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SEFER VAYIKRA - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

AS A ZECHUS FOR KLAL YISROEL DURING THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Preparing for Kabolat Hatorah

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פרשת אמור

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Preparing for Kabolos Hatorah

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Part I. Counting Sefiras Ha'omer

Counting Backwards

And you shall count for yourselves from the second day of Pesach, from the day you bring the Omer offering (Devarim 23:15). On that day the Am Yisroel, all together, begin the forty-nine day count in anticipation of Shavuos.

And yet, one thing we notice right away when we study this mitzvah is that we're not counting the way we should – we're not counting how many days it is until Kabolos Hatorah. That's how it should be. Forty-nine days till Kabolos Hatorah. Forty-eight days till Kabolos Hatorah. Forty-seven days. Forty-six days. But no, we don't do that. **וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם... מִיּוֹם הֵבִיאְכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה** – And you shall count for yourselves ... from the day you bring the Omer offering. The possuk

is commanding us to count the days that elapse from when we reap our first harvest and bring the *korban* of new grain in the Beis Hamikdash.

Hayom yom echad laOmer – Today is the first day of the Omer. We ignore Shavuos altogether and focus on counting the days from the Omer. One day from the Omer. Two days from the Omer. Three days from the Omer. We count up from the Omer until we get to Shavuos. It's a queer thing because if the counting was in anticipation of that great event of the Giving of the Torah when we would hear the Voice of Hashem, then we would count down the days that remain ahead. It's something that demands an explanation.

Now, of course, for the *apikorsim* this was an opportunity. *Apikorsim* said, "Oh, once upon a time Shavuos was nothing but a harvest festival. The same way the pagans had a harvest festival, so the *Am Yisroel* did the same thing." Ignorant "scholars" can say such things, but we know that the Torah wants to teach us something here. And so, we'll spend a little time studying the purpose of this counting, the principle we're expected to internalize. Now, *sefiras haOmer* is a *mitzvah d'Oraisa*, and therefore I can't say that I know the reason, but we'll focus now on one answer, one lesson, that we're surely expected to learn from this *mitzvah*.

Counting Food Days

The answer is that we're not just counting down the days to Shavuos; for that we could look at the calendar. *Sefiras HaOmer* means that we're counting days in order to *prepare* ourselves for Shavuos. We're not merely *looking forward* to *Matan Torah*. Of course, that too – but the way we get there, the way to arrive at Shavuos ready for *Kabolas Hatorah*, is by looking backwards to the Omer, the special meal-offering that celebrates the beginning of the harvest and makes the new produce permissible to eat.

And what is the Omer offering saying? Plain and simple, it tells us that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving us food. And when we count *sefirah*, it's *food days* that we're counting. Most people never thought about that – we count *sefirah* because we're eating; the *korban Omer* is *hakaras hatov* for our food.

Coming to Har Sinai with a Full Stomach

And not just once – every additional day that we continue to eat from the new crop requires a new counting. We're counting the days, one day at a time, of Hashem feeding us. "I ate yesterday, and now I'm eating again today." That's what *sefirah* is. We're counting food days! "Hashem, You gave us food for one whole day. "Now, two days You're giving us food." "Now, it's three days and You're still giving us food." Four days, food; five days, food. You're giving us food one day after the next. And we don't stop counting: "Today is the thirtieth day of eating!" Ooh ah! A month of eating!

After counting so many days of eating bread, we're so full of gratitude when we arrive at Shavuot that we're ready to accept the Torah with a full heart, with a *leiv shaleim*. We're so happy that You're feeding us, and if that's the case, we're going to thank You by accepting the Torah! We've been eating for so many days that now we're ready for *Kabolas Hatorah*!

Yesterday's Bread

Now, I understand that when we hear these words, they mean very little to our American ears. And that's because when people have plenty to eat, they don't feel the need to be grateful. In the olden days, when a person came home and asked his wife, "Is there any bread for me to eat?" and the wife put a piece of bread on the table, he was so happy. A piece of bread! Sometimes, when he finished the bread and asked for another piece, his wife had to tell him no because she needed to save it for the next meal or for the children's breakfast. But he was satisfied anyhow; he had eaten a piece of bread.

That's how it used to be. Precisely because he didn't have enough, that's why he was *very* happy with the little bread he did have. He appreciated it – "Boruch Hashem, another day of eating!" – and that's why, after eating the bread, he washed *mayim achronim* and took out a big *siddur* and thanked Hashem for the bread with a full heart. *Baruch Atah, Hashem, oy yoy yoy!* Bread! *Hazan es haolam kulo* – He feeds the whole world, and He does it *b'chein, b'chesed uv'rachamim* – graciously, with kindness and mercy. He was so happy with that piece of bread!

Today's Bread

But today a man comes home and he already stopped on the way home for kosher pizza and kosher ice cream, and now he's stuffed. And so when his wife puts bread on the table, he has no appetite, and he's surely not grateful for anything. He wasn't grateful for the ice cream either. So when we speak today about counting days of eating bread, the message falls flat. It's not always easy to put Torah ideas into American heads.

Bread Is the Symbol of Happiness

But the truth is, it's not only bread we're thanking for. Bread is only a *siman* — it's the climax, the grand finale, of all the *chesed Hashem*. When we say we're thanking Hashem for bread, for the *Omer*, it means we're thanking Him for everything. Everything! Now, for *everything*, even us spoiled Americans can begin to feel gratitude.

How do I know that bread includes everything? In *Mesichta Pesachim* (118a) the Gemara speaks about *kapitel* 136 in *Tehillim* and it says that this *kapitel* is called *Hallel Hagadol*, the Great Hallel. Now, we know that everything in *Tehillim* is *gadol*. *Ashrei/Tehilla l'Dovid* is very great. If you say it every day three times, you're a *ben Olam Haba!* That's how important it is. So why then is this *kapitel* singled out to be called *Hallel Hagadol*? That's the Gemara's question.

Bread Is the Pinnacle of Happiness

And so the Gemara explains that it's called the Great Hallel because of the last line, which is the pinnacle of all of the *chasdei Hashem*. You have there twenty-six times the phrase *בִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדֵי*, enumerating the *chasdei Hashem*. He took us out of *Mitzrayim*, *ki l'olam chasdo!* He drowned Pharaoh in the *Yam Suf*, *ki l'olam chasdo!* He led the *Bnei Yisroel* through the sea, *ki l'olam chasdo!* He led us through the wilderness, *ki l'olam chasdo!* He destroyed our enemies, *ki l'olam chasdo!* A whole long list of *chasdei Hashem*.

And then after all of the praises, after all the other *nissim* are mentioned, what's the pinnacle of the *chasdei Hashem*? The last one, the final thing on the list is *נָתַן לָחֵם לְכָל בְּשׂוֹר בִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדֵי* — You, Hashem, give food to all the living. That's the grand finale — *Hakodosh*

Boruch Hu is *zan umefarneis* the whole world! The Italians are eating sausages. The Irish are eating potatoes. The Americans are eating everything. And we, *boruch Hashem*, are eating, too. We have what to eat!

Prepping For Shavuos

And that's what *sefiras haOmer* is all about – gratitude for bread and for life and for everything, for all the *ki l'olam chasdo* in this world. And it's this gratitude – one day of gratitude, two days of gratitude, three days – that is our preparation for *Kabolas Hatorah*.

And it was also the preparation for the first *Kabolas Hatorah* in history. When we study *Kabolas Hatorah*, we see that it came only as a result of gratitude; it was an overwhelming feeling of gratitude that motivated our ancestors to accept Hashem's Torah. And that's what we'll study now, because it's that attitude that we seek to emulate during these days of counting the *Omer*, these days that lead us to Shavuos.

Part II. The First Sefiras Ha'omer

What Is Service?

Now, you'll remember that when Moshe Rabbeinu was shepherding Yisro's sheep in the wilderness and Hakodosh Boruch Hu spoke to him for the first time, He said to him the following (Shemos 3:12): בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם – *When you bring this nation out of Mitzrayim, תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה* – *they will serve Elokim on this mountain of Har Sinai.*

Now, this *possuk* is usually not understood properly. What is meant by, “they will serve Elokim on this mountain”? So some think it refers to the offerings that were brought on Har Sinai, but the truth is that's not the *p'shat*. It's not important enough – anybody could bring offerings. We understand that the chief event that transpired at Har Sinai was the *Kabolas haTorah*. The *תַּעֲבֹדוּן*, the *avodah* of this mountain, meant that the *Am Yisroel* accepted the Torah with all their hearts.

Hashem Gives His Approval

They said, *Na'aseh v'nishma* – “We agree to do everything, even though we don't yet know what it's going to be.” All the nations, had the Torah been offered to them, would have said, “Before we accept we have to know, *mah kasuv bah?* What's written in that Torah You're offering us? We need more information so we can bring it back to the lawyers to review. We need time to think it over.” But the *Am Yisroel?* “We have no questions! We accept it all!”

וַיַּעַן כָּל הָעָם – *And the whole nation declared* (Shemos 24:3). Without exception, every person spoke up and said, “We accept the Torah!” And not only did they say it, but they really meant it with all their heart. We know that, because when Hakodosh Boruch Hu spoke about that day, He said, *מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לְרָאָה אֶתִּי כָּל הַיָּמִים* – *Would that they kept this heart of theirs to continue to fear Me forever, just like that day* (Devarim 5:25). So we have the testimony of Hakodosh Boruch Hu Himself that when they said *Naaseh v'nishma* it was said with a full heart.

Hashem Keeps Out of It

But the question is: What was it that caused them to accept the Torah? What was the catalyst for their blind acceptance? It just happened that a nation of two million should agree to accept upon themselves an entirely new set of laws and restrictions, without even knowing what they were?! It was the most unusual thing that ever happened; more unusual than *krias Yam Suf*. Hakodosh Boruch Hu could do *nissim* – He could make *Makas Bechoros*; He could split the *Yam Suf*; He could do anything! But when people have to use their own free will, their *bechirah*, there Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't interfere. He allows people to choose on their own. Now, you know that Jews are a stubborn and contentious people – when you have ten Jews, sometimes you'll have ten opinions. And how many Jews were present at Har Sinai? At least two million!

Two million Jews stood together and every single one of them agreed – “We accept!” With their own free will they said with all their hearts, “*Naaseh V'nishma* – We accept the Torah!” And they did it with such a willingness that Hakodosh Boruch Hu looked into their

hearts and testified that they really meant it. It was the most remarkable incident in the history of the world! It was nothing less than a *neis*.

The Catalyst for Na'aseh V'nishma

How could such a *neis* happen? So, if we'll take a moment to study it, we'll discover that it was all a result of gratitude. The people who stood at Sinai had been in Mitzrayim 210 years, and they weren't able to leave. Imagine if from 1776 to 1986, you couldn't leave the United States. Even if they weren't subjected to hard labor all those years, they were still imprisoned in Mitzrayim without any hope of getting out. *Vayemareru es chayeiheim* – their lives were embittered. They suffered tremendously in Egypt. Every time a woman was pregnant, she was terrified that the Egyptians might find out. Because what would happen? The Egyptians kept tabs, and if it was a boy, they would throw him into the Nile as a sacrifice to the god of the river whom they worshipped. And there was *avodas perech*, too; the *possuk* describes it as “*kotzer ruach v'avodah kashah*” – they could hardly breathe from the severity of the labor.

Then finally, suddenly, something happened! In the middle of the night, Pharaoh got up and left his palace, and he came running with all of his advisors and princes. “Please get out of my country this minute!” And the *Am Yisroel* walked out loaded down with all the wealth of Mitzrayim – they took all the wealth of the country with them. It says that in the Torah: *Vayenatzlu es Mitzrayim* – They emptied out Mitzrayim (Shemos 12:36). For all the years of hard labor, they collected back pay now – plus interest!

And so, now they're marching out of Mitzrayim loaded down with silver and gold and watching the destruction of their oppressors. *Dayeinu!* That would have been enough! But then, when they come to the *Yam Suf*, they get to witness their pursuers drowning before their eyes. *Ooh ah* – what gratitude they felt to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. *Dayeinu!* That would have been enough! And they all sang the *shirah*, their song of gratitude to Hashem; they went wild with a delirium of ecstasy. They became so grateful, and they loved Hakodosh Baruch Hu with such an intensity that they were ready to do anything that He asked.

We Accept with Gratitude

And therefore, when the time came, they accepted the Torah because their hearts were overflowing with gratitude. They were in love with Hashem! If Hakodosh Boruch Hu had asked them to leap into a fire for Him, they would have leapt! They served Hashem on that mountain with the fullest acceptance, and that's what *avodah* means – it's the desire to serve Hashem because of the enormous gratitude that one feels.

And that's what Hashem was telling Moshe Rabbeinu the first time He spoke with him: **בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם** – *Because you, as My messenger, will bring this nation out of Mitzrayim, תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים, עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה* – *therefore they will serve Hashem on this mountain of Har Sinai* (Shemos 3:12). Hashem was declaring here that it would be the gratitude for Yetzias Mitzrayim that would charge the nation with an enormous energy of love of Hashem, which would cause the the wondrous and unequalled phenomenon that an entire people would accept the service of Hashem upon themselves forever and ever. That's why, when Hashem began the Aseres Hadibros, His first words were "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim" (Shemos 20:2). The immense gratitude and love that was engendered by the redemption from Mitzrayim was the foundation and the motivation for the *ta'avdun es ha'Elokim*, for the service to Hashem that they accepted upon themselves at Har Sinai. The *avodah* of *Kabolas Hatorah* was the *avodah* of gratitude.

Part III. Our Sefiras Ha'omer

Excited Over Bread

Now, we have to know that this wasn't merely something that happened once – it's something that is intended as a lesson for us always. That's why we count the *Omer* in such an unusual way. Instead of counting down to *Kabolas Hatorah*, we count up! One day of eating from the new crop, two days of eating from the new crop. We're getting ourselves excited over the grain that Hashem is giving

us. *Nosein lechem l'chol basar, ki l'olam chasdo* — one day and another day and then another, until we're ready to say *Na'aseh v'nishma* again.

That's an entirely new attitude we're learning here! An entirely new approach to what *avodas Hashem* means, what it means to be *mekabeil* the Torah and serve Hashem all the days of our lives. To be a servant of Hashem means to serve Him out of gratitude.

The Corrupt Yeshiva Man

You know, if today you find a *ba'al teshuva* who comes off the street and wants to be *frum* — and not only a *ba'al teshuva*, but even a pious Jew who decides he wants to serve Hashem — so he has in his mind that he's willing to do things “for Hashem.” But very often he thinks he's the giver here — he'll give away his time or money or labor to serve Hashem. He'll even sacrifice his desires in order to serve Hashem. He's *frum* now; he's doing for Hashem. That's what he's thinking. “Look what I'm doing for Him! I'm giving away my whole life living like a *frum* Jew and keeping His Torah!”

Once, when I was in the yeshiva in Slabodka, a yeshiva man, an old *talmid*, came back to the yeshiva to visit the *rebbeim*. And so, the *mashgiach* asked him, “*Vus hert zich? What's doing?*” So the visitor said, “In *ruchniyus*, very good, very good. But *gashmiyus* — it's a *shverer matzav*, it's very difficult.”

After this *talmid* left, the *mashgiach* told us *p'shat* in what he had said. The *mashgiach* *teitched* it up as follows: “What I'm doing for Hakodosh Boruch Hu is very good! I'm not pulling any punches; I'm giving Hakodosh Boruch Hu everything I can. But as far as what He's doing for me, it's *shver*, it's not so good.”

Giving to Hashem

And that's upside down! Because now, you think you're the *tov umeitiv*, you're the Benefactor in this relationship, and Hashem is the one taking! “What's He doing for me?” you're thinking. “Almost nothing!” A man who lives that way is not an *oived Hashem*. He's a *mushchas*; he's corrupt through and through. From top to bottom he's corrupt, because he thinks that every time He does a good deed, he is giving Hakodosh Boruch Hu more than He deserves. I'm keeping

Yiddishkeit — I observe all the *mitzvos*; I go to *shul*; I put on *tefillin*; I keep *Shabbos*. Everything I'm doing for You!" Only that he figures he's making a good investment: "I'm suffering for Your sake in this world," he says to Hashem, "because I know You'll pay me back in the next world!"

Now, although it's true — Hashem gives a person *Olam Haba* for his *mitzvos*, no question about it — but we're learning now that this attitude is wrong. It's very wrong. This man is making a big mistake about what *Kabolas haTorah* is all about.

One Sha'ar at a Time

Kabolas Hatorah needs a preface. The *Chovos Halvovos* has ten *she'arim*, ten sections. The first is *Shaar Yichud haElokim*. He talks there about recognizing the truth of Hashem, philosophical proofs to the existence of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. The second section is *Shaar Habechina* — that's the study of the wisdom and kindness of the Creator apparent in all the phenomena of nature, all the good that Hakodosh Boruch Hu bestows on us. And after that, then comes a third section, a *sha'ar* called *Sha'ar Avodas haElokim* — the Gate of Service of Hashem.

Now, the *Chovos Halvovos* explains that this system, this arrangement of his, is intentional. He says there that only *achar habechina*, only after you study the kindness that Hashem is bestowing on you, *tavo ha'avodah*, only then can you really serve Hashem. When a person begins to realize what Hashem is doing for him all the time, that's the *beginning* of his career of being an *oved Hashem*. Of course you have to do everything anyhow; you have to keep everything! But you have to know that it's not *avodas Hashem* until you've studied the preface of gratitude.

The Civilized Jew

You can't just jump into *avodas Hashem*. Of course, doing *mitzvos* is very important because you can't be a Jew without *mitzvos*. But it's like saying, "You can't be a civilized man if you don't wear pants in the street." So you wear pants and now you're a civilized man. But wearing pants doesn't yet make you a *tzaddik*. And just doing *mitzvos* doesn't

yet make you an *eved Hashem*. It might make you a decent person, a Jew, but to be an *eved Hashem* you need more than just pants, more than just *mitzvos*.

The first step is recognizing what Hashem has done for you, and what He is doing for you every second. That's number one! Why is that? Because it's only after a man is convinced that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is showering upon him very many forms of kindness, only after a man feels loaded down with indebtedness for all the blessings that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving him, it's only then that someone can also feel the urge to do something in return. And that's what *avodah* is! *Avodah* means to have a desire to repay the kindness of Hashem. According to the *Chovos Halevavos*, *avodah* means to be so humbled in gratitude to Hashem that you want to do something to pay Him back.

Who's the Lender Here?

And this preface is essential. Otherwise, if you skip this preface, you're not *serving* Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It could be you're doing *mitzvos*, you're learning Torah, but you think that you're doing benefits for Him! Because you think that without any reason at all you're doing His will. Without any motivation on your part except charity, you're fulfilling the Torah, and therefore Hakodosh Boruch Hu is indebted to you.

But that's not an *eved Hashem*. On the contrary, you're on top! *Eved loveh l'ish malveh*, when someone borrows money, he becomes indebted – a servant – to the money lender. So here we are lending Hashem, we're doing good deeds to Him, and we're doing them all the time, so He owes us. He's our *eved*, *kevayachol*. He's *your* servant, *chalila*, not the other way around.

But if you realize that you're receiving benefits, piles and piles of benefits, mountains of benefits, and you can hardly pay back even pennies, so you're embarrassed. You're so convinced that you're in the red, that you're indebted to Hashem, that you don't know what to do. You're put to shame; you don't know where to hide from Hashem in embarrassment. You're *nichna*, you're humbled, and like Dovid HaMelech you begin to say (Tehillim 116:12), **מָה אֲשִׁיב לַיהוָה כִּל תַּגְּמולוּהִי**

יָשׁוּב – How can I pay back Hashem for all that He bestowed upon me? When you ask that question, then you're ready to be an *oived Hashem*. You say *mah ashiv* – “What can I pay back? At least let me serve You as an expression of my gratitude!” Ohh! Now, you're ready! Now you can finally begin the career of *avodas Hashem*. Now you can be *mekabeil* the Torah.

Part IV. The Foundation of Sefiras Ha'omer

Torah on One Foot

You remember when the gentile wanted to become a Jew, when he wanted to be *mekabeil* the Torah, so he came first to Shammai. “Teach me the whole Torah on one foot,” he asked. On one foot! Shammai was too busy for such games. He was a builder and he had a yardstick in his hand, so he pushed the man away with the stick. In other words, “Evaporate!” Now, it could be that he's criticized for doing that, but the truth is that Shammai was right. What do you mean, “Teach me the whole Torah on one foot?” If a man came to study plumbing and said to the master plumber, “Teach me the whole torah of plumbing on one foot,” the master plumber would take out a monkey wrench and give it to him over the head. “Plumbing you want to learn on one foot?! What do you think this is?!” That's what Shammai said. “What do you mean ‘Torah on one foot’?! You have to sit down for a long time to learn the Torah, for years and years.”

But this *goy* was a persistent fellow, so he came to Hillel: “Teach me the whole Torah on one foot,” he said to Hillel. So what did Hillel say? He said like this: “You want to learn the whole Torah on one foot? Okay, lift up your foot and let's go.”

So what did Hillel tell him? *Mah d'alach sanai* – What is hateful to you, *l'chavrach lo saavid* – don't do to your friend. And Hillel told him, “You can put your foot down now. That's the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary; now get busy studying.”

Who's Your Friend?

Now, Rashi has two *peirushim* on that, but we'll just study the first *peirush*. Hillel was saying to the candidate for *geirus* like this: "You want to know the reason that you have to eat kosher, the reason that you cannot shave with a razorblade, why you cannot wear *shatnez*, why can't you write on Yom Tov? So I'll tell you the reason," Hillel said. "If you had given someone very many gifts, costly gifts for a long time, over and over again without end, and then finally one day you requested of him a small favor, that he should go on a small errand for you, and he told you, 'Why should I?' how would you feel? That's gratitude?! You'd feel that he's a barbarian! If after you did so many favors for someone, he refused to do a small favor for you, that would be hateful to you."

And if that would be hateful to you, then *l'chavrach* — to your great Friend in heaven, *lo saavid* — don't do that to Him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu has given you so many things that you're indebted to Him forever. Just the fact that He gave you life for so many years is more than enough, yet it doesn't even occur to you that you're in the red. You're so deeply in debt that there's no way to pay Him back. He gave you life! Now, that's a big debt already!

What Have You Done For Me Lately?

Now, some people say, why should I repay? Did I ask Him to give me life? Did I ask Him to create me? That is the summit of ingratitude. The question alone shows a corruption of character, because suppose this person suspects that he might not live more than a few days because of a certain fatal illness — he would do *everything* in the world to find a *refuah*. He'd go to every physician and take all kinds of tests. He'd pay all kinds of money. He wants to live! Aha! You want to live! So what are you asking such questions, "Did I ask Him to give me life?" You love life! And so, just for that, just because you woke up this morning, you should be walking around all day thinking, "What can I do to pay Him back? What can I do to serve Him?"

People don't understand that today. I once was speaking to a *ben yeshiva* about this. He says, "What am I getting?" What's Hashem giving him?! He was thinking that he doesn't have five Cadillacs, that

he doesn't have a yacht and a summer home in Maine. The fact that he has three meals a day – that's nothing to him. The fact that every one of his organs is in perfect condition, the fact that his mind is functioning and that he's not locked up in an institution – that's nothing to him, because he never spent time thinking about it. The fact that he's an American citizen – you think that's a small thing? I was in Europe, in Lithuania, and once I was walking in the street. I saw an American Jew in the street and he was brandishing his red American passport – in those days it was red – and he was showing it off with glee for all the natives to see who he was. Everybody envied him that little book. That's when I began to appreciate it.

A House Without a Foundation

If a person doesn't learn to appreciate all these things – and not just superficially, but to actually feel a debt on his shoulders – then he's very far from being a servant of Hashem because he has started out without the right foundation. There cannot be any kind of *avodah* without first knowing that you are the one who is the recipient of countless benefits.

It's a pity we don't study this. We should take out time, a lot of time, to think about what we're getting from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. If we would study the benefits thoroughly, we would see how much we're enjoying.

How fortunate you are that you were born. So many miscarriages take place, but you were born! You made it into this world! And you're not a cripple either! And you're not blind. You live normally, more or less, and you have so many limbs and so many organs, and every one is functioning – each one is a miracle of plan and purpose. Each organ by itself is a most wonderful contrivance that no human inventor could ever equal.

And every day you arise in the morning, you open your eyes and you're still alive. And you begin using again the great gift of your body and your mind, all your faculties. You can remember; you can think; you can speak; you can see and hear; you can function in every manner. When you begin thinking in this manner, you're ready for *avodas Hashem*.

Part V. The Avodah of Sefiras Ha'omer

You're On Your Way!

Now, hearing this opens up for you a whole new vista of *avodas Hashem* – it opens doors for you that you never imagined existed, because now your *mitzvos*, your Torah, can take on a whole new meaning. But it's not enough to just hear it – you have to study it thoroughly; you have to live it. If you study this *chessed Hashem* and that *chessed Hashem*, you'll begin to feel a little bit of what we're speaking about now. And when a person begins to appreciate even a little bit more than before, so now he's more of an *eved Hashem*. He's on his way now.

You'll begin thinking, “Maybe Hakodosh Boruch Hu isn't indebted to me after all. Maybe I'm not doing so much for Him. Maybe when I come to the next world, I'll find that I've fallen way behind in my payments even for the first day of my life. I'll find out that whatever I did for Hashem in this world, I didn't pay for the first day of my life yet. When I was a little baby and I was breathing and living normally, whatever I got on that first day, I didn't pay Him back no matter how many *mitzvos* I performed, even until the last day of my life. For all that Hashem did for me, I can never pay back. I haven't paid yet for all those diapers that I was wearing then.”

Hallel for One Breath

You have to pay for those diapers. You have to pay for all the milk you drank that first day. And you have to pay for all the breaths you breathed that first day. You know that? On the *possuk*, כל הנשמה כל הנשמה, תהלל יה, the *Medrash* (*Bereishis Rabah* 14:9) says, *al kol neshimah uneshimah tehallel Kah* – For every breath you take, you have to say Hallel. Suppose you have to say Hallel for every breath – and not half-Hallel! So we would never finish paying for the breaths of that first day; we would still be saying Hallel now!

You're not convinced that a breath, one breath is worth saying Hallel? I have a simple experiment. Put your head in a bucket of water and hold it there for three minutes. If somebody will say, “I'll let you

take one breath if you promise to say Hallel afterwards for it,” it’s a bargain! He’ll let you take your head out for one second. You take one breath and back in the water again. And as you’re there, under the water, so you signal to him, “I’m ready to say another Hallel.” You’d be willing to say two Hallel, too! It’s a bargain – one Hallel for each breath. And so you see that we are far behind in our payments to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. He gives us our lives, and He supplies us with all the happiness that we enjoy – we’re very deep in the red. We’re way over our heads in debt, and therefore, as much as we possibly can, we want to serve Him.

Park Benches Don’t Need Mezuzos

Let’s say Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives you a home to live in and all he requests is that you put up a *mezuzah* on the door. Are you going to ask him why? So He just might say, “If you don’t want to put up a *mezuzah*, fine. Give Me back the house.” Nobody has to put up a *mezuzah* if he has no place to live in. It’s only if you have a house to live in that you have to put up a *mezuzah*.

It’s like the boy who asked his father: “Pa, do I have to *bentch* every day?! So his father said, “No. Only when you eat.” For just looking at bread you don’t need to make any *bracha*. So just look and don’t eat! If Hashem tells you to make a *bracha* over food, will you say “Why should I?” “That’s fine,” Hashem might say. “Don’t eat My food and don’t make a *bracha*.”

Why do you have to put *tefillin* on your head? Because you have a head! You don’t want to put on *tefillin*, so give back the head. If Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, “Tomorrow morning put *tefillin* on your head” and you say, “Why?” so He can say, “Well, give back the head. Everyday I’m giving you a head; and it’s a very valuable gift.” So when you put on *tefillin*, realize that you’re doing it because of **מָה אָשִׁיב לָהֶם** – How can I repay You for all that You have bestowed on me?

It’s Not Enough

So now, when you begin a career of being *oved Hashem*, it’s not enough, let’s say, to just go out and buy a more expensive pair of

tefillin. It's not a bad idea, by the way. You should make sure that your *tefillin* are kosher *tefillin*. And if you must, don't delay in buying a new pair. But it's still not enough. It's not enough if you just buy a better *tallis*. It's not enough to put up more expensive *mezuzos*. It's good, but it's not enough.

When you put on *tefillin* tomorrow morning, and you put on *tzitzis* tomorrow morning, and you say *kriyas Shema* and *daven*, and you give charity, they should be expressing one thing. They should express your feelings of humbleness for all the benefits that Hakodosh Boruch Hu has given you. So Torah and *mitzvos*, and everything you do is merely a demonstration that you are subject to Him, that you are humbled before Him in gratitude.

All the benefits that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives us require of us some small payment. And that was Hillel's answer to that *ger*. The reason for the whole Torah is gratitude. That's the reason why we fulfill the *mitzvos*. *Mah d'alach sanai* – what is hateful to you, if after you did so many favors for someone, he refused to do a small favor for you, that's hateful to you – then *l'chavrach*, to your great Friend in heaven who has given you everything, *lo saavid* – don't do that to Him.

The Foundation for Our Avodah

And therefore, the foundation for the whole Torah is nothing but gratitude. Now, an attitude like that is not something you acquire in one day – you can't listen to a lecture and expect to be ready to serve Hashem. The *Am Yisroel* didn't just show up at the foot of Har Sinai, hear a *shiur* from Moshe Rabbeinu on gratitude, and say *Na'aseh v'nishma*. There was a big preface, a big *hakdamah* of understanding and appreciating *chessed Hashem* that came first. And it was that preface of enormous gratitude that was the catalyst for the *ta'avdun es ha'Elokim* that took place on that mountain.

And so, when we come back now to our subject of *sefiras haOmer*, our counting up from the Omer in anticipation of *Kabolas haTorah*, we understand that it's primarily a counting of gratitude. We're counting one day after another; one day of the *chessed Hashem*, a second day of *chessed Hashem*, and another, and another. And we

keep counting until we can say, like Dovid Hamelech did, “*Mah ashiv* – Oh, Hashem! What in the world can I do to show You my gratitude?”

You know why Dovid said that? Because, *kosi revayah* – his cup was filled; it was overflowing with happiness. “*Kosi revayah*, my cup is overflowing!” he said. “So many happinesses I’m getting!”

But our cups? You know why our cups don’t overflow with the kindness of Hashem? Because when the kindness is given to us, for a moment we’re happy, but it doesn’t remain there. It doesn’t remain in this *kup!* (*The Rav pointed to his head*). We put it into the *kup* but there’s a hole in the bottom, and whatever goes in drips out. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is always giving us happiness and kindness, but when we look into our cup of happiness, we see nothing there. It all dripped out through the hole.

And therefore, we must get working on this *avodah* of *sefiras haOmer* by counting each day, and remembering the happiness of the day before as well. Each day gets added to the next one, and our cup begins to fill.

Now, it takes more than forty-nine days, by the way; it takes a lifetime of thinking. But the lesson we’re learning is that each day counts – each day is important! And after a while a person begins to think, “Look what Hashem is doing for me! So many days of happiness!” And your mind begins to overflow with gratitude. It pours out; you can’t help yourself. And you begin to ask yourself the same question Dovid Hamelech asked: “*Mah ashiv laHashem, kol tagmulohi alai* – What can I pay back to Hashem for all that He does for me?”

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Continued from back cover

It's important for us to realize that we Jews have the days that are really important. If you want to celebrate we have the days! In the Torah calendar there's a plentitude of happy occasions. *Lag ba'omer* is a glorious occasion! Celebrate it! And there are plenty of other ones too.

So why do you have to go shopping for Mother's Day and Father's Day? Not only are you shopping among the gentiles but you swallow the bait that the storekeepers and the chamber of commerce are hanging out for us. We're silly suckers; because they say "Ooh," so we say "Ooh."

So you'll say, "But now that Mother's Day already exists; now it's real – we can't ignore it." That's a different question; what to do now that it's here. But it's important to realize where it came from – that makes a difference too. But whether we actually should ignore it? That's a different story because there's such a thing as *darkei shalom*. Sometimes for the sake of harmony it pays to do certain things. I just want to emphasize that we shouldn't be slaves to the mode of the day and to go crazy because of things that businessmen invented.

TAPE # 122 (May 1976)

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What is the Torah view of Mother's Day and Father's Day?

A:

Look; there's no question that the American public has been sold an item that was created for the purpose of filling the pockets of businessmen – the American public is the real proverbial sucker. Because no matter what you'll say about Mother's Day, it's a day when people make money. Not only florists! Jewelers and bakers and candy stores – everyone is lining his pockets because of Mother's Day.

Now, Mother's Day doesn't have any significance based on historical reasons or some religious grounds. Mother's Day is not guaranteed by the Constitution, by the way. It was nothing but a ploy of the businessmen. That's all it is. Now you mothers will have to forgive me for being so crass and vulgar, but that's the plain truth.

Now, I'm going to say something that's going to be fifty percent unpopular. The authenticity of your celebration of Mother's Day depends on how much you celebrate Father's Day. Because Father's Day like Mother's Day is not genuine. The truth is that Father's Day was just an afterthought by the businessmen, that's all. They thought – “If we're going to cash in on the mothers, so what about the fathers too?” But it turned out to be a flop. Father's Day is a very small business item. So they sell a few cufflinks, a few cheap things to give the old man; but Mother's Day is it – that's the big day!

Continued on page 21

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