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THE **PENSON FAMILY** EDITON

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פרשת פקודי

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Elevated in The Home

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Part I. The Home Gets Old

The Focus of Sefer Shemos

We're finishing *Sefer Shemos* already and we note that we've encountered a very queer phenomenon along the way. We began this *Sefer* learning all about the *shibud Mitzrayim*; about how our forefathers were oppressed for so many years in bondage until finally Hakodosh Boruch Hu appeared to Moshe Rabeinu and sent him to redeem the *Am Yisroel* – the whole story of Moshe is in this *Sefer*. And that we understand; it belongs there. It's an important part of the narrative that happened to our forefathers.

Then came *Yetzias Mitzrayim* – a very important event in our history. The exodus from *Mitzrayim* is the foundation for *kol haTorah kulah*. The *daas Hashem* that we acquired by means of witnessing the *makkos*, that's what made us Hakodosh Boruch Hu's people, every detail is important. And so, a great deal of space is devoted to that tremendous event.

Then we go on further and we come to *Matan Torah*. Ooh wah! The greatest day in history was when Hashem spoke to our nation and gave us the Torah. That tremendous event certainly is important; no question it belongs there. And all the laws that we learned then – the *mishpatim*; yes, *mishpatim* belongs there! We’re a law-people! All the laws that are the foundation for Bava Kama, Bava Metzia; the laws of Pesach and Shabbos and everything else – it’s all very important.

A Lot of Space For A Little Building

But then something strange happens; as soon as *Matan Torah* ends, right away begins the *Mishkan*. It’s remarkable to see how much space is devoted to the details of making the *Mishkan* and all of its *keilim*! There’s *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, parts of *Ki Sisa*, and *Vayakhel-Pekudei* too. We’re surprised to see how much space is given to it – the details of the *Mishkan* takes up more space in the Torah than any other subject. And it’s a big deal too; it’s not passed over so easily. The *ba’al korei* has to practice up on this before he can read it – he shouldn’t make any errors in the difficult words that he has to read.

Vayikra with all the unfamiliar laws of sacrifices, at least deals with things that apply forever to the *Beis Hamikdash* – that we understand. But the *Mishkan*? Something that would be for just forty years? Hakodosh Boruch Hu could have said, “Make for Me a *Mishkan*; a house for Me to live among you. I’ll leave the details to you – how many flowers and knobs you should put on the *menorah*, that I’ll leave up to you.” But *nothing* was left to them. Every detail was specified by Hashem – how to make the curtains, how to make the pillars, how to make the sockets. And it required a lot of expertise and craftsmanship – it required time and great expense. And then after it’s all commanded, it starts all over again; the Torah begins telling how they did it. The Torah tells us again and again, “They did this as they were told” and it describes again all the details that were done. It’s a remarkable story that to most of us seems to be superfluous.

The Heart of Our Nation

So you have to understand what it’s teaching us. When the *Am Yisroel* were given the *mitzvah* of erecting a *Mishkan*, so everybody got busy pitching in with their hands and with their money and their

time – it was a national expression of service of Hashem and we cannot overestimate the effect that it had on the people. The entire camp was in an uproar! Altogether we're busy serving Hashem! In every tent people were working; sewing, banging with their hammers, contributing whatever they could to help build the house of Hashem. The weavers and the carpenters and the leather workers and the goldsmiths – everybody! Men and women brought materials and they labored to provide the things that were necessary – all the accessories. It was a very big job.

And then finally when the *Mishkan* was erected, it stood in the middle of the camp surrounded on all sides by the populace of the Jewish people. In the center of the camp was the house of Hashem, which means – that is the core, that's the heart of our nation!

We're being taught here how important that place of Hashem's service was to the Jewish nation. Our nation is a nation that serves Hashem! It's not that we're a nation, and that we also have places to serve Hashem. No! It's the service of Hashem – that's our nation! Nothing else! And around *avodas Hashem*, that's how we set up camp! The *Mishkan* stood there always as a constant reminder to every Jew in his private tent – it didn't matter if it was a big tent or a little tent, a fancy tent or a plain one – he understood now what was the focus of his life. Serving Hashem is the heart around which the entire people are gathered.

The Mishkan Shiloh Takes Over

And that's why, when Yehoshua brought the nation into *Eretz Canaan* and he deposited the *Mishkan* in *Shiloh*, so the *Mishkan Shiloh* became the center of our nation. And even though the *Am Yisroel* was now spread out in the land and they weren't living in close proximity to the *Mishkan* like they had been in the *midbar*, but the lessons of those forty years were engraved on their minds and the *Mishkan Shiloh* was the focal point of the nation. It was to *Shiloh* that the *Am Yisroel* traveled to remind themselves that Hashem was still living among them.

Of course, there were some changes made – but the *Mishkan Shiloh* always had some remnants of the original *Mishkan*. The walls were now made of stone but the *yerios*, the sheets that had been used for the roof of the *Mishkan* in the *midbar*, were still used and many revered remnants of the original *Ohel Moed* were still there.

And so, when they used to come three times a year to *Shiloh* it was for them an especial opportunity for contact with their great past. You know, when you have artifacts, remnants of antiquity, everybody comes to look at them – especially if they were things that were made in the days of Moshe Rabeinu. And so when they came to *Shiloh* they felt like they were united with their great past in the *midbar*. With those great days when they would wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night seeing the House of Hashem – and all day long in between. And even though it had stopped now when they had come into Eretz Canaan, but still, they remembered. For 369 years the *Mishkan Shiloh* stood in the land of Efraim – a very long time. And it always was the heart of our people, the place where the Am Yisroel traveled to with pride.

The Lords of The Land

But it didn't remain like that forever. There are sometimes periods in our history when idealism begins to take a back seat. Sometimes it might be because of persecution, other times it's because of prosperity – whatever it is, there's a *yeridah* and after a while things aren't the same. And that's what happened in the days of the *Shoftim*. In those early days of our history, when the Am Yisroel was still establishing its new power in Eretz Canaan, they were often under the yoke of the *Plishtim*. The *Plishtim* lived on the shore of the Mediterranean and they were the lords of the land. It was a loose kind of hegemony – they weren't the kind that were evident everywhere in the country, but they were there; they were always in the background causing trouble.

And because of that, many people were afraid to travel on the main roads. Even to be *oleh regel* on *yom tov* or to bring *korbanos* to *Shiloh* during the year, many people stopped doing because of the danger of being accosted. The *Plishti* officers would sometimes seize people without any reason; a flimsy excuse would be made up and people would be imprisoned or maybe their possessions would be taken away from them. And so it's understandable that people were afraid to travel.

Everyone remembers the story of Devorah HaNeviah; when she came onto the scene, she found such a situation. She sang about it: **הָדְרִלּוּ אֶרְחוֹת** – *They stopped going on the main roads* (*Shoftim* 5:6). They were afraid to travel because of the gentiles who would wait in

ambush on the sides of the roads. “It’s too dangerous to go up to Shiloh,” they said.

The Old Mother

Now, don’t think they stopped going right away. The Am Yisroel of antiquity were a very enthusiastic people; they loved Hakodosh Boruch – they were far above our present level. Even the best Jews today, let’s say the Jews of Boro Park or even Meah Shearim, they couldn’t compare to the Jews that lived in those days. So they didn’t give up altogether. They found backroads to use in order to avoid the Plishtim. **וְהֵלְכֵי נְתִיבוֹת יִלְכוּ אַרְחוֹת עֲקָלְקָלוֹת** – *When they had to travel, they went by byroads. They went by akalkalos, on crooked byroads.*

But we understand that when the roads are dangerous, there will always be a slacking off; when people are discouraged from doing a *mitzvah*, after a while they stop. And so after a while, the *mitzvah* of *aliyah l’regel*, going up on Yom Tov to the Mishkan in Shiloh fell into disuse. So, although when Devorah and Borok ben Avinoam had a great victory over the Plishtim it became possible again to go up, nevertheless people were afraid to go. Or, even if they weren’t so afraid, but once they had stopped, they didn’t go anymore.

The *Medrash Shmuel* (1) explains it with a *possuk*: **אַל תִּבְזוּ בִּי זָקְנָה אִמִּי** – *Do not scorn your mother when she grows old* (Mishlei 23:22). ‘Your mother’ means the Jewish nation. Sometimes the Am Yisroel grows old – it means that even very important practices fall into disuse. There are periods in our history when we weaken to some extent and it appears like we are too old of a people – we’re losing our fire. And that’s what happened then; the practice of traveling to Shiloh went out of style. So Shlomo Hamelech says, “Don’t scorn the Jewish people; don’t give up. The Jewish nation is never really old. We can always rejuvenate our people.” And even though it seems to you at the moment that it’s a hopeless case, don’t give up. With some effort you can always bring them back to the Torah again. And that brings us to an important personality in the history of the Am Yisroel.

Part II. The Home is Rejuvenated

An Important Personality

In the beginning of *Shmuel Alef*, we read about a certain person: **בֶּן יִרְחָם בֶּן אֱלִיהוּא בֶּן תְּחוּר** - *There was a man from Har Efraim* - **וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה** - *and his name was Elkanah*. **בֶּן צוּף אֶפְרַתִּי**. It gives his lineage there and it tells us he was “Efrasi.” Efrasi means he was an important personality. Now, how he became important, we’ll soon see. But right now we’ll study the *poshut pshat*; we’ll see what the *poshuk* tells us about this man: **וְעָלָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מֵעִירוֹ** - *This man used to go up from his town*, **מִמִּזְמָה** - *every year*, **לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת** - *to bow down at Shilo*, **וּלְבָרַח לְהֵשֶׁם** - *and to bring offerings to Hashem*.

וְעָלָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מִמִּזְמָה means that Elkanah instituted a system of going up to Shilo for the *shalosh regalim* - every time by means of a different route (*Yalkut Shimoni 77*). And because he wanted to make a demonstration out of it, so he didn’t sneak through on the byroads. He went on the main road and he purposefully would pass by different towns wherever he went, trying to convince more people to join him. First he would gather as many people as he could from his hometown, and then as they passed by other villages, he enlisted more and more people to join. He said, “Come along with us. *Lechu v’naaleh el har Hashem* - Let’s all go up to the house of Hashem.”

That’s how one man, all by himself, encouraged people to come to *Shiloh*. And little by little, bigger and bigger throngs used to come to *Shiloh* until he restored the *mitzvah* of *aliyah l’reigel* to its ancient prestige. On all sides now, when *yom tov* came, people were thronging all the roads and byroads - the *Am Yisroel* is coming together, marching to the *Mishkan*, singing songs and bringing offerings, cattle and sheep to offer up in *Shiloh*. And it wasn’t just the *mitzvah* of *aliyah laregel* that was restored - it was the great lesson that it’s *Shiloh*, it’s *avodas Hashem*, that is the center of our lives. The old glory of the *Am Yisroel*, the glory of the nation that knows that *avodas Hashem* is the heart and soul of the people, was restored; and that’s all the credit of one man - of Elkanah.

The Next Generation

However, it didn't stop there. Because of his efforts, this man was given a big reward. Everybody knows the story of Elkanah's two wives. One was Peninah who had a number of children, and the other was Chanah who was childless. And every year when they went up, although Elkanah attempted to cheer up his childless wife – he would give her an extra portion from the *korban* to express his loyalty to her – but she couldn't even eat because of her broken heart. You should look into the *pesukim* there; you'll see the entire story, an interesting story which we won't tell now.

Of course, Chanah used her time in Shiloh wisely – she spent her time in prayer. Now, one time, Eili, the old Kohen Gadol, saw how she was praying with all her heart. At first he thought she was an intoxicated person because he saw her standing there and didn't hear any words; all she was doing was weeping. But when he spoke to her, he discovered that she was praying from a broken heart and begging Hashem for a child. So Eili blessed her – he told her, “Go in peace. You're going to have a son.” He encouraged her with a bracha that she should have a son and Hakodosh Boruch Hu fulfilled the wish of the *tzadik* Eili and blessed Chanah with a son.

Shmuel Makes His Rounds

Now, when Shmuel was born – that was her baby, Shmuel Hanavi, so his mother kept him for a little while but then she brought him to Eili the Kohen Gadol and she said, “Here he is; I'm dedicating my son to the service of Hashem.” She was fulfilling the vow that she had made when she prayed to Hashem for a son; she had promised, “I will dedicate him to the service of Hashem.” And that's how the career of Shmuel began.

And after Elkanah passed away, his son Shmuel continued to grow greater, even more than his father. Shmuel HaNavi had a great career of *avodas Hashem*; among the great things that he did, it's related about him as follows: **וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו** – *Shmuel judged the Jewish people all the days of his life*. That means, he led them and he taught them. Of course, all the *Shoftim* did that – that was their function, to teach the people the *Toras Hashem*. But of Shmuel it says specifically that he “judged Yisroel all the days of his life.” That means, Shmuel dedicated his life to the Am Yisroel, to

teach them and to guide them in coming close to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And it tells how he did it: וְהִלֵּךְ מִדֵּי שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה – Every year he used to go around and visit all the Jewish communities, וְסָבַב בֵּית אֵל וְהִגְלִיל, וְהִמְצִיפָה – he used to make a circuits, visiting all the towns and villages (Shmuel I 7:16). וְשָׁפֵט אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל הַמְּקוֹמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה. – and he used to judge Yisroel in all these places. וְתִשְׁבְּתוּ הָרְמָתָה בֵּי שָׁם בֵּיתוֹ – he used to return finally to his home in Ramah. Not that he stood in his own town and he waited for people to come to him for guidance – that's what others did – but Shmuel traveled the country and visited all the communities, big and small. He used to stop and speak to them and inquire what was the condition of the communities, how was the *avodas Hashem*, how the children were growing up, whether there was peace in the households, whether they were serving Hashem and upholding the *Toras Hashem*. It's a big *mesirus nefesh*, a big inconvenience to be on the move always. But Shmuel considered that his function.

The Movement Grows

Now, as a result of Shmuel's labors, a great change took place in the people; a great movement was started. Because of Shmuel's dedication; his constant traveling, his supervising all the *kehillos*, seeing that everybody was toeing the line, that the *Toras Hashem* was sovereign in all the homes – as a result of that, in the twenty years that Shmuel led the people, there was a revolution, a rejuvenation of *avodas Hashem*. The whole *Bnei Yisroel* was yearning for Hashem!

It states וַיְהִי עַשְׂרִים שָׁנָה – In those twenty years something great happened, וַיִּנְהוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרֵי הַשֵּׁם, The whole house of Yisroel began to yearn for Hashem. Now, they always yearned for Hashem. The Jewish people never lost sight of the one function of their existence, to serve Hashem. But in the times of Shmuel, a great yearning began to grow among the people and Shmuel was the one who poured oil on the fire and he caused the yearning to get bigger and bigger.

But Shmuel Hanavi wasn't the end of Elkanah's influence; no, it didn't stop there! Because as a result of what Shmuel did, he was given a gift from Hashem – a young disciple named Dovid. Dovid was a great man even without Shmuel – he had his own parents who were excellent teachers – but he was also a *talmid* of Shmuel HaNavi,

and Shmuel took Dovid in his hand and he raised him up. He taught him how to be a *melech* and he inspired him. And oh, how inspired he became!

Dovid's Innovations

Now you have to know, when Dovid appeared on the scene, it wasn't just an accident that happened. Dovid was sent *min hashomayim* at the time he was needed. Just when the generation had reached a pitch of enthusiasm, Dovid was sent to utilize that and a remarkable thing occurred at that time – the songs of *Tehillim* came into existence.

Dovid began his system of *shiros v'sishbachos*; it was a new career, a new movement in the *Am Yisroel* – singing to Hashem. We're accustomed to that; we think it has to be that way. But Moshe Rabbeinu didn't make *Tehillim*; neither did Yehoshua. None of the *Shoftim*, although they were great people, did it. Certainly Moshe Rabbeinu and Yehoshua caused the people to be enthusiastic for the service of Hashem, but now something different occurred.

A song of enthusiasm, *tehilla l'Dovid* – song of praise by Dovid was instituted. All over they began singing Dovid's songs. Beautiful songs! Dovid was a *ne'im zemiros yisroel* – the sweet singer of *Yisroel*. He was a gifted man who was a master at the harp and you could be sure that his *niggunim* were masterful renditions. And the words?! Every word was precious. We're already accustomed to *Tehillim*; we know all about it – but in those days it was a new thing and it caught on. People were humming the songs as they worked on the fields. At home too, they sang the songs. When they sang the *zemiros* on Shabbos they didn't sing *yom zeh mechubad* – they sang Dovid's songs. *Mizmor shir l'yom hashabbos*, that's what they sang at the table. All over the *Am Yisroel*, people were singing Dovid's songs. At first it was the *bonei Tzion*, Dovid's entourage, who sang along with him. They became a circle around him and that circle spread and the Jewish nation became inspired. And soon there was such great enthusiasm that Dovid was able to say, *זֶה דּוֹר דּוֹרְשׁוֹ* – This is the generation of those who seek Him, *מְבַקְשֵׁי פָנָיֶךָ* – who seek Your face, Hashem.

The City of Hashem

It's a little difficult for us sitting in North America to try to picture the spirit that reigned at that time. We're all good Jews and certainly we give a good deal of our time for the service of Hashem, but to us it's just part of our activities – it's an important part; we wouldn't give it up for anything, *chas v'shalom*, but we have our own lives to live and *avodas Hashem* is part of our lives.

But what happened in the *Am Yisroel* then was much more than that. Dovid saw that the generation had been raised to the heights of enthusiasm and he inspired them even further. When Dovid built up Yerushalayim, we have to realize that it was built especially to be the *ir Hashem*. That's all it was. It wasn't Yerushalayim; it was the *ir Elokeinu* – the city of our G-d – only that Dovid permitted people to settle there too. But anybody who came there knew that the purpose of this city is Hashem and they were expected to have nothing else in mind but that.

It could be in the course of the centuries people became forgetful of that. Like any good ideal, in the course of time it becomes habituated and people forget, but at the beginning, in Dovid HaMelech's time, there was a fire that was raging throughout the entire Jewish nation; a fiery devotion to Hashem that burned forth from Yerushalayim.

Fasting and Feasting

And so, now we have the whole *Klal Yisroel* in the days of Dovid, all of them are yearning to Hashem with all their hearts. They were so enthusiastic and inspired that the time finally came for the erection of the *Beis Hamikdash*. And therefore at that time, it occurred to Dovid to build the *Beis Hamikdash*. The *Beis Hamikdash* – that's the climax.

Now, you have to understand that this is what Dovid HaMelech envisioned. After all those years of great inspiration that were engendered by the efforts of Shmuel HaNavi and then by Dovid Hamelech to make the nation more and more enthusiastic, finally the time came when Dovid said, "Now we must build the *Beis Hamikdash*. That'll be the climax where our entire nation will serve Hashem together."

When the Sanctuary was finally erected in the days of Shlomo, the son of Dovid, that was the highest form of national service of Hashem. And finally that great moment arrived. Shlomo Hamelech is standing in Yerushalayim surrounded by *kol Yisroel*. The entire Jewish nation came together – at the *chanukas habayis*. It's one of the greatest days in our history. That building was dedicated by every man, woman and child in the Jewish people. *Milevo chamas ad nachal mitzrayim*, everybody came to that great inauguration of the *Beis Hamikdash*, because it was *everybody's* job to be an *eved Hashem*.

It was so great of an occasion that they ate on Yom Kippur to celebrate it. That year they ate on Yom Kippur! Because the idealism was so rampant, so extreme, they expressed it with meals, with a *seudas Yom Kippur*. *Al pi Hashem* it was done. Imagine a *seudas mitzvah* on Yom Kippur! It meant that it was even more *kappara* than fasting on Yom Kippur. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wouldn't let them eat unless the eating was just the same as the fasting. And so they were feasting in Yerushalayim in honor of the *Beis Hamikdash* because everybody's heart was full of happiness and gratitude to Hashem. "Finally we have this beautiful building to inspire us even more in the service of Hashem. We're dedicated to Hashem now with all our hearts; we're so enthusiastic that we'll be able to bring this fire back home with us and make our homes places of *avodas Hashem*."

Part III. In Your Home

Who Dreamed First?

Now, when the entire nation stood at the *Chanukas Beis Hamikdash* with Shlomo Hamelech, I don't know if the people were thinking about who was the real catalyst for that great event. But we look back now, and we understand. We understand that it all began in the house of Elkanah – it was the culmination of all the activity that Elkanah had begun many years before.

Because at that time, whose dream was coming true? Was it the dream of Shlomo Hamelech? Absolutely. Was it the dream of Dovid Hamelech too? Absolutely! Shmuel Hanavi? Yes, it was his dream as well. But first and foremost, it was the dream of Elkanah. Elkanah

started it all. And he started it where? In his home! The Beis Hamikdash began to be built in the humble home of Elkanah.

Elevated in His Home

So we go back now and study again the *possuk* that we cited in the beginning of the lecture tonight: וְעָלָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מֵעִירוֹ – *This man used to go up from his city and gather together the people to make the trek up to Mishkan Shiloh.* On those words, the Medrash Shmuel states as follows: *V'alah haish hahu* – “*And that man went up*” means, *nis'aleh b'veiso, he rose up to greatness in his home.* It was between the four walls of his home that Elkanah became great. He didn't wait for somebody to promote him to a position of prominence, a *shteller*; *kol iluyo lo haya ella mei'atzmo* – *All of his greatness was by his own efforts.*

Elkanah began in his house; nobody knew about him. He wasn't famous. He didn't have any great throngs of people coming to listen to him. He wasn't building the Beis Hamikdash and he wasn't composing Tehillim for the nation either. But he didn't have to wait until he had some “good opportunity” because *he knew that his home was that opportunity.* And because he was a *ben aliyah*, he was the kind of man who didn't stand still, so he jumped at that opportunity. He inspired himself. Elkanah started on himself, in the privacy of his own heart he came closer and closer to Hashem. In his home he was becoming greater and greater. That's how it all started; all of his excellence, all of his increase in stature was due only to his own efforts. *kol iluyo lo haya ella mei'atzmo* – *it all started from himself.*

That's how it all began. All he had was his wives and his children and whoever else was in the house but that was enough – his *avodas Hashem* began to overflow and the family became inspired; they saw an enthusiastic husband, an idealistic father. His house became full of the spirit of Hashem. If we would have been there, we would have understood what a tremendous influence this man had on the *bnei habayis*.

Changing The World

But once a man begins in that direction, Hakodosh Boruch Hu spurs him on. And so, it began to spread to the neighbors. It was a contagion. *Nisaleh b'chatzeiro* – he became elevated in his *chatzer*; it means that all the people in the block began to recognize his worth.

And then *nisaleh b'iro* – he became famous in his town, and then *nisaleh b'chol yisroel* – he became famous everywhere.

The next door neighbors heard what was going on and they began to do the same thing and then it started traveling down the block and after a while it spread throughout the entire town. Now that's a very big achievement. If you can influence the people in your courtyard, all the apartments in your apartment house, you're a personality. And that's what he did. Everybody became inspired by his example. They were all fired with enthusiasm for the service of Hashem.

Now, they were all *frum* people even before Elkanah came along; he didn't have to preach to the people to keep Shabbos or to pray or to put on *tefillin*. Everybody did that! That was the regular practice of the Am Yisroel. But he inspired them to even greater heights. He put a fire into their hearts. When they saw his devotion to the service to Hashem, it spread in his *chatzer* and then in his *mavoi*, and then the entire neighborhood became enthusiastic.

Traveling With Elkanah

Now, this seems to us very far from our experience but that's what happened to this great man. And he became famous. Everybody in town was talking about Elkanah and they all tried to follow in the direction that he was traveling. Of course, he must have been a winsome personality, a kindly, friendly person who was interested in his neighbors and I'm sure he spoke to them and inspired them. It was not merely by his secret activities that they were inspired. I'm sure that he went out and urged them; and when they saw how sincere he was, so they began to listen to him and they began to travel in the direction of Hashem along with him.

And then he began the practice of going up to *Shiloh* through different routes every year, and after a while the whole Am Yisroel was under his influence. This year he traveled by this road and people saw Elkanah and his followers singing and going up to *Shiloh* and then next year a different place and everybody after a while began practicing the mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel* three times a year to go to *Shiloh*. And so the Jewish nation now was singing on the roads and marching up to *Shiloh* – the place of Hashem was jammed every year. And it was all the work of one man, Elkanah.

We All Have The Opportunity

Now we have to understand that this story is not told for itself. It's supposed to be a model for every Jew. Every person comes into this world to utilize the opportunities available here. And one of the most important opportunities is the home – the career of the home is the most important of all. It's in our homes that all of us have the opportunity to be *nisaleh*, to elevate ourselves in the home the same way Elkanah did.

Imagine you live in Boro Park, in a big apartment house. So now you have the opportunity for your idealism to spread. It can spread to your upstairs neighbors and your downstairs neighbors, and before you know it the entire building can grow stronger in service of Hashem. Of course, everybody there is *frum*, everybody keeps Shabbos and everything else; but you understand that being *frum* is only the beginning of a career of *avodas Hashem*. It's not enough – there's much more to accomplish! So you begin to elevate yourself in your home. Within those four walls you begin to become a servant of Hashem.

How to do that? Many ways. First of all, the *brachos* you make when you want to put a piece of food in your mouth should be said out loud, and enthusiastically – and you teach your children to say *brachos* the same way! In the Jewish home not long ago, it was a practice for the children to recite all their blessings in a loud voice. When they were about to eat, they all washed and their mother stood over them like a *mashgiach* in a *yeshiva* and she paid attention as each child made a blessing – she had a watchful eye to see that nobody was cheating; that nobody was being lazy and mumbling the words. The mother in the home wanted to hear a loud *al netilas yodayim*; and then the mother said “Amen” along with the other children.

Real Gratitude

Then they came to the table and each one had to make *hamotzi* and the words resounded on all sides. *B'kol tzehala*, every child loudly thanked Hakodosh Boruch Hu for that little piece of bread. There wasn't much more than bread in the Jewish home sometimes; if you had a lot of bread to eat, then it was a wealthy home. Many times, the children couldn't ask for a second piece of bread. The old timers

remember that. But they were taught to be grateful for what they did have.

You must teach your children to think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu and to be grateful to Him for everything that they have. When you're speaking to your wife and to your children, you're talking always about the kindness of Hashem. And all day long we hear "Boruch Hashem," "Boruch Hashem," in the house. Not like people say "Boruch Hashem" by rote – "In our house we mean it!" Teach your children. Say, "Children, altogether let's say, 'We love You Hashem.'" And all the children in a chorus; boys and girls all chime in and say, "We love you, Hashem." That's how to plant a seed in their minds forever. Someday they'll remember, "We once said, 'We love Hashem.'" You're a different person now – once you say that, you're transformed entirely.

Let's see how you say *birkas hamazon* at the table. Jews used to sit around the table and they didn't just *bentch* – they thanked Hakadosh Baruch Hu! When the father was saying *birkas hamazon*, he took out a big *siddur* in honor of the occasion. He kept an especially big *siddur*, like the Reb Yaakov Emden *siddur* or some other big *siddur* – he knew it by memory of course, but thanking Hashem was a ceremony. *Hineni muchan umezuman*, he washed his hands and took out his big *siddur* and he intoned the words and you could feel that this was a home where Hakodosh Boruch Hu was being served. So if you want to be *nisaleh b'veiso*, you say *birkas hamazon* with enthusiasm, you pour out your heart in gratitude each time you eat – that's already a very good beginning.

The Maid's Son, The King

Every woman – in the privacy of her home, if she serves Hashem, so even in the kitchen she can grow great. You know, to a great extent it was Dovid HaMelech's mother who was responsible for him becoming a great teacher in the *Am Yisroel*. He said אָנִי עַבְדְּךָ בֵּן אֲמָתֶיךָ – "I'm your servant the son of your handmaid." His mother! His mother didn't have a *yeshiva*. Her kitchen was where she was *nisaleh*.

When the little Dovid used to totter into the kitchen, she spoke to him and she inspired him. And that's how Dovid grew up. אָנִי עַבְדְּךָ – "I'm Your servant," sang Dovid to Hashem. Do you know why I'm Your servant? בֵּן אֲמָתֶיךָ – Because I'm the son of your handmaid. She

was serving You in the house! In the kitchen when I was a little boy, she was serving You. And she served You by bringing me up this way.

Many women have become tremendously *nisaleh* in the home just by means of how they raised their children. There's no greater elevation than raising Jewish children! You know sometimes a woman calls me on the phone to tell me that she feels unfulfilled with her duties in the home. But the truth is that a man can be sitting and learning Torah and writing *chiddushim* and also feel unfulfilled; we must remember *why* we're doing what we're doing. A woman who forgets what she's working for, what greatness lies in building a Jewish home, so of course she feels unfulfilled. You're working in the greatest endeavor available to Mankind. You're raising up a living *Shas*! A mother in her home is actually inundating the world with Torah.

The Living Talmud

Suppose *Mesichta Berachos* was alive. Suppose you could take *Mesichta Berachos* and put blood into it, and bones and skin and hair on top of it, and it would talk. And *Mesichta Berachos* is walking around and you could feed him too. He's a little toddler, a mischievous fellow who breaks things whenever you turn around, but what wouldn't you do for *Mesichta Berachos*? So in the beginning you have to clean him, and clean his diapers. *Mesichta Berachos* when he's little, he's a nuisance. And when he's bigger, he's a bigger nuisance. Big boys are also nuisances. There's always going to be trouble in the house when there are people around. But what wouldn't you do for *Mesichta Berachos*?

But suppose it's not only *Berachos* – it's the whole *Shas* toddling around in your house. So even though he turns on the water in the bathroom and it floods the bathroom, for a *Shas* you do anything. And your daughters, even better. Your daughters are going to be a whole lot of *Shasim*. You're creating *tzadikim* and *tzidkoniyyos* in your home.

Our Heroes On The Wall

That's why it's a beautiful thing when people have pictures of *tzaddikim* on the walls of their home. Now some people have a prejudice against pictures. There are some very, very pious people like that, but we're not like that. We do have pictures. Let's say a

picture of a girl in the meadow, maybe standing in a garden. But such pictures gentiles can also have. I like landscapes too. I like pictures of nature. You can have that too, why not? So while you're looking at the landscape, you'll think about the creation that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made for our happiness. But why not pictures of *tzaddikim* too? A picture of the Rambam. A picture of Vilna Gaon. If you're a Lubavitcher, a picture of some of the *rebbe*s.

There are so many *tzaddikim* that can adorn our walls *and children will see that these are your heroes*. It's a very big asset in a home when you have the pictures of *tzaddikim* adorning your walls – the whole family looks up to them. And it should be a principle to speak about *tzaddikim* too – to praise *talmidei chachomim* always. The people who learn Torah, *yeshiva* people, *rabbanim*, *talmidei chachamim*, *gedolim*, your mouths should be full of nothing but lavish praise for the heroes of our nation. Always the father and mother should continue to speak about the great ideal of a becoming a righteous man, a servant of Hashem.

The Charitable Home

All of these examples are opportunities for achieving greatness within the four walls of your house. Elkanah made his home great – he made it a place of *avodas Hashem* – and we can do the same thing in our own homes. Every Jewish home should have *pushkas* – charity boxes. When I was a little boy, I remember how every Jewish kitchen had charity boxes nailed all around the door – on both sides, up and down, and up and down – that represented all the *yeshivos* of Yerushalayim, the old *yishuv* in Yerushalayim. -to unlock it with a little key and he would empty out his *pushka*. It was a whole ceremony. He would pour out the coins onto the table and your mother was standing and watching as he was counting the pennies – only pennies. A nickel in the *pushka* was a rarity in those boxes – a nickel in those days meant a bus ride. And then he wrote out a receipt and he took out his little hammer and nailed the charity box back onto the wall. And you knew you were in contact with Yerushalayim. You were in contact with the *Ir HaKodesh*.

A genuine Jewish home should have charity boxes and the mother is always dropping in something before she kindles the Shabbos candles. And that's how children should be taught too. The children should always know that in our home we support Torah

institutions. A Jewish home should be a place that's in contact with the Torah institutions of the world. And so the Jewish child, from infancy, has to feel a responsibility. If he grows up and becomes a rich man someday, he'll feel it's his duty to write out checks. He'll be on the board of directors for a *yeshiva* because you raised him to be connected to *talmidei chachomim*.

The Never Ending Subject

Now, this subject of *nisaleh b'veiso*, of becoming elevated in the home and thereby elevating the home, is a very big one. The details are endless and we won't stay here all night. But we must always plan that our homes should become a sanctuary. That was one of the great lessons of the Mishkan – the teaching that *avodas Hashem* is the heart of the Jewish home. Because when the Am Yisroel came together to build the Mishkan, they were internalizing that Hashem lives among us! And when they saw the House of Hashem standing in the middle of the camp – wherever they were in the camp they could see the Mishkan in the middle – they learned the eternal lesson that wherever your tent may be, it's around Hakodosh Boruch Hu that our nation camps.

And so, it means that everyone has to think about the opportunities in the house. Are you utilizing your house? Is your house being made into a *makom kadosh* – a place where you serve Hashem? It's all the little things, the daily activities that transform your life. *Nisaleh b'veiso*, means that you don't search out for great opportunities; *gedolos v'niflaos*. In the house, with all the regular episodes of living normally in a house, that's where you're *nisaleh*. It's when a man makes use of the limited abilities that he has in his home or that he has in his privacy, then Hakodosh Boruch Hu will give him a push – and when Hashem is pushing who knows how far he will go?

Home Sweet Home

Now, I'm not saying that's the sole criteria. There are other areas besides the home. For a man there are surely opportunities outside the home; although the home is extremely important, he has some other areas too where he must make progress. But a mother, a father, the children, all have to know that the true measure of their success is in the home. What goes on in your tent, in between the four walls of your home, that's where your greatness will be achieved

- that's your opportunity to mold a nation. *Nisaleh b'veiso*. The home is what counts!

And once somebody understands this function, so he begins to put all that he has into his house. He makes sure to learn Torah in his house, to do *mitzvos* in his house, and make *brachos* out loud. He brings up his children with idealism. Shabbos and Yom Tov and every day, are beautiful days – they're all gifts from Hashem. In the home they praise good character and kindly words. All day long, whatever you could do, put into your house. In your little home – maybe it's five people, if you're *zoicheh* it's crowded with ten people there, maybe more – that's where you'll serve Hashem and that's where you'll grow great by building a Mishkan in your home.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What should the role of the father be in the home?

A:

He should contribute everything that he has to give. That's the plain and simple answer. Which means that when he comes home, before he walks in, while he's still holding the doorknob, he should make it his business to dispel any crabbiness, any grouchiness that he acquired during the day. Because now begins his big career in life – the career of the home.

He has to expect anything from his wife when he comes in. "All day long you've been in a quiet office while I've been suffering from these kids." She is about to give a blast at him. So while he's holding the doorknob, he should steel himself for that blast. He should be ready for anything. He should make up his mind that whatever is going to happen – no matter what is going to happen – I'm going to play my role. I'm going to be a good actor. That's how he should prepare himself for when he comes into the home.

The only problem is if he's home all the time – what should he do then? On Shabbos; now that's hard! To act only in the evening, maybe. But all day Shabbos, that's a big job. And so when he goes to shul on Shabbos he acts natural, and then when he comes home again, he should prepare again for the ordeal. And then he shouldn't remain long in the house. He should come quickly back to the synagogue to learn. The less you're around, the easier it is to be an actor.

But that's only the beginning. There's a lot more to say about what a father should be contributing to the family. He has to put in a sense of humor into the house. A father must bring with him a sense of humor. Mothers are dealing with the children all day long, so they're worn out raw. And therefore every little problem is magnified in her eyes. Little Chaim'l, he doesn't eat, and it becomes such a major problem that all the problems of the world are dwarfed in comparison. And so the father has to make a joke out of it. Of course, he has to be careful to do it in such a way that she doesn't become the butt of the joke. But it has to be a joke – "It's not so serious; Chaim will one day be a big fat rabbi anyhow."

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