

תורת אביגדור
הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Vayikra
The
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- #61 - Counting the Days | #182 - Happy Always |
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בעזרה שי"ת

פרשת אמור

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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נא שלא לקרות בעת התפלה וקריאת התורה

Part I. Counting for Wisdom

WHEN IS SHAVUOS?

In this week's *parsha* we are introduced to the *mitzvah* of *sefiras ha'omer*, the counting of forty-nine days between the bringing of the *Omer* offering and the *yomtov* of *Shavuos*: וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמָּחֳרַת הַשָּׁבֹת - "You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the first day of Pesach, מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאֵכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה - from the day that you bring the *Omer* offering, עַד מִמָּחֳרַת הַשָּׁבֹת הַשְּׁבִיעִת - until the day after the seventh week when you will celebrate *Shavuos*" (Vayikra 23:15). In the Torah the *yomtov* of *Shavuos* is not designated by a certain day of the month; instead it depends entirely on the counting of days. "Today is day one," "Today is day two," "Today three, and so forth until we say "Today is day forty-nine," and then we know that *Shavuos* is tomorrow.

That's how it's been for all of our history; the whole Jewish nation stands up and counts *sefira*. From the time Yehoshua entered the land until the *churban bayis rishon*, the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, we were counting. And even when we were exiled from our land and couldn't bring the *Omer* anymore, they continued to

count the days from *Pesach* until *Shavuot* - we're still counting today. For forty-nine days we become the nation that counts.

But there's a question here. Because if the purpose of this counting was merely to know when to celebrate *Shavuot* - as it appears from the *posuk* - so the Torah could have merely said, "And seven weeks after the first day of *Pesach* you should celebrate *Shavuot*." What's the necessity of a special counting, a special ceremony of counting the days? And even more than that, why is it that we *all* have to count? Let the *Beis Din* count; let *them* keep count and let us know! That's how it is with counting the *shmitta* years after all. The *mitzvah* to count the years for *shmitta* and *yovel* falls exclusively on the *Beis Din* and we don't participate at all.

THE NATIONAL COUNTING CEREMONY

And yet, when it comes to *sefiras ha'omer* the Torah goes out of its way to obligate every single one of us to participate in the counting. The *gemara* (*Menachos* 65b) says regarding the *mitzvah* of counting the *Omer*: וְסִפְרֶתֶם לָכֶם - "And you should count *lachem*, for yourselves; and *chazal* tell us that the plural *lachem* is used to teach, שְׂתִתְּהוּ אָחָד וְאָחָד לְכֹל אָחָד - that the counting must be done by *every individual*."

So what's this national business of counting? A whole nation of millions should stop everything to count days?! What for? Of course, you'll hear many reasons you'll hear - we've spoken about them here too - ideas that correspond to the *Omer* and *Matan Torah* and to the days in between. But we'll focus now on a more general idea, an important attitude that pertains not only to these forty nine days before *Shavuot*, but to the counting of all the days of our lives!

613 PANORAMAS OF OPPORTUNITY

The brother of the *Vina Gaon* in his sefer *Ma'alos Hatorah* (*Hakedamah*) teaches us a very important rule - he says it in the name of the *Gra*, but it's found in the *Rishonim* as well - and it's an idea that opens up for us a panorama of opportunity. He declares that although the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvos* of the Torah are

commandments on their own, yet they are also intended to be much more than that. He says that they are actually six hundred and thirteen *klalim*, general principles, that serve as models that should guide us in our everyday lives. And therefore, although we do not add to the *mitzvos*, yet we can always surmise in which direction Hashem wishes that our minds should go by studying these general principles.

Now, if the *mitzvah* of counting days is intended as a model for us, we should spend some time trying - at least a little bit - to understand what we're being taught here. In which direction is Hakodosh Boruch Hu guiding us by commanding us to count these days?

DOVID HAMELECH LEARNS TO COUNT

In *Tehillim* (90:12) there's a *possuke* לְמִנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ בֵּן הַיּוֹדֵעַ - "Make known to us how to count our days properly." We say it every Shabbos morning, and we should take it to heart because it is of the utmost consequence to each one of us. Dovid Hamelech is saying here a supplication, a *tefilla* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu: "Please Hashem," he said, "Please teach us how to count our days."

Now, just to count days, Dovid Hamelech wouldn't need to call out to Hashem. You need Hashem to teach you to count days?! A little *yingel* at home, even before he goes out to the *cheder*, can count days. You count, that's all! So we look back at our *possuke* and we see that it wasn't that Dovid wanted to know how to *count*. "Teach us how to count our days '*kein*', how to count our days *properly*," he said.

The word *kein* means 'properly' like we find בְּנֵי בְּנֵי עֲלֻפְחָד - "The daughters of *Tzelofchad* are speaking correctly, properly" (Bamidbar 27:7). So לְמִנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ בֵּן הַיּוֹדֵעַ means, "Make us know how to count our days *correctly*." It's not enough to count; for the *mitzvah* of *sefiras ha'omer* it might be sufficient, but for counting the days of our lives, Dovid understood that we need more than that. What Dovid wanted from Hashem was help in counting his days '*kein*', correctly.

Now what it means to count successfully, that's a big subject, but the first thing we make note of is that there's more to counting than merely ticking off the days; there's something we're aiming for here. And that's what the *possuk* continues: "Teach us to count our days properly, וְנִבְיֵא לָבֵב חֲכָמָה, - "and help us bring a mind of wisdom." That means, teach us *how to produce a mind of wisdom*.

WHAT IS WISDOM?

Now, if I would just stop here, we still wouldn't know how to count. Because wisdom could mean many things. Maybe it's technical knowledge? So, of course, immediately we would say no. Certainly it's not a prayer that we should succeed in putting into our heads every day more facts of science, or the wisdom of ways and means of performing crafts or vocational skills. So the best among us would say that it's referring to the *chochmas hatorah*; what else is *chochma*? We pray to Hakodosh Boruch Hu that we should utilize our days in filling our minds with knowledge of Torah. I'm sure everyone here would say, "Certainly! What else?!"

And there's no question that the *chochmas hatorah* is very important; when you add one *yedias hatorah*, one detail of Torah, to your store of knowledge, then you were successful today, you became rich. No question! *Chochma* can mean *Mesichta Brachos* and it can mean *Shabbos* and *Eiruvin* and *Pesachim*. It can mean *Sukkah* and *Rosh Hashana* and *Yuma* and *Beitzab* and *Megilla* and *Ta'anis* and *Moed Katan* and *Chagiga* too. It could mean all of *Shas*! There's no question *limud hatorah* is a *chochma*.

But *l'havdil* we must say the same if you gained some more facts about the sciences; if you studied books of biology or chemistry, whatever it may be; that's also a *chochma*. Of course, by no means on the same scale as Torah, but if you learn it in the right way, you recognize that you're studying the *darkei Hashem*, the ways of Hashem in nature and in history, לְדַעַת בְּאֶרֶץ דְּרָכֶיךָ, there's no question that it's also a certain achievement of *chochma*. But here, when Dovid was counting his days to "to produce a mind of *chochma*," a different type

of *chochma* altogether is intended. The wisdom Dovid is speaking about here is one that is set far above all the other forms of wisdom in the world - and it's that wisdom that will be our subject for this talk.

THE LONG BEARDED YAREI SHAMAYIM

In *Iyov* (28:28) it states: הֵן יִרְאֵת הַשָּׁם הִיא חֲכָמָה - "Behold, *yiras Hashem*, fear of Hashem, *bee*, that is called wisdom." Now, when I say *yiras Hashem*, right away people think they know what I'm talking about. But they don't; it's not what you think it is. And therefore the word *yirah* itself must be defined - otherwise you might imagine all types of wrong ideas. You see what the world thinks it is - people think that it means putting on externalities. Here's a man who decides to choose the way of *yiras Hashem*, so the first thing is he lets his beard grow long. And then, a black hat. Very nice! And then in some cases he puts on a long black coat. Beautiful! And in very many cases, that's it! He thinks he's graduated; he thinks he has it.

And that's why it's important to emphasize that *yiras Hashem* is much more than externalities. It's a *chochma*; a knowledge that must be learned; a science that must be studied and practiced. And it's not easy. It doesn't mean merely learning the technicalities of Torah. It's wonderful to learn *Bava Kama*! It's great to learn *Mesichta Shabbos*! It's great to know all the details of *halacha*; it's a very important wisdom. But it's not *the* wisdom.

GREEK FOR DUMMIES

I'll explain that. The *chachomim* (Shabbos 31b) said on this *possuk* of "Hein *yiras Hashem bee chochma*," that the word *hein* in Greek means one. In pig Greek, in pig Latin, *ain* or *un* was a way of saying one. And so we can read the *possuk* as follows: "Fear of Hashem is wisdom and הִיא חֲכָמָה, וְהִיא לְבִדָּה חֲכָמָה - *that alone is called wisdom!*" (*Mesillas Yesharim, Hakdamah*). There's only one true *chochma* because all the other forms of wisdom pale into insignificance in comparison to the *chochma* of *yiras Hashem*.

The question remains though, how to achieve that *chochma*? How do we achieve the wisdom of *yiras Hashem* that is more important than all *chochmos*? So the first step is to know what it is we're striving for. You'll recall that I expressly took the trouble to emphasize that *yiras Hashem*, the fear of Hashem, is not what people think it is and therefore before we go on, let's define this term; what is meant by *yiras Hashem*?

Yaro, to be afraid, is actually derived from *ra'oh* to see. Because when a person doesn't see, so he's not afraid. "Ignorance is bliss," says the world. A man is afraid only when he sees that something is actually coming, or at least he sees in his imagination that something is coming. So *yirah*, fear, is a form of *r'iyah*, seeing.

LOVE, FEAR OR AWARENESS?

And now we come to the point of tonight's talk. When we say *yirah*, when we talk about counting our days for *yiras Hashem*, what we really mean is that we are trying to make every day a day of "seeing Hashem." Now, while you're still in this world you'll never be able to actually see Hashem, but what it means is *becoming aware of Hashem*. *Yiras Hashem* is really 'being aware of Hashem' and once you understand that then you've grasped the fundamental *yesod* of being a *frum* Jew.

Now of course, *yirah* means fear too. You have to fear Hashem! Today when a rabbi speaks about fear of Hashem, people think he doesn't know English, and what he really means is "Love Hashem". Nothing doing! When we say "fear," we mean fear in its most literal sense. Only that true fear is founded on Awareness. And so, if we'll translate it in one word, *yiras Hashem* is Awareness. Being aware all the time of Hashem! To feel, to actually be convinced, of the immanence of the Presence of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And that is the *reishis chochma*, the highest of all forms of wisdom. To gain more and more *emunah chushis*, more and more sensory feeling - not only *emunah sichlis*, intelligent understanding - but it should enter into our senses and our nerves until we are as aware of

Hakodosh Boruch Hu as we are of anyone else. At least as much as you're aware of your neighbor or your Uncle Morris in the Bronx, you should be aware of Hashem.

QUESTION YOURSELF EVERY DAY

And so, even if someone is *frum*, even if he's very pious, and he's careful with every detail of Judaism, but if he never labored to acquire any real awareness of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, then he does not have *yiras Hashem*. He's *frum*; certainly he's devout, and we don't begrudge that at all, but he doesn't have any *yiras Hashem*. Because specifically, *yiras Hashem* means seeing Hashem, living with an actual feeling that you're standing in front of Him at all times. And the more you think about Him and the more real He becomes to you, the more you become a *yarei shamayim* - which is the purpose of our days in this world.

That's why we counted today! And that's why we'll count tomorrow, and the day after that. And that's why we'll continue counting our days even long after *Shavuot* ends too. Because *sefiras ha'omer* is the *klal*, it's the rehearsal for the important function of counting the rest of the days of our lives - of making sure that every day of our lives is being used to achieve more and more *yiras shamayim*. Every day that ticks off the calendar is important and must be counted; we're expected to ask ourselves, "Did I bring more *yirah* into my heart today?"

Part II. The Purpose of Time

THE CLOCK HANGING 93,000,000 MILES AWAY

Now, in order that we should comprehend the enormity of this function of counting days, the Torah doesn't wait until *Parshas Emor* to let us know its importance. Way back in the beginning, when Hashem created this world, He taught us about this.

Do you know what the sun and the moon are for? Why did Hashem create the sun and the moon? So we look back into the *chumash* and we see that there were a few purposes. And one of them

is the one we're speaking about now, the function of counting our days.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם - “And Hashem said: Let there be luminaries in the firmament, לְיָמִים - for days” (Bereishis 1:14). Now, to separate between day and night, that's already mentioned earlier in the *posuk*, לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה, - “To separate between day and night,” and therefore we must say that the word *lyomim*, “for days,” is telling us something new altogether - that the purpose of the sun is for creating separate days; in order that we should experience the passing of time.

Now, if you think about it, this is an astounding idea. The Torah is revealing to us a very surprising fact, something we would never have dreamed of by ourselves. Actually, it's such a startling statement that even after hearing it, we'll have to be very pious people to accept it. We, little human beings, on this tiny earth - compared to the sun it's tiny after all - do we deserve to have a tremendous clock hanging for us way out in space? You know how big the sun is?! You know how far off it is?! And the purpose of that tremendous orb in the sky, that beautiful ball of fire, is merely to serve as a timepiece for us?! Absolutely! Hakodosh Boruch Hu declares it openly: it's to let you know when a day has passed by. *L'ymim*. There you have it, black on white.

THE LONGEST WASTED DAY

In case you would get caught up in life, in case you wouldn't notice life passing you by, so the sun rises and sets, rises and sets, and it thereby lets us know that the days are passing. Another day is coming, and then another day, and now another one has passed us by. If not for the sun then life would be this one long stretch of time. We'd be born in the world and we would continue always, one long day or one long night, whatever it is. And time would go by, and before we know it, the time is up.

You know, if it weren't for the sun, so people, when they went out on a spree, it would almost always have a sad ending. Let's

say a man got into a fight with the boss, or a fight with the wife, and he ran out into the street from his home or from his job; he said, “*Forget about it all!* It’s a wasted day anyhow.” That would be the end of him altogether because that wasted day would never come to an end. Like one man from the *yeshiva* told me, he admitted to me that he was discouraged, and he went to the movies. A kollel man! He was so disgusted; “The day is ruined anyhow,” he said. “Let’s fall down to the bottom.” The movies *is* the bottom by the way. And if not for the sun he would have sat in the movies the whole week.

LIFE IS LIKE A WATERMELON

And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu breaks up life for us into little pieces so that we should appreciate and make use of them. It’s like the woman who has a lot of children, and the father brought home a watermelon. It wasn’t a big watermelon, and for thirteen children it wasn’t much. And she knew that if she would just put the whole thing on the table it would be finished up and forgotten about. So she cut it up into little slices and gave each one a little piece. “Tomorrow,” she said, “is another day. Tomorrow is another opportunity, but I’m reminding you to make sure to enjoy this little piece because that’s all you’ll have today.”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us life; life is the biggest watermelon there is. The trouble would be if life would be dished out in one long monotonous string. Hakodosh Boruch Hu could have given us a big watermelon of eighty, ninety or a hundred years, and it would feel like nothing. So what does He do? He dishes it out in portions. He cuts it up first of all into years. Every year you feel, “Oh, another year I’m getting? *Boruch Hashem*,” you’re so happy; another year of life, an additional opportunity for achieving success!! You’re more able to appreciate the opportunities of life when they’re broken down into the smaller pieces we call years.

MORE GREEK FOR DUMMIES

But even that’s too much, it’s too big of a portion, so He chops it up into months. Life is chopped up into small portions, so

that we should be encouraged to make the best use of it. And that's why we say **רְאֵשֵׁי הַדָּשִׁים לְעִמְךָ נָתַתָּ** - *nasata* means that it's a gift. Rosh Chodesh is a gift! What's the gift of Rosh Chodesh? We say *zman kapara l'chol toldosam*, it's a day of atonement, a mini Yom Kippur. Do you know why it's a day of atonement? Because all of a sudden we get a jolt - we become aware that a month has passed by! *Oy vey*, a month! What did I accomplish this past month? In very many cases, nothing at all! A tragedy! And that's why it's a *zman kaparah*; you realize what an opportunity time is and you decide to make amends, to begin making use of counting time. And even that's too big, so He chops it up into days. There's an old Latin saying, *carpe diem*, snatch the day. Grab the day! Grab the day before it goes lost.

It's a great gift that time is broken up for us into sections by movement of the sun and the moon, and therefore the great *chesed* of the luminaries should be utilized. Don't throw away the gift that Hashem gives you every day. What a benefit, what a blessing it is to be reminded every twenty four hours. So tomorrow morning when you wake up and you see the sunlight pouring through your window, so keep in mind that's one of the reasons why you're going to say **בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'שָׁם יוֹצֵר הַמְּאוֹרוֹת** - "I thank You Hashem for the sun that reminds me of the passage of time." The sun is rising and moving through the sky to keep you on your toes: "Don't forget to make today count," says the sun.

MEGILLAH ALL YEAR ROUND

And once you understand that Hashem put that great ball of fire into the sky *l'yomim*, so you should be motivated to count your days, so now you'll make sure to make use of it. Every day becomes a new opportunity, a brand new day for achievement. Like the *Chovos Halevavos* says (*Sha'ar Cheshbon Hanefesh* - *Cheshbon* 11): **כִּי הַיָּמִים מְגִלוֹת** - "The days of your life are notebooks." Every morning you get a new clean notebook to write in.

You remember those days in the *yeshiva*, when you started with a new notebook, full of ambition. And you were thinking, "This

notebook I'm going to keep neat and clean.” Every morning is a brand new notebook, says the Chovos Halevavos, **כְּתִיבוּ בְּהֵם מֵה שֶׁתִּחַפְּצוּ**, **שִׁיזְכֹּר לְכֶם** - “Write in those notebooks what you want to be remembered of you.” What are going to do with that notebook already? You’re going to scribble a little bit on the margins?! Is that how you want to be remembered in the Next World, by some doodling?! The thing that you will want most to be remembered by is *v’navi l’vav chochma*; by how much *yiras Hashem*, awareness of Hashem, you produced each day.

THANK THE SURGEON!

Hakodosh Boruch Hu is **מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית** - in His kindness He renews every day the work of creation. Every day is a new chance given to you by Hashem. So last night you went to bed and you were disgusted. Maybe you were falling off your feet and you felt like a failure; nothing went right yesterday. So you went to bed and Hakadosh Baruch Hu got busy on you. He brought a whole team of physicians who were working on you all night; they were ironing out your wrinkled emotions and they were straightening out your muscles; and they did a good job. In the morning you woke up and you’re a new man now.

You get up in the morning, you open your eyes and you’re well rested - not that you get up with a yawn and a headache: “Another day to face, another day to go through the grind.” That’s what happens when you stay up late; you wake up knocked out and disgusted! That man is a *meshugener* - he doesn’t deserve to get up in the morning because he doesn’t know how important it is to count the days.

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu delivers you safe and sound in the morning so you open your eyes and you have to say, “Thank you.” What do you say to the surgeon? You can’t just say, “Nice job doc; thank you.” That’s not enough. You have to write a big fat check; you get sick again when you see the bill! But Hakadosh Boruch Hu doesn’t give you a bill in the morning. He only wants that

you should open your eyes and say: מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים – “I give thanks to You, O’ Living and Enduring King, שְׁחַזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה – that You returned to me my life in pity, רַבָּה אַמּוּנָתְךָ – how great is Your steadfastness. What did I do to deserve another chance, another day to count, another opportunity to make use of?! *Rabah emunasecha*, how great is Your steadfastness.”

MAKING MORNINGS GREAT AGAIN

And therefore, the morning is the best time, because you have new energies in the morning and the day starts all over again. The sun rises again in the morning and the birds are singing and everything is cool in the morning. It’s a new opportunity and life starts all over again. When you view the counting of time through the eyes of the Torah that’s when you can begin to understand the glorious achievement that every day of life is. “And now that You have given me another chance to achieve *yiras Hashem*, I’m going to make it a day that counts.”

And so in the notebook of tomorrow morning - even before you get out of bed, you should begin writing down your achievements in *yiras Hashem*. You say *modeh ani* and you’re already accomplishing in *yiras Hashem*. Now, if you just mumble it by rote, maybe not so much, but if you practice up that you’re actually saying thank you to Someone, so that’s already a big achievement in *yiras Hashem*. Don’t think it’s nothing; with a little thought, with some awareness of Whom you’re speaking to, *modeh ani* can make you great - it’s the first page in your notebook of today.

A SIXTY SECOND EXERCISE

It’s a glorious experience – to wake up into this world *and to make use of it*. Even to utilize a day for just one minute is an achievement. One minute of life is an opportunity for greatness! Imagine we were here for just one more minute; sixty seconds from now we’d have to say goodbye to this wonderful world of opportunity. If we had only sixty seconds left to count, you know what you could still accomplish?!

We'll try it together, an exercise - let's utilize these sixty seconds and think together: "There's a *Borei* who created the universe out of nothing and that means that there's nothing that has any intrinsic existence except for Hashem. And He created me as well. *Hashem Echad!* He's the only thing that matters to me. And He gave me this great kindness that for the following fifty seconds I can think about Him and achieve the prime purpose of my being here, the purpose of recognizing the *Borei*. So for the next forty seconds, I am going to become more and more aware of You and fulfill my purpose here. I'm looking outside at the setting sun and I know what You're saying to me Hashem; time is passing by. So I express now my gratitude to You Hakadosh Baruch Hu for everything You've given me. I love You Hashem, and I speak to You, my King, my Creator and I express my gratitude to You for the beautiful world You made for me. Thank You for my eyes and my kidneys and my feet and I especially thank You for making me part of Your chosen people." And now we have ten seconds left. And you say, "I thank You, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who has given me this great opportunity to count the seconds in this world and achieve my purpose in this world of thinking about You." And then time is up; you go out of this world having achieved your purpose. **יש קוֹנֵה עוֹלָמוֹ בְּשֵׁעָה אֶחָת** - "A person can become great in only one minute," only that you have to know how to make that minute count.

Now the fact that we're still here, that we're still breathing *boruch Hashem*, doesn't mean that you can relax now and waste the minutes. No, our one minute exercise was just that - an exercise for the rest of our lives. Like *sefiras ha'omer*, it was a rehearsal for the many more opportunities we'll still have! So now you can go out into the world for many more minutes and live successfully.

Part III. Making Time Count

WILL YOU THROW AWAY DIAMONDS?

Now, you have to realize that there's a *din v'chesbon*; the gift of more time from Hashem is a tremendous opportunity, but it's also

a tremendous responsibility: בְּיַדְךָ עִתָּתִי – “In Your hand, Hashem, are all my times” (Tehillim 31:16). That means, all my hours are in Your hands; all my minutes are in Your hand. It’s not mine, it’s Yours. And if I take out of Your hand another minute, another diamond, and I take it and throw out of the window, so Hakodosh Boruch Hu says “Oh, that’s *chutzpab!* I’m handing you every minute, such a precious gift! It’s *b’yadai*, it’s in My hands, and you’re taking it from Me and wasting it?”

Here’s a man, he decides to make a trip someplace. For what purpose? For enjoyment, for pleasure. A trip for pleasure? You’re going to waste part of your life on nothing?! You’re a *rotzei’ach*, no question about it; you’re killing yourself when you waste time. I’m not saying that you can never go anywhere, but to just go without *chesbon*, without remembering how precious time is, it’s a *cheit*, a sin, because it means that you don’t recognize your purpose in this world.

TWO QUEER STORIES

Now this, I’m careful about telling it to you, but I’ll tell it anyhow. The Chofetz Chaim’s son wrote about his father, he said that his father was not such a big *machnis oreich*; he didn’t spend too much time with guests. You hear that? The Chofetz Chaim wasn’t a big *machnis oreich!* When a guest came, he made the bed for him; he brought in the big straw mattress and showed him where to lie down, but he didn’t spend time with him. He gave the *oreich* everything he needed - if he needed to talk, he gave him his time as well - but he didn’t spend extra time because he was counting his days.

The following is also a very queer story, but I have to tell it to you anyhow. The Gra had a sister whom he hadn’t seen for thirteen years. Thirteen years! And now his sister came to Vilna to see him, “Oh, my brother!” she called out, “It’s been so many years.” So the Vilna Gaon spoke a few words with her and then he went back to his *sefer*. So she was somewhat discouraged. He saw a tear in her eye. He said, “In the next world, we’ll sit and talk”. That’s what he told her: “In the next world, we’ll have time to sit and talk.” Now, don’t tell

this to other people; it's only for you to hear. You have to understand that it was the Gra who lived for a purpose.

But even if you're not the Gra, and you're not the Chofetz Chaim either, still your time has to be precious in your eyes. Let's say you and your wife go visit somebody else. So you sit down in the dining room, you and your wife, and he and his wife, and you talk and talk and talk. You're a murderer. You're killing yourself for nothing. You have to make excuses, "I can't go tonight; I have to get some work done at home. And when somebody comes to waste your time, a *nudnik*; let's say, your next door neighbor wants to talk a little bit, he's visiting you, so be friendly to him and then say, "I have to go to the bathroom" - something you have to tell him so you can escape from him. Find some *teretz*! Save your life! Because he's a holdup man; he's a robber! It's worse than stealing your money! Now, we don't look at it that way because we are accustomed to following the footsteps of the unthinking multitudes who don't care if they waste their time, but that's the truth.

YOUR TIME AT WORK IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Now some people will say, "What are you talking to me about wasting time?! What do you want from me? It's a pity, but I must remain in the office all day. I'd like to take off and go someplace to study Torah; I'd like to go to the *beis medrash*, but I'm wasting my day in the office anyhow." That's a big error! Working in your office or in the shop, that's your job right now, that's where you belong, and even there you can make your days count. You know, being in the office, you can serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu in many ways. In many ways!

I'll give one little example. In today's offices, there are a lot of things that you're not supposed to see. And if you'll make it a principle as much as possible to look only at kosher things and guard your eyes, so you have to know **אִךָ לֹא פָעִלוּ עוֹלָה בְּדַרְכֵי הַלְכוּ** – "Also those who did not do any wrong are walking in His ways" (Tehillim 119:3). By restraining yourself from doing wrong, you're also walking

in the ways of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You're reminded of Hakadosh Baruch Hu; that's *yiras shamayim*. When your eyes encounter something that you're not supposed to look at, well, it's natural that your eyes have to move, but immediately you remove your eyes and remember that you're a Jew. You're *oveid Hashem* and you're becoming a bigger *yarei shamayim* in the office.

There are better ways than that too. You can think of Hakadosh Boruch Hu while you're doing work. יִשְׁכַּחךְ אִישׁ שְׁלֵא – “Happy is the man that won't forget You.” You can always be thinking about Hakadosh Boruch Hu. You don't have to forget Him while you're doing work; even complicated work. You can think that you're punching the keys of a typewriter because you're serving Hakadosh Boruch Hu; you want to support a kosher Jewish home where there are going to be kosher Jewish children who will be brought up *b'derech haTorah*; it costs money to maintain a Jewish home. It costs a bunch of money to pay tuition and that's what you're working for.

THE GLORIOUS CAREER WOMEN

And the ladies and the girls have a glorious opportunity as well. While they're stirring the pot in the kitchen, while they're sweeping the floor or sewing, whatever they're doing, they're thinking of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. A glorious career! And I'm serious about that; it's a glorious career! Instead of taking these minutes, these diamonds, and throwing them away, they're cashing them in. They're the most precious achievement.

You counted a few seconds while washing the dishes?! You thought about Hashem while standing in the shop?! You're a great person already! Try it; try thinking for one minute that you're standing in front of Hashem. Even one minute of thinking during the day is so precious that you can already count that day as a success! Even if you don't think all the time, even though you waste a lot of time, if you'll spend one minute of thinking, it's a tremendous

achievement. You're one out of ten thousand, you're a head taller than everyone just because of that one minute.

COUNTING *SEFIRA* AT SUNSET

Now, although there's no end to the wisdom of *yiras Hashem* you can bring into your mind, but **תַּפְסֵת מְרוֹבָה לֹא תַפְסֵת** – to undertake too much at once, so you won't do anything. So we always go back to our lesson from *sefiras ha'omer*; once a day - at least once a day to remember Hashem. At least when the sun is about to go down, remind yourself: "Did I count today? What did I accomplish today? Is there anything to count?" Is it just another day passing away, maybe wasted away, that won't ever come back?

It's the end of one opportunity and we don't have too many of them in our lives. And so when the sun goes down, that's the time for a person to start thinking. Every day, from now on for the rest of your life, don't be in a hectic pursuit of the business of life to such an extent that you cannot stop every day for a moment. You're sitting in your office; it's wintertime and it's close to 4:30 and the sun has dipped beneath the horizon of the skyscrapers. Stop for a moment and think that the day is almost over and count that day. *Ha'yom yom echad* to counting the days of my life. *Hayom yom sheini* of fulfilling *v'navi l'nav chochma*. *Hayom yom sblishi* for achieving Awareness of Hashem.

Now, in case the day hasn't been utilized, make use of the remaining moments before the sun goes down and the day is gone forever. In all eternity, it will never return again. Not once more in history will you be able to relive this day. There'll be other days, yes. Hopefully you'll wake up tomorrow morning and you'll have another day, but *this* day is lost forever. And therefore, before it's gone irretrievably, stop for a moment, and *carpe diem*, grab what you can.

THE HOUSEWIFE AND THE BAKER

How do you grab? I'll tell you. You know, a woman can bake muffins, she can cook chicken, and she can become heroic in the kitchen. Imagine a housewife standing in her kitchen as she is

kneading the dough, she is thinking, “My hands are the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu; like it says, נָתַן לֶחֶם לְכֹל בְּשָׂר׃ בִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶד׃ – “Hakodosh Boruch Hu in His endless kindness gives food to all the living” (Tehillim 136:25). How does He give bread? Does He stretch his hands from the sky and hand us something? The *psbat* is that it’s through the woman who’s making the *challah*.

So if you’re baking *challah* or if you’re selling bread over the counter, it’s a glorious opportunity for the *reishis chochma*, the most valuable of all wisdom. All the bakers should be here tonight because otherwise their lives are being wasted. Think what a baker could accomplish every time he hands a loaf across the counter, and he’s thinking: נָתַן לֶחֶם לְכֹל בְּשָׂר׃ - “I’m giving bread to all the living and I’m doing it as a *shaliach* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.” The fact that he’s being paid for it, that doesn’t detract from the greatness of this accomplishment.

And so, at the end of the day, the mother is standing in the kitchen, or maybe the baker or the grocer is standing behind the counter, and they look through the window and see the sun is going down; they should remember why Hashem made that great ball of fire. “Don’t miss even one day!” You remind yourself that once on Shabbos, you had prayed לְמִנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ בֵּן הַדּוֹעַ - “Teach me to count my days properly,” and so, in the last moment, as you put the muffins into the oven or as you hand the last loaf of bread across the counter to the boy who went on an errand for his mother, you do it with the thought that “My hands are the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu Who gives bread to all the living.”

HASHEM SENDS PEOPLE TO DENTAL SCHOOL

And suppose a dentist, a weary dentist who’s been standing on his feet all day in the office. There was a long line today in the dentist’s office and he’s been grinding one tooth after the other. And as he picks up the drill he looks through his window; he wants to see how many more hours does he have to work today. And when he sees the sun going down he catches himself for that last moment of

the day. “What am I living for? Just to put more checks into my drawer? Is that it? Is that what the days of my life are worth? Just some more checks?” And he thinks, לְמִנּוֹת יָמַי בֵּין הַדָּרֶעַ – “Hashem, help me to count my days.”

So what does he think now as he drills into another tooth. “Pay attention to your work” - that’s the first thing he has to think. But if he can add the thought, “You, Hakodosh Boruch Hu, are רֹפֵא הוֹלֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל. You’re the one who heals Your people; and I’m just Your *sh’liach*, Your messenger, doing Your work in this world. And therefore for the rest of the time that’s allotted to me today, I’m going to think this thought; I’m working for You Hashem, curing people of the ails of the teeth.” How does Hakadosh Boruch Hu heal after all? That’s one of His ways; by sending people to dental school. And so as the sun sets behind the building, the dentist says to himself, “I’m going to make people happy by giving them healthy teeth and I’m doing it because I’m Your *shaliach*.”

YOU’RE LOADED WITH WEALTH

The greatest wealth that a person has is a wealth of years and months and days and hours. That’s the real wealth! A young man is loaded down with capital. Hakodosh Boruch Hu sends him out into this world with a great wealth - he has many years ahead of him to be *navi l’vav chochma*. A young man of two, a young man of twenty, a young man of forty, a young man of sixty, a young man of eighty - he has wealth. As much as he has, it’s a wealth.

The wealth of life is only for a few moments. Relatively, life is only a fleeting pause in eternity. And therefore is it any wonder that we pray to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, we beseech Him, we beg Him: *limnos yameinu kein boda* - teach us how to count our days so that we shouldn’t spend our days being bemused! You know how many people spend their *yomim* with their minds preoccupied with nothing at all. Here’s a man who’s walking around thinking about ways and means of fighting with his boss; he’s spending his days thinking of ways and means how to get even with him.

There are people going around, and they're tense and they're worried, thinking that they're being persecuted by their neighbors and their mothers-in-law. They spend time bemused about the injustice that is being done to them. And their lives are being wasted away by silly and foolish imaginations. Not lunatics! I'm talking about sane people. And what about the people who waste their lives pursuing after imaginary wealth, instead of the true wealth of *yiras Hashem*; people who waste their lives pursuing imaginary pleasures?!

THE TALL GENTLEMAN'S VISIT

And then before they know it, the *malach hamavess*, a tall dark gentleman comes into the hospital room. And he's lying in bed, this old fellow, and the *malach hamavess* taps him on the shoulder. So the old fellow says, "Can't you just give me a few more days? *Now* I understand how precious days are. I want to count a few more days, *please*. And I'll count them this time for the purpose of *navi l'van chochma*." So the *malach hamavess* turns to him, "Sorry, that's what they all say, 'Now I understand.' I've heard that millions of times already. Come on, time to go now." And your opportunity to be *limnos* has come to an end.

And because our counting will one day come to an end we were given the commandment in the Torah of וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם, "And you have to count for yourselves," so that we should be reminded of this very important function. The *mitzvah* of *sefiras ha'omer* is a rehearsal for the counting of the days of our lives; it's a model for the wise nation to count *all of their days*. And that's why the whole Jewish nation was sure to be counting because we are expected to keep a record of our days. Every individual is expected to be able to count his days and to be able to answer the question, "What did I accomplish today?" Every day is a precious bauble. Whether it's raining or snowing, hot or cold, whatever is doing in the world, it doesn't matter - today is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

And the fact that you came here tonight is already a step in the right direction; it's a *siyata dishmaya* to help you learn how to count

the days. And therefore as much as possible we try to remind ourselves of the very great principle, לְמִנּוֹת יְמֵינוּ כֵּן הוֹדַע – “Please, Hakadosh Boruch Hu, let us know how to count our days properly.” It’s a big study; it’s not simple at all. What you heard tonight is kindergarten talk. Of course, it’s useful kindergarten talk. And if you’ve never heard it before, then this is the kindergarten where you have to come! Because *reishis chochma*, the most important of all wisdom you can achieve, *yiras Hashem*, is Awareness of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And it’s only if we count our days *kein*, successfully, that we’ll be *navi l’vav chochma*, and acquire the wisdom for which we came into this world.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Chazal tell us that we should always make sure to speak *lashon nekiyah*, a clean language (Pesachim 3a). How does one make the determination of what is included in the category of clean or unclean language?

A:

Well, you start out when you're a young child and your mother says to you, "Don't say that!" If your mother tells you that, then you've started out on the road towards knowing what is not *lashon nekiyah*. And if your mother wants to wash your mouth out with soap, then you've surely received a very important lesson in the sugya of *lashon nekiyah*. That's number one. *Al titosh Toras Imecha*. It's a very important lesson, by the way. Your mother, at home, is your first teacher. Your first lessons are at home. Also, your father sometimes.

And then you begin to learn outside the home as well. In Slabodka, they never said the word *shlecht*, the word "bad." They never said the word *shlecht*. Never. I was there six years. Six years – and they never said the word *shlecht*. "Not good," they would say. But they never said *shlecht*. They never referred to a *goy* as a "*sheiget*." Because that's a *Sheketz*. The word "*sheiget*" comes from the word *sheketz* a disgusting creature. "*Sheiget*" is *sheketz*. But a *goy* is not a *sheketz*. He's a *tzelem Elokim* He's not the best picture of *tzelem Elokim* but he's actually a *tzelem Elokim*. So, in Slabodka, they called a gentile an *Areil* or a *goy*— but they never said "*sheiget*." The word "*sheiget*" is never found in Slabodka language.

So, in a good environment, if you make sure to stay in a good environment, you'll pick up what is called *lashon nekiyah*.

TAPE # E-167

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