

# תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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## Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

### פרשת שמות

#### THE GREAT MAN IS BORN

In this week's *parsha* we are introduced for the first time to one of the greatest men in our history: ותהר האשה ותלד בן - And Yocheved gave birth to a son (Shemos 2:1). Moshe ben Amram is born into the Jewish nation, a handsome baby boy. ותרא אותו כי טוב - His mother saw that *ki tov hu*, that he was good looking (Shemos 2:2). She didn't see that he was good natured, or that he was smart. You can't see that in a baby! She saw that he was handsome; a beautiful child. And that's almost all that we know about this little boy.

And yet only a few *pesukim* later Moshe, already an elderly sage of eighty years, is being granted a vision of the glory of Hashem at the burning bush: וירא מלאך השם אליו בלבת אש - And a messenger of Hashem appeared to him in a flame of fire (Shemos 3:2). And suddenly this adorable little boy, now a man of eighty, is chosen to be the redeemer of the Am Yisroel.

#### THE MYSTERY OF MOSHE

Now it would be proper for us to consider the story of Moshe's life, and to study how Moshe ben Amram became Moshe Rabeinu; what was his path to success? After all, he was the man who took us out of *Mitzrayim* and led us for forty years in the *midbar*. He spent forty days and forty nights with Hakodosh Boruch Hu; he

spoke to Hashem *peh el peh*, and brought down the Torah to the Am Yisroel. There was no man greater than he.

And not only was he one of the most remarkable men in the history of our nation, but more importantly, he is one the great models that we aspire to emulate. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 5:2) says that! He says that we should all aspire to be like Moshe Rabeinu: כָּל אָדָם רָאוּי לְהִיּוֹת צַדִּיק כַּמֹּשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ - "Every person is fit to be righteous like Moshe Rabeinu." Now, you'll never become a *navi* like Moshe was, but everyone of us was born with the talents needed to become a *tzadik* like Moshe, and therefore it is incumbent upon us to probe the life of this great man to find the seeds of his greatness.

And yet when we begin to investigate his life we are stymied by a most peculiar fact. Moshe Rabeinu, an eighty year old man, seemingly appears out of thin air; the redeemer of the Am Yisroel appears on the scene and we know almost nothing about him: We're not told what made him great and why he was chosen or what paths of *avodas Hashem* did he walk on for eighty years that made him the one chosen to redeem the Am Yisroel. How did the *ish Mitzri* become the *ish ha'Elokim*, the only man who would ever to speak to Hashem *peh el peh*, mouth to mouth?

#### HE ESCAPES AND TURNS EIGHTY

Of course, we are all familiar with a few short *pesukim* about his early days; he was brought up in the palace of Pharaoh and then was forced to flee for his life when he defended a fellow Jew by killed a *Mitzri*. But besides for that we know almost nothing. Moshe Rabeinu turns up many decades later at the burning bush in the mountains of Midian, having been chosen by Hashem to redeem His people.

And I'll tell you a *chiddush* now - even the one incident we know of this great man, how he went out from the palace to save his fellow Jew, is told to primarily us to let us know that we know very very little about Moshe. Of course, there are other important things we learn about Moshe from there as well - and we'll talk about that one day. But the primary purpose of those *pesukim* is to introduce the story of *his having to flee*. The little we know of him, only comes to tell us that we actually know very little about this great man.

## ISOLATION AND SOLITUDE

He was forced to flee for his life into the lonely wilderness, and he became a wanderer in exile. Don't think it was easy for him - it was a lonely life, no contact with his people, no family and no friends. And after many years, his wandering led him to Midian. And even there how did he spend his days? As a shepherd, alone in the mountains of Midian, grazing the sheep of Yisro. That's what the Torah tells us about his years in Midian. He spent his days alone in the *midbar* as a shepherd pasturing the flocks. וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חַתָּנוֹ כִּהְיָ מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמְדַבָּר - "And Moshe was pasturing the sheep of Yisro his father-in-law and he led his flock toward the wilderness" (Shemos 3:1). Moshe spent his days - it was months and *years* - in solitude in the remote pastures of loneliness.

So what we're seeing here now is a picture of a nomad, a lonely wanderer for *forty years*. Forty years is a long time to be alone! And besides for a few small incidents, that's all we are told about how Moshe became Moshe Rabeinu. That's all we know about him, that he wandered through the wilderness alone.

And so we'll have to say that it was there, *shepherding sheep in the isolation of the wilderness*, that Moshe achieved the greatness that earned for him his place in history. It is evident that this had been the plan of Hashem - to separate this promising and gifted man from his family and send him into the wilderness and lonely wasteland of Midian and Sinai. And this was all to *keep him in solitude*. Solitude wasn't merely an episode in his career; *it was the cause of his career* and it readied him to become the greatest man in history. By separating him from his family and by *keeping him in solitude*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu was creating the future leader of the Am Yisroel.

And so that is what we will attempt to study now; the strange fact that Moshe Rabeinu spent most of his formative years - years that we would have imagined would be spent under the tutelage of *tzadikim* and *ovdei Hashem* - and instead they were years spent alone, separate from his fellow Jews, and often isolated from Mankind all together. So what was the plan of Hashem over here? What kind of environment was this for Moshe Rabeinu? Now, I'm too small to be able to answer these questions - but I have the right to try to guess.

### CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES OF LONELINESS

And so in order to appreciate more fully this plan of Hashem, we should endeavor to study this step by step; what is it about

solitude that can make a person so great. We'll begin by reading a selection from the *Chovos Halevavos*. The *Chovos Halevavos* has a *sha'ar* called *Cheshbon Hanefesh*, which means "thinking" and he suggests certain duties that we're expected to think about, thirty different ideas. He says there are many more but he suggests thirty of them. It's *kidai* to study them all, but tonight we'll study some of *cheshbon* number seventeen.

He says as follows: What should a man think about when he has an urge to seek the company of people? It means when he feels lonesome; let's say it's *motza'ei Shabbos*, the family went out to visit the relatives in Boro Park and he's left all alone in the house. He looks through the window and he sees cars crowded with people speeding to some destination. And he imagines their fun times ahead. Or let's say he's stuck in the yeshiva on *motza'ei Shabbos* - he's an out of town boy and everybody else is at home with their families and he's left alone in his dormitory room. Or he's just an unfortunate fellow who didn't marry and he's all by himself wherever he is. And he yearns for the company of people.

And so this man is thinking about how much fun it would be to be together with people. So what does the Chovos Halevavos tell him: "At that time let him consider the advantages of solitude and how good it is to be separate from people *because of the harm that comes from their company.*" The Chovos Halevavos is telling us here the most basic benefit of solitude - if you associate with people who have little *yiras Hashem*, or maybe they have wrong ideas, so they poison your mind. There's no question that you're going to cause certain defects in your mind and in your character.

#### FOOLS ARE MORE COMMON THAN WISE MEN

Of course, he doesn't mean the company of *talmidei chachomim*; he means ordinary people, the *chevras hakesilim*, the company of fools. But the truth is that wise men are often hard to find. Most often it is among the fools that you find yourself. And so he tells us, the first thing to consider is the harm that comes from the fools and the great benefit that you can accrue therefore by merely avoiding their company.

Now, sometimes you can't help yourself; you have to visit your in-laws sometimes, so you have to sit and listen to their chatter. And so you'll have to act like you enjoy it. Or maybe for business, you're in an office or a store, and you have customers and coworkers

who like to chew the rag, so you have to act like they're saying something very wise, as if you're interested in their idle chatter. But outside of that, a person should always think about the dangers of the *chevrah ra'ah*, of bad company.

#### WOULD YOU CHOOSE UNCLE HARRY TO BE YOUR REBBE?

For instance much harm is accrued to a man from merely superfluous talk, from shooting the breeze. So you'll tell me, "What's so bad about talking about the news, about sports and about the neighborhood? I know it won't make me a *tzadik*, but harmful?!" Yes, superfluous talk is *in itself* an injury to a man: The *Chovos Halevavos* says that you should avoid the yakking of other, למען אשר לא יביאום הבלי חביריהם לההביל גם הם כמותם, in order that the superficiality, the emptiness of your associates should not bring you to become empty too. When you're together with ordinary, empty people, you become ordinary too. He's talking here about *frum* people. Their *tzitzis* are out and they have black hats. There are many *frum* people who are *empty*, and therefore if you'll associate with people, you'll come down to their level and you'll become empty too.

"I'll become empty too?" you'll ask me. How's that?" So pay good attention because I'm telling you now one of the unrecognized dangers that comes from listening to superfluous talk - it causes the listener to think along with the talker, or rather to *unthink* along with the talker. And so, as the "words of wisdom" come gushing forth from Uncle Harry's mouth - he's talking without any planning after all - so your mind is following what he is saying. You're a respectful person after all, so you're listening, you're concentrating. And all the inanities, all the thoughtlessness of his conversation, is being repeated by you in your mind. That's what happens when you listen to anyone - the words are being replayed in your own head. So Uncle Harry just became your "*rebbe*." And he just filled your mind with "He said," and "She said," "We said," "I said," and "They said." And it's a long confusion that merely fills up your head with nothing at all - something for which there is no need. And that's one way easy of ruining your mind.

And even with good people, decent people, but if they're people who live more or less with materialism - and it's something you find a lot of today - they hardly ever think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu - so you should know that they're going to drag you down to their level. It's contagious. Wrong attitudes and wicked

ideas are contagious. Now, you wouldn't sit together with people who have pneumonia or the flu and they're coughing and sneezing in your face, that you understand. You get upset if someone is “so kind” as to share his germs with you. That kind of sharing you have no interest in. You'll keep away from him or at least you'll tell him to cover his mouth. And you have to know that often, the words coming from a person's mouth can be much worse than pneumonia.

### THE SINS OF CONVERSATION

And as if that wasn't enough trouble, the Chovos Halevavos quotes the *chochom* in *Mishlei* and says even more: **כָּרוֹב דְּבָרִים לֹא יִחַדֵּל פֶּשַׁע** - “In a multitude of words there cannot be absent any iniquity” (10:19) There's no question, *Mishlei* tells us, that when people talk voluminous they are going to commit sins. It's not even a question! *Lo yechdal peshah*, it's impossible to avoid it. It's not even easy to avoid sins when you choose your words, but when you open your mouth and turn on the faucet, then there's no question that *lo yechdal peshah*. That's the *possuk* in *Mishlei*. I'll just add now my own observation: You can imagine when you sit down on a bench in the courtyard of your apartment house with a neighbor or a friend, and four hours elapse in conversation. And you're not silent during that time. It's lively, it's gushing, pouring forth. In those four hours you can imagine how many times *peshah* was committed. But of course if you don't think about that; so you blindly and “innocently” continue to produce *peshah'im*. It's like the man who blindly and “innocently” drives his automobile off a cliff. It's a disaster.

Now we go back to the Chovos Halevavos: “And by avoiding such company you'll avoid speaking against people and mentioning faults of people and ridiculing people.” Because that's what people do when they sit and have nothing else to do. They talk about other people. And finally when the whole conversation is used up, and he already spoke about everybody that he could, so he begins picking his relatives apart. It's a *possuk* in *Tehillim*, **תֵּשֵׁב בְּאַחֶיךָ תִּדְבֹר**, **וּבִבְנֵי אִמְךָ תִּתֵּן דּוֹפִי**, and against the son of your own mother you impute foolishness” (50:20) And when somebody will say, “What are you saying against your own brother?” you say, “It's my own brother! I don't mean any harm.” No harm?! You just blackened your brother and made him look as silly as possible.

## YOU'LL SIN MORE AND MORE

And also lies. Talking brings to sheker; big lies, little lies, *lo yimaleit*. The more you speak, the more you'll be *nichshal* in the opposite of *emes*. Because in order to make your stories interesting, you have to embellish them at least a little bit with stories, with details that never took place. You don't intend to lie, but still you want your listener to be interested, he shouldn't be bored by you. And so, you utilize stories and facts that never took place.

And so that's how it is when you're around people. When you're with people so you don't control yourself. Your tongue wags and wags. You say whatever comes into your mind. You're "forced" to do it because you *have* to say *something* when people are around. So you say all kinds of things, and all kinds of trouble happen. You'll sin and sin some more, and your mind will be dragged down to the lowest common denominator of your conversations. It's a fact that's proven all the time, every day, in everyone's life - and therefore the more you avoid *chevra ra'ah*, wrong company, the better off you are.

## SOLITUDE: THE MOST PRECIOUS OF ALL THINGS

However, important as that is, we're not going to say that Hakodosh Boruch Hu sent Moshe Rabeinu out into the solitude of the Midian wilderness just for that. Avoiding *aveiros* and superfluous talk, that's very important - it's a diamond on its own - but Hakodosh Boruch Hu had much more in mind for Moshe Rabeinu. Because actually there is a much more profound benefit of solitude, something much more than merely avoiding *cheit*; and it is *that* benefit that made Moshe Rabeinu the great man that he became. And that's what we'll study now.

Now, in order to better understand the *ma'alas hahisbodedus*, the great benefit of solitude, we will study a piece from the *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chapter 15). You should pay close attention to the following because this statement we're going to read now is a diamond; only that you have to be a *maiven*, a connoisseur, in order to appreciate such a gem. He says like this: ויקר מן הכל, the most precious of all things, הוא ההתבודדות, is solitude, to spend time by yourself. Now, it doesn't have to be all day long but *some* time a person must make for himself. And he says that doing so is יקר מן הכל, it's more precious than anything else! You're hearing something now! He doesn't say that it's also a good thing, and not even that it's precious - but it's "more precious than anything else!" Solitude!

## THE KING WISHES TO ESCAPE

And the *Mesillas Yesharim* continues: וכבר הזכיר דוד המלך בשבח ההתבודדות, Dovid Hamelech spoke words of high praise when speaking of this quality of solitude. He said: מי יתן לי אבר כיונה - "If only I had wings like a dove, אעופה ואשכונה, I would fly far away and reside somewhere in a lonesome place. ארחיק נדד, I would wander off and be alone, אלין במדבר סלה, I would remain in the wilderness; I would make that my place forever."

So here is Dovid Hamelech sitting in his palace surrounded by people, surrounded by his advisors and friends, he had a lot of admirers as well, all good things - he's living the good life - and yet what do we find? That he's yearning to be in the wilderness! Now that's a big question because what was Dovid doing up there in the wilderness anyhow? What did he yearn to go back for already? He had everything he wanted!

## MOSHE RABEINU DOESN'T NEED THE MOVIES

And of course, for us it's a good question because when we think about being alone in the wilderness it doesn't seem so enjoyable. If we would go hide away in the mountains, with nobody else, with nothing to do, we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. Many people are not capable of enjoying their own company and therefore it's impossible for them to be happy unless something comes in to cause them to remove their mind from the present. If you would bring a good novel with you into the wilderness, or maybe a portable television, OK, then we're talking. But that's not solitude - that just means they have nothing in their heads and so they're always trying to fill that vacuum with something. Those are the type of people who line up in front of the movies waiting to be admitted. These are people who can't live with themselves! They always have to go someplace where something is "happening." Their lives are so empty of happiness that they'll stand in line and pay admission for something that is a substitute for happiness. And what type of happiness is it? When they leave the movies the money remains behind, they take along nothing with them except for a mixed up head, silly unrealistic pictures that never happened and never will happen. But at least for the moment their minds were off themselves. There are a lot of people not capable of solitude.

But people who want to succeed in life will train themselves to enjoy their own company. That's what Moshe Rabeinu did for so many years. It's what Dovid Hamelech did after him - because Dovid wanted to be great and so he studied the life of Moshe Rabeinu and chose to walk in his footsteps. And those are the people who are able to live happy and successful lives even without frequent contact with others. You know that the Gra kept his shutters closed by day. His windows were shuttered up by day so that he shouldn't be able to look into the street and remove his mind from the business of serving Hashem.

### SOLITUDE FOR US

But I remember my rebbe, *zichrono li'vracha*, telling us that we shouldn't do it. Because if we close the windows and shutter them, we'll just fall asleep. We'll take a long nap. So it depends what you'll do in the wilderness, what are you doing when you close the shutters. If you go into solitude carrying a pillow, or a newspaper or radio under your arm; if take with you a telephone, or a little black and white television, then that's not solitude. You're listening to the man on the other side of the radio or the man on the television screen who's pouring ideas into your head. You're far from being alone if you're reading a newspaper - you're sitting together with the nincompoops who write for the New York Times! And so, you have to know what to do when you're alone.

And so we'll explain as follows: Solitude doesn't merely mean that you should be alone; it means that *you should be alone for a purpose, for the purpose of perfection*. Solitude means being alone and being capable of using that opportunity to produce perfection of character. And the secret to this success is the realization that actually *you're not alone - you're alone with Hashem!* Now that's something to think about! When you find that time without all of the distractions of life, and now you're finally alone, that's when you're finally alone with your best friend, Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Now don't tell this to your wife - she should always think that *she's* your best friend. But the truth is that your greatest success and happiness in this world will come from the time you spend alone and build a relationship with your true best friend, Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

### IT'S GOOD TO BE A BEIS YAAKOV GIRL

Now I know that many people when they hear these words, it sounds extreme to them. They think I'm exaggerating. A man here

said to me once, "Relationship with Hashem?! What am I - a Beis Yaakov girl?" But that's because people don't realize their purpose in this world. They don't know that they're here *only for that* - to gain a relationship with Hashem, that is tangible; an actual *kirvas Hashem*. It is the most noble way of perfecting oneself, of attaining *shleimus* and making the most out of life.

And so now we can come back to the question we asked earlier: Why did Dovid yearn so much to *אלין במדבר סלה*, to remain alone in the wilderness forever? And the answer is because for Dovid, what was the good in life? Dovid said, *קרבת אלוקים לי טוב* - "Being close to Hashem, that's what I say is good."

#### THE ANCIENT SHEPHERD AND HIS GOOD FRIEND

Dovid grew up as a shepherd and he spent his entire youth in the wilderness. And it was there, far away from the distractions and encumbrances of life, that he found it most conducive to being alone with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. There was no company around to spoil his mind, and to distract his thoughts. He was still a boy, unencumbered with a family; he had no enemies, nobody was jealous of him yet, and he had nothing to worry about. And his true greatness came there, *בנאות דשה ירביעיני על מי מנוחות ינהליני* - when he was lying down with his sheep in the green meadows, by the still waters of the creeks.

And he would take out his harp to play sweet songs in order to inspire himself to think about his *yedid nefesh*, his "best friend in the world." And it was there that he sang to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and his soul ascended on the notes of his harp to heaven. And he became great there, behind the sheep, singing his songs to Hashem.

#### THE COCKTAIL KEEPS THE KING UP AT NIGHT

And it was all of those songs of love and gratitude that Dovid sang all of his life. It says it openly in Tehillim! Dovid Hamelech was up a big part of the night, every night, talking to Hashem - this we know from his own words. He said "*Tov* - do you know what is good in this world? *L'hodos LaHashem* - to give thanks to Hashem." And he did what he said, he practiced what he sang. "*U'lizamer lishimcha elyon* - the only good in the world is to sing to Your name, O, Most High," And when did he do it? All day long! "*L'hagid baboker chasdecha*." He related Hashem's kindness in the morning when he got up and "*V'emunascha ba'leilos* - "And Your steadfastness to help me in the nighttime." This means that by day and by night, that's

what Dovid was doing; he was thanking Hashem. It wasn't for a few minutes in the morning, and another few minutes at night. That's just what we do, as a faint echo of what Dovid did. He spent his life in solitude with Hashem, talking and thanking, thanking and talking without end. *Kol zman shehaneshama b'kirbi*, as long as I'm alive, *Modeh ani l'fanecha*, I give my thanks to You.

David was busy thanking Hashem all the time. When he breathed the air, he thanked Hashem for air. Ahh, air! The very best cocktail in the world, oxygen, mixed with a little nitrogen. Dovid would breath it in deeply and then he would thank Hashem for another breath. Of course, Dovid did other things as well. He was a king, and a *talmid chochom* too. He had a lot of work on his hands. But he always found time to be alone with Hashem.

### THE PROPHETS AVOID PEOPLE

And that's why even when he sat in the palace among his *chaveirim*, Dovid Hamelech said: **הבט ימין וראה ואין לי מכיר** - "I look on my right and I see that there is nobody who knows me." Nobody knows me! You *think* they know you, but no it's only a dream. **מי לי בשמים** - "Whom do I have in heaven?" You, Hashem and that's all I need." **ועמך לא הפצתי בארץ** - "And together with You I don't want anyone else in this world." Dovid meant these words - it wasn't just poetry - and he meant it because his time he spent alone with Hashem had brought him close to Hashem.

These were the thoughts of Dovid Hamelech, his songs that he composed and sang during his years of solitude, and so later when Dovid became a *melech* he yearned for those days of *kirvas Hashem*. "Ah! If only I could have wings and fly back to the wilderness where I once was as a youth! And I would be alone, alone by myself, alone with Hakodosh Boruch Hu."

And that's what the great men of our past always did - that's *how* they became great. The Chovos Halevavos tells us that: **והנביאים אליהו ואלישע מצאנו היות מיחדים מקומם אל ההרים**, we find that the *nevi'im*, Eliyahu and also Elisha, they preferred to be alone on the mountains. You know, people like to mingle with others, with company, and or spend time with friends. But the *nevi'im* had the *opposite* attitude. It's a remarkable thing. They avoided the company of people as much as possible. **מפני התבודדותם**, because of the benefit of solitude.

Of course, when it was necessary they came and they preached the message of Hashem to the public. They spoke with people when it was important, but they didn't *seek* the company of people; they preferred to be in solitude - to be alone with Hashem.

#### GREAT MEN SKIP SHUL

And the Chovos Halevavos continues: והחכמים החסידים הראשונים זכרונם לברכה הלכו בעקבותיהם, they walked in the their footsteps. They followed the example of the *nevi'im* and they sought solitude. כי מצאו להם זה , because they found it to be the most useful means of acquiring perfection; the most useful way to acquire Awareness of Hashem, good character and self-control.

That's why there were great men in our history who went out into the wilderness, into the forests to be alone, sometimes for days. It was a sacrifice - they gave up *tefillah b'tzibur* and other mitzvos! Everybody knows the story. The *Baal Shem Tov* went into the forest for days. Now being days in the forest means that he missed *davenen* with a *minyan* . So it seems; unless maybe he slipped out once in a while into the *beis knesses*, but it doesn't say that in the story. It seems like he stayed in the forest for days. And he wasn't taking a nap on a bed of moss. He was making use of his time and he was talking; but he wasn't talking to himself. He was talking to Somebody with a capital S.

#### HE CLOSED HIS GEMARA WHEN NO ONE WAS LOOKING

Rav Simcha Zissel, *zichrono levrachah*, spent every night standing on his feet - all night long on his feet studying *gemara*. That's what he told the people he did, but you can suspect him of taking a little time out and talking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. In the wee small hours when nobody was listening you can be certain that he was speaking to Hashem. You can take my word for it, he was spending time alone with Hashem, talking to him, the same way Dovid did.

That's what all of the great *tzaddikim* did; it's what we call *hisbodedus*. Rav Simcha Zissel and the Ba'al Shem Tov were doing what Moshe Rabeinu and Dovid Hamelech did for years and years in the wilderness. And these *tzadikim* utilized solitude in order to gain the awareness that they are alone with Hashem; to gain a palpable feeling of standing in the presence of Hashem. And so even when they returned to their *talmidim*, to their communities, they were not

deceived, they always retained the Awareness of Hashem that they had achieved in their solitude.

### GRAB THE OPPORTUNITIES OF LONELINESS

And therefore the man who aspires to be better, the one who wants to make progress in this world, he tries to find opportunities to be alone. To spend your life, as much as possible, alone in your thoughts with Hakodosh Boruch Hu, that is the great career open to all of us; a noble way of perfecting oneself, of attaining *shleimus* and making the most out of life. Because there's nothing in life as conducive to perfection, as the condition of being alone with Hashem

Now, what to do when you're alone - that's something that takes a lot of explaining, but the first step is to decide that *you're going to be a person who utilizes solitude properly*. Let's say you're all alone in your room. There's nobody there right now. Your wife is out shopping. It's Saturday night and she's out with her friends. They're going to the stores, shopping. So you happen to be home by yourself. Ah! You can take this as a glorious opportunity. I'm alone for a little while. I'm alone with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. If you wish, you can talk to Hashem. It's the best company. If you have nothing to say, open a *Tehillim* and talk to Him in the words of *Tehillim*, the words of praise. Now that's not a *chiyuv*. If you wish you can go along with your wife on the shopping spree. There's no sin if you don't want to remain home. But if you are a person who seeks greatness of character, you seize the opportunity to be alone and you understand that it's a gift from *shamayim*. Of course you have to learn how to spend your time alone but when you learn it, you'll appreciate that great gift.

### AN EXCELLENT WAY OF SPENDING YOUR TIME

Now one of the first things, the most basic thing you'll have to do when you're alone with Hashem is to think about the *chasodim* he bestows upon you all the time, and to thank Him for them. You can start by thinking about the food you ate today. Thank Hashem for your food. So you say, "I was *yotzeh* already once. I thanked." No, that's not enough. You have to thank Him always, in addition to your *brachos*, in addition to *birkas hamazon*.

There's no end to what you have to be thankful for. Walk out in the cold weather and you have a nice warm garment made of wool. You have to think about these things and tell Hashem how grateful you are to Him. 'Thank You Hashem for giving me warm

clothing!" And say, "Hashem, *Baruch Atah* for a beautiful day!" It takes a long time before the day is finished; thank Him a number of times each day for a beautiful day. "It's a beautiful day, Hashem, a beautiful day!" Now, when it's raining - it's also a beautiful day. "Oh," Hashem," it's beautiful day when "diamonds" fall from the sky!" You say, "I thank You Hashem, I thank You Hashem, I thank You Hashem." That's an excellent way of spending your spare time.

### LEARN TO BE HAPPY!

I know that most of what you're hearing now seems a very artificial and remote to your minds; it's so remote that we're not even interested in hearing about it. You're waiting for me to move on, to say something else. But I want to tell you that those people who train themselves to be alone with Hashem are the happiest creatures on earth. There is nothing more pleasurable than the opportunity to talk directly to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That's the *simchah* of *ahavas Hashem*; a man that is praising Hashem always is a really happy man.

Now thanking Hashem is only the beginning. Once you make time to be alone with Hashem, there's so much to do; so many good things to do to perfect your character. You can think about yourself, think about your life. Because a man has to think about himself - is he walking in the ways of *yosher* or not? He has to examine his lifestyle in general and he has to examine his individual deeds, are they in accordance with what he would like them to be, or better yet, in accordance with what the *Torah* would like them to be? So you need time for that! Otherwise your life goes by and you continue to repeat the same errors and not to make progress. It's important to have time alone.

### THE LAMPOST & LUNGS PROJECT

And therefore it's the people who live with *seichel*, who are cognizant of the fact that they can have a real relationship with Hashem, there's no question they'll be better off. Only that you can't start all at once. You do it gradually. היום יקנה קצת ממנו, today you acquire a little bit, ומחר יוסיף עליו מעט יותר, and tomorrow you add a little more, עד שיתרגל בו לגמרי, until you'll become entirely accustomed to it.

So let's say you're walking in the street with a friend and you say "Let's make a project that from this lamppost to the next lamppost we'll think only of Hakadosh Baruch Hu." Try that; it's not as easy as it sounds. If you're not with a friend, do it yourself; even

better, you're walking down Kings Highway all alone with "your best friend." Challenge yourself: "If I can think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu from this street to the next street - it's only twenty paces in between - so that means I was alone with Hashem for a little bit." And at the end you relax. "Ah, I did it. I made it. For twenty paces I thought about Hakadosh Baruch Hu." A man once said to me "Twenty paces is nothing. I think about Him always." *Ah nechtigeh tug!* It means he *never* thinks about Him. You can't do it unless you practice up and it's not easy.

It's like breathing. You know, it's a good idea to practice breathing. You breathe in deeply and you hold your breath and walk five paces. Then you exhale. Now you take a deep breath again and walk six paces while holding your breath, and then exhale. After a while you'll be walking fifty paces. That's a record for you. If you can walk fifty paces holding your breath then you have big lungs, big windbags. You can be a good runner too, an athlete. That's the way to exercise your lungs. But here's a way of exercising your *neshamah* and your mind.

#### IT'S A MITZVAH TO THINK ABOUT HASHEM

And it's not just a good piece of advice that I came up with. It's a command of the Torah: **השמר לך פן תשכח את השם אלקיך**, be aware, beware not to forget Hashem. What does it mean not to forget Hashem? It doesn't mean merely to keep the *mitzvos*. It doesn't say beware not to forget the *mitzvos*. You should beware *not to forget Hashem!* That means you should be thinking about Him!

Try thinking about Hakadosh Boruch Hu for one minute straight. There's so much to think about. Think that Hashem is looking at you. Think Hashem loves you. **אהבתי אתכם נאום השם** - "I love you," says Hashem. Do you think about that ever? Do you ever stop to think that Hashem loves you? He loves you a thousand more times than your mother loves you and you never thought about it?! You never once thought that Hashem loves you immensely, infinitely?!

#### YOU'LL BECOME A HEAD TALLER

That's a wonderful thing to think about for your one minute excursion into solitude, your minute of being alone with Hashem in your thoughts. So you're thinking - and if there's no one listening then you can say it too: "Hashem, I know You're right here with me and that You're listening to me. You love me more than I can

imagine. You love me more than my mother loves me, more than my father, more than my friends love me. You're taking care of me, everything You do to me is for the best and I love you too!

And then you relax. You made it! You were together with Hakodosh Boruch Hu for a minute straight. And after a while try for two minutes. And when you get used to that, you can try a little longer. Now that's a man who's a head taller than the rest of the world!

#### A DAILY OPPORTUNITY

Another remarkable opportunity for being alone with Hashem is your dressing in the morning or undressing at night. The *Tur* says (Orach Chaim 2:2) that one has to be careful not to expose his body unnecessarily when he's dressing or undressing alone in his room. So you might say well it's dark in this room; who sees me? Don't say, "Who sees me?" **השם מלא כל הארץ כבודו**. He sees you!

And therefore every morning and every night when you dress and undress, it's your opportunity to have some solitude with Hashem. You're thinking these thoughts. Hashem is here with me and He's looking and that's why I'm careful how I undress. Of course Hashem has x-ray vision too. Nevertheless, the fact that He is looking should be enough to make you cover yourself. It's a practice; it's a *targil*. You do it always and little by little you gain an awareness of this great truth that Hashem is looking. It's very important to work on that.

Sometimes you take a walk and that's a great opportunity. For all of us here walking could also be a form of solitude; solitude doesn't mean you have to be in a cave or on a desert island. When you walk down the street, you're all alone; no one is talking to you, and it's a glorious opportunity to talk to Hashem.

#### YOU NEED HASHEM CONSTANTLY

Ask Hashem that He should help you with everything. "I am going for a walk Hashem. Please help me I should succeed in gaining good health, and that I shouldn't have any difficulties with rude people that bump into me. And while they are "bumping into me" they put their hand in my back pocket and taking out my wallet. This happens every day on Kings Highway! Somebody is shouting, "I just lost my wallet; it had a hundred dollars in it!"

“Please Hashem, I shouldn’t have any difficulties crossing streets.” When you want to cross the street, absolutely, you should ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu for help. Ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu to protect you from accidents. Accidents are happening all the time. You think you are a wise man, that you look both ways when you start walking and that's enough. There is a fellow ahead of you, he is turning the corner on two wheels, and he's not asking you for permission. Every day, there *nisim* happen! He just missed you by half an inch.

Here is a man walking on the sidewalk, all of a sudden, a truck zooms by - a drunken man driving a truck runs up in the sidewalk and hits him and he's finished. He wasn't even thinking of buying a burial plot. A young man and all of a sudden he is dead laying on the sidewalk. Ah yah yay, a tragedy! It happens again and again, drunken drivers run up on the sidewalk. You have to cross the street, surely, but before you cross, you think it's a foolish thing to say a *tefilla* you should cross successfully? And so, always ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And when you get to the other side, say “Thank You, Hashem that I made it across successfully.” And when you come home *b'shalom*, “Baruch Hashem, I made it. I came home and everything is in order. Thank You Hakadosh Baruch Hu.” That's solitude with Hashem, and it's available to you all the time.

Now sometimes, how to get solitude is a problem. Let's say you're in a *yeshivah* and you're busy all day learning in the *yeshiva*. If you're in a busy *beis medrash* where is your solitude? So a *tzaddik* once said, let's say you're in the *yeshivah* and you have a *gemara* in front of you, so you put the *gemara* in front of your face and you're transported to some far off isolated place and you're speaking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu *b'hisbodedus!* “Hashem, please, Hashem, see that I don't waste my years, that I accomplish something in my young days, and help that I should be able to do something later in life for You and for Your people.”

### THE WRONG BASHERT

If you're not yet married, *Al zos yispallel kol chosid eilechah le'eis mitzo* - every chossid has to pray when the time comes to find a wife. *Matzah zu ishah*. You have to pray and pray, but not just one time, you have to pray and pray and pray that Hashem should send you the right one. Don't say, “It's *bashert*,” and forget about it. It could be *bashert tzaros* for you, *chas v'shalom*. That could be *bashert*, too. The

*gemara* says Delilah was *bashert* for Shimshon; a “big *hatzlacha*” he had from Delilah.

So, you have to pray to Hashem, “Give me a good *bashert*.” You have to pray; oh yes, you must pray. And start praying, not on *erev* the *chasunah*; pray a long time before. It is very important. You have to pray for children. For healthy children. And that your children should give you *nachas*. How many *talmidei chachomim* don't have any *nachas* from their children! So you're talking to Hashem non-stop. You're alone with Hashem in the *beis medrash* and that's what the *Chovos Halevavos* calls בתוך ההמון; it's possible to be “in solitude in the midst of a multitude.”

Of course you can't be alone all the time. You have to be a father or a mother as well. You have to be a son or a daughter, a neighbor, and employee, whatever it is. But as much as possible, if you can spend time in solitude, a little bit, more or less, and think about Hashem and talk to Him, it's amazing what can be achieved. Then you feel *you're alone with Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And that's the truth. Because even when you're dwelling among your brothers, you're in a crowd, you're hanging on a strap in the subway, you're really all alone.

So now you'll think about that when you're on the subway. You're caught in the subway in rush hour and you're hanging on the strap, close your eyes and feel *the place is empty*. Of course you should watch your pockets anyhow. Keep your hand on your wallet and forget about the crowd around you. All around you is a storm of humanity with all their little interests, their little worries, their conversations, their little minds. You're holding onto the strap but you are now in the wilderness of Midian all alone; you're *misboded* with Hashem and you're coming closer to Him.

#### GETTING YOUR MIND CLEANED AT THE DENTIST

Let's say you're sitting in a waiting room by a dentist and you have to wait a half hour. If you have a *sefer*, look in the *sefer*. You don't have a *sefer*? Here's your chance. Or you wake up in the middle of the night. Sometimes for a few minutes you can't sleep. So until you fall asleep again let's say you'll be thinking: כי הוא אמר ויהי, Hashem spoke. That's all He did, He spoke and the world came into existence. הוא ציוה, He commanded ויעמוד and there arose a world. בדבר השם שמים נעשו, the heavens were made only by the word of Hashem. לעולם השם דברך ניצב בשמים. Your word

is standing in the *shamayim*, Your word! You said *yehi* and it's standing in the *shamayim*. You take away the word *yehi* and the whole *shamayim* would collapse into nothing. Everything around you is all just Hashem's imagination. You ever think about that? He spoke **כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי**. He was the One who was *mehaveh* the whole *briah*. A great *nes*. It never happened again *yesh mei'ayin!* That's a thought that can make you great while you're sitting alone in the dentist office or hanging onto the subway strap.

Let's say you're sitting at a *bar mitzvah* party and all around you all the tongues are clacking. What do you need it for? Is all that chatter going to do you good in the Next World?! So you're a smart fellow, so you act like you're listening but your mind is someplace else. You're "in the forest" now, like the Baal Shem Tov went in the forest. You're in the forest with Hashem. **וַיִּתְבוּרַד עִם בּוֹרְאוֹ** - You're find solitude with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And when somebody asks you something, so you come out of the forest to answer. They'll say, "He's absent minded," so you say "I'm sorry, I was thinking about something." They'll think you were thinking about your business or something. Let them think so. What we're seeing now is that It's possible *l'hisboded b'soch ha'hamon*, to find solitude with Hashem even as you're in the midst of people.

#### LOUD CHASUNA MUSIC IS A YESHUAH

Let's say you're attending a wedding. At the wedding as you sit around, it's not polite to take out a *gemara*; so you're sitting at the table or you're dancing, clapping, whatever you're doing, you're participating. But your mind is with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. First of all, you can say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Ribono Shel Olam bless the *chosson* and bless the *kallah* they should all have good health all their lives. They should have *parnasah berevach*." You could say it with your mind and nobody's listening. But even better, you can say it with your mouth - the music is so loud, nobody will hear you. They think you're singing along. Bless them that they should have the most beautiful and smartest children. Bless them they should always get along *b'simchah* with each other. Bless them they should live long and dance at the weddings of all their grandchild and great-grandchildren. Do you think that at all? Why shouldn't you? They need your *tefilos*. Everybody getting married, you should know, needs as many *tefilos* as possible. And **אֲתָהּ שׁוֹמֵעַ**, Hashem is listening to your *tefilos*. And when you do this, you should know you are

exceptional. Because you're in a big wedding hall full of people, hundreds of people. But as far as you're concerned, it's just you and Hashem.

### GREATNESS AT COUSIN CHAIM'S HOUSE

Or let's say you were forced to go somewhere; after all you must go to visit Cousin Chaim in Boro Park. It's your wife's cousin, and you can't say no this time. So they're eating *melave malkah* and everybody is chatting and you're like a fish on dry land. Their minds are being ground to pieces by the idle chatter. So you're sitting among them and you close your eyes for a moment. They'll think you're dozing off but actually you have retired into your cave and you're talking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You're thinking your thoughts. Everybody is talking, you're thinking! Ahh! That's solitude. Just for a moment. One moment is also a very big achievement. Solitude doesn't mean a lifetime of being isolated from humanity. Every minute is an achievement in itself. Of course *tzaddikim* are able to have *deveikus*, clinging to Hashem, always. But we're not that big. But if you have *deveikus* for one minute then you've already accomplished something great with your life.

Now I know people will listen to me and they will just dismiss these ideas. They think that it's a *midas chassidus*, it's something that only very great people should do. But that's wrong. Don't think that what we're saying here is going overboard. Just because ordinary people will often live like they do with *hesech hada'as*; they *daven* as ordinary people *daven* and mostly their minds are occupied with ordinary things, doesn't mean that you have to do the same. Hakadosh Boruch Hu wants more than ordinariness. He wants you to be close to Him because those who are far away from Him will eventually go lost. And even though you seem to be a *shomer mitzvos*, but actually you're far away from Him if your mind doesn't concentrate on Him, if you're not living with Him in your mind. And therefore, as much as possible you spend time talking to Hashem. You don't have to have a *siddur*, you don't need a *Tehillim*. Use your own mind. In your own thoughts, in your own words, you're alone with Hashem.

### SOLITUDE THREE TIMES A DAY

Now, while we're on the topic, I'll mention one more opportunity that we have every day and that's *shemonah esrei*. The *amidah* you know, is said almost silently, and it's supposed to be as if

you're standing in the *kodesh hakodoshim* and you're talking to the *shechinah*. That's how a person should imagine himself. There's nobody around and you're talking directly to Hashem. It's a glorious opportunity. Nobody can hear what you're saying except yourself perhaps, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu is listening. Now that's real solitude.

Only that when a person doesn't have the attitude of talking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu so his *shemonah esrei* is just to him something he has to rattle off by rote, something he has to do, and he'll never experience the ecstasy of speaking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And that's the great tragedy of what we do when we daven; we're talking to Hashem but actually **קרוב אתה בפיהם ורחוק מכליותיהם** - "You are close in their mouths but You are far away from their kidneys." It means that You, Hashem are far away from their insides, their minds. That's what the *navi* said. And that's the truth - that's what *davenen* is.

And so it's very important for us to think Hashem is listening to us. That's step number one: **כי אתה שומע**, You are listening. If He's listening to you, it's impossible to remove your mind from thinking what you are saying. When you're just saying something to the wall or to the *siddur* it's possible to forget the *kavanah*, the intention, of what you're saying. But when you're talking to someone, you never talk *shelo be kavanah* unless you're *meshuga*.

### IT'S GOOD TO BE A HYPOCRITE

And it's only if a man sincerely embarks on a career of learning to constantly speak to Hashem, that his *davenen* finally becomes meaningful. Now at first it's superficial; you're a hypocrite. Of course it's a good hypocrisy - you're doing it to train yourself. You talk to Hashem and you say, "I thank You Hashem that You have made me healthy." When you see a man hopping in the street with one empty trousers leg; he has crutches and you have two good legs, you have to stop and think "*Boruch Atah Hashem*, that I have two legs." You see a man walking in the street and one empty sleeve pinned to his pocket, you have to thank Hakadosh Boruch Hu that you have two arms.

The gemara says, **לעולם יבקש אדם שלא יחלה** - A person should always ask for *rachamim* not to become sick. When should he do it? *L'olam!* Always! Sickness is always lurking in every nook and cranny of the body. All around us germs are floating around in the air. If you walk in the street, and somebody coughs into your face, a

whole mouthful of germs sticks to your face from his saliva. It is a very fine form of disgrace!

### LEARNING TO SAY "YOU"

We are in the midst of a cauldron of peril, and illness is one of the most frequent things that happen, *chas v'shalom*, to a person. And so the *chachomim* are giving us a piece of very sound advice - ask Hashem not to become ill. You can ask in general, which is also good, but when you hear what happened to a certain man, that he had a tumor in his brain, then you should ask Hashem specifically, "Ribono Shel Olam, heal that man; send him a *refuah sheleima besoch sh'ar cholei Yisroel*. And please Hashem protect me, protect me! Hashem, I don't want a brain tumor! Please protect me!" And no matter how many times you say it will not be enough. In *shemone esrei* we say it three times a day but actually all day long you have to thank Hashem that you are well and ask Him to keep you well. Always pray that you should be well, your wife should be well, your children should be well, pray for them all the time.

And little by little you will get accustomed to saying the words. And after a while you're going to feel that there is Somebody actually listening. After a while, when you say **אתה**, "You" you feel like you're talking to Somebody. And when that great day comes, then you know you have arrived! That's what the Mesillas Yesharim says, that at first you say it, and say it, and after a while the realization enters your mind that you're actually talking to Someone. You're talking to Hashem and you've begun to taste the sweetness of being alone with Him.

### THE GREAT CAREER OF MOSHE RABEINU

Now, we've only begun to scratch the surface of the great opportunity of being alone with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It's a great career that is open to everyone, men and women, boys and girls. And it's the career that made Moshe ben Amram into Moshe Rabeinu. And so we come back to the question that we asked in the beginning of our talk. What was the secret to Moshe Rabeinu's success? What did he do for more than forty years wandering alone in the wilderness of Sinai, and shepherding in the mountains of Midian? And the answer is that those were the years that made him great because those were the years that he spent alone with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It was days, and months, and years of thinking about Hashem, taking to Hashem, becoming more and more aware of

Hashem. All the things we spoke about tonight - and much much more - were accomplished by Moshe during those years.

One of the prime requisites for the development of greatness is solitude. And having to go lost for forty lonely years was the great opportunity for greatness that Hashem presented to Moshe Rabeinu. Moshe Rabeinu led Yisro's flocks into the wilderness alone, like Yaakov had done many years earlier in the house of Lavan, and like Dovid did many years later. And it was there, in solitude with Hashem that his character and grew apace and ripened until the day when Hashem deemed him ready for his destiny.

And that's who we aspire to emulate - like we said before: כל אדם ראוי להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו - "Every person is fit to be righteous like Moshe Rabeinu." Only that you have to start somewhere! We're all capable of using the great opportunity of solitude from time to time; of using these exercises we spoke about tonight to train ourselves into a life of solitude with Hakodosh Boruch Hu *the same way that Moshe Rabeinu did*. And once you start on that career, even if it's only one minute at a time, then you're already living successfully. You're utilizing the great opportunity of being alone with Hashem in this world in order to prepare for that great career in the Afterlife of being alone with Hashem forever and ever.

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## Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Tztz"

**Q:**  
**How does one talk to Hashem?**

**A:**  
And this I'll answer as follows. At first you have to be a hypocrite. You have to do it superficially; you have to say the words. And that's what we do when we daven. We're talking to Hashem although actually קרוב רחוק מכליותיהם is what the *navi* said. "You are close in their mouths but You are far away from their kidneys" – that means from their insides. And that's the truth. That's what *davenen* is. It's only if man sincerely embarks on a career of learning to speak to Hashem that his *davenen* becomes meaningful. After a while when he says, אתה, "You," he feels he's talking to somebody. And when that great day comes, then you know you have arrived.

And so first do it superficially. You're a hypocrite. Of course, it's a good hypocrisy. You're doing it to train yourself. You talk to Hashem whenever you can and you say, "I thank You Hashem that You have made me healthy." When you see a man hopping in the street with one empty trousers leg, and he has crutches; and you have two good legs – you don't need any crutches – so you have to stop and say, "*Boruch atah Hashem* that I have two good legs." You see a man walking in the street with one empty sleeve pinned to his pocket, then you have to thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu that your sleeves are not empty.

And little by little you'll get accustomed to saying the words, and after a while you're going to feel that there's Somebody actually listening. That's what the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, that at first you say it and after a while the realization enters your mind. Because you have an instinct that all human beings have that Hashem is actually there and He's listening.

TAPE # 317

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