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Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת וישב

THE GREAT ROLLER COASTER

When we study, even superficially, the life of Yosef Hatzadik, we see that it was a roller coaster ride of tumultuous circumstances and emotions. Sometimes he rode to the heights of success, and then suddenly he found himself thrown into a deep pit of despair. Over and over again, Yosef was buffeted up and down by the waves of life, back and forth, up and down.

Sometimes the wave would bring him up- he's the chosen one of his brothers, the apple of his father's eye. As a young boy he was the most beloved son, and his father conferred upon him the *kesoness passim*, a *kapoteh* that conferred upon him *gedulah*, a sign of extraordinary love from his father.

And then the wave came crashing down on him; he found himself hated by his brothers. They couldn't even look at him because of their disgust, and they threw him into a deep pit and left him there to die. The "darling son" was then taken down in chains to a foreign country, a land of strangers, where he suffered the terrible indignity of being sold off, never to see his family again. From the heights of success, the young leader of the family, he was suddenly a lowly and ignoble slave in *Mitzrayim*.

And then unexpectedly, this *eved ivri* began to rise to power in one of the most powerful and aristocratic homes in Egypt. His master elevated him, and he became the *major domo* who was in charge of the whole household. It says in the *possuk* that the master knew nothing of what was transpiring in the house because Yosef was given full authority!

YOSEF WAS NOT IN NEW YORK

But the roller coaster ride was only beginning. Once again, the wave of despair came crashing down upon him and he's in the dark and foul dungeon of prison. The same family that had raised him to a position of honor, now turned on him and had him thrown into prison.

Now this prison was a hole in the ground. It wasn't a prison as fancy as Attica. Attica is a luxury palace! The people locked up there are doing just fine. Three square meals a day, television, a bed, recreation, all good things they have. Only that the felons who go there know that they have a big sympathetic public - the New York Times and all the liberals. And all they have to do is shoot some of the guards and kill them. And then they set fire to the building and say "We want a hearing!" And now they get a hearing. The stupid people who run New York set up a committee to hear out the complaints of these wicked felons. They're upset; why? Because they want color television; they're being deprived of human rights. It's a basic human right to have color television!

But Yosef didn't have such privileges. He couldn't get any hearings. It wasn't a prison building. It was a hole in the ground, a *bor*. *כי שמו אותי בבור*, they put me into a big hole in the ground. No windows, no sanitation, whatever you "dropped" remained there. It was a foul hole. And it was done on purpose. In the good old days the purpose of prison was to *discourage* crime, not to encourage it. And now Yosef found himself in prison. And he wasn't going to get out, that's where he would stay until his last breath.

THE CALM TSUNAMI VICTIM

And then abruptly he was pulled out of that dungeon, and his prison clothes are replaced with לבוש מלכות. Before he could blink, this lowly *eved ivri*, a lowly prisoner, is standing before Pharaoh and he is appointed the מושל בכל ארץ מצרים, the ruler over the whole land of *Mitzrayim*. Pharaoh put a golden chain around his neck and made him second in command over the most powerful country in the world! Imagine the exhilaration! It was the pinnacle of success; nobody in *Mitzrayim* ever dreamed of such happiness!

When you think about it, it's remarkable how many extreme circumstances Yosef underwent in the first forty years of his life. It makes the head spin. And yet we find something exceptional when we study Yosef's life. And it's encapsulated in the words of *chazal* that he remained righteous wherever he was. He weathered every storm he encountered with the equilibrium of a most calm man and wasn't thrown off balance by the tsunami of circumstances that buffeted him to and fro.

Yosef didn't fall prey to the despair and *yei'ush* of the lows that he encountered. In prison he should have fallen to the lowest rung of discouragement. Now, who would have blamed Yosef had he sat down and moped, "What happened to me?! This is not my place; what can I accomplish here? Look what they did to me! Such wicked people in the world - I have to suffer for nothing! Ah, the heck with everything!" No, Yosef didn't say, "If only this" or "If only that." He made the best of his new "home."

THE DEAD HEIR

And when he was suddenly appointed the מושל בכל ארץ מצרים, the shock of such a change of circumstances, would have been too much for anyone. The human body can't handle such extremes. I always tell you the story of the man whose uncle died, it was an uncle who he was close to, and the nephew was terribly sad. He was heartbroken; he couldn't get out of bed he was so sad. And then the following day he received a phone call from a lawyer telling him that he was the lone inheritor of his uncle's vast

fortune, a fortune he wasn't even aware of. And he had a heart attack right there on the phone. His heart couldn't take the shock. To undergo such changes in circumstances is very difficult for the heart of the unprepared man to handle.

But we see that Yosef wasn't disturbed by even the most extreme fluctuations in his circumstances. He rode the roller coaster ride of life with the calm demeanor of a man who seemed to be ready for it all.

MOSHE TO MORRIS TO MAURICE

And neither was he led astray, like so many others have been, by all of power he suddenly acquired. Yosef was Yosef Hatzadik from beginning to end.

You know it's not easy to stay Yosef. I'll give you a *mashal*. Seventy five years ago a distant relative of mine, his name was Moshe, came to America from Europe. Now, is he still Moshe today? No; first he became Morris. As soon as he walked off the boat he became Morris. That's what people did when they became overwhelmed by the neon lights of America. And then when he achieved some wealth, some stability, Morris wouldn't do. So he became Maurice. Maurice! Now that's a *chashuveh* name. And today the family is no more. All gone. Not a Jew left from that line in the family.

And that's what should have happened to Yosef. He should have become Joseph, and then Joe and then in no time he's Ossie. And that would have been the end of him. Now, the question we have to ask ourselves, the question we want to answer tonight, is how did Yosef accomplish such a feat? How did Yosef remain Yosef *no matter what happened*? How is it that Yosef Hatzadik remained Yosef Hatzadik through all the ups and downs? And it's a very important question we're asking right now because that's what we want to do as well. We're also being buffeted by the currents of life, and we want to know the secret of achieving greatness in the midst of life's various circumstances.

YOSEF LEARNS KOHELES IN MITZRAYIM

Now there is a basic attitude that Yosef lived with and it was this frame of mind that caused him to succeed in everything he encountered in his career. And it is this very important mindset of Yosef's which we are going to study now.

The key to Yosef's successful career is found in the words of Koheles, words that most of us are familiar with; but we'll soon see that it is not as simple as it seems. It says there (3:1): **לכל זמן ועת תחת השמים** - "There is a time for everything in this world." **ועת ללדת ועת למות** - "There's a time of giving birth and there's a time to die." **ועת לספור ועת לרקוד** - "There's a time to mourn and a time to dance." There's more there, a time for war and a time for peace, for speaking and to be quiet. All the various circumstances of life are enumerated there.

Now the question arises: What is Koheles telling us? Don't we know all that already? We see with our own eyes these things happening all the time. Here there's a family that's rejoicing, and *chas v'shalom* at some other time they're sitting and weeping. And you turn on the radio and you hear about Pearl Harbor being attacked, you see photos of the soldiers marching out to war, so you know we're at war. And when the newspapers say that the Japanese and Germans signed in surrender, so you know we're at peace now. I know just well that there's an **עת מלחמה**, there's a time when a country is at war, and then **ועת שלום**, there's peacetime. And I know that there are times of happiness, **ועת לשמוח**, and times of sadness and crying, **ועת לספור** and the **ועת לבכות**. So we don't need Shlomo to tell us all these things!

KEEP SIMCHAS TORAH AND TISHA B'AV SEPARATE

Now you could say superficially that Koheles is telling us something else. There will be an **ועת לבכות**, a time that *you should* cry. There will also be a time that *you should* be happy, when *you should* laugh and dance. And there will be time *to make* peace and *to make* war. There will be a wide variety of emotions and reactions that every person will express throughout life, and

Shlomo is telling us that we should be doing the right one at the right time. That's one way of understanding.

Like it says elsewhere, **דבר בעתו מה טוב** - "How good it is to do the right thing at the right time." Which means, let's say, it's *Simchas Torah*, a day of rejoicing with the *Torah*. That's no time to think about sad things. Suppose when everyone is dancing with *Torah*, one man is sitting in the corner and he's sad, he's thinking about the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. "Ay yah yay, the *churban beis hamikdash*." It's a fine thing, but it's at the wrong time. On *Simchas Torah* you must bring forth from your mind feelings of happiness, excitement. That's the **עת לרקוד**. Not like I saw once on the street - I saw two men, two grown men, jumping up and down. I thought who knows what, maybe *Moshiach* was here. Only when I got close, I saw they were dancing because their baseball team won the game. That's not the **עת לרקוד**. That's bringing forth the emotion for happiness at the wrong time.

Tisha b'Av night when you say the *Kinnos*, you don't walk around, you don't shoot the breeze with *chaveirim*. You walk home with your head down, you don't greet anybody, it's the time of *aveilus*, so you act like an *aveil*. That's the **עת לבכות** and the **עת לספור**.

DON'T FALL ASLEEP READING TORAS AVIGDOR!

And at the time of sadness, that's when you should express your emotions of sadness. When you're standing outside the funeral parlor you don't crack a joke, you don't light a cigarette. I saw people, *talmidei chachomim* light cigarettes, and run around, shake hands; it's not *Purim*, it's a *levaya*! Shlomo Hamelech is telling us that outside a funeral parlor that's the **עת לבכות**, you stand with respect; you have to conjure up some sadness, show some sadness on your face.

Now this we understand - certainly it's an important principle, to act with *derech erez*. Like it says elsewhere: **שלא יהיה** - "You shouldn't be awake when everyone else is sleeping - you disturb people - and you shouldn't sleep while everyone is awake." You're sitting at my lecture,

everyone is listening, you shouldn't be snoring. That's the lesson Koheles is telling us, there's a time to cry and a time to laugh, a time for peace and a time for war. And you shouldn't be crying at a time of laughter. And you don't laugh when everyone else is crying.

DON'T DIE WHEN IT'S INCONVENIENT...

Now although this is all that is true, and it's important too, but that is *not* what Koheles is saying here. Because if he's just telling us to do the right thing in the right time, so we can understand *עת ספור*, there's a time to mourn, and *עת רקוד*, there's a time to dance. But it also says *עת ללדת ועת למות*, there's a time to die. You're telling us to choose a time to die? Could it be that *עת למות* means, "Make sure to die in the right time?!" Is Shlomo telling us, "Don't die when it's inconvenient; don't pass away on *Erev Pesach*, people are busy, nobody has time for you to die"?! But we know that funerals take place on *Erev Pesach* too. You can't choose a time to die.

So we see that Koheles means something else entirely. He's teaching us here one of the fundamental principle of *emunah*, but it's one that goes unnoticed too often by too many people. Because everyone knows that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is running the world; He's the Ribono Shel Olam, He's the Boss. But that's not enough. It's not enough to just believe that Hashem is in charge, that He runs the world, in a general sense. Koheles is teaching us here a deeper and more pervasive aspect of this *emunah*. And that is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is in control of *every detail of your life*. He is maneuvering the steering wheel of your own personal history in the direction that He wants. And He's not doing it with any randomness at all. He is purposefully placing you in various situations because each circumstance is its own separate test and its own separate opportunity for achievement.

EVERY STAGE OF LIFE IS ITS OWN GIFT

And that is the understanding of *לכל זמן* - there will be a time for everything in your life - all kinds of different opportunities for achieving the perfection that you came to this

world to acquire. לכל זמן ועת, for every kind of achievement of character, for every form of perfection of mind, *there is a time*. There is a perfection that can be achieved in one עת that can only be achieved in that circumstance, and a different form of perfection that can only be achieved in a different עת. Every עת, every situation, is *its own opportunity for greatness*.

You can't walk through life with a foggy *emunah*, a weak understanding of how Hashem is running the world. If it's all one big meaningless conglomeration of random events, one accident after another, then you're missing all the great opportunities of life.

We need to live our lives with *emunah*, seeing that every עת, every stage of life, is a part of the לכל זמן that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is gifting us. And living with this fundamental life attitude, means living with the power of *emunah* - understanding that *life is nothing but a succession of grand opportunities*.

HASHEM IS BROILING YOU LIKE A CHICKEN

All these changes in your life situations are being manipulated purposefully in order to test you and give you new opportunities constantly. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is manipulating everything so that you'll be faced with different circumstances - each עת being an opportunity for perfection that was not available to you in a different עת. What you can achieve in the עת ללדת is not the same perfection of mind and character available to you in the עת למות.

It's like a rotisserie - there's a chicken broiling and it's constantly turning round and round so that it should be broiled in every corner, well-done. And a man is being broiled all of his life so that he should become perfect in every aspect of his character. You'll be broiled as a child in a home, and then the rotisserie spins and now you're being broiled as a young man. You're being cooked in a place that wasn't cooked before. And then there's marriage, and children, dealing with a boss, a landlord. And the rotisserie spins and spins, and you're being cooked to perfection on all sides, in all different ways, until the עת למות - the time of

death which is also a great opportunity for perfection, a time for achievement that wasn't available to you in your life. We'll speak about that soon.

PARTNERSHIP WITH HASHEM

עת ללדת, when a child is born. You know what an opportunity that is?! The עת ללדת is a great opportunity to gain perfection that you won't be able to achieve anytime else. It's many opportunities! You have to marvel at the miracle of creation. How did this happen? This great *neis*, that this most complicated of all objects in the universe - the human being - comes forth perfected in his mind and body. And it's in millions of details.

Our first mother, Chavah did not lose the opportunity. When she saw her first child, she exclaimed, קניתי איש את השם - "I just created a man together with Hashem!" She utilized fully the opportunity to appreciate the magnitude of this miracle. You know how astonishing it is to see a perfectly shaped human emerge; a living child formed from the food that his parents ingested and which had passed through thousands of stages of metamorphosis until it had been transformed into a man possessing countless details necessary to maintain life. And this wonder-child was a perfect replica of his parents in every organ and body function and mental faculty. "I created a man together with Hashem," said Chava.

LETTING THE BRIS TAKE AWAY FROM THE SIMCHA

And if you don't marvel, if you just look at it as a commonplace thing, then you've lost the opportunity of perfection in עת ללדת. You know how many people, I'm talking about the *frummeh*, I'm not worried now about the others, you know how many miss this opportunity. They're overwhelmed by other things during the עת ללדת and they lose the great opportunity of לכל זמן.

Of course you're happy, you're excited, *Boruch Hashem*, you think about it for a fleeting moment. But that even the *goy* does. The עת ללדת is a time given to you by Hakodosh Boruch Hu as an opportunity for perfection that is impossible to achieve otherwise. And you'll be judged on how well you utilized the

“Two weeks before Pesach, his condition deteriorated and he became a lot weaker. Due to his advanced age, the doctors could only treat him with a blood transfusion, but they were confident he would regain his strength. However, Rabbi Miller only wanted outpatient treatment; he was unwilling to check into the hospital. He wanted to utilize every moment to the fullest and he could not do so while confined to a hospital bed. In addition, he felt that the best cure-all was sleep, and in the hospital he was not able to sleep properly.

His doctor gave him medication but said solemnly, “There is really nothing more we can do.” When Rabbi Miller heard that, he responded with a smile, “This is what I was preparing for my whole life.”

Rav Avigdor Miller: His Life and His Revolution p.541
Rabbi Yaakov Y. Hamburger
Judaica Press

opportunity. The feelings of gratitude and love of Hashem that can be generated at the birth of a child are unmatched at any other *עת* in your life. It's the great *avodah* of gratitude.

But if you're not aware of what Koheles is telling you here, that *לכל זמן*, and that the *עת ללדת* is one of them, then you'll miss out on a great opportunity. And you'll get entangled in the *טרדות* of the hospital and the other children; the *shalom zochor*, the *bris*, the *kiddush* and the *kibudim*, and the great opportunity of *עת ללדת* goes lost.

YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, SO MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF IT

And at the end of life comes the *עת למות* - “The time to die.” You have to utilize the time of death! The few moments that a person has left before he leaves this world, the last

day, the last hour, the last few minutes before one's life comes to an end are among the most precious moments in his entire existence.

Look, you have to die anyway sometime. So you might as well get something out of it. Left and right people are dying and they haven't learned this great lesson that this *eis* is another opportunity for its own form of greatness. People are missing this great opportunity of dying like a real Jew. They might be looking back with regret, they didn't accomplish what they could have in life. All those wasted opportunities. And at that exact moment they're wasting their final *opportunity*. What a pity!

This is your one opportunity to die. Shouldn't you die properly? In the last minutes of his life a man has to prepare himself to meet Hashem. He has to be full of regret for all the wrong things he did. He has to say it with his mouth; that's the mitzvah of the Torah. It's a *mitzvas asei min hatorah* to say *vidui*. If a man is *zoicheh* to have awareness before he dies he can repent. He can say *vidui*, and by regretting and confessing and coming back to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, so he has taken the power of free will which is still his - it's still his for a few more minutes, *only* for a few more minutes! - and he has utilized this rarest gem in all of creation, *bechira*, to change himself, to come back to Hashem. And he is forgiven! *Teshuva* together with death is one of the true forms of atonement. And if a man does *teshuva* in the last minute he's forgiven and he becomes a *ben olam habah!*

YOU'RE GOING TO SCARE HIM TO DEATH

And while we're on the subject people are afraid to tell those who are dying to say *vidui*. If you tell a sick man to say *vidui* he think you're sentencing him to death. It's a terrible pity. So you can't rely on others reminding you. And that's why while you're still young get it into your head say *vidui* without any postponement. If a man is sick you can't tell what's going to be. Once a man came to me and he mentioned by the way that he's going in the next day for a small operation. He said goodbye and I never saw him again. He died on the table. He thought it was a small operation.

You know how even the most simple of people can use the opportunity of death and become great in those last moments? You can die like Rabbi Akiva died. Here's your one opportunity to fulfill a great command that you've been speaking about your whole life. Every day you say it again and again: **ואהבת את השם** - "You should love Hashem with all your soul, with all your life." And the *gemara* says that it means **אפילו נוטל את נפשך** - even when he's taking away your life from you, even then you still love Him. You're thinking "He knows what He's doing. He knows what's good for me. He's the *rachum v'chanun* and I still love Him despite what He's doing to me now; despite the fact that

He's taking away my *neshama*." It's a "martyr's death." But instead of being burned or executed you're lying on your bed in the hospital.

But if you close your mind and you remain unaware that you're being given an opportunity, then another opportunity is lost, another opportunity goes down the drain. *עת למות*, there's a time to die. It's a wasted opportunity. People are lying in their beds suffering waiting for it to be over.

We have to be prepared at all times to succeed in that *eis* that Hashem placed us. So if you're on the operating table, you're thinking this is the *eis* that Hashem prepared for me now and I'm going to make it a success. So you say *vidui* and you say "I love you Hashem," so you fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem no matter what happens even if He does take your life away. That's how you fulfill *eis lamus*, the time to die.

"MY DEAD BODY CAN'T HARM YOU"

There are other ways of utilizing death. Rav Simcha Zissel, when he was dying, he was lying on his deathbed, so he asked that the people of the *chevra kadisha* should be called to him. And he told them, "Don't be afraid of me after I'm dead. A dead man is nothing; he can't do you any harm." Because some people are afraid to move a dead man, a *chashuva* person; it's uncomfortable. So before he died, when he was dying, he had them in mind, he was concerned about them. He called them in and he reassured them, "Don't be afraid of me. Once I'm dead I'm nothing." You're hearing now what a *ba'al mussar* is!

So *tzadikim*, people who want to succeed, utilize even the last moments of their lives. A wise man will utilize his *עת למות*, he will utilize the great opportunity of death. In the last minutes of his life, if he uses it properly, he can acquire such greatness that he couldn't achieve all of his life.

Now this is the teaching of that chapter in Koheles, that nothing in life is to be wasted. Because there is a lot between the *עת ללדת* and the *עת למות*. It's all the days of our lives! No event,

no time, is for naught; it's all given for a purpose. Life is full of opportunities. לכלל זמן ועת, one opportunity gives you things that the other opportunity won't give you.

YOU'LL NEVER HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY AGAIN

A person is being broiled well-done as a child, and as a brother. He's being tested with opportunities. How does he behave with his younger siblings? His older brother? Are you helping your siblings or merely thinking about yourself? Your relationship, your interactions with your brothers and sisters, when you're all together in one home is a great opportunity for perfection. How do you talk to your parents? It's not always easy dealing with parents. Do you hold your tongue? Do you humble yourself? It's a test, a perfection that comes from dealing properly with the family. Until a certain time and then it's all over. That opportunity goes lost; you get married and you leave the family.

And then begins the new test of being a wife or a husband. It's not easy being a spouse. And it's not supposed to be easy. Does a chicken spinning in the fire expect it to be easy? A husband and wife have to learn how to overlook idiosyncrasies of their spouse - that's a test that you'll never have again. You'll be "cooked" into learning how to keep your mouth shut. You know, it's one thing to keep your mouth closed when you're a child in the house. Your father might take off his belt and lean you over the chair. But to keep your mouth closed in your own house where "you're the *macher*"? That's the real test!

A PARENT'S PERFECTION

And then there's the *עת* of being a parent. A parent to little children and then to older children. A mother becomes great as she raises her children - there is no one in the world who becomes more of a giver than a mother in a house full of children? Are you making use of that opportunity for perfection? A father sits with his son reviewing the *gemara* and he thinks his son has a head of stone. Nothing goes in! You know what kind of perfection of patience the father is achieving right now. It's an *עת* of perfection that was never available to him before.

And there's the test of dealing with your wife's relatives; father-in-law, a mother-in-law. Then one day the test of being a mother-in-law or father-in-law. Now that's a test! Now you're really cooking!

FORTY SIX DOLLARS FOR RENT!

There's also the "*eis*" of being a tenant. You know I had a man once in my congregation who was a tenant, and he lived in a house where the rent was controlled. He paid forty-six dollars a month rent! Oil had gone up, electricity had gone up, everything had gone up, and he still paid only forty six dollars. The landlord begged him, nothing doing. Not only did he not pay more rent, but he used to go the rent control office and accuse his landlord. He would file complaints, "My landlord is not giving enough heat, enough services." And he used to boast to me that he was getting "even" with his landlord. Finally his landlord died, from *tzaros nebach*. He was a landlord of a little two family house, a man who struggled. I still remember, we were riding in a taxi and he told me about it, he told me his landlord died. He thought he had a big victory. So I was thinking, "You missed an opportunity; you're a failure. Why couldn't you have been successful with your landlord? You're making a good living." He was making a decent living this fellow. "Couldn't you have thrown in a few more dollars? You had to persecute him and take him to the rent control constantly. That's a victory?! It's a failure!" He missed out on the perfection he could have gotten from "*eis*" of being a tenant.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave you that landlord in order to give you the opportunity to bring forth what's in you. It's a tragedy to live with a landlord and to misuse him. You could have utilized him. Let's say he wasn't such a pleasant fellow. He was an angry man, let's say. I don't know if he was, but let's say he was an angry landlord. It's an opportunity. Who cares if your landlord is mean? Who cares if your neighbor is this or he's that! The question is, what are *you*? Are *you* succeeding? And that's our career in this world, that's our test. Are we using the great many and varied opportunities that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is sending to us.

RAV MILLER'S "MUTE" NEIGHBORS

You know I lived next door to people who had just installed screens on all their basement windows, expensive screens. And my grandchildren went out and they poked sticks into the screens and they made nice big holes in the screens. Now if their grandchildren had done it to my screens I doubt that I would have been so patient. But my neighbors didn't say one word! Not one word! We lived next door to them for thirty years and never did they complain, not about what my children did to them when they were little or what my grandchildren did. These people are successes. They achieved success in their *eis* of being neighbors.

Now am I saying that the right thing to do in all instances is to be quiet? Absolutely not. Sometimes the right thing to do is to speak up and say words - but you have to say the right words. Sometimes, if you don't have any words, or you don't know which words are the right words, then certainly no words are better.

GOING TO THE NEXT WORLD "WELL DONE"!

As long as you're in this world, you'll never stop spinning on the rotisserie. When it stops then you can't cook the chicken anymore; it's finished. You go into the Next World exactly the way you are on your last day. If you'll be half-cooked, that's it, you're only half cooked forever. If you didn't cook properly as a landlord, you're not fully cooked. If you didn't cook well as an employee - if you weren't loyal - so you missed a great opportunity of **לכל זמן**. If you didn't cook well as a tenant, you were always complaining, not paying the rent on time, so you didn't learn this lesson of Koheles. And when the rotisserie finally stops spinning, you'll regret all those opportunities that went lost.

Now suppose a man has a different attitude. When the situation changes to something not to his liking or not what he was expecting, he's dissatisfied, he complains. "This is not according to my honor." "I can't deal with such a person." "Such things I cannot do." "Such things I don't like to do." He's

uncomfortable, he's unhappy and he looks for excuses in every situation *not* to utilize the opportunity.

That person is the fool, because that's what a fool does, he finds faults in this world. He's dissatisfied with his lot in life, and at each stage he's complaining.

SAYING IT "LIKE IT IS"

Of course, he thinks he's smart - most fools do. He says, "I'm being realistic; I'm saying it 'like it is.'" But actually he's saying it *not* like it is, and therefore he misses the purpose of life.

And that's because he doesn't live with *emunah*. Instead of *emunah* he's living with complaining and dissatisfaction. And therefore he's not utilizing the great opportunities that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving him.

He thinks, "If I had a different set of parents, I would have been something. But with such parents, who can get along?!" That person is a failure. Because these parents were given to him so that he should become the very best son he could be *to them*. It's not that he should make the best of the situation - *this is the situation that was made for him!* And instead of utilizing his parents, he thinks, "If I had parents like this fellow over here..." That's what it means עיני כסיל בקצה הארץ - "The eyes of a fool are at the end of the earth." If only I was over there, in that place, in that family, in that yeshiva. That's the sure sign of a fool who's wasting his life away.

THAT'S HIS REAL BASHERT

Or when he's married: "Oh, if I had a different wife, then I could be something" Or, "If I had a different husband, then I'd be happy." "If I lived in a different city, a different country, if I had a different job, a different boss." A man who lives with such excuses will be a failure. Because he is not living with *emunah*, with the clear faith that Hakodosh Boruch Hu put him here, with this wife, or under this boss, for him to utilize *that* עת of his life for success.

Here's a man who told me, "If I would have only had a different kind of a wife, then I would have been successful." What

that really means is that he has no *emunah*. You know that Rav had a very difficult wife. The *gemara* (Yevamos 63a) says that Rav's wife, when he used to ask her to make something for supper, so she would purposely make something else. And the *gemara* tells that when one of his sons had to bring a message from his father to his mother, the first thing he did was he would turn the message upside down. That way, the mother when she heard it, she would turn it upside down again, and Rav would get the supper he asked for. So Rav told him, "Your mother has improved lately!"

Now when Rav was asked by his son for an example of a woman who is a blessing to her husband, he said, "Your mother." Because Rav understood that life is not given to us to complain, to be dejected, and to say "if only." Life - and all of its *עֲתִים*, all of its scenarios - is given to us to be utilized, *for our benefit*. And Rav became great *just because* he had such a wife. And the reason he was able to be successful with such a wife is because he understood that she was given to him just for that purpose.

Here's a woman who says, "If I had a different mother-in-law, or better yet, no mother-in-law at all. If only I would have married an orphan." But she doesn't realize that she was placed purposefully into this situation so that she should make out of herself the best daughter-in-law that she could be. And that's her success. And her mother-in-law is supposed to make from herself the very best mother-in-law. And that's the purpose of these relationships. They're sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu to afford us opportunities to make something out of ourselves.

YOUR EMPLOYER CHEATING YOU AGAIN AND AGAIN

Imagine a man who has an employer who constantly tries to cheat him out of his wages. He says, "You didn't work hard enough," or "I have to deduct for this hour that you came late," - even though you came on time. He says, "I didn't promise I would pay you so much money. I said we'll *discuss* it." And finally this man becomes disheartened, and he feels, "The less work I do for him the better off I am. I have to get even with him."

Now is there anyone who ever had an employer as discouraging as Lavan? Lavan wasn't such a pleasant fellow to work for. Yaakov said, ותחלף את משכורתִי עשרת מונים, "My boss manipulated my wages again and again." Lavan constantly cheated Yaakov Avinu; at every step.

YAAKOV GETS FROSTBITE

And how did Yaakov react? How did he react to this עת of his life, being an employee for a tough boss, a treacherous person? He reacted by being the most devoted that we ever heard that a worker was. He became a model of a loyal servant, a *shomer ne'eman*.

זה עשרים שנה - He served him for twenty years; and he served him loyally despite all the treachery and wickedness of Lavan. The Torah describes it: הייתי ביום אכלני חרב - "When I was attending your sheep on the scorching days, the heat consumed me." But Yaakov didn't leave the sheep, he didn't go to seek shelter in the trees. He remained with the flock. וקרח בלילה - "And at night the frost ate me up." But he didn't leave them. טריפה לא - "I didn't bring back to you any torn up animal. I paid from my own pocket." He didn't have to pay; a *shomer sachar* is *patur* from *onsin*. It wasn't his fault. So not only did he do his duty but he went out of his way to be loyal. And that to us is a model of a how a man succeeds in life.

Now how did Yaakov do it? You think it just came natural to him, that he was a *tzadik*, he was loyal, nothing bothered him? Absolutely not! It was an *avodah*, it was difficult. But Yaakov succeeded because he knew, he had pounded it into his head, that "Hakodosh Boruch Hu *put me here* because He wants me to make something out of *this* situation. If I have a father-in-law and an employer like Lavan, so it's for a purpose, so that I should make use of him." And he did! And that's because he understood that this עת was just another one of the many עיתים of his life that Hashem had designed specifically for him. It was there, in Padan Aram, away from home, living with a rough and tough father-in-

law, who happened to be his wicked boss as well, that's where he gained a perfection that he wouldn't have gained anywhere else.

HASHEM WAS ALWAYS "WITH YOSEF"

Now it this lesson in Koheles that we studied tonight that opens the door to understanding the success of Yosef Hatzadik. You know that more than once the Torah says about Yosef that **השם אתו**, that Hashem was with him. Now that doesn't just mean that whatever he was going through he felt that Hashem was with him. It's true, but actually it means much more than that. **השם אתו** means that Hakodosh Boruch Hu was right there *putting him into these situations*.

And Yosef was fully aware of this at all times. Every situation he found himself in, he knew it was **השם אתו**, it was Hashem standing with him, placing him into that specific circumstance as an opportunity for perfection.

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS IN LIFE

Now remember what I'm telling you now because this is our lesson for tonight: Yosef didn't use any alibis, he didn't look for any excuses to say, this is not the situation that I could become great in. That's the main point here, that's the important point. Because of his *emunah* in Hashem, he knew that there were no accidents. For Yosef Hatzadik there was never a question of "Why did this happen? And why this? And why not that? Why am I being placed in *these* circumstances?" Yosef never lost sight of this great truth that there are no accidents in life. And instead of being downcast and embittered in the most difficult moments, and instead of losing his head at the heights of his success, he was aware that Hakodosh Boruch Hu was putting him through tests; and he therefore rose to the occasion. Because the man who knows that **לכל זמן ועת** and that **השם אתו**, understands that every situation in life is a test, and an opportunity for greatness.

NOT LETTING HIS KAPOTEH "GET TO HIS HEAD"

Even in the midst of "hopelessness" and "despair" Yosef never lost his equilibrium at all because he knew that Hashem

was with him, purposefully placing him into each situation. When he was his father's darling son, the little brother, that was the opportunity for a certain perfection of character. To navigate the love of a father and the jealousy of older brothers, to not let the glory of his *kapoteh* of many colors "get to his head," was a remarkable *avodah*; it was a perfection of character the would never come again. And when he was sold off into slavery by his brothers, it was a different opportunity.

When the wife of Potiphar cast her eyes upon him, Yosef could have thought that he was ruined anyhow, his life was worthless, he might as well be like all the other slave boys. He could have fallen into the low ways of slave boys. עבדא בהפקירא - no responsibilities, no *achrayus*. But he didn't think that way. How could he? It was השם אתו! And when the test came - and it was a terrible test! ויהי כדברה אל יוסף יום יום - she spoke to him every day. Every day! The *gemara* says that the בגדים שלבשה לו - she changed her clothing twice a day in order to entice him. And she promised him "the world," big monetary reward. And she also threatened him when that didn't work. You could kill a slave in those days; you could torture a slave to death. And she threatened to do that. It was no empty threat. Just because the *baal korei* reads through these *pesukim* in a few seconds doesn't mean that it was easy for Yosef. It was terrible.

And yet Yosef utilized this occasion, this *eis*, and from this terrible test he created a tremendous episode, one of the heroic episodes in history. He made a precedent for generations.

SQUEEZING OUT PERFECTION IN PRISON

When he was cast into prison, into that hole, that was a another test. Instead of becoming depressed and embittered by the undreamed of catastrophe, being left to die in prison, Yosef reacted with exemplary uprightness of character. He made sure to squeeze out as much perfection as he could from this *eis* as well.

And when he became the *moshel* over all of Mitzrayim, that was also Hashem placing him there for a new עת in his life. In

every situation Yosef knew that he was being put to the test for achieving what couldn't be achieved before or after - a perfection of character and behavior that could only come now. Nothing at all was an accident; it was all planned exactly this way. And because he understood the big principle of **לכל זמן ועת** that's how Yosef remained always Yosef Hatzadik.

A man who recognizes that whatever circumstance he is confronted with in life is being purposefully sent to him as an opportunity, he's the one who pulls the bull by the horns and makes the best of it of every **עת** in his life. That's how all of our great people made their lives, lives that were filled with a variety of **עיתים**, into careers of success. They always kept at the forefront of their minds the fundamental concept of *emunah* that Hashem is in full control. And included in His control is that every stage in one's life, is a fulfillment of the lesson of **לכל זמן**.

YOSEF WAS A MODEL

And that's why the story of Yosef is written in Torah; so that we can have before us the model of a boy, a son, a brother, a slave, a prisoner, and a ruler, whose power of *emunah* provided him with all the succor he needed to face every stage of his life and to make the best out of every situation. And the best out of every situation means making yourself the best you possibly could. And that's why Yosef succeeded in everything he did.

And we need that model of Yosef, absolutely. Because today you hear all the time people complaining. If only this, if only that. But not Yosef; he knew that it was *davka* this and *davka* that, those were the **עיתים** that were going to be his success in life.

And if we learn this great lesson of *emunah*, the fundamental principle that Hashem is placing you within each experience for the purpose of seeing how you react, how you utilize it, then that will be the foundation of your success in life.

THE SECRET TO BALANCING

The man who lives with this *emunah* won't be taken by surprise. Because he knows that life is meant to be that way, it's

meant to be a variety of experiences. And so, if you have *emunah* you won't be thrown off balance, you won't be knocked off your equilibrium. And instead of being buffeted by the experiences, you'll make the best use of it and you'll gain the greatest success in life. But if you don't have this *emunah* then you're constantly being buffeted and disappointed, surprised and thrown off balance.

And that's why it's so urgent for you to use all the opportunities that come your way; because they are not *coming* your way, they are being *sent* your way. And you have to constantly be reminding yourself that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is manipulating your עיתים in order to make you great.

CHAZARAS HASHIUR DURING BIRCHAS HASHACHAR

And what better time to remind yourself of this great principle than every morning during *birchas hashachar*. You say the *bracha* המכין מצעדי גבר, "Hashem, You are guiding all the steps of my day." And you're thinking, "Hashem, You're the One who is placing me in every situation I find myself in. It's all You guiding my life."

A person must utilize the various עיתים that Hashem is providing him with as tests, by recognizing that that's what it is, a test. Every situation in life is being sent *min hashamayim* as an opportunity. And actually the opportunities are endless because the עיתים in your life are endless. At the same time that you're being tested as a son, you're also being tested as a brother. And you're being tested as well as a *talmid* and as a *chaveir*. And each עת is another opportunity for greatness.

You will be tested as a wife at the same time you're being tested as a mother, as a daughter-in-law and as a neighbor. And I'm only saying the *roshei perakim*, because everyone in his or her own life will find endless opportunities for success. And the most successful person is the one who is wise enough to utilize to the fullest the years, and the months, and the weeks, and the days of his life. That man is the wisest man of all, because he understands that eventually his life of עיתים, his life of opportunities, will come

to an end. And it is the man who used לכל זמן, the one utilized every opportunity in this world to grow greater, that is the man who succeeded in his purpose in life.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Tz"

Q:

Why is it that we find Matisyahu and other tzadikim in the older generations carried swords and today a Rosh Yeshiva would never think about owning a weapon?

A:

The truth is that not only *roshei yeshiva*, but even bums shouldn't carry weapons today. Because it's not necessary. Unless you're going to go at night through Bedford Stuyvesant, or take a walk through Harlem; but then a sword wouldn't help you anyway. You'd have to have a shotgun. Or an armored car. Because they also have shotguns, so what will your shotgun help you?

Besides, Matisyahu wasn't in the habit of carrying a sword. Only that he knew what was going to happen that day, so he put a sword under his cloak. But in general it doesn't pay to carry weapons today at all. If you're a man of peace and you're not armed, you're more likely to survive. Once you pull a knife, then you cannot tell what the other party will do. He'll get desperate and who knows what he'll do!

That's also why I don't approve of learning karate for self-defense purposes. What good is it you know the ways and means of tackling an opponent, if the opponent will be standing behind a door ready to jump you as you pass by? And these bums won't play by the rules of karate. They hurl knives. Some of them have learned how to hurl knives from a distance. And the knife reaches the victim with the point first. They hurl knives and they shoot guns. So what is it going to help if you learn karate? Karate won't help against the bullet.

So the best karate is to stay home. Don't go out at night. And if you're stuck and you're confronted by bums, the best self-defense is to just keep quiet and empty out your pockets and give them everything. That's the best karate.

I always say over the Chinese proverb, "The biggest hero is the one who survives. The one who runs away, that's the hero."
TAPE # 391 (December 1981)

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