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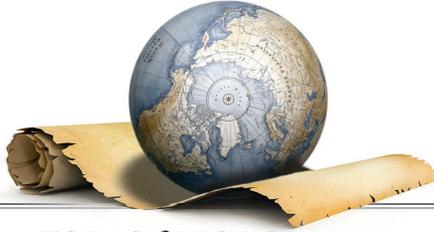
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פרשת וירא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

**Middos Of Avrohom**

**Contents:**

**Part I.** The Path of Middos - 3

**Part II.** The Right Path - 8

**Part III.** On The Path - 13

*Part I. The Path of Middos*

**I Know This Guy**

The Rambam tells us a big *chiddush* which we wouldn't know ourselves; and the truth is that it's such a big *chiddush*, that even after he says it it's difficult for us to accept. And therefore it pays to listen well because if we'll understand what the Rambam is saying it will give us a big hint, a key, for how we can live successfully.

The Rambam quotes a *possuk* from this week's *sedrah*, a *possuk* that's describing what it was that caused Hashem to put His seal of approval on Avrohom Avinu and choose him to be the father of the Am Yisroel. The *possuk* says: *כִּי יֵרַעַתִּי - I know this man, לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו, וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו - that he is going to command his children and his household after him, וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ הַשֵּׁם, - and they will keep the way of Hashem.*

Now pay attention. I said that ידעתיו means “I know this man,” but the truth is that Hashem knows everybody. He knows everything; every person, every animal, every insect in the world, every blade of grass, and every molecule He knows. So what does it mean “I know Avrohom”? It doesn’t mean knowledge; it means “My *daas*, My Mind, is especially on him.” We can call it *hashgachah pratis*; the particular attention of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. ידעתיו means that from now on, forever and ever, Hashem is thinking of Avrohom.

### Man Of Loyalty

Now, we’re happy to hear such a thing. Our hearts should swell with pride when the *baal korei* reads those words because if Hashem is thinking of Avrohom it means that in his merit Hashem is thinking of us, the *zera Avrohom*. And it’s not a *drush* or a twisting of verses to say that. It’s as clear as could be, that’s what the Torah tells us everywhere: Hashem’s Mind is on Avrohom and his descendants after him forever.”

Now, the big question is why? What is it that achieved this merit for Avrohom? Hakodosh Boruch Hu explains His reason: לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו – Because Avrohom is going to command his children and his household after him, וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ הַשֵּׁם – and they are going to keep the way of Hashem, לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט – to do justice and righteousness.

So here we have our answer. Why did Hashem choose Avrohom? Because He knew that Avrohom was a man who meant business with his ideals; that he’s going to hand them over to his posterity. Hashem saw in Avrohom that he was a man of character and that whatever He would do to him would not be wasted; whatever investment He would make in him would be for a purpose. לְמַעַן – I know he is going to transmit it to his children. He is the man who will stand by his principle of loyalty through thick and thin and hand over the Torah to his posterity.

### The Devoted Mother

But not only loyalty – loyalty is a great characteristic, but included in לְמַעַן is that Hashem saw that Avrohom will be industrious and efficient in handing it over. He’ll do everything in his power, whatever it takes he’ll make sure to do. Because it’s not enough to just *want* to transmit to your children your ideals; you must devote your life to it.

Like the mother who sees that her little boy is slow in learning *siddur*, so the mother goes all out in her efforts to teach him. There are devoted mothers who spend hours and hours – besides being busy

raising a big family they spend hours and hours with slow little boys and little girls helping them. Fathers who after a long day in the office – and they still have to go out to the *beis medrash* to learn and *daven maariv* – they sit with the little boy who’s breaking his teeth over a piece of Gemara. That’s the *לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אֲחֵרָיו* that Hashem is talking about.

Now, although the Torah doesn’t tell us explicitly that Avrohom sat with Yitzchok and taught him, but from these words of Hashem you understand that this is what he did. Avrohom spent a great deal of his life instructing his son. Not only hours; days and weeks and months and years. And you can be sure that Avrohom’s instructions were not wasted because his son was so imbued with this idealism that he transmitted it to his son, Yaakov Avinu. And from Yaakov, it was passed on to his twelve sons and to his grandchildren too. And today too, we are still moving because of that push that Avrohom gave.

### **Keeping The Torah**

Now, the question is, what exactly was Avrohom handing over? What is meant by “I know him that he’ll make sure to teach his descendants *וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ הַשֵּׁם* – to keep the way of Hashem?” What “ways of Hashem” was Hashem confident that Avrohom would pass down?

Now, to us it’s not even a question; we understand that Avrohom taught his descendants to keep whatever Hashem commands them to keep. Whether it was the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach* or the *mitzvos* of the *seichel* – Avrohom kept and taught all those *mitzvos* that his *seichel* was *mechayev* – all that is included in the *derech Hashem*. And we understand also, that because of Avrohom’s influence Hashem was confident that when the time would come to receive the Torah, Avrohom’s descendants would accept it and fulfill it with loyalty.

And that’s exactly what happened. To this day, the *Am Hashem* are still keeping the Torah. We’re not talking about the lost ones, the ignorant ones, the assimilationists. A lot of them have peeled away and some are still trying to peel off but there has been and there always will be a loyal Jewish nation that keeps the Torah without any alteration. We are keeping exactly the same Torah that was given at Sinai - it’s a remarkable thing! No changes have ever been made or ever will be made. There is no other nation in the world that is doing that.

## **Under The Influence**

Now, that's not an accident. Hakodosh Boruch Hu knew that He was investing in somebody who would put so much energy into the task of transmitting this tradition that it would keep going forever and ever. We're still moving with the strength of that great impetus that Avrohom gave our nation.

It is hard for us to think so – we think we are moving on our volition, or maybe because of the influence of our parents and our *rebbe*s – but you must know that our parents and our *rebbe*s are moving only because of that great shove that Avrohom gave his son. He put such a fire into his son that this fire continues to supply an enthusiasm that burns in our hearts and it will burn forever.

It's a difficult thing to understand how one man could achieve that, but that is what he did. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu saw that. “*I know this man Avrohom that he will command his children and his household after him and they will keep the way of Hashem.*”

And so we understand, it's simple to us, the “*derech Hashem*” that Avrohom passed down to us means the *derech* of fulfilling the Torah. We see it with our own eyes. Whether you live in Boro Park or Gateshead or Yerushalayim, you see it with your own eyes wherever you go.

### **Just Good Character?**

But along comes the Rambam and he explains something about this verse, a *chiddush*. This is what I said before, that it's almost hard to accept. He says, “What is the *derech Hashem* that Hashem wanted the Am Yisroel to keep?” Listen well because it's something we would never expect. The Rambam says that Avrohom was chosen because Hashem was confident that he would hand over the *derech Hashem* of good character. You hear that?! The “*derech Hashem of doing tzedakah u'mishpat*” means to walk the path of good *middos*.

Of course, fulfilling the entire Torah is *sine qua non*, no question about that, but the Rambam is teaching us that the children of Avrohom are especially singled out and beloved because Avrohom will see to it that they're going to keep the way of good character! In Lakewood and Boro Park and Gateshead, besides for keeping all of the Torah, the *derech Hashem* includes walking on the path towards *middos tovos*.

Now that's a very important statement, especially in view of the fact that for a few reasons nobody thinks that the subject is worth

discussing at length. First of all everybody thinks that he has good character anyhow. Every person is convinced that he is pretty good. Yes, he makes mistakes sometimes, maybe he might even have some slight flaw – flaw, not flaws – but overall he’s really good so there’s not much that needs fixing. So that’s number one – it’s not an important subject because he already has good character.

### **Everyone Has Good Character**

Secondly, Jews in the lands of assimilation – that’s America, England, France, Australia, Canada and so on – have become convinced that the *goyim* also have good character. We imagine that the gentiles are pretty good. After all the gentile in Manhattan wears perfume and he dresses so nicely. He says please and thank you. Ahh! Such refinement! So what’s so peculiar about the *zera Avrohom* that they keep the way of Hashem of good character?

And that’s why this subject is so important. It’s so vital that we should understand and accept what the Rambam says here. He’s teaching us one of the most important pieces of information in the entire Torah, that the *derech Hashem* because of which Hakodosh Boruch Hu has decided to concentrate His intention on Avrohom and his descendants forever, is the *derech* of correct character, good *middos*.

### **It’s So Important**

Now let’s not jump to conclusions right away and think that you know immediately what is meant by good character. That is a different subject. But first, let’s just get that *chiddush* into our heads: a man’s success in this world for which he is *zocheh* to be designated as Hakodosh Boruch Hu’s chosen one, and for which he will be worthy of great happiness and reward, is the fact that he has correct character, good *middos*.

Not that good character is one of the important requirements in the Torah, but it is *the most important* requirement. That’s what the Gra says in the *sefer* Even Sheleimah. One of the very first statements in that *sefer* is that everything that we do in our lives depends on character traits. “If he won’t work on his character, what is the purpose of life?” is what he says.

So you might say, “Is that so important? Isn’t the most important thing to obey the Torah, to know the Torah?”. Look, the Gra certainly holds that it is necessary to obey everything and to learn. He learned all

the time; he was famous for his diligence in studying Torah. And still this great navigator in the *yam haTalmud*, who spent his life traveling the seas of the Shas, he tells us that the fulfillment of the entire Torah depends on *middos*.

That's one of the important things that Hashem is looking for in us. It's the *derech Hashem* we are expected to walk on and that means that we have to get busy; we have to start walking that path by healing our character traits. Most of us are sick, some of us very sick, and we have to learn how to heal ourselves.

## Part II. The Right Path

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### Sick Characters

The Rambam, in Hilchos Deios, *perek sheini*, states as follows. I will say it in translation. "Those who are physically ill sometimes feel that sweet things are bitter, and bitter things sometimes they feel are sweet. Some sick persons desire such foods that are not fit for eating – sometimes they eat even dirt or charcoal – and they reject good food like bread and meat; depending on the nature of the illness.

The Rambam continues: "That's how it is when a person is physically sick. But similarly, there are persons whose characters are sick, and they love wrong attitudes and they despise the right way. And they are loathe, they're lazy to walk in the paths of righteousness, depending on the nature of their illness. And Yeshaya the Navi said about these people, **וְהָאֲמָרִים לָרַע טוֹב וְלַטּוֹב רָע** – *Woe to those people who say about good that it's evil and about evil that it's good.*

Now, we're not talking about people who don't believe in the Torah. We're not talking about liberals, people who have been ruined by the public school system. That's not the Rambam's audience; he's not talking to college professors. He's talking to Orthodox Jews who were then the body of the Jewish people, people who believe in the Torah and who obey its laws. And yet, even *shomrei torah u'mitzvos*, certainly it is possible for their characters to be corrupt. They can be ill in their attitudes and in their emotions; it's not *middos*, it's much more than that – it's attitudes.

## **Ideas And Character Traits**

I'll explain that because it's something that most people don't understand. The Rambam, we know, was very careful in choosing his words when he wrote his *Yad Chazakah*. Even when it came to the titles of the chapter headings he was especially precise. Now, we note that the section where the Rambam discusses the importance of good character is called *Hilchos Deios*, the Laws of Attitudes. That's the name he gave that section. Not *Hilchos Middos*, the Laws of Character, but *Hilchos Deios*, the Laws of Attitudes.

Now, we ourselves don't say *deios* when we speak of character. For instance, if somebody is a candidate to be a *chosson* for your daughter, the first thing you want to know is how is he in *deios*. It means how is he in his attitudes: Is he a loyal Jew? Is he a *shomer mitzvos*? Does he appreciate Torah learning? Is *davening* important to him? Does he have the right attitudes towards being a good husband and building a Torah home? And so on.

And then, there's a different set of questions you ask: How is he in *middos*? Does he get easily angered? Is he arrogant? Stingy? So you see, in addition to his *deios*, his attitudes, we also ask about his character. Because today we differentiate between the two subjects; we understand that *deios* means concepts and ideas, and we view that as an entirely different subject than *middos*. Somebody can have good ideas and wrong character traits or good character traits and wrong ideas; so it seems to us. And yet the Rambam calls *middos* by the name of *deios*; character traits he names ideas.

### **Arrogant Attitudes**

And so if we listen to the Rambam we hear between the lines that his attitude towards character, towards personal reactions to things, towards how a man feels and lives his inner life; according to the Rambam they are all included under the heading of *deios* because he understands that character traits, *middos*, are actually ingrained ideas.

It's only because we have become accustomed to viewing a certain form of emotional reaction as the proper one, that is why we react that way – because we are accustomed to think it is the right way to be. And therefore if we could really understand that this is not the right reaction then it would be easy for us to uproot these character traits in ourselves.

I'll give a few examples so we can understand it better. Here's a man who is accustomed to considering himself important – and it's not because he made any calculations about what other people possess, their virtues compared to his virtues. No, he didn't make any such reckoning; he *instinctively* knows that he is better. "I know that my judgment is best. Sometimes I can make an error, but in general my mind is more straight than most people and therefore I can rely on my judgment." And he actually thinks that this is the right way to be. It's an attitude of the mind.

### **Immoral Attitudes**

There are other people who are accustomed to licentiousness, to do whatever their eyes persuade them to do. Don't think that they regret their attitude; actually they consider their way the proper way of life and others, those who abstain from all kinds of extraneous pleasures, are despised by them. They look down on them. They call them squares, prudes, unnatural people.

'Natural' means to do what you wish, according to these ill-natured people who are sick in their souls. So what do we see from this? That it is possible for people to be so ill in their characters that they see things upside down. Of course, they say *we* see things upside down.

It's like that with everything. When someone quarrels all the time, there's an attitude that lurks there behind the quarreling; arrogance and other things too. Unhappiness also, is a *deiah*, an attitude. People who are unhappy, it's because to them that is the correct attitude towards life. Anyone who is an optimist, anyone who is cheerful and satisfied always, he's silly, he's not 'realistic'.

### **Angry Attitudes**

People who are angry by nature, actually admire the quality of anger and they look down on those who are patient and tolerant. To them, it is heroic to react with violence. That is the proper way to do. And even if he thinks sometimes, he has doubts whether these attitudes are actually proper, but how far they're improper, that he doesn't realize.

And so, the Rambam is teaching us that all of our character traits, our *middos*, are really a habit of thought, of attitudes, and anyone who is sick in his *middos* – and who isn't? – must first be healed in his *deios* because bad character is a habit of behavior that is rooted in bad attitudes.

Now, we must understand that these people are actually mentally ill. Not in the sense that they are unbalanced and cannot function. They appear to be normal; superficially they are healthy but they are ill in their characters, they are sick in their attitudes. And that is a very serious form of illness.

And therefore to be healed, to heal oneself from the wrong attitudes that we all suffer from, it's not enough to practice, with tricks and contrivances how to have good *middos*. You must know how very wrong it is, how these attitudes of the mind are a sickness that require healing.

### **What's The Solution?**

And so, what is the remedy for these people? That's the question the Rambam wants to answer for us: וְמָה הִיא תִּקְנַת הוֹלֵי הַנִּפְשׁוֹת – *What is the remedy of those who are sick in their characters?* What should they do to be healed?

So today the answer is you go to a professional and pay big money in order to be corrupted further! Actually, the psychologist who is trying to heal your soul, he himself locks his office at two o'clock in the afternoon because he has to run to his appointment with his psychiatrist to get help for himself.

Of course, we must make an exception for *frum* Jews that are psychologists, some of them are actually trying to help people according to the *darchei haTorah*. They may, in order to make you feel that your money is not wasted, throw in a word, a professional word here and there to make you happy, but after that they give you advice from *Pirkei Avos*, from some *mussar seforim* or something he heard from his *rosh yeshivah*. There are some, not many, and therefore we cannot negate all those who are practicing psychology. A lot of *frum* Jews, even *bnei Torah* who are in that field are capable of helping you. Don't ask me who they are, however. You have to go to a *talmid chochom* who knows these things and if he tells you to go and to whom to go, then you'll listen to him.

### **Unpracticed Preachers**

But just to run to a psychologist to be healed in your *middos*, it's a waste. There used to be a writer, Emily Post. She wrote columns in the newspaper about good manners and getting along with people. A lot of people were hoodwinked by that. They thought, "Ooh ahh! Emily Post! What does Emily Post say?"

Who was this Emily Post? Well, she was divorced. She was such a mean old cat that her husband finally dropped her and she never remarried; she could never remarry again. A failure of a woman and she was sitting and writing columns for years and years on how to get along with people. We don't believe in such stuff.

### Generation of Specialists

And therefore we have to listen to the words of the Rambam: “Who should you go to remedy the illnesses in your character? יִלְכוּ אֶצֶל הַחֲכָמִים – You should go to the wise men; *chachomim* means the *chachmei haTorah*, שְׂהָרָה רוֹפְאֵי הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת – because a Torah scholar, that's the healer of the souls.

Now, it doesn't mean any *chochom* because not many people among the *chachomim* today are proficient in that. And that's because just as we see in every field, specialists have peeled off, each one in his own direction – for every little branch of medicine there is a specialist – so also *l'havdil* in Torah there are specialists today. There are *chachomim* who know *halachah*, they can *pasken* a *shailah*. Other *chachomim* can say *shiurim* in *nashim* and in *nezikin*; they're famous for their *lomdus*, but when it comes to *halachah* they know very little. And even those who are capable in all of the *halachos* and also all of the *lomdus* in Shas, most of them never specialize in studying the words of the *chachomim* and the words of the Tanach which deal with *middos*.

How can a man claim to know something about character if he didn't study *Mishlei* carefully? *Mishlei* is that sourcebook of counsel, of successful living; one of the most valuable sources of happiness in this world is *Mishlei*. And there are *chachomim* and *roshei yeshivah* who never learnt *Mishlei*! And not only *Mishlei*; the whole Tanach is full of good counsel; only you have to learn it in a proper way.

That is why the Rambam specifies, go to *chachomim* who are רוֹפְאֵי הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת, those who are able to heal the characters. And these *chachomim* will be the ones who will teach you and guide you, עַד שֶׁיִּחְזְרוּם לְדֶרֶךְ הַטּוֹבָה, – until you are brought back to the right path.

### Where Are You Headed?

Now, remember what we've been saying here all the time. Being brought back to the right path *doesn't* mean yet that you have acquired good *middos*; it means you are *convinced* what is the right way to behave – that is number one. Because before you can do anything, before you

can succeed in walking on the *derech Hashem* of good character you must decide what it is that you are looking for. If you are traveling, let's say, to a certain place, the first thing is you have to know the place you want to get to.

Let's say, you stop someone on the street and ask him, "How can I get there?"

"What do you mean 'there'? Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know!"

You don't know?! The first thing you need to know, what your destination is. And once you are clear in your mind what you want to become, then the next step comes up. But the first step is to know what is called proper behavior.

## Part III. On The Path

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### Getting To Work

Now I don't want to discourage anybody because every little bit that you do is a very big accomplishment, but you shouldn't expect it to be easy. You can't expect to improve your *middos* unless you transform your *deios*, your attitudes; and to change a mind takes work. Greatness doesn't come easy. We're talking now about the path because of which Hashem chose Avrohom and his descendants forever, and something as great as that is not something you can sit back and listen to in one lecture – even a hundred lectures is not enough. It's a lifetime of work.

Let's take the angry man as an example. There are a lot of people who get angry easily. It doesn't mean you blow up every day but there's no question that many people get angry when they shouldn't. It's something that many suffer from.

And so that person, the first thing he must do is learn a new attitude, a new *deiah*. When he goes to the *chachomim* – it could be he goes to the Mesillas Yesharim or the Shaarei Teshuva too – he begins to learn a new attitude. He's learning now that anger is nothing to be proud of; it's a filthy and disgusting thing.

### What Is Anger Really?

When he learns in the *seforim* that *בְּלִי הַבוֹעֵס בְּאֵלוֹ עוֹבֵר עֲבוּרָה זָרָה*, that a man who is angry is considered in a certain sense as an idolater, so he begins to put that attitude into his head. "When I get angry, I'm not the

tough fellow I imagined I was; I'm not a man of principles who is putting his foot down. What I am is an *oveid avodah zarah*." An idolater has thrown off his loyalty to Hashem, and an angry man has also thrown off his loyalty because he is no longer under control of Hashem; he is a slave of his anger – at that moment at least.

Now, I'm just saying words now but when a person begins to actually learn these things, he repeats them and studies them, so little by little his mind begins to be transformed. To him anger is like bowing to a cross *chas v'shalom*. It's disgusting! It's disloyal! It's terrible.

And once a person uproots his old attitude towards anger and replaces it with a new one, a Torah one, now he's ready to begin acquiring good character; now he can start working on overcoming his *middah* of anger. As soon as he feels it bubbling up inside him, he's afraid of it, he's disgusted by it, and he finds it easier to quash it.

### **Arrogance Is Disgusting**

That's how it is with all the character traits. You know why it is that a person can be arrogant? A person is a *baal gaavah* only because he doesn't know that arrogance is an ugly thing. It may be wrong but it's not ugly. Suppose a person knows that it's disgusting to walk in the street with pants that he dirtied – he didn't make it on time to the bathroom and now he's dirty. He wouldn't go out! He couldn't do it. It's too embarrassing.

If you learn the right *seforim*, you'll realize that feeling arrogant is like you had an accident in your pants. "Oh," you'll say, "well, that's something else. It's shameful. It's disgusting."

You have to understand how ugly *gaavah* is. *Gaavah* is ridiculous. It's stupid. It's filthy. And it's only by means of a lot of thinking and introspection that a person can change his *deiah*, his attitude, and actually feel how wrong it is, how filthy and disgusting it is to be arrogant and to look down on others.

### **Acquiring Humility**

Once you get that into your head by means of listening to the **הַכְּבִּימִים שֶׁהָרַךְ רוּפְאֵי הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת**, now you're ready to conquer that *middah*. Let's say you spent time studying that. You've been learning what it means to be sick with arrogance and little by little your *deiah* begins to be transformed. Now you're ready to begin practicing on the *middah*; you're not interested in having a filthy mind that makes snap judgements about people. You're

not interested in looking down at others and criticizing them, and so you're ready now to work on the *middah* of *anavah*.

And so you'll make it a practice of recognizing virtues in other people. Even people who have faults, they possess other qualities of character that may be admirable. A person is not merely one thing; a person is a bundle of character traits and now that you're disgusted by your own arrogance so you train yourself to spend time every day studying the good qualities of other people.

At first, it's not so easy because you're blind to the other man's good qualities. Of course you are; because it's only you that has good qualities! You're only aware of your own *maalos*, your own good qualities. However, if you're willing to think a little bit, after a while you begin to see that you're not the only *tzadik* in the world – other people are full of good things too. And little by little, you begin to level out with other people. Maybe you'll even end up feeling inferior to many people. When you start studying people, you'll be amazed at the good qualities of people and little by little, the *gaavah*, the filthy arrogance, will start leaching out of you.

### **Grouches Are Unpopular**

If someone is unhappy or a complainer, he has to learn the *seforim* that teach him that unhappiness is a sickness of the mind. It's a sickness so insidious that even Hashem is not interested in you. That's what our *chachomim* tell us. וְנִרְגָן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף – *The complainer separates himself from his friends* (Mishlei 16:28). People don't like complainers. A husband who complains, his wife won't like him. His children won't like him. A wife who complains, a mother who complains, she's not liked. Employers don't like employees who complain. Anybody who's a complainer should know he's not popular. People don't like to hear complainers. Nobody likes a grouch.

But the Sages say (Tikunei Zohar) it means even more than that. אֵין אֱלוֹף אֶלָּא הַקְרוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא – *Aluf means Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You'll lose that Friend too. A complainer separated himself from his most important Friend too. Hakodosh Boruch Hu becomes tired of him; He can't take him anymore. If you complain against anything, you are complaining against Hashem too!*

Oh, that's a different *deiah* already. "I didn't know that. I thought I was just complaining about the weather. I was complaining about the neighborhood, that's all." No, no; you have to learn a new attitude in this

world – unhappiness, complaining, means that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is tired of you. And once you learn that, you're ready to begin working on your *middah* of unhappiness and complaining.

### **Get With The Program**

And that's a program for all the traits of character. It's a lifetime of work, this *derech Hashem*, because the *deios* and *middos* of a man are endless. If a man is stingy, he has to study what it is that has created that attitude in his mind. If he has a big mouth, he has to study that too. If he's lazy, he has to transform his mind; he has to study what it means to be an *atzlan* and on the other hand what it means to be a *zariz*.

And that's why the Rambam says that a person has to go to the Sages who will teach him the right attitudes and turn him back to the righteous ways; you're not going to learn character in the public schools. Even in the *yeshivas*, *lehavdil*, I'm not convinced you're going to learn good character there – unless there is somebody there who makes it his business to explain these subjects to the *talmidim*. And so, if your only contact is coming to *shul* and performing *mitzvos*, living like an Orthodox Jew – it's very good; *ashreichem!* – nevertheless, you should know that your chances of changing your character are almost nothing.

And that's why you must be in contact with the *chachomim* and their *seforim*. That's the only answer – to learn the textbooks, *lehavdil*, the *mussar* textbooks that teach about these things. Study the *maamarei Chazal* again and again. Repeat them to yourselves always. Learn *Mesillas Yesharim* again and again. Learn the *Shaarei Teshuva* and *Chovos Halevavos*.

But not only to read *seforim*. Even if you're in contact with *seforim* and you're learning those sources that speak about these subjects, if it's not your intention to seek this information with the intention of recognizing yourself in the *seforim* so you're going to look at it with unseeing eyes and you'll pass over it without having an effect on you. And therefore, the number one step we can say is, a person has to be aware that it's necessary for him to change and that he's searching for new ways of thinking.

### **Successful Transformations**

And when you're looking for them, you'll discover that they're there. If you won't look for them, you can learn all the *seforim* and not be aware of what they're saying, but if you're looking, these *seforim* will constantly

continue to enlighten you and to give you more and more direction in your quest for a change of character. If you learn the right *seforim* you will get the right ideas into your head. You'll get into your head the true ideals, the true attitudes, and then you'll be able to overcome all those things that have found a place in your mind only because you don't realize how wrong they are.

And so it has to be a goal for every single one of us to build our character, to form our *middos* in the mold that Hakodosh Boruch Hu expects from the *zera Avrohom*. It's a career, a career that is absolutely essential for everybody. Nobody can dodge this obligation. The job of *tikkun hamiddos* of changing oneself is incumbent on everybody and the Gra says if you're not going to embark on the career of changing yourself, לָמָּה לֹא חַיִּים – why should you be alive? That's what life is for, to change your *middos*.

Everybody is able to turn around his nature. It is remarkable how different people can become. In the course of years, you won't be recognized anymore; you become somebody entirely different. And that is what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wanted of Avrohom Avinu and his progeny! A nation of *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos* whose lives are conducted according to the principles of proper *deios* and good character.

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos

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Hashem chose Avrohom because He knew Avrohom would inculcate his generations with good character. Good character is actually acquired through the right attitudes of the mind. This week I will *bli neder* spend five minutes a day learning *mussar* in the hope I can change my inner attitudes and my character traits.

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# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

WITH RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

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Q:

**Should I continue praying for something that I desire to get, even though I've been praying for so long already and I haven't seen any results?**

A:

Yes. **קוה אל השם חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל השם** – “Hope to Hashem, strengthen your heart, and keep on hoping to Hashem” (Tehillim 27:14). Never give up hope. Keep talking to Hashem.

Now, there are two benefits. First of all, by continuously repeating your request, maybe Hakodosh Boruch Hu will consider you worthy just because of that – just because of your turning to Him all the time. Maybe He'll consider you worthy, and grant your request.

And even if, *chalilah*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu sees fit to ignore your requests, you have gained immensely! Because prayer changes a person. When you call out to Hashem from the bottom of your heart, you're actually talking to Somebody, and you become more aware that He is standing in front of you and listening. And that's one of the greatest benefits that you could ever gain – more awareness of Hashem.

That's why davening to Hashem is so important. When a person stands up to say *shemonah esrei*, he's standing before the King. We don't see Him, but He sees us. He hears every word. **כי אתה שומע** – You are listening to Your people. And You're listening **ברחמים**, with compassion. When people *daven*, and they *daven* again and again, they should know that they're learning a great lesson – the great lesson of believing in Hashem. And there's nothing greater in life than coming to a true belief in Hashem. And therefore, if Hashem will listen to you and grant you your request, very good. And if He won't, it's also good, because you have gained immensely.

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