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פרשת בשלח

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Emulating Him

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Part I. Beautifying Him

Miraculous Salvation

When our forefathers stood at the edge of the Yam Suf, looking over their backs at the enemy closing in on them, they were filled with terror. Because it wasn't *stam* an enemy – the Mitzrim were boiling with anger. They had been laid very low because of us; they had just suffered ten *makkos* one after the other and then watched helplessly as we made a triumphant escape, taking along with us all of the wealth of Mitzrayim.

And so the Mitzrim were intent now, not only on regaining their property but on taking revenge. They were armed to the teeth and there was no place for the Am Yisroel to flee – in front of them was the impenetrable sea and behind them was the vengeful army of Pharaoh with “six hundred chosen war-chariots and all the chariots of Egypt” (14:7), under the leadership of the best generals (15:4). And so וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד – they became very much afraid (14:10).

Everybody knows what happened next – the Am Yisroel cried out and the *Yad Chazakah* of Hashem split the Yam Suf in two and they passed through to safety. As their enemies pursued them into the sea, the waters came crashing down and drowned them. *יָרְדוּ בַּמְצוֹלֹת כְּמוֹ אֲבָן*, the enemy sank like stones into the depths of the sea and they were utterly destroyed (15:5).

A Resolution

Now, when our forefathers stood at the other side of the Yam Suf and witnessed this unequalled spectacle, a tremendous excitement seized them. They were electrified by what took place, they were exhilarated by the tremendous experience of being snatched from the jaws of death by the Hand of Hashem. And in their gratitude they stood up together and sang *shirah* to Hashem.

That itself was a tremendous achievement, no question about it, to sing to Hashem for what He does for you, that's already a great perfection of character.

And yet we understand that there must have been something that the Am Yisroel undertook that day. When something big happens, when a great salvation occurs, people make *nedarim* and they promise to try to repay Hakodosh Boruch Hu for the great benefit that He bestowed upon them. Like it states in Tehillim (116:13-14), when *בּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׂא*, when you lift up the cup of salvation, then *נִדְרֵי לַיהוָה אֲשַׁלֵּם*, you have to pay off your vows to Hashem.

And so, it pays to ask, what *neder* did the Am Yisroel take upon themselves as they stood there on the edge of the Yam Suf?

The Eternal Oath

Now, when we study the *shirah* they sang to Hashem on that day, we see that there are many ideas there, many teachings and lessons that can be gathered therefrom; but in the whole *shiras hayam* we find only one obligation that they took upon themselves in return for this great *yeshua*, only one promise that they made collectively.

At that time they took upon themselves an oath, and they swore to Hashem as follows: *זֶה קָלִי* – “This is my Hashem,” they said, *וְאֶנְדְּוֶהוּ* – “and I am going to beautify Him.” *Naveh* means beautiful and *v'anveihu*, means ‘I will make Him beautiful.’

And so the Am Yisroel stood at the seashore and said, “We’re so thankful to You Hashem that we’re making now an eternal promise to You. From here on in, we will aggrandize You; we will glorify You all our lives.”

A Historical Mission

That's what the Jewish nation chose as its function on the day they were saved from drowning in the sea — they dedicated their lives and the lives of their children forever and ever to the one great task, the one great function of **גְּדַלְנוּ לַיהוָה אֱתֵי** – “Let’s make Hashem great in the world”. And if that’s the one thing they chose, you must say it’s a pretty big deal.

Now, the plain meaning of course is that “We’re going to spend the rest of our history talking about the greatness of Hakodosh Boruch Hu”. And so you know now one of our most important jobs in this world — we have to praise Hashem. We should always think and always talk about Hakodosh Boruch Hu to ourselves and to everybody else. That’s what the promise was: **זֶה קְלִי וְאֲנֹהוּ!**

Thousand Nations

As Jews we’re going to let the world know how great our Hashem is! **הִלְלוּ אֶת הַשֵּׁם כָּל גּוֹיִם** – we speak to the world and tell them; we are expected to go out and tell it to all the nations. We say it every day: **הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה קְרָאוּ** **בְּשִׁמּוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתָיו**. *Hodu* means, elevate. *Hodu la’Hashem* means to make Him great. “Call out, proclaim in His name; speak in the Name of Hashem and make known among the people His deeds.”

And our forefathers were proud of their mission, and they fulfilled it. That’s why in the ancient times we spoke to *goyim*. Not because we wanted to make them *geirim*. There’s no *mitzvah* to convert *goyim* unless they come asking for it, but there certainly is a *mitzvah* to let the world know the truth. And so that’s what they did in the days of old. And there were results — there were remarkable results.

When we see that Shlomo Hamelech had 1000 wives – princesses from all over the Near East — you have to understand it was a demonstration, a recognition by all the kings that Shlomo’s words were having an effect on them. And they were happy to have their daughters marry him even though they were only one out of 1000 wives. This was because Shlomo was spreading the word. He was fulfilling the promise made at the Yam Suf of **זֶה קְלִי וְאֲנֹהוּ**.

The Emperor and The Empress

Much later too — in the times of the *churban Bayis Sheini* you must know that the practices of *yahadus*, of Judaism, were widespread among the nations. It’s remarkable how many people among the gentiles were sympathetic to many Jewish *mitzvos* and kept them. Poppaea, the wife of Nero the emperor, was a very *frum* woman. She kept Judaism. She couldn’t

become a *giyores* because it was danger. She'd lose her life in Rome, but it's openly known that Poppaea, the Emperor's wife, kept Judaism.

And later when Nero disappeared from sight, he also joined the Am Yisroel. The *goyim* say he was assassinated but I told you once that I saw in the Encyclopedia Britannica, it's stated there that although Nero was assassinated but still after his death there were persistent reports that he was seen in different parts of Italy. And our *chachomim* tell us the inside story. Our sages tell us (Gittin 56a) that he ran away and he became a *ger*. Of course, he did it on the sly – had they known he was alive, they would have looked for him and assassinated him. The Romans wouldn't stand for that.

Ignoring the Poet

We know also that all over the Near East very many practiced *yahadus* without becoming *geirim*. In one of the books that Virgil wrote – Virgil was an ancient writer, a famous poet – and he writes there that he was talking to an important Roman that he wanted to speak with and the Roman said, “Not today. It's the 33rd Sabbath.”

Now, there's only one Sabbath, the Jewish Sabbath. This Roman aristocrat is telling Virgil he won't talk business today because it's Shabbos.

Now the '*meforshim*' on Virgil try to explain what it means “the 33rd Sabbath.” Some say it means Yom Kippur, but whatever it is, it's remarkable. A prominent Roman said, “I cannot see you today. It's the Sabbath.”

Heroes of Adiabene

Jewish businessmen when they came to Chadayav spoke about Hashem. Chadayav was a Near Eastern country; it was called Adiabene. Jews travelled there for business but they always kept in mind the business of **זָה קָלִי וְאֵינְהוּ**. We know that they spoke to the king and they spoke to the queen, and they made *geirim* out of them.

Izates, the king of Chadayav became a *ger*; he forsook the religion of his own countrymen. And Helena, his queen, became a *giyores*, a very *frum giyores*. Our sages tell us (Nazir 19b) that she undertook to be a *nazir* for seven years. Seven years! And for seven years she kept her *nezirus*!

Then she came to Yerushalayim to bring her *korbanos* and the *chachomim* told her that a *nazir* cannot be in *chuz la'aretz*. *Chuz la'aretz* is like a cemetery, *metame betumas meis*. The sages told her that she has to stay in Yerushalayim and start all over again. And that's what she did!

Making Noise in Kuzar

In the times of the early Middle Ages, there was a country called Kuzar. The Kuzarim were a warlike nation, a Tartar people in Asiatic Europe, and Jewish businessmen traveling through the land of the Kuzarim spoke to the king and he became a *ger*. A remarkable story. A well-known fact. The *melech* of the Kuzarim was a *ger*.

Now, such a thing – hundreds of years of gentiles, prominent gentiles, seeking out Hashem – could only be because our forefathers didn't keep quiet. They *couldn't* keep quiet because they had made a promise, "We're going to aggrandize You; we'll speak about Your greatness wherever we go."

And so wherever they went they carried aloft with pride the banner of *yahadus*. They spoke about Hashem's greatness and made Him beautiful in the eyes of everyone.

Keep Talking

Of course, today we must limit ourselves; in those days the nations were the only ones who needed to hear it but today there are plenty of Jews who are deaf and dumb and so we can't afford to waste our time going to Africa or to Norway. We have to talk to the Jews right here in Flatbush – in Eretz Yisroel too a lot of Jews need to be spoken to.

And the truth is that before you speak to the Jews here in Flatbush, you have to speak to the one Jew that's most important to you – and that's yourself. You should always be reminding yourself about Hashem's greatness.

That's why we *daven* so much. In my first *shul* we had a gentile neighbor, an old man, right next door. One afternoon, we were walking into the *shul* to *daven mincha*, I heard him say to his daughter, "What is it with these Jews?! All day, back and forth, back and forth, to the synagogue. Don't they ever finish praying?"

The answer is, no, we never finish praying. When we pray, we're talking to ourselves. We're busy praising Hashem – so that we can hear it!

Don't 'Catch Borchu'

That's why *pesukei dezimra* is so important – you're talking to yourself! You know, sometimes a yeshiva boy comes to *davening* late in the morning, just before *borchu*, and he feels happy; he's getting *borchu* in. He feels like he accomplished something today.

Oh no! You're missing *pesukei dezimra*! All the *halelukos*! You're missing out on the great function of וְאֶתְהַדְּרֵנוּ – "And I will beautify You." It's not

only a national obligation; it's an oath that devolves on every individual. "I will beautify Him by speaking about His greatness," – that's the plain meaning and that's the job of every single Jew; every man and woman, every boy and girl has to be busy fulfilling the oath we took on that great day of praising Hashem as much as possible.

That's the importance of *pesukei dezimra*. You should be on time – in some shuls you'll have to come early – but no matter; if you want to fulfill the oath that we made on that day you should be early. And say every word with *geshmak*; enjoy the honey of every word of praising Hashem. Because that's our function. That's what we promised at Kriyas Yam Suf: **זֶה קְלִי וְאֶנְדוּוּ** – "I'm going to beautify Him!"

Part II. Beautifying Ourselves

The Beauty Surrounds Us

Now, there are many ways that we fulfill this promise, there's not merely one way, and all of them are true. On the *possuk* **זֶה קְלִי וְאֶנְדוּוּ** our sages tell us: **הַתְנַאֲה לְפָנָיו בְּמִצְוֹת**, make His *mitzvos* beautiful. It means that whatever belongs to Hashem and His Torah we're going to go out of our way to make it as beautiful as possible.

All the *mitzvos* are to us beautiful. We make sure to see all beauty in Torah things. We love all the methods of practicing Judaism. Everything connected with our nation, of course it means the Torah of our nation and the Torah practices, everything connected with the service of Hashem is beautiful.

That's why to us, the most precious object is a *mezuzah* – more than the most expensive jewelry. *Tefillin*, *tzitzis*, that's the glory of the Jewish nation. We take pride in demonstrating and displaying all these signs that Hashem gave us that we're His people.

Be Admired

Of course, living among gentiles, many Jews lose that viewpoint. Even the *frumme* become jaundiced against Jewish attitudes and habits.

And therefore it's important at all times to remember, to recollect this vow that we made there that everything that's Jewish is beautiful! Of course, if it's not Hashem's, then it's not Jewish. It can be Hebrew. It can be in the Land of Israel. If it's not Hashem's, if it's not Torah, it's not beautiful. But whatever belongs to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, His *mitzvos*, and His Torah and His ways are beautiful.

And we go out of our way to make them beautiful in order to make Him beautiful, to aggrandize Him. Because we say that if He commanded it, that's what matters most. And so we try to buy more beautiful *mezuzahs*. We try to beautify the Shabbos by setting a beautiful table. We try to beautify the *mitzvos* of *tefillin*, of *lulav*, of *sukkah*. All the *mitzvos* we try to beautify in honor of Hashem. *Lulav naeh*, when Sukkos comes, so you acquire a beautiful *lulav*. *Tzitzis naeh*, your *tzitzis* should be beautiful.

So if you're buying an *esrog* not only spend money for a kosher one but give a little extra for a beautiful one and if you're able to put it in a handsome container so as you march to the synagogue through the streets people should admire that beautiful container and they see that you really love the *mitzvos*, which means you love Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You're trying to aggrandize Him, to glorify Him.

I and He

Whatever you use for a *mitzvah* to serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it should be beautiful. That's certainly a good idea. Certainly that's a way of glorifying Him. It's true and it's included in this vow that our fathers made.

But we're going to see now a different explanation of the oath that we took to glorify the Name of Hashem – we're going to hear from Abba Shaul who was an expert in explaining the words of the Torah. And in *Mesichta Shabbos* (133b) he comes along and gives a twist to these words.

אבא שאול אומר – Abba Shaul says, what does *veanveihu* mean? So he makes a play on words and he says אֲנִי וְהוּא can be read like this: אֲנִי וְהוּא – “I and He.” It means, “I am going to be like Him.” It's a play on words. *Anveihu*, I will beautify Him, means “I'm going to be like Hashem.”

A New Perspective on Drush

Now let's explain that. Because most people, when they learn this Gemara they take it to mean that it's not the real *pshat*. It seems like the *pshat* says one thing, that you have to glorify Hashem and along comes the *drash* and says *ani vehu*, resemble Him.

We're going away from the *pshat* of “I'll beautify Him; I'll glorify Him,” and now we're saying something else – “I'll emulate Him; I'll follow in His ways and adopt His characteristics.”

We understand that *v'anveihu* really means “I will make Him beautiful” only that Abba Shaul is going away from the plain meaning of “I'll glorify Him” and he's putting an entirely different meaning into the words.

But we must know a general principle about the words of *chazal*, that in most cases their *drash* is actually the *omek hapshat*, it's the profound

pshat. If you analyze the plain meaning more deeply, you'll see that it includes what the *chachomim* tell us. Abba Shaul is not forsaking the real *pshat*, he's not contradicting the first meaning; he's giving an insight, a more delicate insight, into the original meaning.

Shirley, Gary and Barry

And so we'll explain the principle as follows. It's a fact of human nature that when you look up to somebody, when you admire somebody, you tend to imitate that person. Don't we see in everyday society that the poor try to ape the rich? They do whatever they can to resemble the ones they admire.

That's why fifty years ago all Jewish girls in America were named Shirley. At that time there was an actress called Shirley – I don't want to say her last name; it's too much honor for her – and so, all over the country women came home from the theater and told their husbands that when they have their baby girl they're going to take to themselves the great honor of giving their daughter the name of that actress. You walked on the street and all you heard was Shirley, Shirley, Shirley. Everybody was a Shirley.

There was an actor named Gary so a whole generation of Jewish boys became Gary. Then came an actor named Barry, and a whole generation of Jewish boys became Barry.

Now, *lehavdil*, people who aren't so dumb, if you're not a dumb American, so you emulate better people. But that's the nature of Man; he'll imitate what he admires.

Lubavitcher 'Spodik's

You know all the Lubavitchers wear their brim turned down. Why? Because the Rebbe has a brim turned down. Their rebbe wears a hat with the brim down in front so all the *chassidim* have the same fashion.

Not only Lubavitch. All *chassidim* try to look like their rebbe; everywhere. That's why when the movement of *chassidus* began, all the *chassidim* when they dressed up for Shabbos, they looked like their rebbes. It wasn't merely a matter of pretending to be what they weren't. They looked up to the rebbe. It's a compliment to their rebbe. If you love your rebbe, you want to look like him.

That's one of the great things you find by the *chassidim*. Every *chossid* tries to look like a *talmid chacham* and a *rebbe*. Why? Because that's his ideal. He looks up to them.

Rebbe Becomes a Trucker

Here is a man, a truck driver. I saw it yesterday – he’s driving a big Mehadrin truck and he comes out and he looks like a *chassidische rebbe*. You see that all the time! What’s that about? A rebbe driving a truck?! It’s not a rebbe who is a truck driver. It’s a truck driver who’s trying to be a rebbe because that’s his ideal, that’s who he looks up to.

And that’s the biggest compliment you can give someone. If you’ll find somebody who is emulating you; he’s dressing like you and adopting your mannerisms, you must realize that that’s a very big compliment. The fact that someone considers your ways worthy of imitation is a demonstration that he admires you. In fact, it’s the biggest compliment you can give someone. When people emulate you, it’s because they admire you.

Nation of Copycats

And so, along comes Abba Shaul and he tells us, “You want to aggrandize Hashem? You want to fulfill your promise of *v’anveihu*, of making Him beautiful and great? The best way is *ani v’Hu!* I and Him! I’m going to be like Him.

That, says Abba Shaul, is the plain *pshat* of *veanveihu*. It still means “I’m going to beautify Him.” But *how* will I do it? How am I going to glorify Him? *Ani vehu*, I’ll try to be like Him. By trying to be like He is, by imitating Him. In all the *middos*, all the qualities of character which are described about Hakodosh Boruch Hu in the Torah, I will try to emulate Him.

Emulating Baboons and Serpents

And the Jewish nation did that! Josephus testifies to that. Josephus, you should know, was not a *darshan* – he wasn’t a very frum Jew either – but he had the good sense to understand this: “We have a G-d that’s perfect,” he writes, “and therefore our nation follows His attitudes.”

He’s speaking there about the nations of the world and he says, “The gods of the nations have all the vices and the worshippers have adopted those vices.” The gods of Rome and Greece were known to him and they were invested with every kind of wickedness and this was imitated by their worshippers.

The Egyptians worshiped the baboon, he said, and so all people in Egypt emulate the baboon. A baboon is jumping up and down in a cage and the people come and bow down; soon they begin acting like baboons. You became like your god; it’s human nature.

They worshiped the serpent too – they admired him and so it’s natural that they began adopting his mannerisms and they became

serpents in their behavior. Josephus said that; he says the people admired their gods and they acquired the qualities of these animals.

Becoming Perfect and Glorious

But the Am Yisroel, says Josephus, they have the perfect G-d, the G-d with all the exceptional qualities, the most perfect of qualities, and because they emulated the One true Hashem, that's why they acquired exceptional qualities of character.

Josephus made that statement. It's a remarkable thing for a politician to say. But he said it because he's saying what was well known and famous among the Jewish people. It was an ideal. Unfortunately, a lot of Jews today never heard of it, even *from* Jews. It's an ideal for a Jew to study the Ways of Hashem.

And it became our ideal, a national ideal, on that day when our forefathers stood at the Yam Suf and they said together, “זֶה קָלִי וְאֶמְדָּה! We're so full of gratitude to You Hashem that we take upon ourselves to forever make Your name beautiful and glorious.”

Imitation As Flattery

Now, when we want to glorify Hashem, there are various things we could do – you can aggrandize Him by beautifying His mitzvos; you can sing His praises wherever you go and; that's all wonderful, very good – but the best way to glorify Hashem is by trying to emulate His *middos*. *Ani v'Hu!* I will resemble Him! That's worth more than all the words in the world.

You want to elevate Hashem? You want to glorify Him? Study His *middos* as described in the Torah and imitate them. That's the vow of our forefathers אֲנִי וְהוּא – I and He. הָיִי דוֹמָה לוֹ – be like Him. Strive to resemble Hashem! If you want to really glorify Hashem then you'll demonstrate it by imitating His ways and practicing them in your own life.

Part III. Changing Ourselves

Becoming Something

And so we begin to understand now how vital, how urgent, is the function of transforming our personality by emulating the perfect ways of Hashem. It's not only the way to be successful in this world, the way to be happy and get along with others. Even an Irishman should try to change his character if he wants to live successfully, if he wants to stay married and keep his job. If he wants to get along with his neighbors he'll do that.

But we're not talking about that now. It's much more than that. For us, perfecting our character means we're fulfilling the oath that the Am Yisroel made to Hashem on that day He saved us from destruction. And that's why the subject of transformation of character among Jews is one of the major forms of *avodas Hashem*. It's because you're becoming something, a *me'ein* of the *middos* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Pesukei D'Zimra at Breakfast

So here's a man full of praise to Hashem. He comes to shul and he's holding his gartel and he's saying Az Yashir, *b'kol rom*, out loud. He's shaking and he's praising Hashem, "זֶה קְלִי וְאֲנִיָּהוּ." He says it with a special niggun too. Woohoo! It's beautiful!

And that's how it *should* be! It doesn't say אָז שָׂר מְשִׁיבָה. Chazal say: שָׂר לָא נֶאֱמַר – it doesn't say they *sang*, אֲלֵא יִשִּׁיר, – that they're *going* to sing. Which means forever and ever. He saved us on that day from destruction. It was a great experience that we'll never stop singing about. זֶה קְלִי וְאֲנִיָּהוּ – We promise we're going to sing Your praises forever.

But what happens after *davening*? This man comes home and he's frustrated. "Where's my breakfast?!" He's impatient, he's angry.

Oooh! That man is not really praising Hashem. Of course he is, but he's not thinking about what he's saying – he's just putting on a show when he's in *shul*.

You know when you praise Hashem? When you come home and you emulate Him. That's what you were saying in *shul* anyhow – "This is my Keil and I will make Him great by means of imitating His ways."

Make The Compliment Real

So on the way home from shul, he's thinking, "What do I know about Hashem? Well, I know He's an *erech apayim*." Everybody remembers that. Some people say that in Tachanun. אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם – He's long patient. Patience, that's a great *middah* of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. If He wasn't patient with us, we wouldn't be around here anymore. He's always giving us another chance, and another chance and another chance. "He's אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם! And that means I have to be *erech apayim* too!"

I'm sure you didn't think about this much – well, you should start thinking about it now. That's what we promised at Kriyas Yam Suf – "I'll be like Him, I'll emulate Him. And it's not enough merely to say זֶה קְלִי וְאֲנִיָּהוּ, I decided to be like Hashem. I'll sign the contract, the commitment. No. If you sign a contract but you cannot produce then it's not a good signature. To sign a contract means you have to make up your mind you're going to work on your character.

So he comes into the house and he's thinking, "Just like Hashem is patient, אָרְךָ אֲפַיִם, I'll be patient." Oh! That's וְאֲנִיְהוּ – I'm praising Him; *that's* the praise of Hashem. Merely saying praises, that's cheap – it's words flowing out of your mouth that don't mean anything. But imitating, that's a real praise, that's a real compliment – it's worth all the words in the world.

At Home and At the Grocery

So when you get married and your wife is bothersome; let's say she talks a lot – you'll be patient. A wife has to be patient with her husband. Sometimes he's wild. So you're looking at him and you're thinking, "Ani v'Hu – I'm going to be like Him. I'm going to keep my mouth closed and be patient." You're patient with everybody at home; the children, the neighbors.

If you're a rebbe of *talmidim* and one *talmid* is fresh and you have a *yetzer hora*, you want to throw him out; no, be patient. If you're dealing with customers, you'll be patient. Here's a grocer and a child brings back an open can of sardines, "My mother didn't mean this kind of sardines. She wanted a different kind."

Could be he's boiling. What will he do with that open can? It's for the garbage. But the grocer is quiet and takes it back. Now it could be he does it because he knows customers are too valuable to throw away – better to throw away the sardines – so he keeps quiet. But he should add another thought – more important than customers is the oath he's trying to keep.

The Oath Keepers Study

Now, to keep that oath, you first have to learn about His ways and that's a task. You have to learn it. Without learning you won't know.

And so, one of our most important functions in life is that we have to look all the time with our eyes to Hakadosh Baruch Hu to see what we should be emulating. Now you have to know where to look. How do you look? If you sit on the street and look at the sky, you won't see anything.

If you don't look at the Torah, then you wouldn't know. It's only those people who are accustomed to the *derochim* of Hashem as revealed in the Tanach, in the seforim, these people become imbued with these ideas. In the Torah you'll look and you'll learn all the Ways of Hashem. You have to put your mind to it for that purpose, however. Otherwise, you'll never see it.

Stealing and Studying

Here's a boy learning *Bava Kamma* and he's learning all about the *dinim* of *nezikin*. He has a good head. He's sitting, learning from a Gemara

learning *Perek Merubah* about the *dinim* of stealing, about how a *ganav* has to pay *kefel*.

But you take a look. You see his Gemara. This Gemara that he's learning from, where is it taken from? He stole it from a synagogue. He's learning about stealing but the Gemara is a stolen Gemara.

A true story by the way. He stole it from my synagogue. I said to him, "Look, you're learning *merubah* but that Gemara comes from my shul. Who gave you permission to take it? You're *chayav kefel* already for stealing. And even though you'll return the Gemara, *al pi din* you have to pay two Gemaras if there are witnesses against you.

And so you see that it's possible for people to look with their eyes in the *sefer* and not see anything.

Job of A Jew

And therefore when you look in the *chumash*, you have to look with a purpose, with intention. We have to make it an ideal to read the Torah and the Gemara. The Gemara is full of it, the *darkei Hashem*. Only when you're not interested in that, you're not going to see it. You'll see everything else but that. You'll see the *dinim* of *kefel*, the *dinim* of *daled v'hei* and you'll learn the Tosfos, you'll learn *meforshim* too, and sometimes you'll say a good *pshetl* yourself but you're missing the entire point because you're not looking to learn the *darchei Hashem*.

Only if you're looking to see the Ways of Hashem in order to emulate them, that's how you'll find them. If you start looking, you'll find the Torah is full of the Ways of Hashem, constantly.

And once you begin seeing His Ways you must have a plan; how am I going to put them into practice. You might have to find teachers. There are *eitzos*. There are schemes. There are strategies. There are tricks to make it easier. There are many *seforim* – in English too – many *seforim*. Tomer Devorah, Cheshbon Hanefesh, Orchos Tzadikim. So many. But whatever it is you must start a career of working on your character and transforming your personality. That's the great job that a Jew has to do.

Spare Five Minutes

I remember in Slabodka Yeshiva we learned these *seforim*. In the Mirrer Yeshiva in Europe, many learned these *seforim*. Every day there was a half hour of *mussar* in those yeshivas. And the *mussar seforim* were put on the table and each student chose one according to his interest. And among those *seforim* was a Tomer Devorah and Cheshbon Hanefesh. Generations and generations of young idealistic men studied these *seforim* and to some extent they profited; some more, some less. There's no

question everybody would profit if this was incorporated in the curriculum of yeshivas and Beis Yankevs today. No question about it.

But we can't wait for that; everyone has this one life to try and become what our *shevuah* requires us to become. It takes some time, some practice and effort, but that's included in what we undertook to fulfill. Five minutes a day you can't put into fulfilling the oath that we took on that great day of salvation?

You should know that there were wise men even among the gentiles who gave this *avodah* much more than five minutes. There was one wise *goy*, a true story, who every Saturday night he told his family that he was going into a room by himself; "Please don't disturb me" he said. Every Saturday night he spent time reflecting on his life. A true story – in recent history.

All About The Benjamin

I'll tell you something else. A different *goy* that you know by name, Benjamin Franklin, spent a great deal of time thinking about himself; he made a calendar and on the calendar he put certain attitudes that he wanted to work on. Patience, humility, guarding his speech.

Now, Benjamin Franklin wasn't trying to emulate Hashem; he wasn't thinking about that. Only that he wanted to live successfully. And so he identified thirteen virtues and he worked on one per week. And he had a calendar worked out according to the year and four times a year he repeated it. By the end of the year he repeated all thirteen qualities of character four times. It was the thirteen virtues; thirteen weeks, and he repeated it four times each year, thinking and trying to train himself in these virtues. So you see there were sensible people, *goyim*, who worked on themselves and they gained prudence; they gained insight into themselves.

But a Torah Jew stands to gain much more than Benjamin Franklin if he puts time away for such a project. A Jew who follows this way in life will grow infinitely greater than even the best gentile because he's not merely preparing for living righteously in this world, for getting along with others; he's doing infinitely more than that.

Fulfilling the Oath

He's fulfilling this great *shevuah* that our forefathers made at Har Sinai, of *וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת*, this is my Hashem and I'm going to glorify Him, I'll beautify Him. It's a very important oath and the Jewish people throughout their history attempt to fulfill it. "We're alive only because of You Hashem and we promise that we'll spend our days making you great in this world."

We're singing Your praises all the time! הודו להשם קראו בשמו הודיעו בְּעַמִּים עַל־לוֹתָיו. We try to advertise Hashem to everybody. We teach Hashem to our little children. Children should know Hashem is giving them bread. He's giving them ice cream. He's giving them candy. "Hashem gave you the candy," we tell our children. We have to tell ourselves too! "Make a *bracha*;" thank Hashem constantly." You have to remind yourself and your children, *baruch atah Hashem*, constantly you have to remind yourself about Hashem.

And *hisnaeh lifanav bamitzvos*. We'll make everything connected to Him as beautiful as we can. But most importantly, we can never lose sight of what Abba Shaul taught us. We swore on that day, "Ani v'Hu! We are going to resemble You!" That's the greatest praise of Hashem, that we want to be like Him.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Fulfilling The Oath of Salvation

When our people were saved from certain ruination at Yam Suf, we sang enthusiastically. And we accepted an oath of Anveihu - I shall glorify Him. We glorify Him by praising Him at all times to everyone who will listen, but especially to ourselves. We beautify Him and anything connected to His service.

It follows that we do everything we can to emulate Him. This week I will *bli neder* dedicate five minutes each day to studying about one of Hashem's ways and endeavoring to emulate him.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

- 234** - Emulating Him | **389** - Perfection in Marriage, Emulating Hashem
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What should a man do when he loses his job?

A:

The very first thing to do is to look for another job. That's number one because nobody should be idle. Idleness is only a form of self-affliction because it causes illness.

And therefore even if you haven't found a new job yet, you must find something to do. If somebody is capable of utilizing his time properly then idleness is a very great blessing – he's being given a sabbatical by Hashem and so he can retire for a little while and learn a *mesichta* or learn *sefarim* until he regains his job. But most people are not capable of utilizing idleness and as a result they contract illnesses. הבטלה מביאה לידי שיעמום – Idleness brings to depression (Kesuvos 59b). It's very important to be busy.

In case you don't know what to do, then do *mitzvos*. There are plenty of good things to do in this world, plenty of *mitzvos* to do to keep you busy. But the main idea to keep in mind is that a person should not be idle! He should always have something to do just for the sake of his own health.

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