

Sefer Bamidbar

THE RAHMANI FAMILY EDITION

FOR THE HATZLACHA, HEALTH, AND HAPPINESS
OF OUR FAMILY AND ALL KLAL YISROEL

פרשת מטות-מסעי

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Life and Free Will

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Part I. Real Life

The Sanctuary Cities

In this week's *sedrah* we read about one of Hashem's commands to the Am Yisroel as they were preparing to enter into Eretz Canaan. **כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן** - *When you cross over the Yarden to the land of Canaan,* **וְהִקְרִיתֶם לָכֶם עָרִים עָרֵי מְקֻלָּט תְּהִיֶינָה לָכֶם,** - *you should designate for yourself, arei miklat, sanctuary cities* **וְנָס שָׂמָּה רֹצֵחַ מִכַּף נֶפֶשׁ בְּשִׁגְגָה** - *and a killer who unintentionally takes a life shall flee there* (Masei 35:10-11).

It's talking about a man who accidentally killed a fellow Jew and now finds himself in danger of being killed by his victim's family. The *goel hadam* - the "blood

redeemer" - has the right to avenge the blood of his dead relative and so the Torah provides a safe haven, a place to where the accidental killer can escape. In the *arei miklat* he is protected from the *goel hadam*, **וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ** - *and that way he will not die* (ibid. 12).

But we'll see now that not only was this city a place where *v'lo yomus harotzeiach*, where the killer is shielded from the vengeful anger of the *goel hadam*, but the Torah tells us that while he's there in that city the *beis din* is also required to go out of its way to provide him with all the means of normal living. **וְנָס אֶל אֶחַת מִן הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה** - *He has to flee to one of these cities,* **וְהָיָה שָׁמָּה וְהָיָה שָׁמָּה** - *and there he will live* (Devarim 4:42). And the Gemara says that more than just allowing him to find refuge, the word *vachai* means, *avid lei midi d'tihevi lei chiyusa* - *You must make a life for him there in that city*. Even though it's a form of a prison for him there, but *vachai* - *make for him a life*; the *beis din* has to provide the *rotzeiach* with all the necessities for ordinary existence.

Life and Death

We don't tell him to live on bread and water; he's supplied with nourishing food and vitamins and medicines, everything he needs to live successfully. That, the Gemara says, is what *vachai* means - give him life; provide him with whatever he'll need to live a normal life.

Now, in the crazy world we live in today, you might think it means they have to supply him with color TV. After all, what's life without television? You know there was a big riot last year in one of the prisons upstate. The inmates broke windows and smashed tables. Why were they so upset? Because they only had ordinary TV, black and white TV. "It's not a life," they said. "We need color TV." And so a special commission came, a state board of inquiry, and this committee of wise men sat down together *b'koved rosh* and thought deeply into what life means, about what living life to its fullest

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includes, and they concluded that the felons are right! How can you deprive human beings of color TV?!

But that's not the Torah view of life. Watching television or the movies today means you're going over to the dirty toilet and dipping a cup into the sewage and you're drinking non-stop. The worst thing that can happen to a man is if he gets water on the brain – if he gets sewage on the brain then there's no hope for him at all!

And so *vachai* means *no television!* Television is the opposite of life. Because “and you should provide for him life,” means not that you give him what the lowest element of society thinks life is about – *vachai* means you have to give him the means of living a successful life.

Jailing The Innocent

And that's why the Gemara tells us a queer thing, something we wouldn't have realized on our own. The sages say that included in this mitzvah of 'vachai' is, תַּלְמִיד שֶׁגָּלָה מִגְּלִין רַבּוֹ עִמּוֹ - *When a person has to flee to the ir miklat his teacher is also sent into galus with him.* Just as you must supply him with a city where he can live out of reach of the hands of the *goel hadam*, and just like you provide him with all the necessities of life so that he should live a normal existence, you must also supply him with the opportunity of *vachai*, to live life most purposefully. And included in that is that we make his teacher, his *rebbe*, go into exile with him.

Now, the *rebbe* is innocent – it was the *talmid* who killed somebody *bishogeg*, not him – but when the student is sentenced to go into exile, the *rebbe* is forced by the *beis din* to go with his student.

Imprisoning the Rosh Yeshiva

So the *rebbe* says, “What did I do?! I'm innocent! I have to be imprisoned in an *ir miklat*?!”

So we tell him, “We can't help it. The Torah says *vachai*, that your *talmid* has to live.”

“Let him live,” the *rebbe* says, “I have nothing against him living. But why should I be sentenced along with him? I'll write to him, I'll visit him, but let him live without me!”

“No,” say our sages. “That's not called living life without a *rebbe*.”

So the *rebbe* has to move; he has to leave his home and find a place to live in the *ir miklat* in order to fulfill the command of the Torah. If he has a *yeshiva*, he has to forsake his *yeshiva*; it's his responsibility to go with his *talmid* into the *ir miklat*. And it's based on the admonition *vachai*, he must live. *Avid lei chayusa* – “Make a life for him,” and there's no life without a *rebbe*.

Sending a Torah Library

Now we could have thought that all this was in the olden days. In the ancient times when it was still forbidden to write anything except *Torah*, *Nevi'im* *u'Kesuvim* – you couldn't write the *gemara*; even to write the *mishnah* was forbidden – and so the only source of Torah knowledge was a live *rebbe*. Some *chumash* you could learn on your own but that's all – and even your *chumash* didn't have any *Rashi*. And so, without your *rebbe* you were cut off from the fountain of Torah.

But after printing was invented – suppose we had the system of *arei miklat* today and one of our disciples was unfortunate enough to be sentenced to *galus* so we would think that it's up to the *beis din* to provide him with a *shas*, a big *shas* with all the *mefarshim*, and all the *rishonim* and *achronim* too, and that's how we'd fulfill this mitzvah of giving him spiritual life – give him a Torah library and that's all he needs. So it would seem. The *rebbe* could continue with his great work maintaining his *yeshiva* wherever he was and he could make a big order from the Jewish book store and send a Torah library for the *talmid*.

The Meaning of Life

And yet there's no such leeway given. Even today, with all of our printed books and with all of our Torah lectures on the telephone, when we have *arei miklat* again, this *din* of *talmid shegala*, *maglin rabo imo* won't change. *Vachai* means not only that he should have food and clothing and medicine and *seforim*, but most of all he should have his *rebbe* too. And the *rebbe* would have to come personally because that's what the Torah means when it says *vachai*. To live means you should live together with your *rebbe*.

Now we should try to understand why that is so. You know when you learn mathematics so the one who is teaching you mathematics is not giving you a part of his *neshama*. He's taking a dry formula that he has somewhere in his pocket and he's handing it to you – it makes no difference if he gives you the formula with a smile or with a sigh or with any kind of pious thoughts. You understand what kind of thoughts the teachers have in the schools usually, and so it's lucky that the thoughts don't go in with the mathematics. Thankfully the thoughts remain in his head and the disciples get only mathematics.

Torah Is Not Algebra

But that's not the case here; Torah isn't *lehavdil* like mathematical laws, like geometry propositions. It's a big error to think that Torah is a set of abstractions. No, Torah is something different altogether – it's a way of life; its teachings are intended to become part of your personality.

The problem is that people generally think in stereotypes; they think that just like an algebra teacher teaches algebra, so a Torah teacher teaches Torah. They're the same thing – only one went to the university and one went to the *kollel*. And because the *rebbe* has certain information that you don't, therefore you have to have to be in contact with him in order to access that information.

The truth is that you can't blame people too much for thinking that way because today most of our Torah has been learned from pages that have no character, no personality, no emotions. Even the *rebbe*s themselves are sometimes test-tube babies – they are the result of laboratories. They are the result of printed pages and so their ideas are all paper ideas – since the *heter* to write the Torah down was given, this gem of having a *rebbe* has been neglected to a certain extent. Because actually a *rebbe* gives so much more than Torah information.

Boarding The Ferry

The *gemara* (Kiddushin 70b) tells us that once an old sage came to visit Naharda'a. Now this sage was a disciple of the great Torah giant Shmuel and so Rabbi Nachman took the opportunity to ask him something

about a certain *halacha* that was confounding him. Rabbi Nachman asked him, “Did you ever hear anything about this from Shmuel?” So the old sage said, “Yes, I remember when Shmuel was once about to take leave of us and he had one foot on the ferry boat and one foot on shore; when he was just about to board the ferry across the river he told us this *halacha* that you're asking about.”

That's how people knew their *rebbe*. Whenever they repeated anything of the Torah, the face of their *rebbe* came up before their eyes. The way he stood, the way he spoke, every nuance, it was part of the Torah.

The Breath of Your Nostrils

And that's because Torah means not the *halacha* alone; it means much more. When the *rebbe* speaks, the *talmid* understands that he is accepting from his *rebbe* a part of his soul. The Torah was given over with expressions of countenance and with the participation of emotions in such a manner that it *couldn't* be lifeless. *Ki heim chayeinu!* It was the lifeblood that passed from the *rav* to the *talmid* it became part of his soul.

And that's what life is – that's what a *rebbe* really is. It's not merely a refinement. It's not a luxury. A *rebbe* is *mamash* the breath of your nostrils. It's your life in the world to come. That's what we're learning here and that's what the Torah meant when it said, *vachai*. To live in this world means you should live together with your *rebbe*.

Part II. Choosing Life

The Gem of Free Will

Now, when we talk about the *rebbe* who comes to *golus* along with his *talmid* because of *vachai*; in order to help him live, we have to know that there's something more that is included in the life that a *rebbe* provides. And that's the great subject of **וּבְחֵרָתְךָ בְּחַיִּים** – *And you should choose life*. It's a *mitzvah* in the Torah and it means that you should always be choosing the right path – the path that will lead you to life in the World to Come.

But first, as an introduction, it's important to understand what a gem, what a rare bird, this ability to choose is. There's nothing in the world as exceptional as free will. Because when you study everything in the world, you'll see there's no such thing as something acting on its own – every object in the universe, every process, every act, is the result of certain causes that made it be what it is or made it function like it does. There is nothing that acts independently of the laws of cause and effect that Hakodosh Boruch Hu implanted into nature at the time of creation. The wind doesn't choose to blow; it blows because of a system that Hashem set into place. The rain doesn't choose that today is a good time to rain; it's all part of a calculated system of cause and effect that was created by the Keil Elyon, the Uppermost One who is making all the choices.

Brilliant Bird Brain

In the animal world too – all the animals follow the instincts which they were created with. A bird, you see it hopping across the sidewalk with a leaf in its mouth – that bird is going to build a nest. It decided it's time for a nest? No. It will build a nest because it has a built-in program that tells it when to build a nest and how to build a nest. The bird is not choosing to do anything – it doesn't understand a thing; everything it does is already encoded in its brain with all the details of what to do and how to do it without any instruction from its parents. It is born with the information already programmed into its mental computer.

If you see a bee setting out from its hive, even if it's on its virgin flight, it doesn't need any instructions. It flies in the most amazingly precise manner according to information that has been supplied to it by bees who have previously departed from the hive and left trails behind, certain signals whereby the young bee can set out and follow a pre-programmed path.

The bee even knows how to follow the angle of the sun's inclination! It's remarkable how the bee functions like a skilled navigator using both the signs that have been laid down by the pioneering ones who went before it as well as certain forces of nature like the sun and the earth's magnetism. This little bee who never went to school – it wasn't even homeschooled by the

mother bee – and it visits flowers and collects pollen and nectar. And it does everything with the utmost efficiency! It doesn't understand a thing but everything is coded on his brain with all details of what to do and how to do it.

And so that's an axiomatic truth about creation – *nothing* in this universe has any choice; everything follows the patterns of wisdom which the Creator laid down at the outset.

Purpose of Mankind

However there is one exception to that rule. Mankind! Man has the free will to choose. That is something that we know from our Torah; it's a self evident part of our Torah tradition because the Torah is constantly speaking to man, promising him reward if he chooses this or that and warning him, threatening him with retribution if he chooses the other way *chalilah*. Now, if a man was forced by his nature or by circumstances, then it wouldn't make any sense to command him and it certainly would be unjust to punish him; reward would also have no place. So from the Torah we see that *bechirah chofshis*, free will, is a foundation of *kol hatorah kulah*.

And yet, for Olam Hazeh alone we would be happier if we didn't have free will; we could have been given instincts for how to live successfully and like the cow in the field and the bird in the tree, we'd be satisfied. Nobody would make any demonstrations, there wouldn't be any revolutions, there wouldn't be any fights or divorces – there would be an ordinary settled manner of life. And we would go happily through life and then we would die like all the animals do. We wouldn't have anything to look forward to, nothing to work towards, but at least this world would have been a successful career.

But unlike the rest of creation, our purpose is not Olam Hazeh; *our purpose is the next world*. And that's why we are given this greatness that is beyond anything else in this world – because its purpose is beyond anything in this world.

The Greatest Question

So in a sense, free will is a gift that excels beyond all the forms of benevolence that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has bestowed on us in this world because it is the means by which we achieve the great happiness of the next world. The plain truth is that there is nothing greater than the opportunity to fulfill **וּבְחֵרָתְךָ בְּחַיִּים**, to choose life. Because what kind of life are we talking about? You're choosing a life that is forever.

And therefore this brings us to the great question, what to do about this big responsibility? Hashem didn't make you a bird or a bee after all – He gave you that very rare gift of free will, and so you have to spend some time thinking about this question. It's not a small question at all – you shouldn't think it is just some idle kind of philosophical discussion that doesn't require your attention. Oh no, this is the question of all questions, probably the greatest question you'll ever face: “What should I do with this tremendous responsibility?” After all, many people have spent their lives constantly choosing wrong and they've failed to accomplish in this world what they're capable of.

Hiring a Mashgiach

And this brings us to one of the details in this subject of *bechira* that is too often overlooked – it's the important principle of utilizing the free will in order to limit the free will. You hear that *chiddush*?! There are ways that we could take our ability to choose and utilize it in order to deprive ourselves of free will! And that's the explanation for why you're not considered living unless you're under the watchful eyes of a *rebbe*. Because he's forcing you to choose good; his presence forces you to choose life!

Now, I'm sure this is not appreciated because people don't understand what it means to check your free will but I'll give you an example, a common story, so you can understand. Let's say there was a boy in the yeshiva who sometimes doesn't come down to *shacharis*; it happens sometimes in the yeshiva. And so one day the *mashgiach* catches up to him and reproaches him, “What about coming to *tefillas shacharis*?” So what does the *bochur* say? He says, “I

like to come without being forced.” He doesn't want to be told to come.

Now that boy doesn't realize that what he is saying is the opposite of common sense because one of the foremost ways to utilize your free will is to put yourself in a situation where you're forced to choose life. You should *like* to be forced, you should *want* to be forced. Because when you choose to limit your free will by putting yourself under the watchful eyes of others, you're making use of one of the greatest devices available for saving your life.

Praying for the Environment

Like the Mirrer *mashgiach zichrono livracha*, R' Yerucham used to say, “To be *muchrach* on *yiras shomayim*, to be forced, that's what we have to pray for.”

You know, in the *yehi ratzon* for the new month we say, **חַיִּים שְׁתֵּהָא בְּנוֹ אֲהַבְתָּ תוֹרָה וְיִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם** and also **חַיִּים וְשֵׁשׁ בְּהֵם יִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם וְיִרְאַת הַטָּא**. So it seems like we're repeating ourselves; we're asking for *Yiras Shomayim* twice in the same paragraph?

I'll tell you something that I heard more than sixty years ago, from my *chavrusah* in Slabodka, Rav Aharon Birzher, *zichrono levracha*. The Germans killed him – he was a *talmid chochom*, the son-in-law of the Kurdaneh Rav and he was murdered along with the Kurdaneh Jews. He said like this. The best thing is **שְׁתֵּהָא בְּנוֹ** – we should have *Yiras Shomayim*, but in case we don't have it ourselves, at least **חַיִּים שֵׁשׁ בְּהֵם** – we should be in such an *environment* of *Yiras Shomayim*, that the environment forces us to be good.

Eternity through Externality

If you are in a *kollel* although you are not a big *masmid*, but you have to open a *sefer* once in a while. When the Rosh *Kollel* looks up from his *sefer* you surely have to! That's a great benefit! That's excellent!

The same also if you wear a black hat and you act like you are a frum Jew so your wife cannot be like a woman of the street and wear shorts because people will see her husband and look at her and it has to fit. So you are being forced into a certain form of behavior. Don't disdain that! It's a very great achievement, to look

for externalities that force us to be better people, that force us to choose good. It's a very important part of the *mitzvah* of *u'vacharta bachaim*, of choosing a life that gives you eternal life. The more we choose to restrict our free will and force ourselves to be beholden to better people, that's already the road to greatness.

The Life Preserver

And therefore a *talmid* who had to go into *golus*, it could be he's a big *lamdan*. We're not talking about a sixteen-year-old boy who needs a *rebbe* to *teitch* the *gemara* for him; we are talking about a man of forty, fifty, sixty, he's a big *talmid chacham* and in some cases he might even know more than his *rebbe*. He can leave his *rebbe* behind and make a *yeshiva* of his own in the *ir miklat*. So the Torah says, nothing doing! That's not called life. No matter what, you need somebody; everyone needs a *גְּבֵרָא דְרַמְסֵיפִינָא מִנְה* - a man of whom he is afraid (Moed Katan 24a). That's the benefit of being close to a *rebbe*.

When the *rebbe* is around there is a certain force, something that restrains you; it makes you think two times and three times before you do something. How many people have gone lost because they didn't know or they didn't heed this admonition? You didn't go lost altogether maybe, but surely you took many steps, you made many mistakes that you could have prevented if you had stuck to a *rebbe*.

No matter how well you can swim, the buffeting waves of life are more powerful than you can imagine. You know, if you're at sea and you fall out of the boat and someone throws a life preserver to you, you don't swim out on your own even if you're an expert swimmer. You hold on because that's your preservation! *Vachai!* As sure as you are of your ability to swim in this world, every man must hold onto his *rebbe* because that's life.

Live Near Your Rebbe

It's a tremendous principle that the *gemara* teaches: *Lolam yador adam b'mekom rabo*, a man should always live in the place of his *rebbe* (Brachos 8a). Some people today think that's limited to *chassidim*, but even *chassidim* don't necessarily fulfill this as it was intended. Some use their *rebbe* if they want to get blessings from him or that he should say a *tefillah* for them, or for

advice in a difficult situation, but to live near the *rebbe* because that's your life, that's a concept that's greatly overlooked. And it means therefore that people are overlooking life.

Of course you'll ask, "Who is my *rebbe*? I had this *rebbe*, I had that *rebbe*. I went through the *mesivta* and I had six different *rebbe*s, each year a different one, and they live at different addresses. Where should I move?" At least near one of them! Near the one with whom you had most *shaychus*, the one you were closest to.

See and Be Seen

You can't move? Make sure you're seeing him as much as possible. A lot of people don't have anything. Women call me up on the phone, they're having trouble with their husbands. So I said, "Which shul does he daven in?" If he would have a Rav she could call up, so that Rav could talk to him.

"He *davens* in a few shuls," she tells me.

It means he's a *yasom*. Friday night he goes to one place, Shabbos morning he puts on his tallis and he travels around various places. Mincha and Maariv if he goes, he goes to a different place.

I asked her, "Does he know the Rav in any one of the shuls?"

"No. He never went even to say good Shabbos to any of the *rabbonim*."

Sometimes they tell me that his only *rebbe* is buried in Europe. That's not enough. A dead *rebbe* can't tell you off - he can't keep his eyes on you. A man who doesn't have a *rebbe* is a hopeless case. You're not an insect or a bird who can rely on his instincts to be successful. A human being has to have a *rebbe*, somebody standing over him, otherwise it's not called living.

Where to Move

If you never had a *rebbe*, that's a big problem. It's a big pity. Where should you live? Wherever your wife decides is the nicest neighborhood?! Should I move out somewhere in Briarcliff? A new community with new trees and new houses and new Jews. Everything you take into consideration when you move except for the

most important one. The main principle is the one that's mostly neglected, to remain *b'mekom rabo*.

Isn't that a new idea? When you're thinking of where to settle, to make sure it's near your *rebbe*. Or at least a different *rebbe* even though it's not yours. *Aseh lecha rav* means make somebody your *rebbe*! The *rav* of the local shul, a *talmid chochom* who lives nearby, somebody! Of course get the best one you can but whoever it is you have to stick to him. It doesn't mean that you're committed forever, but until you find somebody better, that's your life.

Choose a yeshiva and move as close to the yeshiva as possible. The yeshiva will be your *rebbe*. It's good to feel like the yeshiva men are looking over your shoulder. The yeshiva building is looking over your shoulder. The *rosh yeshiva*, the *rosh kollel*. It's worth any amount of money to settle there. It's very serious what I'm telling you now. The environs of a yeshiva are the healthiest places to live. You have no idea the effect it will have upon you and your wife and your children if you follow the prescription of *chazal*, *le'olam yadur bimekom rabbo*.

That's it – the Torah laid down the law. And *le'olam* means always! Even when you are older and have grown independent. It could be you're already a *gavra rabbah*, a great man; at least you're married and you have children, even grandchildren, so you think you're something already. And maybe you are. But no matter; *le'olam*! Always! You should be as close as possible to your teacher, always, so that you should see him and he should see you. You must remain under somebody's constant watch.

Part III. Ancient Life

Cause of The Churban

Now, in order to emphasize the importance of a *rebbe* looking over your shoulder, the *gemara* there tells us something about a great man that at first glance seems so remarkable that it's almost difficult to accept. Chazal tell us that it was the violation of this teaching that caused the *galus*! The Churban Beis Hamikdash! You know why we're mourning for the Beis Hamikdash

today? Because Shlomo Hamelech made the big mistake of making decisions without his *rebbe*.

The *gemara* says that *kol zman she'Shimi ben Geira kayam*, as long as Shlomo's *rebbe*, Shimi ben Geira, was still alive, *lo nasa Shlomo es bas Pharaoh*, Shlomo didn't wed the daughter of Pharaoh. It was only after his *rebbe* passed away that he made the decision to marry her, which ultimately brought the destruction of Yerushalayim.

Now, you can't tell me that Shimi ben Geira was bigger than Shlomo Hamelech. Shlomo was far beyond his *rebbe* and Hakodosh Boruch Hu had already put His stamp of approval on Shlomo that he was the *chacham mikol adam* (Melachim I 5:11). It means he was the genius of our history and he was fully competent to get along on his own. He could make decisions that were the best, so it seems to us.

Shlomo's Encyclopedic Defense

And the truth is that if Shimi ben Geira would have confronted him, Shlomo would have had what to say. Let's say Shlomo thought his *rebbe* was dead and all of a sudden after marrying the *bas Pharaoh* his *rebbe* shows up and says, "Shlomo what are you doing here?! You think that just because you converted her, it makes you right?!" So you can be sure that Shlomo had a big *pilpul* prepared, a *maarachah*, to defend his actions. Not like in the *shaalos u'teshuvos*, a *maaracha* with just ten *anafim*; oh no, that's child's play compared to the *chochma* of Shlomo. He would make a whole set of *seforim* defending his position.

There is a halacha sefer called Chazaka Rabbah, a big set, like a *shas*, all on the subject of *chazaka*. Chazaka Rabbah, a whole set like this. Shlomo Hamelech would make a set three times, ten times, as long as that! And he would prove *b'osos u'mofsim* that not only is it *muttar*, but it's a *mitzvah*, a *chiyuv* to do that.

I spoke about that here last time, about Shlomo Hamelech's *derech* in that. It was his great plan to increase *kavod shomayim*; to spread *emunah* in the world by marrying into many royal families and influencing the monarchies of the world. Whatever it was, Shlomo Hamelech could have defended himself mightily against his *rebbe*.

Rome Wasn't Built in A Day

And yet the *gemara* says that only because his *rebbe* was no longer alive, that's why he did it. He would never have done it with his *rebbe* still around. It's a remarkable thing! Had he been in the shadow of his *rebbe*, had the *rebbe* had still been alive, Shlomo would have hesitated to take that step. He would have thought it over and something in his mind would have told him to hold off. The mere presence of Shimi ben Geira would have deterred him – despite Shlomo's tremendous mind and his titanic ability to choose, the fact that there was someone in the background, that would have limited his gigantic free will.

It was only when Shlomo lost that someone, that's when the seeds of the *churban* Beis Hamikdash were planted. The *gemara* says that at that time when Shlomo married the daughter of Pharaoh, a *malach* came down and put a stick into the ocean and seaweed began to collect around the stick. And then more seaweed and then sand and dirt, and after a while an island developed around that stick and there was formed the piece of land on which Rome was built.

Now that's a *mashal* of course but it means that when Rome finally came at the end and destroyed the second Beis Hamikdash, that *churban* was a result of the first *churban*, and the first *churban* was a result of Shlomo's misdeed.

Of course, it took many twists and turns from the day that he married the daughter of Pharaoh until the *churban* but our sages detected in the destruction of the *mikdash* and our being exiled from Eretz Yisroel a connection to hundreds of years previous when a great man didn't have a *rebbe* anymore.

Lost Prophecy

There's a great lesson there that our sages are trying to teach us – having someone looking over your shoulder is so important that the future of our people hinges on it. The *kiyum* of the Am Yisroel, our success, depends on every single one of us living in the shadow of a *rebbe*, someone to look over our shoulder.

And that's why one of the most important things that we mourn over during these days of *aveilus* is that we lost the system of *nevuah*; we lost an entire system

of having people standing over us and guiding us. Of course we weep for the destruction of the House of Hashem and for the people we lost, the **עַם הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁנְפוּ לוֹ בְּחָרָב**, but we should never forget that we are weeping too for the great opportunity that went lost when *nevuah* came to an end.

Now, if we're going to mourn properly we have to know what we're mourning for. It means we have to get a clear picture in our minds, what was the function of the *nevi'im*?

The Maggidim of Yesteryear

You know that up until about a hundred years ago there were *maggidim*, preachers, who used to visit the *kehillos* and speak to the Jewish people. They spoke for hours criticizing. The Kelmer Maggid used to come to towns and speak; he spoke for two or three hours. He was lambasting them. And don't think the people didn't come to listen. It hurt but they listened anyhow.

A man told me he remembers in *aseres yemei teshuvah* the *maggid* used to speak to the storekeepers about honesty in weights and measures. This man said he remembers, if you would take a walk outside of the town, you would find pecks and pints and bushels scattered all over because the merchants had thrown away these bushels or weights in order to buy new ones. They had been worn out and no longer gave exact measurements. That's what the *maggid* accomplished in those days, not so long ago.

The Original Maggidim

But all this is nothing compared to what we once had. It's nothing compared to the days of the *nevi'im*! When the *navi* came he spoke with the utmost vigor to denounce anything he saw that was wrong. Nobody – not the kings, not the *talmidei chachomim*, not the wealthy – no one was immune from his criticism.

And he wasn't a public speaker, an entertainer who told them anecdotes; he didn't hide his criticism between stories. He told them straight away what was wrong with them. The smallest sins were portrayed by the *navi* in the very worst words. That's the system of *nevuah*. Nothing is considered small. And it was said in the bitterest way!

In some cases they attempted to silence the Navi by killing him. Zecharyah ben Berechya was killed at the order of King Yoash. He was criticizing the king in public and finally the king sent somebody to secretly attack the *navi* and killed him. It was a case that was never forgotten in our history. The blood of the *navi* was never forgotten. It was a rarity but it happened. Uriah Hanavi was killed by Yehoyakim. Yeshayah was executed by Menashe.

Oh yes, it was dangerous to be a prophet. Yirmiyah Hanavi says (Eicha 3:53) *vayadu even bi*, they threw stones at me. They attempted to kill him too – he was thrown into a quagmire and he was sinking until a colored man came along and saved his life. It's interesting to know that – a black man saved the life of Yirmiyah Hanavi. The white Jews were afraid to save him because he had enemies but along came a black fellow, a slave, and he told the king, "Look! The *navi* is drowning in mud!" So the king said, "Take blankets and ropes and run to save him." That's how Yirmiyahu was saved. We're grateful to the black people for that! But we see that he had been put there to drown in mud. And that's because Yirmiyah had a bitter tongue. It wasn't *his* tongue though – he spoke the words that Hakodosh Boruch Hu told him to speak.

Preventing Galus

But we must know that for hundreds of years people tolerated the *navi*. It doesn't mean that everybody always obeyed him, but they allowed him to speak. Everyone understood that it was the best thing for the nation; the *kiyum* of the nation depended on hearing criticism, and having a *rebbe*.

What happened finally? At the end of the era of the first Beis HaMikdash, our resolve began to weaken and that's when false prophets began to appear on the scene; it happened because people wanted other kinds of prophecy, not criticism.

Like Yirmiyahu in Eichah (2:14) said in the name of Hashem: נְבִיאֶיךָ חָזוּ לְךָ שָׂוָא וְתַפֵּל וְלֹא גִלּוּ עַל עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ לְהַשִּׁיב שְׁבוּתֶיךָ – Your *nevi'im*—not My *nevi'im*; your *nevi'im*—they saw for you visions that were false and meaningless, וְלֹא גִלּוּ עַל עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ לְהַשִּׁיב – and they did not reveal to you your sins, לְהַשִּׁיב

שְׁבוּתֶיךָ – which would have brought back the captivity; it means it would have prevented the *golus*.

The End of Prophecy

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "I gave you this great gift to help you in this world and the next world and now you're becoming tired of it? So I'm taking away that gift." And that's why the *nevuah* stopped; the Churban Beis Hamikdash was the termination of the *nevuah*. At the beginning of Bayis Sheini there still remained some old *nevi'im* who continued to live on for a little while. And when they passed away no more *navi* ever arose.

It's a remarkable thing; read our history – never again did anybody get up and say כֹּה אָמַר הַשֵּׁם – "So said Hashem..." That's why in the New Testament - of course it's full of *sheker*, the whole New Testament is nothing but falsehood – but Oso Ha'ish was very careful; he knew how to guard himself. He never said כֹּה אָמַר הַשֵּׁם, not even once. He prayed to Hashem, yes; he prayed to Hashem it says. He kept the *seder*. He said *hallel*. He said *hallel* at the *seder* – it says that *b'feirush* in the New Testament. Many things he did. But despite all of his boasts he never said, "So said Hashem...". That he knew you can't do! Because prophecy had already come to an end at the end of Bayis Rishon. The system of having someone appointed by Hashem to stand over you went lost.

Mourning and Its Reward

And that is the saddest of everything that we lost in the Churban because that was the success of the Am Yisroel. Up until then the Am Yisroel relied on the *nevi'im* to guide them toward perfection in *avodas Hashem*. And that's why those generations were so excellent; never again did we have such good people as we had in those days when the *nevi'im* stood on guard and they lambasted every wrong thing that they saw. We were made aware and we became better and better.

And therefore we have to remember always what we lost when the *nevuah* stopped. When prophecy came to an end, we lost one of the most precious gems our people ever had, the gift of unbiased and unlimited criticism that guides us to everlasting life. And it's that gift that we try to relive in our own lives by always

being close to someone who will look over our shoulders and guide us. That's the lesson of *vachai* – and he should live successfully in the *ir miklat*; it's the lesson that “living” means to live a life of coming closer to Hashem by means of *asei licha rav*.

And if as a part of our mourning for the ancient days we remind ourselves of those days and we too try to use that gift of limiting our free will by accepting the guidance of others then we *b'ezer Hashem* will be included in that great promise of **כָּל הַמְתַאֲבֵל עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יִרְוּעַתָּהּ** - *Those who mourn for Yerushalayim will be rewarded that they shall see the salvation of Yerushalayim* (Taanis 30b).

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

One Minute a Day of Choosing Real Life

Life means living with a *rebbe* who forces you to limit your free will and choose only to do good. From now until Tishah B'Av, I will *bli neder* spend thirty seconds thinking about the loss that befell our nation when we lost that great system of *nevuah* whereby the nation was being taught and watched and criticized. And then I will spend another thirty seconds thinking of practical ways that I can gain that same perfection we once had, by means of choosing a Torah teacher who will stand over my shoulder and help me “choose life.”

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

In one of your books you write that *davening* with people who aren't serious about serving Hashem is compared to *sha'atnez* – a mixing that is unfavorable in the eyes of Hashem. But I thought that we are obligated to *daven* with all Jews – sinners as well?

A:

No. We are not obligated to daven with all Jews. No. Because it is of utmost importance to be *mekayem* the ideal of (Avos 1:7) “*harcheik mi'shachein ra.*” Keep far away from a bad neighbor. Far away. And it is *ossur* to be *mishtatef* with a *rasha* even for a *dvar mitzvah* (Avos D'Rabbi Nosson 9:4). All the *poskim* say that clearly. It's *ossur* to join *resha'im* even for the purpose of doing a *mitzvah*.

Therefore it's important not to be bribed by the fact that we are all *davening* the same words. You have to know that even in the best *shul*, if you sit down next to a person of bad character, he can ruin you *chalilah*. I've seen it again and again.

Once a man came into our *shul*. He was a *baal teshuva* and full of enthusiasm. Full of eagerness to learn. And he sat down next to an old man who I knew was a *leitz*. And the old man kept on talking to him during *davening*. Speaking all the time against everybody in the *shul* – including me. Finally this *baal teshuva* became so ruined, so spoiled, that he became my enemy and he left the *shul*. I wanted to make something out of him but this *shochein ra* ruined him. It happened twice in my history. Twice I had such an experience.

And therefore, it's so important to avoid people who might spoil you. Even if it will only spoil you a little, you must beware. It's of utmost importance to seek out the best ones wherever you go.

TAPE #E-183