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SEFER VAYIKRA - THE PENSON FAMILY EDITION

FOR THE REFUAH SHLEIMA OF RIVKA BAS SHOSHANA

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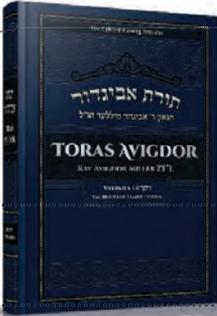


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פרשת ויקרא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Coming Close to Hashem

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Part I. Close to Him

Towards the Mizbeach

We begin with a *possuk* in our *sedrah*, וְהִקְרִיבוּ בְנֵי אֱהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת הַדָּם, עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב וְזָרְקוּ אֶת הַדָּם – and the kohanim should bring the blood to the mizbeach and sprinkle it on its corners (Vayikra 1:5). It means that as they would shecht the *korban*, a *kohen* would catch the blood and then the blood was sprinkled on the *mizbeach*.

But before the sprinkling of the blood on the *mizbeach* there was another *avodah* that had to be performed “and the kohanim should bring the blood”. In the *gemara* this is called “*holacha*, walking”; it means that there was a special procedure of walking towards the *mizbeach* in order to sprinkle the blood.

And this *avodah* of *holachas hadam* was essential – in most cases if it wasn't done the entire *korban* would be rendered *possul* and

unacceptable. Even if they would make an assembly line – a line of *kohanim* would stand from the place where the blood was caught all the way till the *mizbeach*, and they would hand it one to the other until the last *kohen* near the *mizbeach* would sprinkle the blood, it wouldn't be a kosher *korban*. It would be *possul* because it omitted *holacha* – it lacks the procedure of walking towards the altar *and the essential lesson that holacha is coming to teach us.*

What's The Lesson?

And what is that lesson? The Torah here wants to emphasize to us the procedure for coming close to Hashem. Because what is a *korban* after all? It's a declaration of a person's desire – *lehiskarev* – to come close to his Creator and to gain His favor. And therefore when the Torah tells us that *holacha* is essential, it's teaching us that if you want to come close to Hashem, if you want to achieve *kirvas Elokim*, then *holacha*, physical movement is indispensable.

Now, we understand of course that included in *kirvas Elokim* is the great career of the mind – thinking as much as possible about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Absolutely, we're expected to be close to Hashem intellectually. If you're learning Torah, you're utilizing your mind to come close to Him. When you're thinking *inyanei emunah*, that's *kirvas Elokim*. If you're trying to do everything *l'shem Shamayim*, absolutely you're bringing yourself very close to Hashem. So there's no question that we all have to make a career of achieving all the great emotions of *yiras Hashem*, *ahavas Hashem*, *bitachon* and everything else. Perfection of the mind is certainly a *kirvas Elokim* that is expected of us.

But people make a serious error when they imagine that *kirvas Elokim* refers *only* to thinking about Hashem. The *avodah* of *holacha*, of walking towards the *mizbeach*, is intended to teach us, among other things, the great lesson: that in order to achieve *kirvas Elokim* you must come close to Him *physically* – you have to bring your body close to Hashem. Get busy walking towards Him! *Bo'u l'fanav* – *Come before Him!* That's what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants from you. He wants you to come close; to walk towards Him with your feet.

Going to Yerushalayim for Pesach

That's why when there was a *Beis Hamikdash* it was a *mitzvah* to be *oleh regel* three times a year. **שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה** – *Three times a year, יְרֵאָה*

כל זכורה את פני השם אלקיך – you should show yourself before Hashem your G-d. In ancient times nobody traveled on airplanes to hotels for Pesach! No, they all walked to Yesushalayim! Oh, you're walking up towards Hashem; now that's something! You're not just sitting in your house and thinking about Hashem – you're coming to Him. It's a tremendous thing! You're walking to His house; you're using your feet to come close to Him.

שאנו מנחה ובאו לפניך – Raise up a gift, a *korban*, and come before Hashem (*Divrei Hayomim I*, 16:29). Don't just send a *korban* – you know, you could do that too; you might want to appoint a *shaliach* to bring a *korban* for you. After all, why should you make such a long trip to bring a *korban*? You might think that there are better ways to spend your time in His service. "I'll sit in my house all day long and I'll meditate about the *chasdei Hashem*."

But Hashem says, "No, that's not enough. *Uvo'u l'fanav* – Bring your bodies to Me." And so, three times a year everybody left his homestead, his farm, and started walking. The whole nation packed their bags and put on their walking shoes and now there were great crowds of people traveling on the roads. It was an inspiring sight to see the *Am Yisroel* marching up to Hashem! And as they passed different villages more and more people came to join them. And they were all singing – they were walking and singing *shir hamaalos*. It was a *holacha* to the *mizbeach* of the greatest magnitude! And when they finally arrived in Yerushalayim, they all sang together: עמדות היו רגלינו בשערך – "We're here! We made it! We walked miles to see You and now we're standing in Yerushalayim" (*Tehillim 122:2*).

Admiring Their Feet

Now, how does Hakodosh Boruch Hu look at that? So the *gemara* (*Chagiga 3a*) tells us what He's thinking. About the *Am Yisroel* He says the following words in *Shir Hashirim* (7:2): מדה יפיו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב – How beautiful are your feet clothed in shoes. Hashem is praising our shoes? You have to understand that in those days not everybody wore shoes; but when you had to take a long journey, you made sure to put on shoes.

And so when the *Am Yisroel* made their trek to the *Beis Hamikdash*, Hashem looked at their feet and He said, "Kamah na'in ragleihen shel yisroel – How beautiful are My people who put on shoes and walk

towards Me.” The Am Yisroel is walking on the roads and Hakodosh Boruch Hu is admiring their feet. Now, He admires their minds too. If while you’re walking you’re thinking about Hashem, very good; Hashem loves you for that. But the mere fact that your feet are moving towards Him, that’s already beautiful in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. To walk to Yerushalayim, the *ir Hashem*, and to climb the mountain to the top of *Har Habayis* where the House of Hashem is, that’s already a very big achievement.

The Avodah Today

Now, we don’t have exactly that today – we look forward to that great day when we’ll be privileged once again to visit Hashem in His home in Yerushalayim but Dovid HaMelech gives us an example of that form of bringing yourself close to Hashem that we try to make use of even today. He said (Tehillim 27:4), **אֶחָדָה שְׁאֶלְתִּי מֵאֵת הַשֵּׁם** – *There’s only one thing I ask from You Hashem. One thing!* You hear that? A man has so many things he has to ask of Hashem – so many things that you want and you need. But Dovid says, there’s one thing that’s most important to me and **אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֶשׁ** – *that what I’m busy seeking always.* And what is that? **יָשִׁיבְתִי בְּבַיִת הַשֵּׁם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי** – *I should sit in the house of Hashem all the days of my life.*

Here’s a man who is a busy personality. Let’s say he’s a famous surgeon or maybe a great industrialist. He’s a successful man who spends a lot of time in his office. So now, when he comes home in the evening he deserves a good rest. He wants to sit on the couch with his legs up on a chair – why not; he had a long day. But he reminds himself of the words of Dovid Hamelech and he picks up his weary body and goes straight to the house he loves most; to the house of his Best Friend to sit there as long as he can.

And his wife understands that; she says, “When you go there, take me along with you. I can’t go in body but I’m there in spirit.” Sometimes she has to urge him too; she says, “Hurry up, you might miss *maariv*.” And so he takes the hint and gains an alacrity and she has a 100% share. She goes together with him even though she’s busy at home.

Now, the truth is we can’t do it always – we have to make a living. Even if you don’t go to work; let’s say you’re sitting in the shul all day long, but sometimes the *shamash* says, “Sorry, Sir. We have to lock up; you have to leave.” But that has to be an ambition. “If only I could sit in

the *Beis Hashem* all the days of my life.” To be close to Hashem physically, that’s what Dovid desired. That’s why he said, “Of all the things I desire, the one I really want is *shivti b’veis Hashem* – I wish I could sit in the house of Hashem, *kol yemei chayay* – all the days of my life.”

Just To Sit

So you might think it means to go into the *shul* or the *beis medrash* and to open up the *gemara* or the *tehillim* and to get to work. That’s what the *shul* is for after all. No; Dovid didn’t say that; He said, “The one thing I want is *shivti!* I want to sit in the house of Hashem.” Of course, once you’re sitting you might as well accomplish something too; but even if you don’t, just walking up the steps, bringing your body into the *shul* and sitting, that alone is an accomplishment.

I’ll prove it to you. Let’s say right after the *tefillah* you realize you forgot your coat in the *shul*. You’re in a hurry; you have to catch the train so you want to rush back in to get your coat. Oh no! You can’t do that! You’ll walk into the house of Hashem just for your own purpose?! You have no business coming in here just for your coat. So the *gemara* gives you an *eitzah* – it tells you that when you walk into the *shul*, the first thing is you have to sit down. Sit down for a minute in the *mikdash me’at*. It’s a *halacha* – you have to sit down for a little bit and then you can take your coat. And the Rambam (Tefillah 11:9) explains “Sitting down in the *beis haknesses* is a *mitzvah* on its own, as the *posuk* states *ashrei yoshvei beisecha*, ‘How fortunate are those who sit in your house.’”

Take the Opportunity

Now, if we hadn’t learned this *halacha*, it could be we would have thought that *ashrei yoshvei beisecha* means you’re sitting and learning Torah; or maybe you’re *oisek b’tefillah*. No – *yoshvei!* Just put your body down on the chair for a moment, that’s *shivti b’veis Hashem*. Imagine a man comes to the *beis haknesses* and he does nothing – he just sits down there. Not because he wants to find some refuge from the hot sun or because it’s too cold outside – no, that you’re forbidden to do; it’s *ossur* to utilize the *beis haknesses* for a material purpose. But if you’re going in to sit down, that’s wonderful!

Yes; just for the *mitzvah* of sitting, it pays to come in the *beis haknesses*. Isn’t that a good idea? You pass by a *beis haknesses* or a *yeshiva* and you don’t need it; you weren’t planning on going inside. But

you walk in and sit down just for the *mitzvah* of sitting there. It's a good idea to try it some time. Let's say you're riding in the car and you're passing a *beis haknesses* or a *yeshiva*. It's an opportunity to practice up walking closer to Hashem. Stop, walk in, sit down for a minute and think, "I'm doing this for a purpose." And what's the purpose? The purpose is to physically come close to Hashem.

Of course, you want your mind to also become close, but that's not so easy. But that your body should come close is much more simple to accomplish, so you should grab the opportunity. Sit there for a minute and think about that – "I'm sitting here now in the *beis haknesses* because I'm doing what I can to be physically close to Hashem."

A Great Happiness

בָּאוּ שְׂעָרָיו בְּתוֹרָה – *Come into His gates with thanksgiving.* You think you're doing a favor to Hashem: "Look what a good fellow I am. I'm a loyal Jew coming in to pray – and I even got here before *borchu*." No; you're coming in for yourself! It's a great happiness to be close to Hashem! It makes life worth living.

You should say, "Boruch Hashem, I was *zocheh* to walk in!" Wouldn't that be a silly thing to say? So let's all be silly now and say it together – "We're happy that we are using our feet to walk closer to Hashem".

We're learning now that walking into the House of Hashem and sitting there, that's already a fulfillment of the great ideal of *kirvas Elokim* – because as close as you can get to the *Shechina* with your body, that's already a perfection of the *neshama*.

Part II. Close to Them

Shmuel and Shaul

And that's why among the many opportunities to come close to Hashem physically is the *mitzvah* to cling to *talmidei chachomim*. I'll explain that. You remember when Shaul HaMelech returned from his victorious battle against the Amaleki in the days of Shmuel HaNavi, so Shmuel HaNavi chided him, he rebuked him (Shmuel I, 15:14): "וַיִּמְדָּה קוֹלִי הַצֹּאן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנִי – *What's this sound of sheep that I hear in my ears.*" It means, "You brought back sheep from Amalek? Instead of destroying all of their livestock, you brought back the sheep alive?!" So Shaul excused

himself. He said, “I did it only לְמַעַן זָבַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – “I brought it back in order to be makriv them as korbanos to Hashem, your G-d.”

So the Kuzari (4:3) asks a *kasheh*. He says, “Why does it say your Hashem? Isn’t it Shaul’s Hashem too? Shaul was a frum Jew! He was a *tzaddik gamur* – no question about it. Shaul was a *ben Torah* and an *anav*; a very big *tzadik*. I’m not just saying this on my own – Chazal say all these things about Shaul HaMelech. So what does it mean, “Hashem Elokecha, your G-d”? He should have said, לְמַעַן זָבַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – We want to bring them to Hashem our G-d. Why Hashem Elokecha?

The same *kasheh* we ask when the Yisroel brings the *bikurim* to the *kohen* and expresses his gratitude to Hashem who gave him these fruits. He says: הַגִּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ – “I’m making a declaration to Hashem Elokecha, to Hashem, your G-d.” Is it only the *kohein*’s G-d? Why not Hashem Elokai? The one who brings the *bikkurim* is a Yisroel – he’s a *frum* Jew and it’s his G-d too! That’s a big question.

Closer To The Shechina

And so the Kuzari explains, certainly it’s everybody’s Hashem, but Hakodosh Boruch Hu chooses to rest His Presence on those people who are closest to Him. The *navi* is a man of greater perfection because of his achievements in *nevuah*. And so, when Shaul spoke to Shmuel HaNavi he said, “your G-d,” because he was saying, “Hashem is resting His presence on you more than me! You have an excellence, a *shleimus* of character, and that makes the *Shechina* rest on you even more than upon me.”

So you’ll say, “The *Shechina*? That’s only a *mashal*. The *Shechina* actually rests on him?!” And we say yes! Yes! We’re learning now that the *Shechina* actually rests on the *chachmei haTorah* – it rests on the *kohanim* and on the *nevi'im*. And that’s why when you bring yourself close to *talmidei chachamim*, to those upon whom the *Shechina* rests most intensely, so in a sense it’s considered like you’re bringing yourself close to Hashem. And so we’re learning now that not only walking to the *Beis Hamikdash* or sitting in the *mikdash me’at* is *kirvas Elokim*, but to be as close as possible to *living torah scholars*, that’s another opportunity to be physically close to Hashem.

That’s why the Rambam (Deios 6:3) says that we should all strive as much as possible to be close to the *chachomim b’chol minei chibur*, in

all forms of closeness. To walk with them, to eat together with them, to do business with them. As much as possible, in whatever way you can imagine, to be *physically* close to them, and to thereby be close to Hashem.

Introducing the Prophet

And that's why we have a principle called *shimusha shel torah* – to be *meshameish*, to serve *talmidei chachamim*. That's why, when the *sefer Melachim* (II 3:11) wants to introduce Elisha HaNavi and tell us who he is, what his *yichus* is, so it says, “**פֹּה אֵלִישָׁע בֶּן שָׁפָט**” – Here is Elisha HaNavi, **אֲשֶׁר יָצַק מַיִם עַל יְרֵי אֱלִיָּהוּ** – *who used to pour water on Eliyahu's hands.*” Now, some say it's only a *mashal* – they go off into fanciful explanations; they want to say that *shimush* means learning more deeply – that it means he was a *talmid* of Eliyahu and that he learnt intensely with Eliyahu, but that's not the truth. The *gemara* (Berachos 7b) explains: “*Lamad lo ne'emar* – It doesn't say he learned from him, *ella yatzak*, it says only that he poured water over his hands.” It means that he was present when Eliyahu had to wash his hands, so Elisha took the can of water and poured it on his *rebbe's* hands. And that's the introduction to Elisha – that he washed his *rebbe's* hands.

Now, that's a stunning statement – it's almost not understandable at all. It could have said, “Here is Elisha who learned from Eliyahu Hanavi the methods of achieving *nevuah*.” Eliyahu was the one who trained Elisha to be a *Navi*. Eliyahu had a school of *bnei hanevi'im* and he brought up Elisha in the *darkei hanevuah* – he taught him everything. But no, that's not mentioned at all. All the secrets of the Torah, all the *darkei Hashem*, everything else that was taught in that great academy of *nevuah*, nothing is mentioned of that. The only thing that deserves mention is that Elisha poured water on the hands of Eliyahu HaNavi!

So the *gemara* tells us that we see from here that, “*Gedolah shimusha shel Torah yoser m'limudah* – Serving the one who teaches Torah is even greater than learning Torah from him.” And why is that? Because washing hands is a physical closeness! The physical closeness to Eliyahu, to a man upon whom the *Shechina* rested in greatest proportion, was such a great merit that it's like being close to Hashem *even more than the closeness by learning the Torah* – in a certain sense it's even more important than learning.

Associate With the Greats

And that means we should never disdain the opportunity to be physically close to the *gedolei Yisroel* and to the *talmidei chachomim* of our generation; to associate with them as much as possible. Many benefits can be gained if a person makes it a career of his to be *meshameish talmidei chachamim* and it should be considered a very great privilege because it's a form of achieving physical closeness to Hashem.

Of course, it could be these *talmidei chachomim* are busy; could be that when you seek their company they'll push you away. But that's your job anyhow, to do whatever you can to bring yourself close. You shouldn't worry about becoming an encumbrance; let them tell you, "Get away from here." Meanwhile you try your best to get close to them.

Argue With the Rebbe

Let's say the *Satmerer Rav*; he's a very fine man by the way. I know him personally – a very fine man. But he's a busy man; he's learning all the time, and people come to him all the time with *sha'alos* too. But suppose you go to him and you say, "I heard Rabbi Miller speak so I want to get close to you."

But he says, "I don't have much time."

So you'll say, "Can I at least carry your *tallis* to your *beis hamedrash* for you?"

So the *Satmerer Rav* says, "I don't need it. I carry it myself."

So you beg him, "Please *rebbe*, do me a favor. Let me carry your *tallis*." He's not going to spend time arguing with you in the street, so he relents. So you're walking behind him carrying his *tallis* – you're not talking to him; you're just walking close to him. You have to know that you're accomplishing a great achievement for yourself. I'm not a *chossid*, but I'm telling you – if you'll get that privilege to carry his *tallis*, so you're now becoming closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu; no question about it.

Grab the Opportunities

Now, I picked just one person. But it applies to all of the *roshei yeshivah*; get close to them. They don't have time to talk to you, but if you become useful to them in some way, you're *meshamesh talmidei chachamim*, hang around, after a while, maybe you'll be *zocheh*. And

boruch Hashem we have them today too here and there – not as many as we had twenty years ago, not as many as forty years ago, but still we do have them. Only that most people don't understand how important it is to get physically close to them.

Even when we had really great men, only a few people came to them. When Rav Aharon Kotler, *zichrono livracha*, was alive, how many Jews, *baalei batim* or even *bnei Torah* came to see him personally? He was a busy man – no question – but why didn't you come to see him? Just to walk to his house or to his *beis medrash* – even if you wouldn't speak to him – just the walking meant that you were walking towards the *mizbeach*.

And to speak a few words with him, even better. To ask him for advice, a *derech* in life. So you'll say, "A *derech* in life? I know what to do myself." That's a tragedy because you don't. A few words from a great man would have set you straight. It's a lost opportunity – when Rav Aharon passed away, the generation lost that opportunity forever.

The Basement in Monsey

When Rav Moshe Feinstein was alive, it was a pleasure to talk to him. When Rav Yankev Kaminetzky was still alive, he was a *baal yoeitz*. You could talk to him. He would give advice. How many people bothered to come? Rav Yankev Kaminetzky used to say a *shiur* on chumash in Monsey. He had a little basement where he said his *chumash* shiur. Rav Yankev Kaminetzky talking on *chumash*!! Who shouldn't come?! It should be packed! It wasn't packed. There was plenty of room left over. People don't utilize the opportunities to come physically close to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and then the opportunities go lost forever.

And even in our generation if you'll find *tzaddikim* – it's not so easy, but there are *tzaddikim* in this day too – and you get close to them, you must realize that the merit of coming close to the *Shechina* is being achieved and it's one of the big successes in life. Coming to the great men is a rare opportunity and it's a tragedy how an opportunity for such intense closeness to Hakodosh Boruch Hu is under appreciated. Physical proximity to the *chachamim* is in itself a very big achievement because it's considered getting closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Part III. Close Together

The Ultimate Chol Hamoed Trip

That's why it says, *Chayav adam lehakbil pnei rabo b'regel* – It's a *chiyuv* to visit your *rebbe* on Yom Tov. Why on Yom Tov? The answer is you should visit him all the time, but during the year you're busy working. On Yom Tov, you're off from work. So if you're not working, what should you be doing? Go to the amusement parks? Visit the zoo? You can do that too, but that's not what Yom Tov is for. Those days off are intended to be an opportunity to bring yourself close to Hashem!

And therefore, on Yom Tov a man must go and visit his *rebbe*. What's the purpose? Well, certainly you might hear good things from him too, but even if you don't, even if you come and you fall asleep at his table, but if you went to your *rebbe* on Yom Tov, you already came close to the one who has the Shechina resting on him, to the one about whom you can say "*Hashem Elokecha* – it's your Hashem".

Life Near the Yeshiva

There are more opportunities too. You should know; around here, around Mirrer Yeshiva, you see *tzitzis* being worn out, hanging down. The further away you go, closer to Nostrand Avenue, you see *tzitzis* become more and more invisible. When you pass Nostrand Avenue, all the *tzitzis* are already in the pants. The environment is all important.

What a wonderful thing it is when people who learned in Mesivta Chaim Berlin live near Chaim Berlin and the block behind it, all around it. They were brought up in Chaim Berlin. It was the place where they developed. That's loyalty. That's a *kirvas Hashem*. And all their homes are Chaim Berlin homes. Torah Vodaas too – many families live around Torah Vodaas because they learned there. Mirrer Yeshiva – many people live around Mirrer Yeshiva who once learned there. Some continue to go there all the time. It's a tremendous experience! *Dveikus* – to cling to your *rebbe*. *The yeshiva is his rebbe!*

Choose Your Neighborhood

To be *daveik b'Hashem* means to come together wherever is a place that's favored by Hashem's presence. It's a *chiyuv* to be in such places. I'll give you a *mashal*. Here's a man in Scarsdale who wants to come close to Hashem; let's imagine such a person and he's hearing

now these words that to come close to Hashem means to physically come close, to walk closer to the *mizbeach*. So he should think, “What’s the best place to cling to Hashem – Scarsdale or Williamsburg? Williamsburg is much better; no question about it.”

And therefore, what should this Scarsdale man do? He should move into a *frum* neighborhood. It pays even to change your livelihood, your *parnassah* if necessary. That’s *pshuto shel mikra* of the *mitzvah* of *dveikus*. וְבוֹ תִדְבֶק means you should cling to Hashem physically. To be *mekayem* that *mitzvah*, no question that Williamsburg is a much better place. Of course, not always is it feasible. But if possible, everything should be done to be in a good environment.

Where do you live? Why do you have to live so far out? Why can’t you live close to *frum* Jews where there is a concentration of *shomrei Torah*? Your wife, your children and you yourself will gain immeasurably when you bring them close to Hashem.

Seeing the Shechina

How important it would be for people to bring themselves close to the *Shechina* by moving into *frum* Jewish neighborhoods. On all sides you see Jews who are practicing Judaism and they do it openly. You see men with big families going to *shul* on Shabbos morning. You see women pushing baby carriages – there are two babies in the carriage and four more holding onto the sides of the carriage as they walk in the street; when you see that, it’s like seeing the *shechina*! People are raising families; all *frum*, all with *yarmulkes*, all with *tzitzis* hanging out. A neighborhood like that is worth any money in the world because you’re close to the *Shechina*.

As you walk in the streets of Boro Park, you should say, “*Boruch Hashem*, all the *frum* Jews are together – blocks and blocks and blocks! Big *mezuzahs*! Big families! Boys walk out of the house all in big *payos*! It’s a pleasure to see *frum* families! Williamsburg, even better! You drive through Williamsburg – everybody is *frum*! All the people there dress like Jews, *boruch Hashem*! That’s a place to be! That’s where the *Shechina* is! And that’s called *kirvas Elokim* – to be close to Hashem physically! Just to be there, to walk in Williamsburg, is a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to come close! And so, as much as possible, every Jew should try to find a home among the *frummeh*.”

Rav Miller's Kol Korei

If it was possible, I would say that we should issue a *kol korei* from some headquarters – let's say Agudas HaRabbanim or some other rabbinical headquarters – a public proclamation for all Jews to move back to Brooklyn. “Come back to the *frum* neighborhoods of Boro Park and Flatbush” – I would say Monsey also. There are other fine places too. Whatever it is, move to the places where *frum* Jews are concentrated and make sure that your children don't move out to other places.

In the course of time everybody will have children and children's children. They'd buy houses and all the others living here would have to move out. Because why should they live in houses that cost \$400,000 dollars in Brooklyn – that's what the Jews are offering – when they could live much more cheaply in Maspeth? Let them move out; but the Jews? The Jews should all move back – closer to Hashem.

And it's not only a recommendation, a *middas chasidus*; it's a lifeline to people who are drowning. We have to save their *neshamas*. They don't realize they're being ruined because the influence of the gentile environment is insidious. It's stealthy – it sneaks in gradually under the closed doorways. It comes in through the windows and people's characters change.

Location, Location, Location

But not only that. Even among the *frumme*, it's important not only to assess a home by the fact that it doesn't cost very much, that it's a bargain. Who lives next door to you? It's very important to live next door to *talmidei chachamim*, next door to *tzaddikim* – not to an *am ha'aretz*. An *am ha'aretz* is not a person to associate with. An *am ha'aretz*, even though he's a *chossid*, don't live near him (Shabbos 73a). It's not healthy to associate with him – he's a danger.

A *talmid chochom* on the other hand, even though he's a mean fellow, even though he's *nokeim v'noteir k'nachash* – even if he bites like a snake, so the *gemara* says: *gird that snake around your waist as a belt*. He's a snake? Wrap him around yourself. It means be as close as possible to him because that's the surest way to come close to Hashem.

And therefore, even when you sit in the *yeshiva*, choose a seat near the better ones. In the *beis knesses* too. With whom do you sit in the *beis haknesses*? Who sits next to you? People have been changed by associating, even in the *beis haknesses*, with the wrong people. I know

that from experience. I've watched people deteriorate. I saw a man who came into our shul – he was a *ba'al teshuva*, an idealist. But he sat next to a *leitz* – a *ba'al loshon hara* who was constantly ridiculing people; speaking against the *rov*, making fun of the *gabbaim* and the president. He was a *patpaton* – he would sit and tell you all the slanders against the people in the *shul*. After a while, this idealist became disgusted and he stopped coming.

Be On Guard

And so we understand that you always have to be on guard. Watch out with whom you're sitting, with whom you're associating because *kirvas chachomim* is *kirvas Elokim*. That's why when the *chachomim* were asked (Avos 2:9): *Eizehu derech tovah sheyidbak bo ha'adam* – What's the right way that a person should choose to cling to? So one of them said, *Shachein tov* – “A good neighbor.” Who do you associate with? With your cousins? Sometimes the worst company are your cousins. Who are your friends? Your neighbors? *Le'olam yidbak adam betovim* – A man should do whatever he can to always cling to the good ones (Bava Basra 109b). As much as possible associate only with good ones. Don't visit the others, don't let them visit you. As much as possible cling to the good people, the *frum* people. Look for good neighbors, good *chaveirim* and good teachers. That's the *derech* in life to bring yourself closer to Hashem.

Now, the truth is that we haven't even begun yet to exhaust the subject; there's so much more to say. But even the little bit we spoke about together now opens for us a new door in our career of *avodas Hashem*. And therefore we always quote the words of the *Mesillas Yesharim*: *K'shetistakel od badavar* – If you look more thoroughly into the purpose of life, *tireh* – you're going to see, *ki hashleimus ha'amiti* – the true perfection, the true success of a person, *hu rak hadveikus bo yisborach* – is to come close to Hashem. To cling to Hashem and to be near to Him, that's the greatest success there is. *V'hu mah sh'haya Dovid omer* – Dovid said that in *Tehillim* (73:28), *וְאֲנִי קִרְבַּת אֱלֹקִים לִי טוֹב* – to me, it's closeness to Hashem that is the good in the world.

The Best Opinion Of All

By saying “*Va'ani*” it means there are all kinds of standards in the world of what people consider *tov*. And we're not talking now about the *shotim* who pursue foolish things, the *rodfei ruach* who waste their lives

– but even those people who live virtuously have not always clarified their goals in life. So Dovid said, וְאֲנִי – As far as I am concerned, קְרִיבָה לִי טוֹב אֲלֵקִים – the greatest good for me is to be close to Hashem. And he says, וְאֲנִי because other people were present too; they were also great men and each one had his opinion. But Dovid is the opinion to whom we should listen. The highest tov, the most important good that a person can accomplish, is to come close to Elokim.

And the people who come close to Him in this world, אַתֶּם הַדְּבִיקִים – You who cling to Hashem physically in Olam Hazeah, הַיּוֹם בְּלִבְכֶם הַיּוֹם, you will live forever and ever with Him in the Next World. Kirvas Elokim; that’s our success and that’s our happiness forever and ever.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET’S GET PRACTICAL

Coming Closer Every Day

This week instead of just “going to shul,” I will train myself to realize that I am doing the *avodah* of Holacha now by bringing myself physically close to Hashem. Every time I walk into shul I will stop for 5 seconds and reflect on that, even when I pass a shul on the street I can linger for a moment and remember that I’m close to Hashem. I will also take 30 seconds every day to appreciate living among from Jews because it means that I am living in close physical proximity to the Shechina.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

The Rav mentioned tonight that we are constantly being tested in this world by our environment. What would be the best plan for us to succeed in overcoming this test?

A:

First of all, the most important thing is that you must choose your environment. It's of the utmost importance to live among frum Jews. If you want to be the best, you must live among the best!

It's a very great error to move to the suburbs! Like one person who came here, and I said to her, "What about coming to live in Brooklyn?" So she said, "We want to get away from the ghetto." And that's a terrible sin against the Jewish people. We should seek to be as close as possible to our people. And instead, those who want to get away from the ghetto – that means from the Jewish people – are moving further and further away. And what that means is that they're moving further and further away from Hashem. And closer and closer to *gehenim*.

Some people even moved out to California to get away. And now, even that's too close for them. So they're moving into the Pacific Ocean, to the Phillipines. They're running away from the best environment there is.

So number one is, associate with frum people. That's the very best way to overcome the tests of the environment. There are more ways than that, but that's number one.

TAPE # 801

— This week's Q&A sponsored: —

Lezchus a Refuah Shleima for Dovid Chaim Ben Tzipora.