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WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Growing Old

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Part I. Phenomenon of Old Age

A Hairy Issue

I want to talk to you tonight about hair; about the hair we have on our heads. Now, don't think that you wasted your time coming here tonight – it's a very important subject; be patient with me and you'll soon see just how important it really is.

Before we begin, the first thing to remember is what we have said here many times already. Everything in creation has one main overall purpose: **הַאֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה** - Hakodosh Boruch Hu made

this entire world, **שִׂירָאוּ מְלַפְּנֵינוּ** - in order that people should recognize the Creator (Koheles 3:14). And that means we're expected to study the phenomenon of hair in order to become aware of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

So next time you're holding your hand on your hair, let's say you're brushing your hair or stroking your beard, realize for a moment that you're touching a testimony of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Why did He give you hair? Why is hair on top of your skull? Why isn't hair all over your face? Where does it come from? What is hair? Is it just a simple thing, a thin thread that grows from your scalp? Those are questions that you should think about. At least once in your life you should spend some time on that because we're expected to utilize hair to come to awareness of the One who created it.

The Shock Absorbent Helmet

You know, today in the playgrounds, the more modern playgrounds, they don't have cement pavement under the swings or under the climbing poles, but they have something that gives a little bit. If you look today in the playground, you'll see that. That way when the kids fall down head first, it gives a little bit.

But Hakodosh Baruch Hu was even earlier and He provided something built in; a built in shock absorber. Sometimes you fall on your head and that little mat is extremely important. It absorbs the blow and sometimes it makes the difference between just a headache and a crushed skull.

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Love the Jaffes.

Think about that next time you see your toddler growing out his hair; that's a gift from Hashem. That's what hair is doing on the head of the children.

But not only children; even when you grow up. Sometimes you have to fight, you go to war, and if you get a blow on the head with a club, that shock absorber makes all the difference.

Aristocratic Women Killers

The ladies too. The good old days, the age of chivalry, was an age when they used to hit women over the head with clubs. Neighbors fought with each other all the time and the women neighbors were easy pickings.

I'm talking now about the United States. In Kentucky up until recently, when a man was upset at his neighbor because he thought he was stealing his corn, he'd wait behind the bush and when his neighbor's wife would pass by on the road he'd jump out and hit her over the head with a club. When families weren't on good terms with each other, they used to shoot from behind fences at their neighbors.

We're talking about the aristocratic families in America, the blue-bloods in the hills of Kentucky – no immigrants there; no Irish, no Italians, only real old-time Americans carrying on the real old-time tradition of good *middos*, of shooting at their neighbors from behind bushes! And they would shoot even at women of other families. Vendettas like this were carried on for generations; for generations neighbors shot at each other.

Of course, against modern weapons hair won't help, but way back when they didn't shoot yet, when they only used to hit each other over the head with clubs, so whether you were a child or a man or woman, a thick coil of hair or a good heavy *sheitel* would stand in good stead.

Miniscule Monuments

You think I'm saying that in levity? It's serious. Hair is protection. It's like a soft helmet, a protection cover, that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave

us to carry around wherever we go. It's only because we're so accustomed to it we don't think about the benefits.

But I don't want to talk now only about hair on the whole. Every strand of hair is a *neis*! You know that hair under the microscope looks like a tower? And not a plain primitive tower like the Washington Monument. Each hair is a wonderfully constructed edifice of complicated planning built up like a skyscraper.

If you look at a hair under the microscope and you follow it up to its tip, you see that there are stairs. It tapers up in stages, and each stage is built up on a pedestal of the stage beneath it. Each stage becomes narrower than the previous one and is set into the bottom one just like something is set into a socket. And it's at the sockets that the hair is pliable. It's not like we think the hair is one long entity. At the various sockets of each hair, the hair bends. It's a complicated business, a strand of hair.

Wooly Bread

When you look at human hair, you see that so much hair can come out of the scalp. Hair, you know, doesn't come out of the brains – it comes out of the skin of the scalp. How can the skin of the scalp produce so much hair? Look at a man – he has a long beard; way down to here; and it came out of the skin of his face. It's remarkable that the skin can produce this wool that is coming out of your chin.

Where does the skin get it from? And the answer is that it's a *neis*. Whatever you eat is transformed in the cells of your body into keratin by means of many miracles. Keratin is the material of which hair is composed. Now, you can't make keratin yourself. If you could, you could patent it and become a millionaire overnight! It's wool!

How does the food you eat become wool?! It's nothing less than a miracle. You see a girl with nice long hair; you have to know it's nothing but bread. Bread?! Yes, it's nothing but bread. When you put a piece of bread in your mouth, the bread turns into hair. How can bread turn into hair?

Ohhh, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a Master Chemist; He knows how to do that. Hakodosh Boruch Hu has given the body such a wonderful ability that it can take anything that you eat and transform it into the necessary chemicals to produce the hair.

The Hairy Certificate

Now, although I have a big *yetzer hora* to go on – it’s so interesting; at least for me it is – and I would like to talk about this subject, about how the hair we see every day is intended to make us aware of Hashem all the time, but I want to talk now about an entirely different lesson we can learn from our hair. And that’s the changes that occur as you age; white hair.

Now what is the purpose that the Creator caused the hair to turn white in old age? That’s a legitimate question. Why does the hair turn white? It’s just an accident? The pigment runs out?

There’s a plan here! Of course there are the most practical purposes; white hair is to render him exempt from various demands of the community. In the ancient days when everyone went to war, so white haired men were exempt. He didn’t have to produce a birth certificate or a medical certificate; he carried his certificate on top of his head.

When the son saw that his father’s hair was beginning to change color, he would say, “Dad, you stay home in your rocking chair and relax; we’ll go out to battle.” He was balding already and the protective mat wasn’t too useful anymore, and the little hair that he did have announced his age as too advanced for war. White hair means that they should let you alone now; you’re retired from pursuits of war, and from heavy labor.

Crown of Experience

But along comes Mishlei (16:31) and he tells us another reason. *עֵטֶרֶת הַתְּפֹאֶרֶת שִׁיבָה* – white hair is a crown of glory. It means that this man has the experience, the life experience to be worthy of giving good counsel. Hashem crowns him by placing on his head a wreath of dignity so that the

community should henceforth look up to him. The gray or white hair is an advertisement to the world, if you want advice, here is the place to come.

When people are sitting in counsel and deliberating, let’s say, about the future of the community or the future of the country, who are the ones who are most trustworthy? Old heads. Old heads are calm heads and seasoned heads; not hot heads who have no experience.

And that’s one of the great purposes of white hair. *עֵטֶרֶת הַתְּפֹאֶרֶת שִׁיבָה*, white hair is a crown of glory; it’s a diploma which shows you’ve been through the university of hard knocks or rather the *yeshivah* of experience and you learned the whole Torah.

Real Diplomas

Now, some people get a diploma, even a *semicha*, they get by deception. They call themselves rabbi in the telephone book but they know nothing. Well, imagine a bum broke into a doctor’s office and he stole the doctor’s white suit and his diploma and he took it to some garage and he hung it on the wall and he put on the white jacket and he is ready for business, he’s ready to butcher people. Of course there are counterfeits. So an old man who hasn’t learned anything in life except wrongdoings, he is carrying around a counterfeit document.

But had he lived with reason, had he lived properly, then this certificate entitles him to honor. That’s what Shlomo adds on at the end of that *possuk*. *עֵטֶרֶת הַתְּפֹאֶרֶת שִׁיבָה* – hoariness, that is white-headedness, is a crown of glory, *בְּדֶרֶךְ צְדָקָה תִּמְצָא* – it is found if you walk in the path of righteousness.

And the Almighty puts it on your head for a purpose, you should know there is a difference between him and these upstarts all around him; these black-headed fellows know nothing at all. So next time you seek advice and you go to a *yeshiva*, let’s say, don’t go to the black-haired one. Go to the white-haired one. If you’re going to ask *yinglach*, children, you’re doing it at your own risk.

Now, there is a statement in our sages that there was a time at the beginning of man's history when it wasn't that way. You know, people lived very long. Someday we might rediscover the secret of longevity, but in those days they knew it and they lived long; they lived very long. *And they didn't age.* The Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a) says עַד אַבְרָהָם לֹא הָיָה זִקְנָה, *until Avraham there was no ziknah.* It means people didn't show signs of aging.

Now you people who know about cats or dogs, unless you are a specialist you don't know the signs of age in cats or dogs. A cat is a cat; until you find him lying on the sidewalk rolled over, then you discover it was an old cat. You are not given advance information. I suppose an expert would be able to discover it, but there's no superficial sign.

But Avraham considered how wrong it is that this system should persist. He said "We're not cats and people are going to be misled. If they want to seek counsel of me, they might come to Yitzchok". In those days it wasn't possible to know. And when you go to seek the father and by accident you consult the son so it's new wine; new wine is not the same as old wine – it makes a big difference.

The First Elder

And therefore, Avraham prayed to the Almighty that there should be some changes in nature. And at that time it was וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן – Avraham became old (Chayei Sara 24:1).

The first time it's mentioned in the history of mankind that old age appeared as a phenomenon was וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן – signs of age became apparent on the head of Avraham. Now whether it's *k'peshuto* or allegorical, but the truth is there. The Almighty granted that וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן; old age began to evidence itself. Hakodosh Baruch Hu said that I'm going to give you a crown of glory, and people will see that you are the one from whom to seek counsel. וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן, that's the first one in history that's called a *zaken*.

You Can't Hide

However, in addition to what Mishlei tells us, there is another reason, a more spiritual reason, for white hair. White hair is a notice that time is running short; that you have to hurry up and begin achieving.

That should be your biggest worry, that you didn't achieve enough during your lifetime up till now, in your youth. And that's why graying hair is a big *matanah*; it's a message *min hashomayim* that you have to shake a leg; time is short.

That's why anyone, when he notices the first gray hairs, if he tries to pluck them out – by the way men shouldn't pluck out gray hairs; women are permitted but not men because it is considered a woman's practice and men don't do female practices – but besides for that, plucking out the grey hairs is like getting a marshal's notice and ignoring it; you will not accomplish anything by tearing it up. There is a copy at headquarters! And when you're due in court they'll come and get you. You can't run from the Plan of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

The Stimulus Plan

Rabeinu Yonah in his Shaarei Teshuva (2:7) tells us that. He's talking about the various spurs, the impetuses, that Hashem gives to man in order to encourage him to correct his ways in this world before it's too late, and he says as follows.

One of the more important opportunities that a person is given to utilize as a stimulus to become better is כַּאֲשֶׁר יָבוֹאוּ יְמֵי הַזְּקֵנָה – *when the days of old age begin to approach*, וְהִגִּיעוּ יְמֵי הַשֵּׂיבָה, – *and the time when when he starts turning gray.* שֵׂיבָה means when he starts turning gray, when signs of age begin to appear in him.

וַיִּכַּל כּוֹחוֹ וַיִּמְעַט ... וַיִּחַסֵּר הַמְּזִג בְּטַבְעוֹ. *And his strength is somewhat less than before.* Let's say, he doesn't have all of his teeth anymore. He'll never have as many teeth as he had when he was younger.

He has some false teeth maybe, some fillings. It's not the same as it used to be once upon a time.

He's not the same man as he once was. He used to skip and jump around and now even though he's still strong and healthy, he's not that active. Once you are middle aged even bending over to pick up something from the floor is more difficult than in your younger years.

It's a gift from Hashem. Otherwise he'd keep going on and on, and never be aware. When he starts turning gray, when some aches and pains creep up on him, that's a sign from Heaven that he must get busy. It should be utilized as a sign that he has to prepare. Make use of it! **יִזְכֹּר קִצּוֹ כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא**. *He should remember his end because it is now approaching.* His end is approaching. The closer it gets the more he has to think about it.

Fearsome Forty, Frightening Fifty

Now, it doesn't mean that he doesn't have time left. It doesn't mean he's preparing to pass out of this world, but still he's closer than before. Could be he'll live many years yet but this change in his physical condition is intended to give him a hint, a prod, to become better.

וְיִרְחַמֶּהוּ וְיִשֶׁב אֵלָּהּ *And let him return to Hashem and Hashem will have pity on him.* Hashem will have pity on him and help him.

Now this refers to almost anybody who is in the middle of his life, **כִּי יַעֲמֹד הָאָדָם בְּחֻצֵי יָמָיו**. If you're thirty-five already, you're halfway to seventy. And when you pass the middle of your life, you're forty or fifty, then surely it should be a stimulus. But even those people who are young and haven't reached this time yet should learn this now. If you learn it now you'll prepare yourself for the time when you'll start noticing signs of infirmity and you won't let it go to waste.

Getting The Message

You're still a young man but you see now a hair that turned gray. Don't let even one gray hair go to waste! They're sending you a message *min hashomayim* that you have to make preparations

now. You have to get busy improving the faults that you acquired during your years. You have to make amends for the wrong deeds you did, and make teshuva before it's too late.

Not only for what you did – it's even more important to begin making up for what you didn't do! There's so much to accomplish in Torah and *mitzvos*, in good character, in *yiras Hashem* and *ahavas Hashem*. And now as you're getting closer to the big *din v'cheshbon*, messages are being sent to you, as a stimulus, a prod, to prepare for that final day.

Tiffany's Ten

I'll repeat to you a little picture that I once drew for you here. It's the story of a man who won a contest and the prize was ten seconds in Tiffany's vault. Tiffany has a vault – at least it used to have – and this man won the opportunity to spend ten seconds grabbing whatever he could.

And so the great day came when this man came to Tiffany's. He was dressed in his *Shabbosdike* garments; and he made sure that his wife sewed him extra pockets on all sides of the lining. And reporters were there and photographers; the president of the bank was there in full dress – and of course there was a representative of the Internal Revenue Service there too.

And everyone is waiting because that vault opens by a clock at a certain moment. And finally a bell rings and that heavy massive door began to open up and he was amazed at what he saw. He was stunned by the blaze that he saw on all the shelves. Glittering stones, shining white and some blue and green. He's standing there in shock.

But the president nudged him, "Hurry up! You only have five seconds left! It's late!" And so he lunged into the vault and he fell down on his face and his hands and started grabbing but then the president of the bank took him by his coattails and pulled him right out. The bell rang and the door closed. Ten seconds were up.

That's what life is. Life is an opportunity to snatch the precious stones of achievement.

The Living Dead

Now if you think that the picture is exaggerated, no matter how glorious those ten seconds would appear to you, it is nothing at all compared to ten seconds of life. Because in this life you can achieve such diamonds that have no peer in beauty and lasting qualities and in price, and never again will this opportunity be repeated.

You know, when the hearse comes in front of the synagogue on the way to the cemetery and they open the doors for a moment in order to say *kel malei rachamim* the dead man would like to get out and run into the synagogue just for a moment. He alone, more than anyone else appreciates how precious the opportunity would be. But they don't let him. It's already too late for him. And that's why getting old – white hair and all the other infirmities and weaknesses that come with getting older – are one of the great blessings of life. They're the great reminder that life is for accomplishing.

The Elderly Seeker

That's why an old man walks bent over. In the yeshiva of Rav they used to say (Shabbos 152a) about an old man, *אֲדָלָא אֲבִידָנָא בְּחַיִּישְׁנָא* - *for that which he didn't lose, he's now seeking*. It was an aphorism about a person who grows old and now he's walking in the street bent over; he's looking down and moving his head from side to side. And so a little boy says to him, "Mister, what are you looking for?" The old man must be looking for something important that he lost – that's what it looks like.

So the old man replied, 'I am seeking what I never lost!' He's not seeking something that fell out of his pocket. He's seeking something much more important than that.

All his life he was walking erect, looking ahead, looking around, because he thought, "That's it!" Like a child who stands by the window of the store and he thinks that it's paradise; "If only I could get inside and buy whatever I want!"

Hammered by Hammers

If you were poor children, you know what I'm talking about. Most of you weren't poor; most of you were born rich, but if you were poor children, you stood at the store window, looking.

I was a poor boy; I stood in the door of toy stores. On the way back from Hebrew school I stopped every day and glued my eyes to the window. I used to stand and watch for weeks and months. I was looking at a little hammer that I wanted to buy. There was nothing more important to me than that hammer. Finally I saved up a quarter and I bought that hammer! It took a long time! Today, hammers mean nothing; I can buy a lot of hammers today! I have no use for them!

But that's a child. He gets pulled along by everything he sees in the world. And most people remain children always. They grow taller, they look older but they're still little children. They're looking ahead and they see things. Bigger hammers and cars and money and *kovod*. Whatever it is, the grown child is looking and looking.

Applause for The Appetizer

And that's what they said in the yeshiva of Rav. When this child finally begins to near the end, he's walking down the same avenue where the toy store is but now he's looking down; he's bent over. What's he looking for? "For what I didn't lose."

At the end a man realizes that he didn't lose anything. You lost candy? You lost romance? You lost money? You can't take it with you anyhow. So what is the use?

You were looking for glory? You never had it anyhow. It was an illusion. What is glory? Let's say, the board of directors and the sisterhood of the hospital are sitting and applauding you. Feh! They are not even thinking about you! While they're clapping for you, they're thinking. "When do they serve the supper! When are they going to get through handing out the testimonials and start serving supper?"

So you didn't lose anything. It was one big illusion. And therefore the old man is reminded about that. He looks on the ground and he says, "I am seeking what I never lost; I am seeking something far beyond that. Maybe in my youth I didn't look earnestly enough; let me look now at least."

Walk Like A Cow

That's why the old man stops looking straight ahead; he knows there is nothing to see over there. Instead he looks at the earth. Looking at the earth means, there is nothing to look for in this world; it is all a deception. When you are old and you walk with your head down it means you are thinking about things that are not in front of your eyes.

It is a good idea in general, when you walk on the streets today, you should look at the ground, in general it is good, it is healthy for you. **לֹא תִתְרוּ**. **אַחֲרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם**. Look on the ground; don't pick up your eyes – you might encounter some garbage.

But an old man, he does it automatically because he is not deceived by his eyes any more. Of course some old men are just looking without any sense at all; a cow also looks at the earth when he walks! But the symbolism is supposed to teach us that the things in front of him are meaningless; he is looking at the ground and the ground reminds him, "You will soon come to me; you will soon be mine."

Gaining Ground

Now, if he's not foolish he won't be deceived by that. "I won't be yours," he tells the ground, "It's not true. I won't be yours because I am looking beyond you. I am looking through you." That's how the wise old man thinks because he was prepared; for many years already he's known that the signs of old age were intended to remind him that *hayom laasosom*, now is the time to accomplish. This world is your opportunity! Don't waste it!

In the Torah (Devarim 7:11) it says **אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה** **וְהַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם**, these *mitzvos* which I command you

today to do them. And our sages say, *hayom*, today and not tomorrow. It's either now or never. In the next life no achievements will be accomplished. Once a man leaves this world, although he enters a glorious existence, the happiest existence which even Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself could imagine but the time to accomplish is over.

Part III. Preparing for Old Age

Until Nightfall

There's a *possuk* we say in *borchi nafshi*, **יֵצֵא אָדָם לַפֶּעֱלָו וְלַעֲבֹדָתוֹ עַד עֶרֶב** – A man goes out to his work and to his labor down to the evening. It's talking about the ancient times when men were hired by the day; day laborers, and so they began working as soon as daybreak occurred and they continued down to sunset. This was before welfare, before the liberals created generations of loafers, of lazy people. In those days you couldn't get food checks, food stamps – if you wanted to eat you worked a long day's work; **עַד עֶרֶב**, until nightfall.

But our sages (Bava Metzia 83b) tell us that Dovid Hamelech is talking about something else too. He's praising the person who knows that he's in this world laboring for Hakadosh Boruch Hu. **בְּמִי שֶׁהִשְׁלִים עֲבֹדָתוֹ עַד עֶרֶב** – And he's considered a successful laborer because he completed his service down to nightfall.

Nightfall means when the sun of life sets. When the sun is beginning to set on a man's visit to this world, sometimes the weary laborer feels that he is justified in resting. It's almost the end of the 'day' anyway. Oh no. As long as the sun is still above the horizon, the loyal worker continues on; **עַד עֶרֶב**, down to nightfall.

Avrohom Continues

That's why you find old men who gird themselves with strength and energy and they try their best to add a little more to what they formerly were. Avrohom Avinu did that. In his advanced years, when he was a very old man, **וַיִּסְף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח**,

אָפּה – Avrohom continued and he took a wife. Avrohom had had children already and we know that his main accomplishment, Yitzchok, already was born. And yet Avrohom did not give up the opportunity; the great opportunity to bring children into the world is such a gift that he didn't want to waste it.

וַיִּסָּף – Avrohom continued. This word, *vayosef*, is superfluous in the Torah. It should have said וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה – he took a wife. No. וַיִּסָּף – he continued. Even in his old age, as long as he's still around, he wants to continue to make use of the opportunity to labor for Hashem.

When R' Zelmele, the brother of R' Chaim Volozin, was on his deathbed they came to visit him. And they saw that he was suffering great discomfort; he was laying down in his bed and rolling from pain. And yet he was busy saying *divrei Torah*; he was learning. And he continued to learn up to the moment he expired. That's a great man! He was working all his life but even at the end he was working, *adei arev*.

The Lone Sage

I once visited a home for the aged in Baltimore; I had to see someone there. It was springtime and the older people were sitting around; it was a lawn with park benches and they were sitting there. In most cases, they were doing nothing, just staring. They were waiting for the grave. If there was a visitor, so they spoke, otherwise they were sitting and looking into vacancy. It was a pity. It means that life was already behind them.

And as I was looking around the lawn, my eyes fell upon one old fellow with a white beard sitting at a little table by himself with an open Gemara. And he was going a mile a minute. He was reviewing what he had learned once and he was preparing now for the great examination because that's the one of the first questions they're going to ask, "Did you study Torah?" (Shabbos 31a). And it's not enough to say yes. You have to show something. And so he was reviewing all that he had learned in

his lifetime – I'm sure he was learning new things too. He was busy, laboring *adei arev*.

Now a man like that didn't start that an hour before I came. He had started it when the dew of youth was yet on his brow and that had been his system all his days. The Torah had been his happiness, his consolation. Whenever his wife was mean, he took himself to the *beis hamedrash* and opened up his Gemara and forgot all his troubles. When business was going slow, when there were worries, he took himself to the Gemara and there he found what his soul desired.

And when he found his first gray hair, it only encouraged him more. And in his old age, you could see this man was still producing. His white hair, his white beard, only encouraged him more. He knew he was running out of time and he didn't want to waste a minute.

Disciple of the Newspaper

Isn't it a pity when you see old people sitting down in that little square on Kings Highway and Ocean Avenue and they're look vacantly at the world while the golden hours of life are running out. But that's what happens when you don't take the hints early on.

I was talking the day before yesterday to an elderly man, an old neighbor. This old fellow, all his life he was a diligent student of the Forverts. Many times he came over to talk to me in the street, enlighten me. He knows I'm an ignoramus. He knows I know nothing about this world so he comes and tells me a piece of information that he picked up from the Forverts. This has been going on now for 27 years. What can I say to him? These people are locked off from reality.

Forget About Israel Bonds

I couldn't tell him to go to the synagogue and start learning Torah because he has no connection. So I said, "Mr. So-and-So, you should start taking walks." He was overweight; a very heavy man. "Start taking walks" – that was my entering wedge;

maybe after he takes walks, then I'll be able to lure him on into my web.

He says, "No, I'm fine." He was smoking a cigar too while he's telling me no.

"Maybe you'll stop smoking," I said, "You can start taking walks; get some fresh air now. Find something to do in your last years." I didn't say those words, "last years." I couldn't say that to him because he knows he's going to live a thousand more years. He intends to be around a thousand years more.

"Find something to do," I said.

He said, "I'm busy. I'm working for Israel Bonds."

Alright. He's busy selling Israel Bonds. Okay. I have nothing more to say to him.

Now, some people think, "Israel Bonds – what else is there to do in old age?" My friends, there are a lot of better things to do than Israel Bonds. The subject of Israel Bonds, I won't bring up now; I'll wait until you're a little more advanced. A lot of people are still in the elementary courses yet and they're not ready to hear anything about Israel Bonds. So I'll let you dream your dream of Israel Bonds for a little while longer. But that's not the way to spend your old years. You'll come to the next world with Israel Bonds under your arms? I don't know how welcome you're going to be.

Times or Tehillim

Isn't it a tragedy when an old man wastes his last years? I was once riding on a bus; sitting alongside me was a chossid. Right in front there was an old man reading the New York Times. So the chossid – he had some boldness, so he said aloud, "Isn't it a pity?" he said, "An old man in his last years reading the Times instead of saying Tehillim?"

The old man turned around and mumbled something. He mumbled. What could you expect? If you're a student of the New York Times for years and years, you're not going to change in your last

moment. *Adei arev* you're going to be busy with foolishness.

That's why you need old age; to wake you up. That's why it's good that you came tonight because you're hearing something valuable; it's most priceless. It's not easy to change when your bones are rickety, when your character is set in stone already. It's like clay; when it's still soft and pliable that's the best time to make something of it. Once it begins to dry out a little bit it's not so easy to shape.

And that's why I say if you're still in the sixties, hurry up! Ninety is not eighty and eighty is not like sixty! You're sixty years old? You still have some juice in you! Of course, fifty nine is still better. But even sixty five or sixty six, there's still a lot of hope for you. You can still shape your clay.

Twenty Two is Old

But, if you want to end it in even a better way, you'll start ending it now when you're twenty two years old. Make a good beginning for the end. If right now you get busy preparing; if you can change your way of life and live a life of Torah and a life of devotion to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, a life of accomplishment in Judaism, a life of accomplishing character perfection, then that's the best preparation for the *avodas Hashem* of your old age.

And then when the time comes for us to leave the world, **יֵצֵא אָדָם לְפָעֵלוֹ**, the *tzaddik* will go out from this world, **וְלִעֲבֹדָתוֹ עֲרֵי עָרֵב**, after having worked down to nightfall. The Gemara (Bava Metzia *ibid.*) says on that *possuk*, **יֵצְאוּ צְדִיקִים לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָרָם**, *tzaddikim* go forth from the world to receive their reward. When a *tzaddik* has finished his days and he departs from this world, he is setting out on a mission of collecting for what he accomplished in this world, **וְלִעֲבֹדָתוֹ עֲרֵי עָרֵב**, to collect payment for his labor that he worked down to evening.

And that's why we are admonished; we are warned, while you still have some juice in you, seize the opportunity and try to discover what there is to learn about this world, why you're here,

what you have to accomplish. And there's only one place to find the answers. If you look anywhere else, you won't find it. You're going to find it in the Torah. We have to learn how to grow old. And the time to learn is right now.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Growing Old with Accomplishment

Avrohom Avinu begged Hashem to give us reminders of our advancing age so that we can make use of them and begin preparing for our eternal destiny. Regardless of my age; every day this week when I say the *bracha* of *Hanosein la'yaef koach* I will *bli neder* stop for a moment to reflect on how I can use the *koach* I still have to serve Hashem while I can.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

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is. Remember what I'm telling you now – you are what your environment is!

Now, if you do it because it's *parnassah*, you can't help it. Let's say you're a plumber and you were hired to fix the toilet in the Billiards. OK, what can you do already?! You'll have to pass through. But if you choose to go there, then Hashem says, "You are identified by the environment that you choose." **אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובררך חטאים**. Absolutely, it's wrong to go to the Billiards!

Now, you want to play billiards at home? Why play billiards? There are other, better things you can do. But you want to play billiards? OK, could be. But what about utilizing the time for something worthwhile? I would say, better take a walk. You can't take a walk? You can't walk at night because it's dangerous to walk on the street? So you walk in your apartment back and forth. Open the windows in your house so you'll have fresh air coming in, walk back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. It's good exercise. It's much better exercise than playing billiards. Playing billiards means that you are imitating the gentiles. Why are you imitating the gentiles?! Get exercise instead. Your feet are moving when you're walking and your whole body is exercising. It's much healthier for you if you walk around in the house back and forth. Much better than playing billiards.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

Is it okay for me to play pool, whether at the pool hall or at home?

A:

If you go to the Billiards, then you have to know that it says in Tehillim the following about you: **אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובררך חטאים** – "Praiseworthy is the man who did not walk after the advice of the wicked, and on the path of the sinners he did not stand, and in the company of scoffers he did not sit" (Tehillim 1:1).

A place of *leitzim* is no place for a Jew to be. A billiards hall is a place of scoffers. People who spend their free time playing billiards are scoffing at the purpose of life. Even though you're just going for enjoyment, let's say. You don't mean any harm. Still, if you're standing among *leitzim* then you have to know that you're becoming a *leitz*. You can't help it. You are what your environment

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