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SEFER VAYIKRA - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

AS A ZECHUS FOR KLAL YISROEL DURING THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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פרשת אחרי קדושים

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Abstinence and Pleasure

Contents:

Part I. Necessary Abstinence - 3

Part II. Idealistic Abstinence - 9

Part III. Pleasures of Abstinence - 14

Part I. Necessary Abstinence

How To Be Holy

In the *kriyah* this week we read the words of Hakodosh Boruch Hu to the *Am Yisroel* that most of us are already familiar with: קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ – You should make yourselves holy (Kedoshim 19:2). Now, there are people who when they hear these words, they think it's only a preface to all the upcoming *mitzvos* in the *parsha*. You should make yourselves holy by keeping Shabbos, by eating kosher, by not worshipping *avodah zarah*, and all the rest of the commandments mentioned in the *parsha*. *Kedoshim tihyu* is only a preamble to the real thing, the *mitzvos*. That's what they think. But it's not true – *kedoshim tihyu* is a commandment in itself. (See *Ramban ibid.*). “Get busy making yourself holy,” says Hashem.

So how do you do it? How do you make yourself a *kadosh*? It's something everyone should take a little time to think about. What's a

program for me to become a holy man?” Should I say a lot of *tehillim* maybe? Finish *Shas*? Could be. Could be that’s also included in the *mitzvah*, but let’s listen now to what *Chazal* have to say on the subject. On the words קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ – “You should be holy,” our sages tell us (*Toras Kohanim*): *Perushim tihiyu* – You should be abstainers. To become a *kadosh*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, you have to learn how to say no to yourself, to abstain from some of the worldly pleasures that are readily available to you. And it’s not something optional – it’s a command: Learn how to separate from this world!

And the more you succeed in this *avodah* of *prishus*, the more holy you become. The *gemara* in *Mesichta Taanis* says (11a) “*Kol hayosheiv b’taanis* – Anyone who fasts voluntary fasts, not a public fast, but an individual who accepts upon himself a voluntary fast, *nikra kadosh* – he’s called a holy man. And we learn this from a *nazir* it says there. A *nazir*, because he volunteers to abstain from wine, that’s why he’s called a *kadosh* in the Torah. The Torah puts a crown on the head of the *nazir*, a crown of *kedusha*, נִזֵּר אֵלֶיקוּ עַל רִאשׁוֹ (Bamidbar 6:7), just because of his abstinence.

The Royal Repast

Now, the *Mesillas Yesharim* has a section on this subject of *prishus* and if you take a look there (ch. 13), you’ll see that he brings many examples to prove to the reader that it’s a *mitzvah* to train oneself to abstain, to separate from things in this world. He quotes from *Medrash Pesikta* (6:2) a statement about Chizkiya, the king of Yehuda. Chizkiya had a royal table and every kind of delicacy was available to him – he was a king after all. But the *medrash* says that at mealtimes, all he ate was a plateful of vegetables. Now, what he did for proteins, I cannot tell you. Probably he wasn’t starved for that either, but if you’d be able to take a peek through the palace window and see how King Chizkiya is having lunch, you would see a plate piled high with vegetables and greens. Spinach, cabbage, other similar things – that was his meal.

And *Chazal* praise Chizkiyahu for that. It says about him, צִדִּיק אָכַל לְשֹׁבַע נַפְשׁוֹ – *The tzaddik eats to satiate himself* (*Mishlei* 13:25). It means he eats for a purpose – green leafy vegetables are certainly helpful; they’re purposeful. And although he had expert cooks, expert chefs who could concoct for him pastries and every kind of delicacy, Chizkiya never ordered that. Maybe for his guests he did, but he himself avoided

any kind of superfluities; he was happy to eat his fill of ordinary cheap available green leafy vegetables. That's how this great man, the king of the Jewish nation, lived.

Not Only For The Great

But what *Parshas Kedoshim* is teaching us is that it's not only for great men; *Perushim tihyu* – all of you should make yourselves holy by means of abstaining. We're learning now that there is an attitude of *prishus* that is highly approved by the Torah. Of course, it needs training; it needs thought, when yes, when no. Sometimes there's a *prishus* which is forbidden; it's harmful and therefore it's wrong. Let's say, a man's diet is deficient and he's not willing to eat nutritious foods; he's *poreish* from healthy foods; so he's a sinner. It's forbidden for him to deny himself the pleasures of a normal diet – he should eat from all the good foods that he needs.

Here's a man who is *porush* from speaking – that's also good. But what if a man refuses to greet his wife or to greet his friends? What if he won't spend a minute or two to console someone who is suffering melancholy? With a few friendly words he could cheer that person up, but because of *prishus*, because he doesn't want to break his principle of keeping silence, he won't do it. He's a sinner!

The word *prishus* means to separate oneself from something that is permissible *but not essential*; that's what the *porush* decides to do without. And so, even though we strive for abstinence in as many ways as possible – we'll soon talk about that – but of course it should be done in ways that don't harm other people, and don't harm your health. And yet there's no doubt that the principle of *kosher prishus* is extremely important and it should be an ideal for all of us. Whether you're capable of fulfilling it to a big extent or even a small extent, every Jew should aspire to some measure of abstinence.

Why Bother?

Now, if we're going to be *persushim* in this world, it pays for us to understand why we're doing it – what's going to be our motivation for being “abstainers”? So we look again into the *Mesillas Yesharim* and we see that he says there that our intention when we are *poreish* from superfluous things is because we want to be *misrachek min ho'aveirah*, to keep away from doing what's wrong. *Kadeish atzmecha b'muttar*

lecha – Make yourself holy by means of avoiding even what is permissible according to the letter of the law (Yevamos 20a).

By being far away from even permissible things, we will be protected from coming into contact with forbidden things. And therefore, anything that might lead you to something wrong – whether it's harmful or it's sinful – so even though right now this matter does not cause it and the matter itself is perfectly permissible, nevertheless, the *porush* already abstains from it because of the possible consequences. That's how the *Mesilas Yesharim* understands this quality.

For example, let's say someone eats without control. We're talking now about a man who eats only the best *hechsheirim* – Leiber's chocolates and Paskesz candy and kosher danishes – but he eats! And now that he's constrained to eat anything that his eyes see, it is difficult for him to abstain from forbidden foods. If the doctor tells him that sugar is dangerous for him, it's very difficult for him. He does it, he tries, but each time it's a struggle because the desire for eating has gained mastery over him.

The Best Place for Whiskey

When a person, however, abstains from unnecessary things, when he eats only wholesome and essential foods, so he learns self control. The Rambam says that a person should eat only what's good for him: *lo k'kelev v'k'chazir* – not like the dog and pig that eat only what's pleasant to their taste buds. And the *porush* trains himself to do that. He says no and no and no to himself and by means of that he builds up his “no” muscles. And now, besides for being healthy, it also becomes easier for him to say no to worse things – if he will ever be confronted by something forbidden he says no because he's already habituated to deny himself certain things.

Of course, you can practice this in various ways. Let's say you're sitting home; you ate a good meal and now they put on the table a piece of chocolate cake. So you say, “It's enough – I'm satiated. I don't need it.” Or maybe you're at a *kiddush* and someone offers you a drink of whisky. “Nu? *A l'chaim?*” he says. So say, “Thank you,” make a *shehakol*, drink a drop and when he's not looking, you pour it down on the floor. If it's a carpet don't do that. But if it's linoleum then you say, “*L'chaim!*” and he drinks the whole cup, and your cup you pour it out onto the

floor. The best place for whiskey is on the floor. Now I'm not telling you what to do. If you want to sit down tomorrow and eat everything, that's up to you. But if you want to fulfill the words of Hashem, *Kedoshim tihiyu*, you're going to have to start training yourself to be an abstainer.

How to Speak

Now, this applies to every aspect of life – not only eating. It applies to talking too. You know, the Vilna Gaon, he said that the best *prishus* is when you don't talk. He even recommends a *taanis dibur* – once in a while you set aside a day when you won't talk – a fast from talking. There were good Jews who used to do that. And if you would meet him on certain days, if you spoke to him, he would say, "Today I can't talk." I suppose it was a day when he was off from work and he was able to hide in a room. And if he would take a walk by himself on the street and somebody asked him, "Mister, can you show me where this and this street is?" so he'd motion with his hand, he'd point, "Mmmmm... mmmm." Of course he'd like to open his mouth and show what a big *macher* he is, that he can show directions, "Go there and there," and get a big thank you. But no! He keeps his mouth closed.

However, you don't have to go to such extremes. If a person trains himself to abstain from careless conversation in general, if he accustoms himself to keep his mouth under control, that's already something. And by means of this *prishus* from speaking extraneous words, so it becomes easier for him to keep his mouth closed when he falls into a company where he might have earned many *avereiros* by means of his mouth. Let's say he's sitting at a wedding where he's sentenced now to remain for three hours in one seat; and he happens to be next to chatterboxes, feather headed people who like to talk about everybody.

Now, had he been a man who never learned control so he would fall into the trap – he'd spend three hours being a chatterbox himself. If he hadn't prepared himself with the lesson of *kedoshim tihiyu* so whenever there is conversation, he gladly and merrily joins in. And when he finds himself at the *chasunah* these three hours could be his undoing. A few hours of *leitzanus* and *loshon hara* and *ona'as devarim* and now the rest of his life could be spent atoning for that one occasion.

But because he's a *porush*, because he already accustomed himself not to open his mouth unless necessity requires, so he sits and makes

it his business to pay no attention to what they're saying. Or he finds excuses to go to the lobby; and even when he returns and he's sitting at the table he spends most of his time in dignified solitude.

How to Look

There's also *prishus* in looking. If people accustom themselves that they look only when it's necessary – when you're crossing the street it's very necessary to look both ways and look again and again – but once you reach the opposite sidewalk your eyes are glued to the sidewalk. And you don't raise your eyes again till you get to the next street. Unless somebody greets you; then you raise your eyes in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mekabel es kol adam b'seiver panim yafos*; you greet him with a pleasant cast of countenance.

That's also a *porush* – he doesn't look where it's not necessary. And certainly when he passes a movie theater, he doesn't read the billboards; and therefore he doesn't have any desire to see unnecessary things. He has the strength to turn away and therefore what may be a *nisayon* for someone else, for him it's nothing because he doesn't even see it! He has no urge to enter a movie-house and no urge to look at television. It's easy for him to keep away from sins, because he's gained control over his eyes – he's not tempted to look in places where the eyes don't belong. The *porush* has trained himself to utilize the gift of sight for important things like making a living or dealing with people the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu demands; otherwise, he's a *porush*.

How to Spend

There's also such a thing as a *porush* in spending. Wise people will train themselves not to spend an unnecessary quarter. Just because things are available, you have to spend your hard earned money? The signs say, "Come in and save!" But you decide to "stay out" and save more! Until you saw the sign, it never even occurred to you that you need it. If there's no need to buy it, if you can be without it, so leave it in the store and keep your money in the bank. People who are in the habit of spending money, however, so they become slaves to that urge and just because things are displayed in windows, many times they buy them. And sometimes that's the beginning of a lot of trouble.

And therefore, people who are chary, people who are stingy when it comes to spending money are better off because they're not tempted

to do time-wasting and money-wasting and health-wasting things. When someone offers you, "Let's take a sightseeing trip in Greenwich Village," so it doesn't even tempt you. You tell him, "I have better sights to view," because you already know that your own street is more beautiful than what you'll see there – and it's safer too.

When people, however, have the urge to look and the urge to spend and the urge to eat and the urge to talk they are slaves to a variety of desires and they are always one step away from disaster. And that's why the *porush* of the *Mesillas Yesharim* makes it his business to be under control. Now, I only mentioned a few examples – there are more branches of *prishus*; if you put some thought into it you will be able to discern in what areas of your life it pays to be a *porush*. But whatever it may be, *hatzad hashaveh shebahem*, the common denominator according to the *Mesillas Yesharim* is that it keeps a man from coming into contact with forbidden situations, with things that are *ossur*.

Part II. Idealistic Abstinence

A Different Type of Prishus

And now we're going to study the subject on a different level. The *Chovos Halvovos* also has a big section called *prishus* – it's the same subject but he approaches it in an entirely different way. Not that he disagrees with the *Mesillas Yesharim*; everything that we heard so far is accepted by everybody who understands what Torah is, but the *Chovos Halevavos* teaches us that there's another compelling reason for learning how to abstain from the superfluities of this world.

The *Chovos Halevavos* there tells us that in order to understand the motivation for *prishus* we have to first understand that a man comes into this world in order to fill his mind with thoughts of Hashem. וְאַהֲבַת אֵת הַשֵּׁם אֶלְקִיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ – You should love Hashem with all your mind.

Now, the Rambam (Teshuva 10:6), when he talks about this *mitzvah* he says that it's impossible for a person to love two things at once. Let's say you're head over heels about some hobby or some interest, then it's impossible for you to concentrate on Hakodosh Boruch Hu and the

great attitudes and ideals of the Torah. And so, the Chovos Halvavos explains that this is our motivation to abstain from this world – we need our minds available for higher things, more valuable things.

Your Expensive Apartment

We're introducing now a glorious ideal and it's described by Shlomo Hamelech in Mishlei as follows: Suppose you have a storage compartment that you rent for ten thousand dollars a week. Would you put your shoes there? It's too expensive to waste on that. Only the most precious furniture you bring there because you cannot waste an inch of that valuable space – your shoes you can leave in the hallway. So Shlomo tells us: *וּבְרֵעַת חֲדָרִים יִמְלֵאוּ כָּל הוֹן יָקָר וְנִעִים* – *By means of knowledge, of thoughts, the chambers of your mind will be filled with all precious and pleasing furniture* (Mishlei 24:4). Your mind after all is the most expensive apartment that you can find – every inch is valuable real estate. And therefore it must be left uncluttered, free of any kind of superfluous furniture in order that you should be able to move in the necessary things.

We need space in our minds for all of the valuable furniture of the Torah – that's what the mind is for – only we don't do it! Because our minds are cluttered with superfluous things. Suppose you're thinking of some puny thing, of some argument you had with someone or some little interest, some little hobby; so that clutters up your mind and it prevents beautiful pictures from entering your brain – it's the law of physics that two objects cannot occupy one space at the same time.

Genesis of Everything

In your mind you have to have a picture of the creation of the universe, a glorious picture that is described in the beginning of the Torah. Everything came *ex-nihilo* – out from nothing. And everything was formed in such a glorious sequence. First, all of space, the firmament, came into existence. And then this earth was created and then the dry land emerged from the waters and then a light was created and then the sun subsequently came; each phase of creation followed one after the other – a glorious picture. It's a pity that people don't realize that this is some of the furniture that should be occupying our mind.

Now if you want to be a superman, if you want to be a person of higher nature, so when you walk tonight out of this place, from here to the corner, you can spend that minute thinking that the One who created the universe out of nothing is looking at you. Try that! That's a very valuable piece of furniture. When you're walking home from shul in the morning or when you're waiting in at the grocery to buy a bottle of milk, so instead of filling your mind with cheap furniture like thoughts about what type of cereal you'll be having for breakfast, you'll begin to move in expensive furniture like thoughts of the *briyah yesh mei'ayin*; spend one minute in picturing the creation of the universe. The entire Torah is built on that preface – even when you're learning Bamidbar, you're learning Devarim, you should remember that it's all based on *briyah yesh mei'ayin*.

That Tremendous Day

Why shouldn't you think every day at least for one half minute about *Matan Torah*? You never heard about that? It's a *possuk* (Devarim 4:9)! הִשְׁמֹר לְךָ וְשָׁמֹר נִפְשֶׁךָ מְאֹד פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ! – Be very careful, extreme careful, that you shouldn't forget what your eyes saw at Har Sinai, יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לִפְנֵי הַשָּׁם אֲלֵקֶיךָ בְּהַר בְּהַרְבֵּי – the day that you stood at Har Sinai.

Oh! What a day that was! A tremendous day that never happened before or after in the history of the world! People heard the voice of Hashem! הֲשָׁמַע עַם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים! – Did a nation ever hear such a sweet and dreadful Voice?! (ibid. 4:33). They died; they fainted and had to be revived! It was an excitement – a fearsome experience, and yet the most happy and joyous experience ever. You must have room in your mind always for such a great picture, the picture of how Hakodosh Boruch Hu's voice thundered from Har Sinai. Put that furniture into the room of your mansion, your mental mansion.

Oil Changes and Carburetors

Now, if you have in your head everything, every *meshugas*, every stupidity, then you won't have any room for these things. So let's say you have in your mind the 'beautiful' ideal of an automobile; your mind is filled with thoughts of tinkering with the engine of your car. Maybe you're obsessed with worrying about the tires or with washing your car. You're thinking that tomorrow morning if you have time, you'll take

the vacuum cleaner and you'll vacuum clean all the upholstery of your car. So it's car and car and car and more car. Your mind is a car mind. Instead of filling his mind with beautiful furniture of Torah ideals, it's filled with oil changes and carburetors.

Now, that's only one example. People's minds are filled with all types of things that are superfluous. Clothing and money and expensive gadgets. Food and travel and other things too. But suppose a man has no car; he has no expensive toys, so his head is empty. Of course, having an empty head is also not desirable either, but now if he's interested in moving things into that empty apartment, so he can begin transferring the beautiful furnishings of a royal suite into his head and he can turn his mind into a beautiful palace. He moves in a golden bed and golden chairs and golden goblets and other beautiful furniture.

Mansion of Delight

And he moves in, for example, a picture of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. לְמַעַן אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי תְּזוּכֹר – In order that you should remember, all the days of your life, a picture of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Now I understand that people who do lip service are satisfied to fulfill their obligation, to say the words morning and evening and then forget it, but if one wishes to build up a mansion full of delightful objects, he tries as much as possible to fix that as a permanent fixture in his mind. He's always aware of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Now, as you train yourself to abstain from the less important things in this world, so over the years you gradually add more and more appurtenances into this royal apartment of the mind. The more you value every inch of space the more time you'll spend thinking Torah thoughts – and it all begins with a mind that is uncluttered with the superfluous things of this world.

The Impoverished Idealist

In *Mesichta Nedarim* (81a) it says: *Shalchu mitam* – They sent a message from Eretz Yisroel: *Hizharu biv'nei aniyim* – “Be careful with the children of the poor, she'mei hem teitzei torah – because from them Torah will come.” So it means, they sent from Eretz Yisroel a message to the *manhigim* in Bavel, if poor boys come to your yeshiva, make a special effort to be *mekarev* them. Poor boys are diamonds because greatness in Torah comes from poor children.

So the *Ran* asks: Why from poor children? Why is it that especially from the poor families will develop *talmidei chachomim*? And he says that it's because poor children have nothing else but Torah. because these boys never had anything else in their minds. They didn't have good times. They didn't have money to spend, so their heads are full of an ideal. A poor boy sets out to the yeshiva and he thinks only of *gemara*. He loves *gemara* and he intends to become a *gadol*; whether he'll become a big *gadol* or a small *gadol*, but he's an idealist.

Whereas a rich boy who sets out to the yeshiva, he has an expensive watch and expensive toys. He has to have a car, and maybe he has a radio too. He has a lot of things to keep him busy. But everything costs! Not only money; it's worse than that. It costs space in the mansion of his mind. He's thinking about his camera and good times and even though he's a *frum* boy, a nice, decent boy, but his head is too full of other things.

Bicycles, Hammers and Donuts

Poor children have much less opportunities to waste their lives! When I was a boy, I never had a bike. I was such a poor boy that when I wanted to buy a little hammer – it cost twenty five cents in those days – I couldn't afford it! It took me a long time but finally I saved up twenty five cents and I bought the hammer. That was a big thing for me! We didn't have any toys. Boruch Hashem! So *Hizharu – Be careful, biv'nei aniyim, with the poor, she'meihem teitzei torah – because Torah will come from them.*

I'll give you a *mashal*. A man sits down at the table in the morning and he should be eating a wholesome breakfast. But instead, he eats some other junk with a lot of flavoring in it – he eats a sugar cereal and a soggy, greasy donut. And now he didn't get the nourishment that he requires; all he gets is a bellyache. He walks away from breakfast with a bellyache and now there's no room in his stomach for the good food, the real food that his body needs. And that's what happens to your *mind* when you fill it with thoughts of sugar cereal and soggy donuts and fancy cars and toys and gadgets – there's no more room anymore for the real pleasures that Hashem wants us to enjoy in this world.

Keep Your Mind Clear

And so, the *Chovos Halvovos* says that *prishus* is the solution; it's the function of clearing the mind of things that are not necessary so that you'll be able to deposit there the more important matters. Abstain! Don't get involved in superfluous things. If every type of food is good for you, then you don't devote too much time to your meals, and you have time for the important things in life. But suppose you must have delicatessen, you must eat out – it means you like to collect germs in other places – and you want it this way and that way; so you have to devote time and thought to that and it leaves less space for the important things in life.

Now, of course you have to work. If a man doesn't work, he's involved with idleness; he's starting up with depression and other *meshugasim*. Sometimes he gets involved with sins too if he doesn't work. You must work, you must live normally, but don't get involved with anything in *Olam Hazeh* – don't fall in love with anything in this world. If you don't need a car, don't buy a car. If you need it, you can't help it. But don't put the car into your head. There used to be an advertisement on the buses; it said "Get involved." Get involved! But our motto is: "Don't get involved!" Stay out of it!

And that's the *prishus* of the *Chovos Halvovos*. Keep your mind clear for the great function for which you were created! You live only once in this world so shouldn't you utilize your head for glorious ideas? We want to keep our minds clear for the great thoughts which ought to occupy our minds. וּבִרְעֵת חֲדָרַיִם יִמְלֵאוּ כָּל הוֹן יִקָּר וְנִעְיָם (Mishlei 24:4) – With *da'as* your chambers will be filled with all precious and pleasing furniture.

Part III. Pleasures of Abstinence

False Pleasures

And now we come to another level, a third motivation for our *avodah* of *prishus*; and it's that *being an abstainer is what will make you happy in this world!* Now your ears perk up! That's a *prishus* that people would like to follow in this world.

But in order to understand this, it's important to first set down that one of the most common things that causes us to not be happy in this world is the pursuit of false pleasures. People think, "This is fun, let's do it!" "This is happiness, let's get it." "Over there, we'll enjoy ourselves!" and by means of that pursuit of empty pleasures they *cause themselves to be deprived of the greatest pleasures in this world* – happiness that is much more genuine and much more accessible to you.

And they don't find happiness when they run after it. Even when people set out to go someplace for a good time, when they come back home they see it was a disappointment. You go to the movies, and the lights come back on again and you see it's nothing but a fake; the story never happened. It's only a film; there's nothing to it.

Others think that maybe they'll find happiness in amusement parks on roller coasters. And if you're a *besserer mensch*, so you'll have bigger *hasagos*, bigger dreams, and you'll fly to the Bahamas to search for happiness. And trust me, you won't find it; you won't find happiness in the Bahamas. Bigger mosquitoes than here in Brooklyn, that you'll definitely find. Maybe some new disease from the islands you'll bring back; but happiness, no. Because for happiness you have to labor. And when you try to find happiness the easy way, by going to ball games and amusement parks, so it may be that you can find a thrill, some fun, yes. But happiness, no. Life becomes one big disappointment.

The Very Good World

And yet we know that this world is not a place of disappointments; Hashem's world is a happy world! We know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is a *tov u'meitiv* – we cannot begin to live in this world successfully unless we assimilate the idea into our bones that Hakodosh Boruch Hu does everything for the purpose of kindness. *עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה* – *He built a world of kindness* (Tehillim 89:3). When Hakodosh Boruch Hu made the world, the first thing He told us was that we should know how good the world is. *וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד* – *And Hashem saw everything that He made, and behold it was very good* (Bereishis 1:31).

Now, if Hashem would say it's 'good' – not 'very good,' just 'good' – we would understand that it's superlatively good because His word is true; His good is very very good. And so if He says *tov me'od*, that this world is very good, then you must understand that it's very, very very,

good. When Hashem says *me'od*, it means *me'oooooooooooooooooooood!* He doesn't give His seal of approval "very good" unless it is very, very, very – and forever we won't stop saying very – good.

Enjoying Everything

And not only it is a world full of pleasures, but they're available; they're accessible at all times and Hakodosh Boruch Hu expects you to enjoy them and to appreciate them. In Koheles (2:10) it states, **וְכָל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלוּ עֵינַי לֹא אֶצְלַתִּי מֵהֶם** – *Whatever my eyes requested, I did not withhold from them*; which means whatever he saw, he sampled. And the *gemara* (*Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:12*) says that if a person fails to enjoy this world there is going to be an accounting. "A man will someday have to give a reckoning, an accounting before Hashem, on all that his eyes saw, but he refused to eat of it." That sounds good; it's a *mitzvah!* Whatever your eyes see, you should sample and if you don't, you'll be held accountable.

And so we see that it is an ideal to make use of the benefits Hakodosh Boruch Hu created for us in this world. He wants us to enjoy His world! So what are we saying now that it's a *mitzvah* to train oneself to abstain from *Olam Haze*h?

Enjoying Light

So you must first understand what type of pleasures Hakodosh Boruch Hu is talking about here. And as an example I'm going to bring out one pleasure that will surprise you – it will make it clear right away what we're talking about.

It states in Koheles (11:7), **וּמִתּוֹק הָאוֹר וְטוֹב לְעֵינַיִם לְרִאוֹת אֶת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** – *How sweet is the light; how good it is for the eyes to see the sun*. Now listen to what Rabbeinu Yonah says in *Sha'arei Teshuva* (2:9) about that *possuk*. "If you're an old man," he says, "and you already have no teeth and the other things you also don't have in old age, so you might think that all the fun of life is gone – you have no pleasure in life anymore."

But that can't be, says Rabbeinu Yonah. Hashem already said that it's a very good world – He didn't say it's a good world until your turn seventy. So he says – listen to this because Rabbeinu Yonah you have to know was a practical and sensible man; I ask *mechila* from him for saying that but it's the truth. What does Rabbeinu Yonah tell us is the pleasure that invigorates and brings joy to the old man? Sunlight! If he

learns to enjoy sunlight then he'll never be unhappy again. And we have to understand the joy of daylight. What a pleasure it is to see daylight! It's a pleasure! How foolish the world is – they live their lives and don't appreciate daylight.

Land of the Chovos Halevavos

Now, this is certainly unacceptable to many people. “That's fun?! Daylight?! Heh, heh, heh – it's so free, so available.” But you're learning a big secret now – listen to this *sod*: All the best things in life are free! Only that people don't know how to be happy with them. Like the Chovos Halevavos says, people tend to ignore the *tovos hakolelos*, the *general pleasures that everybody has*, and they seek only *tovos meyuchados*, *pleasures that only they have and nobody else has*. If he has something that nobody else has, then he's happy with it. Only that is a pleasure, he thinks.

But the Chovos Halevavos says that he's a fool because Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to enjoy the gifts that He's giving to everyone. The fact that your neighbor is benefitting from the sunlight, so that makes it any less enjoyable?! Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving and giving and giving and we just have to keep our minds open in order to study the gifts and to and enjoy them. And you're going to be held accountable for not enjoying them!

It's a great happiness to enjoy daylight. How silly are the people – the boys and girls walk out in the street and they have pockets full of money. They want to buy candy and *nosherei* – that's fun! So we say, “Throw all the garbage away in the trash can and look at the daylight. If you get all of that garbage out of your head you'll finally be able to enjoy the sunlight!” Of course, they look at us and they laugh. “Ha, ha – you're a lunatic. Where did you escape from? From Bellevue?!” So we tell them that we escaped from the land of the Chovos Halevavos, from the land of Torah ideals where daylight is fun!

Simple Joys

Now, sunlight is just one example of how a *porush*, an abstainer lives a life of happiness and kedusha. We're just beginning the career of fun – only that our fun is the real fun of life! Do you know how much fun it is to have two eyes. Two eyes?! But everybody has two eyes? So

what! Ask a blind man what he would give to get back one eye. One eye?! He'd pay millions; he'd go crazy with happiness.

The pleasure of eating a piece of bread. Ah, ah, ah, – eating a piece of bread. As you sink your teeth of bread and the saliva flows, it's a *ta'anug!* That's one of the greatest pleasures in the world. The pleasure of drinking a glass of water! Water! What a pleasure it is! As it goes down your throat; Ah! A life-giving substance – learn how to enjoy water. The pleasure of breathing! Take a deep breath; you're drinking a cocktail of gases that gives you vigor and makes your blood red and invigorates your entire body. Every breath goes into your body and gives you a new burst energy. Breathing is fun!

To have a roof over your head and walls and a door that you can lock. What a blessing it is to have a home. It's a happiness; your home is your fortress. When you walk into a warm house, you should enjoy it! Say, "Ahhh! Warmth is a pleasure, a real *taanug.*" You never said that even once? That's because when your mind is filled with phones and donuts there is no room for the pleasure of a warm home.

Wristwatches and Rolls Royces

Now, you can't always tell this to people because they'll think you're wacky. Here comes along a *frum tzaddik* and he says to me, "You're teaching people that the purpose of life is *ta'anugim*?! To be *rodef ta'anugim*, run after pleasures, that's Torah?!" He was upset with me. I was thinking, "Look; you have a wristwatch. I don't have a wristwatch. You drive a car when you come to the *yeshivah*. I walk to the *yeshivah*. Who is running after pleasure, you or I? You're running after it but you don't have it. I'm not looking for pleasures. They're coming to me. I walk in the street with my two Rolls Royces, my two feet in my shoes, that's the Rolls Royces, and I'm breathing the air of Hakodosh Boruch Hu! I'm enjoying life every second!" That kind of *kosher ta'anugim* is a *chiyuv*; it's a *mitzvah gedolah* to enjoy life that way."

But you'll never be able to fully enjoy all of these gifts of Hakodosh Boruch if your mind is cluttered up with luxuries, with superfluous things, with substitute pleasures. You'll never enjoy the gifts of Hashem if you think that fun comes with traveling and other luxuries. Could be that you'll find some fleeting happiness – the piece of cake and the trip to Switzerland might tickle your nerves a little bit – but you'll never be

a happy person because of that. Only a *porush*, a person who has trained himself to separate from these false pleasures, he's the one who lives happily – extremely happily – in this world.

Spiritual Joys

But not only will a person who accustoms himself to the empty pleasures not learn how to be truly happy in this world, but there is something even more that he's missing out on. I say that this is the fourth level of *prishus*; the fourth motivation for the *avodah* of abstaining. And that is that a mind that is busy with pursuing empty pleasures will never be capable of finding happiness in serving Hakodosh Boruch Hu. When a person has artificial pleasures in his mind, he won't be able to appreciate the pleasure of *avodas Hashem*, of doing *mitzvos*.

Now, for some people that might sound strange but trust me, there's a happiness in doing *mitzvos*. You remember Rabbi Akiva, when he stood *shemoneh esrei*, he wept bucketfuls of tears – *mamesh* buckets of tears on Shabbos. So after he finished they said to him, "Isn't it Shabbos? Are you allowed to weep on Shabbos?" And Rabbi Akiva answered, "I was weeping out of happiness." He was so happy; he was talking to his best friend, the one true friend he had.

It's like a child who comes home after a big absence and he's talking to his mother and father and he's gargling his words – he's pouring out his whole heart to them. He was amongst strangers and now he's back home again talking to the ones he loves, the ones who love him more than anything. Rabbi Akiva opened up his heart to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and he was so happy, he couldn't restrain the flow of tears. Copiously he wept.

Ecstasy of Serving

There's a happiness to *tefillah*! Like it says, וְשִׂמְחָתֵיךְ בְּבֵית הַתְּפִלָּה – I'll make them happy in my place of *tefilla* (Yeshaya 56:7). It means that when you come to talk to Hashem, it's a pleasure, it's *geshmak*! That's what the old-time Jews said, when they finished *davening*, they said "Ah, a *geshmake maariv*!" But when someone has accustomed himself to superfluities, so he has no appetite, no understanding for these real pleasures of life.

There's happiness in learning Torah too. Some people have learned how to enjoy learning Torah. For the person who learned how to be *poreish* from all of the substitute pleasures in this world there's a tremendous joy in sitting in front of a gemara. That's why it's *assur* to learn Torah on Tisha B'Av. *Divrei Torah mesamchin es haleiv* – it's true happiness. It's fun to understand the *sevara* of the gemara, to understand the *terutz* of Tosfos. When you understand something that you didn't understand before in Torah, that's a joy. The *amora* Rava was so happy when he learned Torah that it was said about him (Shabbos 88a) that he was so immersed in the love of Torah, in the happiness of learning, that he didn't know he was sitting on his hand. His hand was bleeding but he was unaware of it because he was so happy with the Torah. It was a real love! A joy of Torah!

Only someone who learned how to abstain from this world can understand the ecstasy of doing *mitzvos*, of serving Hakodosh Boruch Hu. You know when a mother is cooking supper for her family, if she learns to enjoy the *mitzvah*, how happy she is that her children are going to eat what she made for them, happy that she is fulfilling the *shelichus* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. *נִתֵּן לָחֶם לְכֹל בְּשֶׁר בִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ* – *Hashem gives bread to all living and she is doing that*. She is a messenger of *chesed*. Isn't that a privilege for an intelligent mother? As she stands and dishes out food to this child and that child, she is a *shaliach* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu and she is so happy that her *frum* children are relishing her meal. That's her delight in life. She's an *oived Hashem* in happiness because she's not thinking about dresses and sheitels.

The Various Motivations

I'm going to sum up the three levels of *prishus* so you shouldn't forget them. Number one is the *prishus* of the *Mesillas Yesharim*: A man has to learn self control and abstinence so that he shouldn't become a slave to his desires and come to sin. A man who doesn't have any control over himself yields more readily to forbidden things.

The second motivation for *prishus* is what the *Chovos Halvovos* teaches us: A man must keep his mind available for all the great ideals of Torah and therefore he shouldn't clutter up his mind with physical material things. As much as possible, he must keep his mind open to fill it with all the beautiful treasures of pictures of Torah ideals and ideas of Torah. That's the great success of life; to fill your mind with noble

thoughts, with the beautiful furniture of Torah stories and ideals. Building a Torah mind, that's the great achievement of life but it cannot happen in a mind which is occupied by substitutes.

And the third motivation for abstaining from this world is so *that you should learn how to really enjoy this world!* Get out of your head any thoughts that *prishus* means to be unhappy! Only that if you fill your mind with false pleasures, manufactured pleasures, so you're going to ignore all the true pleasures in this world. Hashem wants you to enjoy *Olam Hazeh*, but it's an art you have to learn. *Prishus* means to be happy without luxuries; to learn to appreciate the minimum, to enjoy all the 'simple' pleasures of this world – the pleasures that are available always. And once you empty your mind of all of these manufactured pleasures, you'll find the true happiness, true and immense satisfaction, in *avodas Hashem* itself – Torah, *mitzvos*, *chesed*, raising children; **בְּאַהֲבַת־תְּשׁוּבָה תִּשְׁנֶה תָּמִיד** – *in the love of Hashem you'll go wild with pleasure.*

And all of these things together add up to *kedusha*. *Kedoshim tihyu* – *perushim tihyu*. Not only will you be a happy person but you'll be far away from *aveiros*. You'll walk through this world all the days of your life with noble thoughts in your mind, serving Hashem in happiness, while enjoying all the pleasures that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is showering down upon you constantly. And therefore every Jew should aspire to whatever level of *prishus* he's capable of, because the more he achieves, the more happy and *kadosh* he becomes.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

Is it okay to drink coffee all the time?

A:

You have touched on a very important topic and that is the slavery to habit. Many people have habits. Let's say you're a slave to smoking. Now, if you're a slave to smoking you have to know that you have lost your free will. I was once in Boro Park and across the street I saw a man who I knew who was standing with a Yerushalmi. So I went across the street and this Yerushalmi tells me that he's very ill. He came to America for treatment because his lungs are diseased. He's telling me this and he's puffing on a cigarette. So I said to him, "Why don't you stop smoking?" So he tells me in Yiddish, "No, don't tell me that. Anything but that." He's an *eved*; an *eved Canaani*. He sold himself out to this habit. He's not a free man anymore; he's a slave.

Some people are slaves to drinking alcohol. I know a man who drinks and becomes inebriated. He's a *shikur*. Many people are like that. They drink too much; they're slaves to the bottle. They're slaves to nothing. And eating as well. People can even be slaves to eating. People overeat. Overeating is not good for your health. And it's a *shibud*.

Every type of *shibud* – every type of being mortgaged to wrong habits means that a person giving up his freedom. You're giving up the freedom to make something out of yourself because once you're a slave to *Olam Hazeh*, you're already limited in your service of Hashem. I never drank coffee. As long as I can remember I never drank any coffee. Why should I drink coffee?! It's unnecessary. To become *mishubad* to a habit?! Some people are coffee addicts. They must have coffee all the time; they're slaves. And any habit that enslaves you means that you can't serve Hashem *b'shleimus*.

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