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R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## Towering Greatness

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## Part I. Recognizing the Best

### The Rosh Yeshiva and The Secretary

Many years ago when I was still raw – I'm still raw but I was even more raw then – I received a rebuke from an important personality. I was speaking to a certain Rosh Yeshiva in his office and together with him was sitting one of his secretaries, a male secretary, and at one point in the conversation I directed my remarks to the secretary; on the side, I said something to him. So the Rosh Yeshiva corrected me. "You don't talk to the secretary when

the Rosh Yeshiva is here. When the Rosh Yeshiva is here, you speak only to him."

I learned an important lesson that day. In the presence of somebody important you don't talk to someone else. Because by acknowledging someone else's presence, you are already mitigating his dignity. You are belittling the honor of the more important person.

### Derech Eretz and Democracy

Let's say you walk into a physician's office and the doctor is there, but also there's a girl there who is cleaning up. So you don't say, "Good morning. How are both of you this kind morning?" That's bad manners. You don't include the physician together with the maid. She's nobody in comparison to him.

Now, to hear such things seems jarring to our American ears; it just doesn't seem democratic enough if you don't include the cleaning girl and the doctor in the same greeting. But that's because America is not necessarily a land that's so proficient in derech eretz. And therefore the first order of the night is to forget about democracy. Torah is more important than democracy and derech eretz is one of the foundations of Torah. And if you direct your remarks to the great man together with the one who accompanies him, that's already equivalent to belittling him; it's a lack of derech eretz.

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## Greeting Moshiach

You know who we learn that from? From Avrohom Avinu. You remember when the three malachim were passing his tent וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ לְקִרְאתָם, and he ran out to greet them? But we find that he spoke only to the one in the center אִם נָא מִצָּאתַי הֵן, because naturally that's the one who was most important. Why was he in the center? Because he's the more important one.

I explained this to you once, if you're walking down Thirteenth Avenue and you see three people coming towards you. Let's say on one side, you recognize it's the Satmerer Rav, and on the other side is, let's say, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. And walking right in between them, in the middle, there's an unknown person. So you understand right away that if he's in the middle of these two great people, then he must be more important than both of them. If he's between those two, probably he's Moshiach! And therefore he's the one you greet. Otherwise you're lacking in derech erez.

Now, if you came here just to hear that, very good. You can be a baal derech erez now. So if you meet your father in the street tomorrow morning and together with him someone else is walking, the person who deserves your attention is your father. "Good morning Papa." That's how to greet them the Torah way.

## Ignoring People

Now, this is a subject that's worth studying by itself but I'm going to change the topic a little bit. We're going to see that it's not only when it comes to greeting people. Even if you're just relating a story, an incident that happened, the Torah way is to focus on the better one and the one who's not as important is relegated to the background.

That's why you'll find in the Gemara stories where it is related that someone did something or said something and nothing is said about anyone being together with him. You're reading a story

about Rabbi Shimon, let's say, and you have no idea that someone else was even there at all. And then finally, a few lines later, the Gemara incidentally makes a remark, אֵינִישׁ אַחֲרֵינָא הוּהוּ בְהַדְהָ, – there was another man with him. There was somebody there the whole time. וְהָא דְלָא הֲשִׁיב לֵיהּ – and why wasn't he mentioned? מְשׁוּם כְּבוֹדוֹ דְּרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן – because of the honor of Rabbi Shimon (Gittin 5b).

That's a great principle that Chazal are teaching us. It's true, there are other people too and everyone is important. But the better one is too big that somebody should be mentioned together with him. To make mention of those who are with him is equivalent to mitigating the importance of the better one.

## City of Perfection

You remember when Avrohom Avinu came to Eretz Canaan? His great great grandfather Malkitzedek – that's Shem ben Noach – was still alive, living in Eretz Canaan. Avrohom was a descendant of Shem and this great ancestor of his was living nearby.

Now who was Shem? Shem was a great tzaddik, one of the noblest men who ever lived. וּמִלְכֵי צָדִק מְלֶךְ; שְׁלָם ... וְהוּא כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן; he was a kohen who worshipped the most high Hashem (Bereishis 14:18). A kohen means that he was dedicated; it was his career.

But he wasn't only a kohen. He was a king of a beautiful city, a city that was built lishem shomayim. After the mabul, Shem ben Noach came out of the teivah and said, "The old generations destroyed the world by means of their mistakes but I'm going to fix that. I'm going to start a new community and rebuild the world on the foundation of achieving shleimus."

So he came to a certain place in Eretz Canaan and he founded a town called Shalem on the site of what is now Yerushalayim. The word Yerushalayim is yeru-shalem. Yeru – the cornerstone city, shalem – of perfection. The city was founded for the

purpose of shleimus, of perfection. It's a remarkable thing. Avrohom Avinu's great-grandfather, Malkitzedek, was king of an exceptional town where the slogan was tzedek, righteousness!

### **The King in the Background**

So now you know what was doing when Avrohom came into Eretz Canaan; his zeide, an exceptionally righteous man, was living nearby in charge of an exceptional city. And yet we don't hear anything about him! It's surprising to us! Avrohom's great ancestor doesn't get the slightest mention. Once Avrohom appeared on the scene he became the sole interest of Hashem in this world. As far as the Creator was concerned, all of mankind – even someone as great as Malkitzedek – became scenery in the background behind Avrohom.

You know when you see Malkitzedek? When he steps into the spotlight for a moment to speak to the main character. If you ever were in the theater – I hope you were never in a theater – but they have a spotlight there. The stage is full of people, all kinds of actors, but there's a spotlight that is shining on the one who is the most important one, the one who is doing the talking. All the rest are in a half shadow. You can barely see them unless they are speaking with the main character.

When do we hear from Malkitzedek? When he spoke to the main character. When Avrohom returned from the war against the king, **וּמַלְכֵי צָרָק**, **מִלְךְ שָׁלֹם הוֹצִיא לְהַם וְיִין** – he came to greet Avrohom and then, for a short moment, the light was shining on him too. He earns a mention because he came out to greet Avrohom. But as soon as this episode is finished he stepped back out of the limelight and nothing more is said about him or his descendants.

### **The Principled Hitman**

And we learn from this the principle about how Hakodosh Boruch Hu looks at us in this world. He looks primarily at the better ones! The one who is the best in his environment, the best in his town,

the best in his yeshiva, the best in his synagogue, the best on his street, he towers far above all the rest of them and Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking solely at him. Compared to him the rest are relegated to the background.

Of course, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking at every Jew. Not only every Jew; Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking at every squirrel. He knows what every single rat, every mouse, every bacterium, is doing. Nobody, nothing at all, is not seen by Him and nothing is overlooked. It's a great Torah principle that **אֵין הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקַפֵּחַ שְׂכָר כָּל בְּרִיָּה** – Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not deprive anyone of his due reward (Bava Kamma 38b). Everyone is going to get the reward he deserves, absolutely.

Even a rasha, a gangster, who kills ten people a day, won't lose out on the reward he deserves. Let's say that his business; he gets a paycheck for each body that he delivers – ten people a day. But it's against his principle to kill eleven! Even if he's offered a big bonus, for an eleventh victim, he won't do it. He has principles after all; he's not stam a murderer. Hakodosh Boruch Hu will not deprive him of his reward for that self control.

### **How To View The World**

And so there's no question that everything you do counts tremendously. If you do good things, better things than not murdering people, kol shekein you'll get even more reward. Nothing will be forgotten because Hakodosh Boruch Hu is interested in everything, in every little detail.

And yet, we're learning now the fundamental principle – it's a big chiddush – that there's no comparison between the one who is better and the others. Hashem chooses the best! That's the great principle. His interest in the best one is His true interest in this world. That's what we're saying here, that Hashem looks primarily at the better ones. And we're supposed to learn from that – that's how we're supposed to look at the world too.

### A Crazy Story

Now, don't think that once you heard this so now you can go home. You heard it, so now you know, "Only great people are important; they are who we concentrate on." Oh no, you don't know anything yet. Because it's not so easy to appreciate greatness. Don't think that you would have appreciated the greatness of Avrohom Avinu. Absolutely not!

You remember when Avrohom was waiting for wayfarers to pass by? וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל בְּחַם הַיּוֹם – Avrohom was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day (Vayeira 18:1). It was an extraordinarily hot day and this ninety-nine year old man, recovering from a bris milah, is sitting near the door of his tent waiting; he's bandaging his wound and he's looking out for wayfarers.

And when he sees three plain Arabs – that's how they appeared to him – he ran out into the heat and he fell down on the ground and begged them: אֵל נָא תֵעָבֵר – My masters, please don't go away from your servant (ibid. 18:2). They're demurring but Avrohom is begging them.

Now, in the eyes of other people this was crazy. If somebody is in need, alright – you'll offer him something. But if he's reluctant to accept your hospitality, do you have to throw yourself on the ground? You have to prostrate yourself and beg him to come?

### The Nutcase on Thirteenth Avenue

We're accustomed to reading that in the Torah, but had we seen it we would think it's a little bit off. Avrohom would be queer to us. Suppose you saw that today in Boro Park. Imagine you saw a meshulach from Eretz Yisrael walking down 13th Avenue, and a fine balabus, a tzadik, rushes out in the street and says to him, "Please don't go away

from me. אֵל נָא תֵעָבֵר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ. Please come to my house."

And when the meshulach says, "No, thank you; it's fine. I don't feel like going inside to eat right now," so this balabus falls down on the street; he falls down on his face to plead, "Please my master, don't pass by. Please don't go away from your servant." He's lying on the street begging this stranger to come into his house to eat something.

Suppose the people in Boro Park would see that. They would think that he's nuts. It's the truth – that's what we would think; absolutely. We might appreciate it; could be we'd praise it too; but we'd think it's too extreme.

Great people are sometimes so great that others can't appreciate them. מְשֻׁגָּע אִישׁ הָרוּחַ – The man of spirit, the man who is dedicated fully to Hashem, is a madman (Hoshea 9:7). It means that he appears to be a madman, a meshuganeh, in the eyes of others. The navi said that – מְשֻׁגָּע אִישׁ הָרוּחַ, a person who has spirit is crazy in the eyes of other people. It means it's an old story already that the avodas Hashem of great men is considered extreme by men of lesser stature.

### Bearded Lunatics

I remember about thirty years ago (the Rav said these words in 1970), a man who wore a beard was considered a meshugener. If you walked through the streets of a Jewish district with a beard, they called you meshugener. I remember! It happened to me more than once. I was walking up the subways stairs and a woman, a Jewish woman, looked at me and spit directly into my face. "Meshuganeh!" she said.

Now, I'm not saying that you have to wear a beard in order to be a tzadik – today even genuine meshuganehs wear beards – but I'm just giving you an example. Anybody who demonstrates some idealism is considered a lunatic by people who lack that attitude. Very often people can't appreciate

those who are better than them. I say “very often” – it’s always the case!

### **The Landless Landowner**

Chazal in the medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30) tell us a story about how Rabbi Yochanan was walking on the road, past a field, with his talmid, Rabbi Chiya ben Abba. And Rabbi Chiya said to his rebbe, “Look at this beautiful field with such an abundant crop of grain growing on it.”

So Rabbi Yochanan said, “That was once my field.”

“Your field? What happened?”

“I sold it to learn Torah, so that I could sit and learn.”

Rabbi Chiya was dumbfounded. “Such great wealth you gave away?!” He didn’t say anything. He had respect; he kept his mouth closed.

Then they passed by a beautiful orchard; date trees, and figs and olives. So Rabbi Chiya said, “What a wonderful *pardes* this is – a beautiful orchard!”

And Rabbi Yochanan said, “It was once mine.”

“Once yours?! What happened?”

“I sold it to learn Torah.”

### **Weeping for Wealth**

Then they passed by another place. They saw beautiful things, expensive things and again the same story. And this time when Rabbi Yochanan said, “I sold it to learn Torah,” Rabbi Chiya ben Abba couldn’t control himself anymore. He broke down and he wept when he heard that. He said, “What did you leave for yourself?” His rebbe had sold all of his property in order to learn Torah! He had come from a wealthy family and now nothing was left!

On that story the *possuk* is quoted, **אִם יָתַן אִישׁ אֶת כָּל הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה** – If a man will give away all the wealth of his house for the sake of love on an ideal, **בּוֹז יְבוֹזוּ לוֹ** – they scorn him (Shir Hashirim 8:7). People scorn a man who’s a big idealist! They don’t

understand him! Rabbi Yochanan was scorned – he wasn’t actually scorned but Rabbi Chiya bar Aba, his disciple, couldn’t understand his own rebbe! Now, Rabbi Chiya bar Aba was a big idealist in his own right, but when the big idealist meets somebody who is above him, he can’t understand him.

It’s difficult to understand the greatness of somebody that’s superior to you because actually he towers with his head in the clouds far above you. He rises above this earth, above the whole universe. Now to us, it’s an impossible idea. We’re willing to go along with the idea that a *tzadik* is a fine man, a good man, a very good man, even superlatively good; but actually we don’t begin to understand the difference between the righteous one and the one who is less righteous. And we’ll see now that we understand even less than we imagined in our wildest dreams.

### **The Rasha With a Necktie**

The *navi* foretells that there will come a time when, **וְשָׁבְתֶם וּרְאִיתֶם בֵּין צְדִיק לְרָשָׁע** – you will come back and you will see the difference between a *tzadik* and a *rasha* (Malachi 18:3). It means that someday there’ll be a great day of judgment. There’ll be a final Day of Judgment for all those who ever lived. At that time all accounts will be settled and everyone who lived through this world will be recognized for who they were; on that day everyone “will come back and you will see the difference between a *tzadik* and a *rasha*.”

You know, in this world you think you see it but the truth is you don’t appreciate the vast difference between them. There’s an endless, an infinite difference between a *tzadik* and a *rasha*! We see *tzadikim* and we see *reshaim* and it seems to us that we understand the difference. But the *navi* says “You’re deceiving yourself. You don’t understand anything.”

You look at the *tzadik*; he wears a jacket, he wears trousers, he has a necktie. You look at the *rasha*, he’s also wearing trousers. *Reshaim* wear

neckties too. You look at a tzadik, he has hair on his head, he has two eyes, a nose. You look at the rasha, the same thing. Of course you see there's a difference, but this difference is buried under a mountain of similarities.

But one day we'll all be sitting again at this table, and our eyes will be opened and we'll realize that we never saw anything at all. A time will come when the wickedness and the darkness of this world will be dispelled and we'll see the truth. וְשָׁבְתֶם – We will all return, וְרָאִיתֶם בֵּין צְדִיק לְרָשָׁע – and we'll see the true difference between a tzadik and a rasha.

### **The Other Tzadik**

However, we're going to see much more than the difference between the tzadik and the rasha. Because the possuk in Malachi adds the following: בֵּין עֶבֶר-לְאֱלֹקִים לְאִשֶׁר לֹא עֲבָדוּ – On that day you'll also see the difference between the one who served Elokim and the one who didn't serve Elokim.

So the Gemara (Chagiga 9b) asks a question, "The navi is repeating himself. The tzadik is the one who served Elokim! And the rasha, he's the one who didn't serve Him. So why do you say you'll see a difference between a tzadik and a rasha and also between the one who served Hashem and the one who didn't serve Him? It's repetitious.

So the Gemara answers, actually we're talking now only about the righteous ones; we're finished with the rasha and now we're talking about two tzadikim gemurim, two perfectly righteous people. But there are two kinds of righteous people! Only that one is called 'a man who served Elokim' and the other one didn't serve Him. Of course, both serve Elokim, but there's a difference – a big enough difference that one can be called a servant and one not.

### **Hero Of A Hundred**

What difference are we talking about? That's the question the Gemara asks. What makes one an oved Elokim and one not? It must be something

tremendous after all, something that lifts one tzadik way up above the other tzadik.

You're ready for a surprising answer? Listen to this chiddush. Our sages answer, אֵינוּ דוֹמֶה שׁוֹנֶה פְּרָקוֹ – There's no comparison if one studied his chapter one hundred times and the other one studied a hundred and one times.

Here's one person who learned his Torah lesson one hundred times. In ancient times, they reviewed many times because they didn't have any printed seforim. They didn't write and everything was memorized and so one who was apprehensive, he might forget, he sat and he reviewed it one hundred times until he had it kman dmanech bekufso, as if it was in his pocket.

Now, you have to know that it's not easy to review the lesson a hundred times. A hundred times is very boring. But he wants to know the Torah, so he reviews it a hundred times! That's heroism! He's a shakdan and a mivakeish emes. He knows it already at the third time. But he persists; a fourth time, a fifth time, a tenth time. A fiftieth time. He's dropping from exhaustion already. And finally, this hero after the hundredth time, he finally sighs and closes the Gemara to go home to a well earned rest. That's some servant of Hashem!

### **101 Light Years Away**

But sitting next to him was his friend; and he reviewed it one time more. He stayed an extra half hour and he persisted for a hundred and one times.

Now to us, it's a very small difference, maybe one degree out of a hundred – it's only one more time! So along come our sages and they tell us that אֵינוּ דוֹמֶה שׁוֹנֶה פְּרָקוֹ מֵאֶה פְּעָמִים לְמֵאָה וְאַחַת! That one time is eino domeh! Those are words you have to listen to. "There's no comparison!" The one who studied a hundred and one times is called oived Elokim and compared to him, the other one, the one who reviewed a hundred times is called asher lo avado – he did not serve Hashem. אֵינוּ דוֹמֶה means

there's no comparison. There is no comparison between a hundred and a hundred and one times!

When a man makes progress in avodas Hashem, that puts him light years ahead. Not that a hundred and one is one more than a hundred. It's an entirely different class and there's no comparison. He's so great that all the rest dim into the background. They'll be rewarded but compared to him they're insignificant.

### **Minor is Major**

That's how very great is the spiritual value of ruchniyus. When it comes to gashmiyus it may seem to us only a minor difference. You may not even see the difference. But when it comes to ruchniyus the difference is vast. That, the Torah teaches us, is the greatness of the one who steps out and does a little more. The difference is so great that it's like the difference between a tzadik and a rasha. Of course, the rasha is on the other side, far, far away. But the oived Elokim, and the asher lo avado, however, are also very far away from each other! Extremely far away!

“But both of us were tzadikim gemurim,” you'll say. No, that's not enough. He is bigger than you and that little bit makes all the difference in the world. Because for every little bit you're gaining more favor of Hashem, and when it comes to gaining Hashem's favor even the most minute difference is more than you can ever imagine in this world.

## *Part III. Becoming The Best*

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### **A Tremendous Distinction**

Now, that's a very big subject because it puts everything we do in this world into its true perspective – nothing is small anymore! Let's say all of you tzadikim sitting here know about loshon hora. The Chofetz Chaim made loshon hora famous. Everyone knows that he has to guard his tongue against evil; it's not easy but everyone tries. But you

have to know that the one who tries just a little bit more, that person has lifted himself up tremendously. The one who guards his tongue a little more shoots up and towers into space way up above everybody.

The one who davens with just a little more kavanah, a little bit longer shemonah esrei, that little bit is as far as one star from another. Your friend is also a star, he's also an ovoid Elokim, but compared to you he's lo avado.

That's what it means to be an eved Hashem; you go the extra step to stand out in the Eyes of Hashem. Not only when it comes to davening and loshon hora. There's so much more. The good ideas that you hear in this place – other places too – if you'll take them seriously and put some work into fulfilling them, don't think it's only a little thing. It's tremendous! That little bit more makes you distinguished not a little bit. And if you're a little bit better today than you were yesterday, you're much much better.

### **Craving Kovod**

Whatever you do a little more is going to find you a great deal more favor in the Eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And when He looks upon you with favor, that's the greatest honor that you can ever get.

Now, don't say you don't care about kovod. If a person says, “I don't care for kovod,” he's a fool. He's a liar too. It's not true. You want kovod. You want it tremendously! You crave it!

There are some people who even give their lives in order to get kovod. In battle, some soldiers run ahead and risk their lives; they're willing to be killed in the hope that maybe someplace in the Bronx, they'll put up a statue commemorating his heroism. What happens? There's a statue of a soldier now in the middle of a park in the South Bronx. Birds sit there on his head and leave their droppings. At night homeless goyim come there and they urinate on the statue.

How could it be that people, good people, give up their lives for that?! The answer is that among the secrets of the mind is the intense craving for glory, for kavod. If you study human nature, you'll see that the desire for honor, for appreciation, is perhaps the greatest drive of all in everything they do. Everybody wants kovod! It's a fire that burns in the human soul.

### ***Propelled By Your Cravings***

And it was Hashem who kindled that fire. He says, "You should desire kovod. You should want kovod; absolutely! Only you should want the right kind of kovod; statues are nothing! You should want kovod from Me!

And for that you have to want to excel. He put that desire into the mind of men so that they should desire to excel, to become great, to be a step ahead of those around them. You have to have that feeling that you want to make progress. "I cannot be like the people around me who are stagnant. I cannot lose my life in this crowd. I don't want to merely go along with the yoke of habit on my shoulders and be satisfied with the life of a decent personality, of a loyal Jew."

### ***Seating Arrangements***

Now, I'm not going to criticize you for going along with the crowd. Some people, that's all they could do; it's not a bad thing. Chas veshalom. You live in a frum community, you follow their customs, their standards. You do what everyone else does? Not bad at all. You're a shomer mitzvos, and you're megadel your children for Torah. I'm satisfied with you; I'm not going to investigate too much. I'm satisfied.

And after 120 years you'll get Olam Habo too. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says kol Yisrael yesh lahem chelek l'Olam Habo. You're acting like a frum Jew so you'll be admitted when the time comes. Could be you'll have to make a temporary stop somewhere

before that, but sooner or later you'll be in Olam Habo, no question about it.

But you have to know that when you get there, there's going to be a tremendous disappointment because there's going to be a question in that place about the seating arrangements. Just to get in and to sit near the doorway may not satisfy you. Now don't misunderstand me – you're a lucky fellow to get in. Make no mistake about that. If you could get in even in the last seat in Olam Habo then it's a happiness that you're not able to appreciate in terms of joy in this world. There's nothing like it.

### ***Searing Envy***

And yet, מְלִמֵּד שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד נִכְוָה מִחֻפְתּוֹ שֶׁל הַבַּיִת – in Gan Eden you'll be burning with regret when you see the canopy of your fellow (Bava Basra 75a). You kept everything, more or less and like every loyal Jew you have a chupah l'fi kevodo, a canopy according to your just desserts. But then you look over at the chupah of other people, and you see they have a more beautiful chupah than you. They have a seat closer up front; and forever and ever you're going to be sorry.

That little bit more that he stayed in the beis medrash after everyone left. That little bit more kavanah by davening. He thought about the niflaos ha'Borei, the chasdei Hashem, just one more time every day. Those small things become the biggest things in the next world. V'shavtem u'reisem; you'll be happy there, but you'll see there's a big difference between your eternal happiness and theirs.

### ***The Tragicomedy***

Now don't think it's a contradiction. It's possible to give everybody here a hundred million dollars and everybody would surely be happy. I'm sure most of you would be. A hundred million dollars! Why not? But then you'll discover that someone has two hundred million dollars. Ooooh. That's already a little bit of a sadness.



Now in this world there's still hope. You could hope he'll become bankrupt maybe someday. There's still hope. But in the World to Come it's forever. And the Gemara says nichvah – each person is scorched as if a torch touched your hand. It hurts. Now to get a hundred million dollars and somebody scorches your hand, you're mochel. A hundred million dollars is worth something. But still it hurts; it hurts a lot.

And therefore in the World to Come people will discover what a tragedy it was that they didn't utilize that kovod drive to become better. “If only I had listened to that dynamo in me that was saying, ‘Chaim! get better! Chaim! grow better! Become greater!’ If I had utilized that instinct for kovod to become better, who knows what I could have been?! Only that I was willing to go along with the yoke of habit on my shoulders. I accepted the life of a decent personality, of a loyal Jew, and I was satisfied. And therefore I have a seat in Olam Habo, but it's not the seat that I would have preferred to choose. And it's forever. Forever!”

### **Good Selfishness**

And therefore you have to be selfish in this world. That's what it says in Pirkei Avos (1:14), אִם אֵין לִי – If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? You think your father and your mother are really thinking about you? They spend some time worrying about you, but they don't think always about you. Your rebbe in the yeshiva, your teachers, they think about you sometimes. But you need somebody to worry about you always! Who's thinking about you all the time?

There's only one person who is capable of worrying about you always – that's yourself! And so if you're not for yourself, who is going to be for you? Worry about your future! Worry about your personality! What's going to happen to you at the end of your life? What are you living for? And therefore, it's of the utmost importance for a person

to say, “I am selfish! I am for myself! And therefore I'm going to get better!”

### **The Unknown Great Ones**

That's why you find that Dovid Hamelech was very busy worrying about himself. If you look in Tehillim, he's always saying, הַלְלֵי נַפְשִׁי אֶת הַשֵּׁם – “My soul, praise Hashem.” He's not speaking to other people. He's speaking to himself. “You, Dovid! Make yourself great!” בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת הַשֵּׁם – He's speaking to himself, “My soul, bless Hashem.”

Dovid was sitting in the fields tending the sheep and he was urging himself. When he became a king too, he was sitting on his throne and he was saying these words to himself. “Dovid make something out of yourself. Dovid, don't fall asleep. You're only one Dovid that I have in this world. I'll never again appear on the stage of history. This is my one chance. So Dovid make the most out of yourself!” And that's what he did.

Not only Dovid. Two hundred years ago, there was a Chana and there was a Gittel, there was a Zalman and a Chaim and a Moshe who served Hashem in Eastern Europe, in small towns. There was a Rachamim and a Mazal in let's say Syria, or some other Jewish community. People who went out of their way to say more tefillos than they needed. After davening, they remained and said Tehillim too. They came before when it was still dark and they studied Torah before the prayers. People who were more careful with tikkun hamiddos, with shmiras halashon, with kibud av v'eim, with tzedakah.

### **The World That Matters**

We don't know about them today, but their deeds have not died out! Their deeds go with them in the World To Come and live forever! And they're distinguished there because of the little extra they did! They're forgotten to us today but that doesn't matter because Hashem doesn't forget them. Their deeds live on forever! For those little things they did

more, Hakodosh Boruch Hu considers them with the greatest love. These people who you thought were long forgotten, they're being recognized with a crown of glory that will shine forever in the World To Come!

And that's why you should never be satisfied with what you have already accomplished. It's of utmost necessity that you should always forge ahead more and more because you can never tell what you can make out of yourself! Once you understand the difference between being good and being better, the superlative intensity of kovod that you'll receive from Hakodosh Boruch Hu for every bit of progress, you'll say, "I want to be different. I wish to get better." And then, some day you'll come back and you'll see the difference. And you'll see that the little bit made all the difference in the world – it made all the difference in the world that matters most.

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos

#### LET'S GET PRACTICAL

##### *Getting Better and Better*

Hashem teaches us to focus only on the best. Someone who seems to be just a bit better is actually on an entirely different level than someone who is just good. This week I will bli neder try to add a little bit. I will add one extra compliment for my spouse each day, I will add one extra minute to my davening or learning. This little bit makes all the difference in the Service of Hashem.

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**What's the best way  
to deal with a father-in-law?**

A:

Don't laugh. That's a very important question. And the answer is that the very best way is to always honor him and to keep quiet. Honor your father-in-law and keep your mouth shut. The less you say the more he'll like to you. He'll think you're a somebody if you keep your mouth closed. Open up your mouth, you'll begin to bray, and he sees that you're a donkey in disguise.

It's very important to know that with your wife's relatives you have to smile always, no matter what. Smile always and keep quiet. And they'll like you. They'll like you. If you open your mouth however, you're in trouble.

TAPE # E-183 (April 1999)

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