear. And now I'll never hear him again." *Techiyas hameisim*, yes, but who knows when that will be. *Now* she looks back at what she once had, and instead of remembering the gift while she enjoyed it, she remembers after it's already gone.

#### SING NOW!

And what our *possuk* is telling us is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu expects you, while you still have Chaim and while you still have Sarah, to make sure to utilize it right now and to sing to

Hashem. All your life, that's your responsibility; while you have it you should make sure you learn to appreciate it.

"I want a life of happiness for you," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu. "That's what *Olam Hazeh* is for. But you'd better get busy because it takes work." It's an *avodah* to be happy and grateful always and Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "I want you to use your *seichel*, to use the depths of your *neshama*, and learn how to spend your days in happiness with a merry heart because of all the good that I'm giving you."

### Part III. Painless Reminders

#### LET'S SKIP THE GORY DETAILS

You know, when you look in the *chumash* you see a remarkable thing; because Hakodosh Boruch Hu could have said the prophecy of the *tochacha* in a general way and it would have been enough! We understand what misfortune *chalilah* means. But when you read the *pesukim* you'll see a queer thing. *Shachefes* and *kadachas* and *dalekes* and *shidafon* and *yeirakon* and *garav* - it's enumerated with details. And more details and more details. And some people feel it's superfluous. "I understand already; leave out the details."

But on the contrary, Hashem wants you to listen. He wants you to know what could have been! That's why Hakodosh Boruch Hu wrote the *tochacha* with all of its details so we should know how important it is to be *b'simcha v'tuv leivav*. Because if you're not, then *chalilah*, this might happen and that might happen. *Shachefes* and *kadachas* and *garav*.

And in case the *bal korei* read it too quickly for you so Hakodosh Boruch Hu shows us examples of what could be. In order to encourage us in our happiness, in appreciating what we have, He says, "Take a look around! If the details in the *tochacha* aren't enough; if the *bal korei* is reading it too low, too fast, and you're missing the point, then I'll show you things that are more difficult to ignore. If seeing the words in the *chumash* isn't enough, then take a look in the street."

### IT'S NO ACCIDENT

And so after davening, when *mussaf* finishes, you walk out onto the street; you're going home to make *kiddush*. And as you turn the corner, you see a man coming towards you, and he's holding a long white stick. He's walking in the street with a cane – tap, tap, tap, tap – and he's living in darkness. You see him at the street corner and someone has to take him by his arm and bring him across.

Now, you have to know that it's no accident that he crossed your path. Hashem sent him there so you should see with your own two eyes what *tochacha* really means. He saw that you're slow in understanding, so He sent him to teach you a lesson. And that's what you should do – you should utilize him and start enjoying your eyes just because of that: “Ah, *boruch Hashem*, I'm not like him. I'm so happy to be able to see. Thank you, Hashem!”

### THE BUM TAKES THE BUS

And now Hakodosh Boruch Hu sees that it pays to invest in you – you're a man who knows how to utilize these opportunities. And so the next day you're walking in the street and you see a fellow with one leg, pushing himself in a wheelchair. His other leg is missing from the knee down. From the knee down his pants are empty.

Here comes a bum; as a boy he was always in the street making trouble, throwing bottles at people. He was hanging on the back of the buses, and one day he fell off and he lost his leg. So now, he's sitting in a wheelchair; the city pays for his wheelchair and he has welfare and disability too. And when he waits at the bus stop the bus driver has big *derech erez* for him; he's a cripple, a handicapped person and there are special steps for him. The bus driver lowers the steps and the whole bus is waiting for him, for this great *tzaddik*. And the bus driver raises him up on the bus with *derech erez*, with the *greste kavod*. That's how the world looks at it.

But you look at it a different way because you remember what Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to you. So you look down at your two trusty reliable legs. “Boruch Hashem for my legs. Oh! What a

terrible thing it must be to live with only one leg.” And now you start enjoying your legs. At least for one block you’ll thank Hashem for every step. And Hashem says, “I see you’re fulfilling your part of the deal. You’re *servng Hashem with simcha v’tuv leivav mei’rov kol.*”

#### LIVING ON OCEAN PARKWAY - LITERALLY

Some people have no *parnasah*, no home. They sleep under the railroad tracks or on the benches on Ocean Parkway. If you keep your eyes open you’ll see them. Sometimes you see a woman walking in the streets pushing a shopping wagon. All her worldly belongings are in that wagon. It’s a *rachmanus*. A big *rachmanus*! She has no place to go and she’s worn out. She can’t take a bath and she’s full of vermin. She’s hungry; every bit of food is a miracle, if she can get something to eat.

She has nothing else, no place to sleep. She sits down on the park bench and tries to doze off. She’s afraid to lie down. If she’ll lie down on a bench, a woman in New York City, it’s a *sakanah*. So she sits on the bench and tries to sleep. What does she do in the winter time? Where is she when it’s freezing? Sometimes she’ll find a hole that she could sleep in overnight. It’s a bonanza for her when she finds a hole to sleep in.

You have to know that she was sent to remind you: You slept in a home last night? You’re a lucky man! You’re didn’t sleep on some bench, with all your belongings next to you in a shopping cart. You’re a wealthy man! You’re leaving here tonight and going to a home, to a bed! Thank Hashem for that!

#### RAV MILLER’S LIST OF MISFORTUNES

If you look around, the world is full of misfortune. How is it that *you’re* being spared from these things? There are so many things that could have been. Look at all the illnesses. I once made a list of about fifty illnesses. Illnesses and unfortunate circumstances. And I look at from time to time and I think about all the things that Hashem saved me from.

You can make such a list for yourself. And it’s a good idea to read through it slowly. So many people are sick. This man has that, this woman has this. Make a list and think, “Boruch Hashem,

I don't have *that*. And boruch Hashem, I don't have that." How could a person who lives a normal life not be busy all of his days thanking Hashem?

When I walk in the streets with *chaveirim*, younger *chaveirim*, we stop in front of medical buildings where the doctors put out their signs and we read them. We stop and read them.

**The List**

Credit: Judaica Press: Rav Avigdor Miller, His Life and His Revolution

HE, HIS WIFE OR A CHILD	
	DIVORCE
	GOUT
CLEFT PALATE	MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY
STUTTERING	MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
ASTHMA	CEREBRAL PALSY
C HAY FEVER	PARKINSON'S DISEASE
ALLERGIES	COLOR BLINDNESS
ARTHRITIS	INABILITY TO SMELL
KIDNEY (KIDNEYS) REMOVED	VERY SHORT
COLOSTOMY	EXCESSIVELY CORPULENT
TUMOR ON BRAIN	LIMPING
ULCER	INCONTINENT (URINE)
DEPRESSION	WHEELCHAIR
C NERVOUS BREAKDOWN	CANE
INSANITY	CRUTCHES
BROKEN (LEG, ARM, - BONE)	EPILEPSY
PROSTATE TROUBLE	PARALYSIS
DIABETES	POISONING
HEMORRHOIDS	FIRE
LIVER TROUBLE	HOLDUP (MUGGING)
ONE LEG (ARM) LONGER THAN OTHER	BURGLARY
C RETARDED (OR A CHILD)	LITIGATION
DEAF	JAIL
DUMB	ARMY
BLIND (ONE OR BOTH EYES)	EXTREMELY SLOW-WITTED
C AMPUTATION (LEG, ARM, FINGER)	HEART TROUBLE
CHILDLESS	LUNG DISEASE
NO BEARD (GONAD INSUFFICIENCY)	CANCER

Ophthalmologist, an eye doctor; I don't need him. Stomach specialist; I don't need him. Internist; I don't need you either! By each one we say "Boruch Hashem I don't need you." I try training them to say that.

You should try that too. Stop in front of a medical building or a drug store. They're having a sale, all kinds of medicines. There's a bargain, they're cheap. Thank Hashem, I don't need this. Thank Hashem, I don't need that. Thank Hashem, I don't need that. You have to thank Hashem, because there are plenty of customers for them. Oh yes. Plenty of people need them.

#### SYMPATHIZE AND UTILIZE

So you'll ask me about our fellow Jews who are suffering. Now Hashem has His reasons and we won't understand all of them, but as far as *we* are concerned, we have to utilize what He shows us. A man should be *b'simcha* when he sees that he doesn't have those troubles. We shouldn't use other people's troubles as an alibi in order to say we cannot have *simcha*. We won't use our sympathy for them as an excuse to not thank Hashem.

Of course, we sympathize with those who are suffering; do whatever you can to help them. Be *mispallel* for them - certainly we have to do that. But you should make use of them too, and say, "Boruch Hashem that you saved me from this. You saved me from this illness and that illness." We should certainly sympathize with others, but we must be busy thanking Hakodosh Boruch Hu that it did not happen to us. There's no question that our *simcha* is multiplied by the fact that we've been rescued from the distress that other people had to undergo.

Think about how lucky you are that you're well. Ahh! To be well is such a happiness! So many people are giving you examples on all sides of what it means not to be well. On all sides! And therefore, how can a person who lives a normal life not be busy all of his days thanking Hashem?!

#### HAPPINESS ADDRESSES

If you want, you can come to me after the lecture and I'll give you the address of a man who comes out of his house every morning. Somebody wheels him out in a wheelchair and he has a

blanket over his lap. Sometimes the blanket is raised up and you'll see that underneath he has no feet. He doesn't have any feet at all. And then look down at your two legs. Let's say, even, that you have arthritis; OK, but would you want to exchange yours arthritic legs for his stumps?

Why is it that all around me people are having trouble? We have to think about them! In this family, *lo aleichem v'lo aleinu*, a son died. Here's another family where the mother was left a young widow, *lo aleichem*. Here's a man who's suffering from rheumatic fever for years. He's laid up in bed for years and years already. And a person over there has had serious heart attacks. And now he's home and he can't work so his wife who never worked has to go out and find a job.

#### RAV MILLER'S GUEST SPEAKERS

I said to our *mispallelim* this past Shabbos that we should invite twenty people to speak to us, twenty people to testify. And one of them is the man without legs. Roll him in and he should testify. Let him give a speech to you ungrateful people and let's see what you'll think. And then we'll bring in someone else; someone who is not able to use his *pi ha'taba'as*, instead he has a bag on his side. And let's see who is happier, you or he.

And then our next guest comes tapping his way in with a cane; and behind him is the woman who lives out of a shopping cart. And we'll summon in twenty such witnesses and each one, just by standing there, will teach us how to be happy in this world.

#### LOOKING DOWN AT OTHERS

You know the *Chovos Halevavos* says that. He says that when it comes to *gashmiyus*, to material blessings, you should look down at those beneath you. If we would look down a bit, we would see that we're really exceptional. There are so many people who can't come here tonight – so many bedridden people; there are big institutions crowded with invalids. Mental institutions too! If you're sane enough to come here by yourself – you're more than sane if you come here – you're an exception. One out of ten people in the United States have been in an institution! And if you

haven't — or at least you're not there now — so you have to take that as a reminder; get busy and say like Dovid Hamelech said. He said, "What can I do?" Dovid was worried about it; he said *מָה אֲשִׁיב לַהֲשֵׁם כָּל תְּגִמְלוּלֹהֵי עָלַי* — *What can I pay back for all the good that he bestowed on me?*

Now, when we prepare for the *Yom Hadin* it's important to keep this lesson in mind. Because many people, when the last day of the year approaches, they think, "Maybe I should fast; I should pray a lot and do more *mitzvos*." Very good, very good; why not? You want to do more good deeds? Yes, certainly!

#### THE HAPPY ROSH HASHANA

But among all the good deeds you do, the most important obligation — and the one that is most often overlooked — is to be grateful for the year that is going out now. A year ago we were also standing on the threshold of a new year, and we didn't know what our *g'zar din* would be: *מִי יַחִיָּה וּמִי יָמוּת מִי יִשְׁלוֹ וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר* — *Who will live and who will die, who will enjoy tranquility, and who will suffer.* What the coming year had in store for us was a *safek*, a real doubt. And now it's a year later and you're still here. You made it. If you're here, then you made it!

*Tuf shin lamed vuv* was a good year! And in case you don't think so, in case you feel it wasn't a good year, then you have to know that you are remiss in your obligation and you're not prepared at all for Rosh Hashanah. Because that's our obligation in life — *וְכָל הַחַיִּים יוֹדִיךָ סָלָה* — *If you're alive, then you have to be thanking.*

#### HOMEWORK YOU CAN DO IN SHUL

Now I'll give you a little homework. When you come to the *beis knesses* and you hear *kaddish* being said, so instead of saying *יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ*, *Let His great name be blessed*, as a donation, as a gift to hashem. "Let other people bless His name," you mean. That's what you mean — others should bless His name.

No, *you* bless His name when you say those words. Think of one specific thing when you say *Yehei shmei rabah*. You remember when your tooth was bothering you and it hurt you even to eat. You couldn't eat for three days and you thought they

would have to drill or maybe take it out altogether. And then, all of a sudden, overnight the pain subsided and the tooth began to function well once again. *YEHEI SH'MEI RABBAH MIVORACH!* Thank Hashem for that! You didn't make use of the reminder back then? So do it now!

You remember when you once made a dumb step. You stepped off the curb without looking just as a bus was making a turn? And the bus driver pulled the brakes and cursed you! "I almost hit you! What a crazy dope! He walked in front of my bus!" And you walk away like a dumbbell, not even thinking. Where's the *Yihe sh'mei rabbah* for that?

Here was a man who had a *din torah* pending against him. He was afraid; he couldn't sleep, he told me. A whole week his stomach was boiling; a *din torah* could mean a lot of *tzaros*. At the end, nothing came of it. The other party didn't call him to *beis din*. So what did he do? He forgot all about it. Forgot all about it?! Where's the *Yihe sh'mei rabbah mivorach*?!

#### PREPARE EARLY OR THINK FAST

That's what *Yihe sh'mei rabbah mivorach* is for. Don't wait for the future. He's thinking *לְעֵלְמָא וְלְעֵלְמָא עָלְמָא*, in the future, some time, when Mashiach comes, the great name of Hashem will be blessed. No, nothing doing; don't procrastinate – you get started blessing His name right now!

And so when you say *Yihe sh'mei rabbah* it's a good idea to prepare beforehand. As soon as the *chazzan* starts saying *yisgadul*, think, "What am I going to thank for this time?" Think fast. It's better if you think beforehand, before davening, and prepare at least one thing to thank, but if you didn't, then you have to think fast.

Thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu that you have normal children. Oooh, the *tzaros*. I knew a man who had three children one after the other. All idiots. All idiots, *rachmana litzlan*. A terrible *rachmanus*. If you have normal children, you have to thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for that day and night. Day and night, day and night, day and night, you should be thanking for normal children. At least by *Yihe sh'mei rabah* you should think about

that! And not one *Yiheh sh'mei rabah* for all your children! One for this child, and another for the next child, and another for the next one. And when you finish getting through all your children, you can start again.

#### YOU CAN'T HELP BUT BE HAPPY

Now *rabosai*, don't imagine that I'm tying you down to a life of obligations; I'm tying you to a life of happiness! Because as a result of thinking like this you're going to live lives of *simcha* – you can't help it! You're going to rejoice in every function of your body and every function of your mind. You'll rejoice in your food, whatever it is. You'll rejoice that you have a roof over your head and that you have a warm house in the winter. You'll rejoice that you have cold water in your house, and hot water, and a bathroom. You'll rejoice in your parents and wife and your children. You'll rejoice in life itself – being alive is fun!

And these things you have to know are a *chiyuv gamur!* More than anything else you have to do before Rosh Hashana, the *chiyuv* of gratitude to Hashem is paramount. The Chovos Halevavos says that. The *avodah* of *hoda'ah*, of gratitude to Hashem, that's the real *avodas Hashem*.

#### DON'T FORECLOSE ON THE DEBT!

That's what it says קוֹנֵה עֲבָדָיו בְּדִין – Hashem acquires us in judgement. What does that mean 'He buys us in *din*'? He's *koneh avadav ba'din* because we're so indebted to Him; we are so overloaded with *chasodim tovim*, and we didn't even start paying back. And now we want to come back and ask for another year?! So we're sold out to Him; we're mortgaged to Him. We didn't pay yet for our last year's benefits that He paid out to us, and now we're asking for another year in advance. So we're mortgaged to Him; all we can say is מָה אֶשִׁיב לְהֵשֵׁם – *What can I pay You back Hashem, כָּל תְּגִמְלוּלָהֵי עָלַי* – *for all the good things that you did for me.*

And therefore, if we're wise we'll be sure to make use of the lesson of תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה'שָׁם אֶלְקִיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב יָלָכְךָ מִדָּבָר כָּל וְתַחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָבַדְתָּ אֶת ה'שָׁם אֶלְקִיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב יָלָכְךָ מִדָּבָר כָּל, and to start thanking now for all the kindness of Hashem in our lives.

As much as we can we would like to make the choice to call out to Him in happiness and gratitude. We don't want any other lessons of the *tochacha*, just happiness. And the more we keep our side of the deal, and thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu always, then He will continue to bestow His gifts upon us so that we can continue to walk on the path we've chosen of עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב, serving Hashem in health and happiness *mei'rov kol*.

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Q&A

With  
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

What *sefer* would you recommend we learn if we would like to be *mekabel* upon ourselves to begin learning a *mussar sefer* before Rosh Hashana?

A:

I would advise, if you really mean business, to learn Mesillas Yesharim. Now, you may have a taste for other *seforim*, I'm not saying not, but Mesillas Yesharim, you have to know, is tried and tested. Generations have succeeded by means of that *sefer*. It has a tremendous effect.

The Gra said, when he saw that *sefer* and he read the first eleven *perakim*, that there's not even one single unnecessary word in the first eleven *perakim*. He said that if the Mesillas Yesharim, if Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, was still alive in his days, he would walk on foot to Italy and make him his Rebbe.

So I would advise you, in case you don't know what to do, to learn Mesillas Yesharim. You won't regret it.

TAPE # E-157

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