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SEFER SHEMOS - THE PENSON FAMILY EDITION

IN HONOR OF SHEA MOTT'L'S UPCOMING BAR MITZVAH

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פרשת יתרו

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER זT"ל

Approaching To See

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Part I. Seeking Him

Noblemen Need No Warnings

When the great day of *Matan Torah* came and the entire *Am Yisroel* stood together at *Har Sinai* waiting to see the Glory of Hashem, we find that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave Moshe Rabeinu a very strict command: **רד הער בקעם** – *Descend from the mountain and warn the people: פן יִהְרִסוּ אֶל הַשֵּׁם לְרֹאוֹת* – *lest they break through to Hashem to see.* “They might push through the barriers because of their desire to see Me,” said Hakodosh Boruch Hu. “And then, what will happen? A great tragedy! **וְנָפְל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב** – *Very many will fall* (*Yisro 19:21*).

Now, when we hear these words, we get the impression that we know what it's talking about. Today, let's say, if there's a live wire hanging down from the telephone pole – it's sparking maybe, it's on fire, so there's a natural curiosity that sometimes gets the better of people. And if you're dealing with a crowd of ignorami, of nobodies, so you'll need the policemen to come and set up barriers. To merely tell these wild fellows is not enough. You need barricades, and the police

have to brandish clubs so that the crowds shouldn't touch the live wire and, *chas v'shalom*, וְנִפְּל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב – people might get hurt or die.

But suppose a covey of kings and presidents is passing by. Imagine for a minute, President Nixon is standing with the Prime Ministers of England and France, and a dozen people like that. Does the policeman have to hold out his club threatening to hit them over the head if they get too close? No! When you're talking about people of nobility, high-minded people, you don't need to force any discipline – tell them once and that's all, they'll step away. They're men of *seichel* – they know how to restrain themselves.

Our Forefathers Are Misunderstood

Now, you have to know that our forefathers were much more disciplined than President Nixon – although I have a good opinion of him by the way; I think he's a very capable man, despite what the hotheads say. But our forefathers, *l'havdil*, were very much superior and they had much more self control. And I'm just speaking this way because of this audience. If I were talking to a *yeshiva* audience, I would say the truth, that they were ten thousand times superior. But you people sitting here would think it's an exaggeration, so I'm just saying they were better – actually, they were exceedingly superior, better than anything you can imagine.

Unfortunately, most people don't understand who our forefathers were. I'm sorry to say that even many *talmidei chachomim* have misunderstood the subject of the *dor hamidbar*. And therefore the teachers and the preachers – Orthodox ones – present our forefathers in the worst possible light. And they've done a good job, believe me! Our children have grown up in the Hebrew schools, the boys in the *yeshivos* and the girls in the *Beis Yaakovs*, with the idea that our forefathers were a pretty low crowd.

But here we speak the truth and we therefore have to understand that this was a superior group of people. Despite all of the propaganda, we have to get the truth into our heads and change our ideas about this great nation who came out of *Mitzrayim*. These were the best people who ever lived! Never again was there a generation that understood things as clearly as those who were standing at *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah.

Emunah Courses

Before our forefathers came out of Egypt, they took ten courses in *emunah* – each one of these *makkos* was an education in itself. It

wasn't like high school or college courses – these were courses that were very much advanced. *Emunah* 101 was *dam*. The second course in *emunah* was *tzefardeya*. And then came *kinim*. Each *makkah* that was visited upon Mitzrayim took a long time and our forefathers sat and studied the details of each one and it went into their bones. They became so aware of the Presence, the imminence of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, that if we here would sit together and learn *Chovos Halvovos* every night for five hours a night, we would not, even at the end of our days, arrive at what they arrived after they finished *dam*.

And after they went through everything, they took a few more postgraduate courses at Kriyas Yam Suf. וַיֵּרֶא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת ה' הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל, They saw Hakodosh Boruch Hu at the Yam Suf! And not only the *lamdanim* and the Beis Yaakov women, the disciples of Miriam; even the *shifachos*, the women who swept the floors, saw more than you and I will ever see: וַיֵּרֶא אֵת ה' מִן הַיָּם עַל הַיָּם מִן הַיָּם שֶׁפָּקְדָה עַל הַיָּם מִן הַיָּם – A slave woman saw more prophecy at kriyas Yam Suf than Yechezkel HaNavi saw. That's why Hashem gave them a diploma – He testified about them: וַיִּאֱמָנוּ ב'ה'שָׁם – They believed in Hashem (Shemos 14:31). And if Hashem said they believed, then you can be sure that they were aware of His Presence just as much as I am aware of you sitting right here.

The Nation of Prophets

So we understand that the *yotzei Mitzrayim* were full of *emunah* certifications, one on top of the other, when they came to Har Sinai. They were the *Dor De'ah* – The Generation of Knowledge. Most of them were *nevi'im*! You hear that? Most of the generation of the wilderness were prophets. It may be a big exaggeration for me to say it, but what can I do if Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi says it in the Kuzari. He says, כָּלֵם מִשְׁתַּדְּלִים לְהַגִּיעַ אֶל הַנְּבוּאָה – All of them were trying their best to attain the state of prophecy, וְרַבָּם מִגִּיעִים אֵלֶיהָ – and most of them reached it.

Now the Kuzari is not a *darshan*. The Kuzari, you have to know, counts his words. Instead of “*zuggen ah kvort – zuggt er a vort;*” it means instead of a long sentence, he says only two words. That's why you have to study what he says very carefully. And so, when he states that *all of them, men and women were trying to attain prophecy, and most of them reached prophecy*, you should take those words seriously. And that means that the *Am Yisroel* were on a very high level – they weren't uncivilized people that needed to be kept in check with barriers and warnings of deathly punishment.

And yet, what do we see? Hakodosh Boruch Hu is treating them as if they were a rabble, a wild multitude. They're being warned once

again and again. **אִי יִרְהוּ אֶת יְיָ** – You'll be thrown down; you'll be put to death (Shmos 19:13). That's already a strict warning! And then Hakodosh Boruch Hu added a special *mitzvah*: "Go down and warn them lest they'll break through the barrier." An additional *yeridah* – go down just for that; to warn them! For such a nation, a nation of noblemen and *nevi'im*, is that necessary?!

The Desire To See Him

Now, for the answer to that we look into the *Mechilta*. There's a statement there about this generation and we should understand it as the motto of the *dor hamidbar*; it was their slogan, and here is how it goes: **רְצוֹנָנוּ לְרֹאוֹת אֶת מְלֻכְנוּ** – It is our will, our desire, to see our King. Our forefathers had in their hearts a fire of yearning for Hashem – we have no idea how much there burned in their hearts a longing to see Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Like our pious king, Dovid Hamelech, when he wanted to express how he thirsted for Hashem, so he said: **כְּאַיִל תַּעֲרֵג עַל אַפְיְקֵי מַיִם בֶּן נִפְשֵׁי** (Tehillim 42:2). It's like a deer in a hot desert and he can't find any water with which to quench his thirst; and now the deer is longing with every cell, with every fiber in his body for a drink of water: **כִּי כִּי יִרְצֶה לְךָ נַפְשִׁי כְּמֵה לְךָ בְּשָׂרִי** – So too my soul thirsts for You, Hashem; my flesh longs for You.

It's a burning desire that great men experience. And here was a generation made up of especially great people – all of them. **רְצוֹנָנוּ לְרֹאוֹת אֶת מְלֻכְנוּ** – It is our desire to see our King! That was their dearest wish.

Running Into The Fire

And it was because of that deep wish of the nation standing at the foot of Har Sinai, that's why Hashem had to warn them again and again to beware. This generation that knew Hashem best, they wanted one thing only – to get close to Hashem, to see Him – and because they were subject to this passion more than anyone else in history, therefore the danger was most real. They would be *moiser nefesh* to fulfill this desire – they'd forget about danger and they'd rush into fire to see Hakodosh Boruch Hu!

And so Hashem said to Moshe Rabeinu, "You don't know these people well enough! I know the nature of these people and they're thirsty for Me. They don't care for anything – all they want out of life is to come close to Me! And once the *dibbur* will begin to come forth *mipi haShechina*, they'll become wild with passion and they'll try to break

through the barriers! And therefore, **יָרַד הָעָר בָּעָם** – Go back down and warn them again in My name, **פִּן יִהְרָסוּ** – so that they shouldn't break through."

The Ten Tests

Hakodosh Boruch Hu was now revealing to Moshe the greatness of the Am Yisroel, the nation that exists to seek Hashem, and at the same time the danger that might cause. "This desire is going to cause a lot of trouble from now on," said Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And that explains a lot of what happened in the wilderness to our forefathers. Everybody knows **עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִסּוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בַּמִּדְבָּר** – *There were ten times in the wilderness that our forefathers tested Hashem (Avos 5:4).*

Now, we understand that simply as ten times that the Jewish nation 'sinned' in the wilderness, ten times they failed the test. Everybody knows about these ten things – and all those who learn *chumash* in their youth have the impression that it was a very difficult people to deal with. Ten times – one after the other! Something is wrong with a nation like that! No wonder that finally the Almighty got disgusted with them and threw us out of the land into exile.

The Real Story

We have to rethink this however, because if that's what it means, it's a queer expression. It should have said "Ten times Hashem tested our forefathers and they failed the test." Instead it says, "Our forefathers tested Hashem ten times." What's the meaning of that?

And the answer is that the real story is just the opposite. These ten tests were ten symptoms of the greatness of that generation! Because what were the ten tests? What did they want with these ten tests? They wanted Hashem to openly demonstrate His presence among them. We wouldn't test Hashem like that because we don't long for Him like they did. "Ten times they tested Me to see if I'm still around, to see that I didn't depart from their midst." When they asked for food in the wilderness, it wasn't because they were afraid they would starve. They wanted to see that Hashem should demonstrate His presence. When they asked for drink, they wanted Him to show His Presence.

Because that's the sign of greatness – the desire to see more and more. The ten "sins" of this generation are actually ten signs of greatness, a result of this intense desire. Every "test" was nothing but an expression, an outburst of this longing: "We wish to see our King!"

Part II. Seeking Substitutes

The Secret In Bava Kamma

Actually, it wasn't only them. One of the great secrets of this world is that the great wish of *all of Mankind* is to see our King – in the depths of our souls we are seeking only one thing and that is to be close to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Now, this secret is hidden away in the first *mishna* in Bava Kamma. The *masichta* begins: אַרְבַּעָה אַבוֹת נִזְיָקִין – *There are four main causes of damage in the world* – four categories of things that cause damage to people and property.

The first is *hashor*; an ox. Now, *shor* doesn't mean only an ox – a *yeshiva* man might learn “*shor*” and he thinks “an ox”, that's all it is. No; it means any animal, any living thing that you possess, you're responsible for it. Let's say your cat goes into your neighbor's lawn and digs up the flowers, so you have to pay your neighbor for the damage your cat caused. If it's your animal, so you're responsible. That's why it's good to learn *Bava Kamma*. Otherwise, you'd never dream that you're responsible for your animals.

The second on the list is *habor* – obstacles. Let's say you're sitting here now listening to the lecture and your foot is sticking out into the aisle because you have to stretch for a minute, and somebody falls over it, so you have to pay. You're liable for the damage. That's called *bor* – you dug a pit, you made an obstacle.

The Mysterious Damager

Now, the third thing we'll skip for now and we'll come back to it very soon. First, number four. The fourth category of damagers is *v'hahever* – fire. When damage is caused by fire, or by anything else that moves due to natural causes, like wind, that's called *hever*, fire. If you put a flowerpot, let's say, on your windowsill and the wind blows and it drops down on somebody who is passing by, that's *aish*. You're responsible for the damage it causes.

And now we come back to the third category; the *mishna* calls it *maaveh*. Now *maaveh* is a rare word that is not found anywhere else in the *mishna*. What is this *maaveh*, this mysterious damager? So our great teacher, Rav, says: *Maaveh zeh adam* – *maaveh* means man. Man is one of the four main sources of trouble in the world, one of the big troublemakers who is constantly causing damage.

Let's say you're knocking on your neighbor's windowpane to get his attention and suddenly it cracks – you broke the pane. You can't say, "Oops, I'm so sorry." No, you have to pay. **פָּצַע תַּחַת פָּצַע לְרַבּוֹת שׁוֹגֵג** – You have to pay even though you broke it unintentionally. By the way, if you came in just to hear that, it's worthwhile. People don't know this piece of Torah, that you have to pay for breaking things unintentionally. It's included in *maaveh zeh adam*.

Midnight Seeking

Now, Rav says as follows: "How do I know that *maaveh* means man? I have proof from a *possuk* in *Yeshaya* (21:12). Pay attention now as we explain this *possuk* because we'll come soon to the source of our word. It's talking there about somebody who is talking to the night watcher. In those days the night watcher walked through the streets and nobody was supposed to be around; every decent man was in his house at night.

But as the watchman is walking through the street, somebody puts his head out of the window and he calls out, **שָׁמַר מָה מְלִילָה שָׁמַר מָה מְלִיל** – Oh, watchman, what about this night? It means, "When will the night come to an end? It's an unusually long night and I have a lot to accomplish by day." That's the complaint. He sticks his head out of the window and calls out to the night watchman: "When is it going to be morning already so I can get to work?"

אָמַר שָׁמַר – So the watchman replies, **אֶתָּא בִקְרָא** – 'Morning came already.' "You know how long you've been asleep? You've been sleeping for twenty four hours. You asked me the same question last night and then you went back to bed and you slept through the whole day! **אֶתָּא בִקְרָא** – The morning already came, **וְגַם לַיְלָה** – and this is already the second night. **אִם תִּבְעֵינָן** – If you're looking for the day, **בְּעֵי** – then you have to get up and start looking! Seek it! You don't seek things by lying in bed fast asleep!

Peanuts And The Press

Here's a *yeshiva* man lying in bed, sleeping late, and he says, "Ah – I'd like to be a *lamdan*!" Or somebody else; a man is sitting at home on Shabbos afternoon reading the Jewish Press and eating peanuts and his heart is full of a yearning to know all *Shas*! Stop lying in bed and talking about it – if you really mean it, then do something about it.

That's what the Navi *Yeshaya* said: **אִם תִּבְעֵינָן** – If you are seeking, then don't be halfhearted about it, **בְּעֵי** – Get busy seeking! It means: If

you mean business – not just talk – then look for it and you'll find it. In this world, if you want to accomplish anything, you have to be a seeker.

Man the Seeker

And so, Rav says, who is this *maaveh*, this third damager that the *mishna* in *Bava Kama* refers to? The word *maaveh* comes from the word , בָּעָוִי - to seek. That's the root of the word. *Maaveh zeh adam* – “The Seeker” refers to Man because Man is the inveterate seeker, the insatiable seeker. No matter how much money a man has, he's never happy; he wants more. מִי שֵׁיִשׁ לוֹ מְנָה רוֹצֵה מְאֹתִים. Why is it that a man is never satisfied? The answer is because he's always seeking something more.

Does a cow look for more? Give a cow enough grass and water and he'll stand around all day long chewing contentedly – he longs for nothing! The cat and the rabbit and the mosquito – what they want is very limited and when they get it, they're happy, they're content. They're not *seeking* anything! Only Man is never content; he's always seeking to accomplish, to achieve even more and that's why Rav said that *maaveh* is man – because the only one who seeks in this world is Man!

Hashem's Breath

Now, where did that drive in Mankind come from? What's the foundation of that desire to seek that makes man different from a cow and a rabbit – different enough that *maaveh* becomes the defining characteristic of man; it becomes his title?

It goes back to the beginning of history. In the Torah it relates that when Hakodosh Boruch Hu created man, He did something exceptional: וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים – He blew into man's nostrils a breath of life (Bereishis 2:7). Now that's a sentence that's so important that we really should talk for forty years on this one subject – I'm not exaggerating – but at least a little bit we should talk about what it means this breath of Hashem.

The *Zohar* expresses it in the following words: מִמָּאן דְּנִפְחָה מִדְּלִיָּה נִפְחָה – When someone blows, what does he blow from? From his pocket? No; when you blow, you blow from yourself. And that means Hashem breathed into Mankind something of Himself. That's where we get the famous expression הַלֵּק אֶלְקֵי – the soul of a man is a portion of Hashem Himself. Something of Hashem was put into man and it's still there. More than that I cannot tell you. I don't know what Hashem is, and nobody else does either and therefore nobody can describe what He

breathed. We can't explain Hashem and therefore we're not going to be able to explain what 'a part of Hashem' is. But whatever it is, it's not merely life that was given to all creatures.

At that time, Adam immediately had a very strong drive – it became the fundamental nature of man, an instinct, to accomplish and to achieve perfection by coming closer and closer to Hashem. It wasn't just Dovid Hamelech and the Dor Hamidbar who yearned for Hashem. *All of us* have that drive within us.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu put into Mankind an immense yearning and that yearning makes man a *maaveh*. It cannot rest! It will never find respite. It never will have any tranquility because the *nishmas chaim* is unable to forget the source it came from. That's what makes man a *maaveh*, a seeker. And that's why the *mishna*, when it wants to put man on the list of damagers, it uses the title of "*maaveh*."

Choosing Appropriate Titles

Now really, all this is a puzzle. Because if *Chazal* wished to give man a special title denoting him as one of the four main causes of damage, so couldn't they find a better name than *maaveh*? If you're choosing now to title, to identify man as a troublemaker, why do you choose the one name which actually describes his longing to come close to Hashem? The word that describes man as someone who seeks to accomplish and to come close to Hashem, is that a fitting title to give to somebody who does damage?

And the answer is that this most noble attribute of Mankind, is *actually the cause of all the trouble in the world*. The longing to come close to Hashem is one of the most pure instincts of human beings and at the same time it is the cause of most of the disturbances, wickedness and misfortune in the world. It's only because Mankind has this longing, but he doesn't know what exactly it is that he longs for – he can't put his finger on it – that's what causes all the trouble in the world. He seeks and he seeks and he seeks more, but because he doesn't know what he seeks, he becomes the biggest troublemaker.

Seeking Ice Cream

So what does *Adam Hamaaveh*, Man the Seeker, do to requite this great longing that is stirring in his soul? He goes to the refrigerator! In the middle of the night when his wife is not looking, he takes out the tub of chocolate ice cream from the freezer and he gets busy trying to satisfy the yearning of his *neshama*. And because he's yearning so deeply, he'll fumble around the pantry looking for sprinkles too!

Some people graduate from this – and they move onto bigger and better things. Money! They make up their minds to get rich. They think that that's what they want and they spend their lives accumulating property.

For some it's travel. Look outside the window on *motza'ei Shabbos* – cars from this side of Ocean Parkway are traveling in this direction and the people who live on the other side are going the opposite way – they're seeking. And if they have a little more money to water, so they get on airplanes and fly to Switzerland or to *Eretz Yisroel*. Back and forth, back and forth, looking, seeking, but they can't find what they're searching for.

Art and Fame

Some people go all out for other things. Art! There are people with great souls, *mivakshim*, who go all out for the arts. Art is nothing at all! So what if a man makes a painting? It's so silly. Today you can take a Kodak camera and make a better painting. What is there to his sitting down and making a painting? It's nothing but an expression of the longing within him.

Some look for fame or power. All the people who are out for power are longing for something, they're seekers. Why does a communist dictator shoot his comrades in order to gain power and then he tries to trample on the rest of the world? He's looking for something. He thinks it's power, it's glory. Even that madman Hitler, *yimach shemo*, why did he murder millions? That was his way of seeking mastery, of expressing this longing which had become corrupted in him because he didn't know what it was.

Revolutionaries Find Trouble

All the misguided foolish college students, the revolutionaries who are making trouble, they're looking for something – in all the wrong places. Is there anything in Socialism?! It's just empty promises. The truth is if you would grab one of them by the collar and ask him to analyze what he's doing, he wouldn't be able to tell you. They themselves don't know what they want. Sometimes they can latch onto this cause or that thing, but in general they don't know what they're looking for. And that's why they find trouble.

That's why they're *mazikim*, protesting and breaking windows. They're looking for something *maaveh zeh adam*. That's why they spat on French Prime Minister Pompidou when he came to visit this country. To spit on a visiting head of state?! And all of the trouble that they

make for the police force! Where do they get these ideas from? It's only because they have greatness that is bursting within them – and they think that they're saving the world.

And that's why just between ourselves we can say – don't tell anybody – but we know that liberal Jews are the most dangerous people; they're the worst citizens. They're the most pushy, the most demonstrative, and they make the most trouble. A Jew, more than anyone else in the world, is a *maaveh*, a seeker, but if he looks in the wrong places, he'll never be satisfied. And therefore, when he goes wrong he's the most dangerous and there's no end to the trouble he'll cause while he's trying to requite his yearning – because he doesn't know what he seeks. And en route to the final good, a lot of trouble is caused – a lot of vessels are being smashed and a lot of hearts are broken. The *maaveh* becomes a *mazik*.

Pursuing The Substitutes

And so we see that the same source of the greatness of a man can be his source of ruination – the yearning for Hashem can cause people to become harmful to the world, and more importantly it causes them to waste their one opportunity in this world running after substitutes.

Now, that's easy to say but actually a great deal of thought must be put into this because this desire is testing us always. We're in this world to be tested to see if we'll be deceived and misdirect this instinct of ours towards substitutes. It's a great test – will you seek to quell this urge in the right way?

And so, although this yearning, this noble instinct can be the cause of so many disturbances in this world, the real Adam, the *maaveh* who understands why he's in this world, directs his yearning in the right direction – at coming close to Hakodosh Boruch Hu – and his entire life becomes a life of seeking closeness to Hakodosh Boruch Hu! That's what he lives for, that's the breath of his life.

Part III. Seek With Care

Don't Break The Barriers

Now, included in this warning to not come too close to Hashem – *וְהָעָרַב בָּעַם פֶּן יִהְיֶה־סוֹ*, *warn the people not to break through the barriers* – is another most important attitude that we must keep in mind always. The Torah is teaching us that in the great desire to come close to Hashem you must exercise restraint. There's a certain line, and we

shouldn't break through that boundary. Now exactly where the boundary is, that's a problem, but in the remaining time we're going to study this subject a little bit.

You know, if someone has formed a certain fondness for a king, let's say he actually loves the king, so his love must be restrained to a certain extent. He has to be discreet about it because if he'll start poking his head into the palace windows to see what the king is doing, one of the attendants might give him a punch in the nose. Excessive affection has to be guarded against because overstepping the bounds, especially in the case of the Almighty, can lead to dangerous results.

The Paradox

And therefore, there is always this paradox. You have to get close, very close to Hashem. A Jew has to feel at home in the *shul* – it should be the place where he wants to be most. He should feel like he belongs in the *beis medrash*. Learning, *davening*; those should be the expressions of the desire in his soul and therefore he shouldn't feel like a stranger in the *shul* – he should feel at home there; he should find pleasure in talking to Hashem. And yet, he cannot relax. He cannot forget that he's in a *shul*. It's not a club, a place to see friends and talk.

It's not a contradiction to love of Hashem. Love doesn't mean that you smother that person with your embrace. Let's say you have a beloved *rebbe* in your *yeshiva* – you have a certain *rebbe*. The truth is you *should* love your *rebbe*; you shouldn't feel that he is a machine, a tape recorder that says good *shiurim*. You should love him intensely! Rav Itzele Peterburger, *zichrono livracha*, loved his *rebbe*, Reb Yisroel Salanter. He loved him! When *chassidim* love their *rebbe*, they're only doing what's the Jewish traditional way.

Love and Fear

Suppose however, someone is so fond of his *rosh yeshiva* that he walks over and he puts his arm around his *rebbe's* shoulder – that's breaking through the barrier; you're touching a live wire! So it's up to the *rebbe* to shake him off and to walk away because part of the function of loving Torah is to have fear of Torah. We love Hashem, but at the same time we fear Hashem. Exactly when this and when that – this I cannot tell you.

But we see that although the greatness of Mankind is its desire to seek Hashem, yet at the same time, everyone should realize he must maintain restraint. Always remember, despite your passion to come

close, you must beware of overstepping the bounds of respect and fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

So let's say, you want to adopt Reb Yankev Kaminetzky as your mentor. You want to get close to him so you move to Monsey – better yet, you move right next door to him. It's a good idea, by the way. He's a very great man. He's an old man and he's full of wisdom. He knows everything. Everything! And you can talk about anything with him.

So when he goes out in the morning, you ask him, "Can I go along with you?" He doesn't have any bodyguards and he'll say, "Alright. If you want, you can come along." You go along with him and you listen to what he says. You don't talk – you don't say a word; you just listen to him. And you begin to understand a few things; you'll learn a new way of living. You'll look at his ways too. After a while you'll become permeated with his greatness. It can't help but rub off on you and you'll have a tremendous benefit.

Clinging to Hashem

Not only will you be close to Reb Yankev Kaminetzky; you'll be close to Hashem. You're fulfilling the *mitzvas asef* of the Torah **וּבְךָ תִּדְבֹק** – *You should cling to Hashem*. How do you cling to Hashem? You're going to take a plane trip to the desert and take pictures of Har Sinai?! People do that by the way – that's how they misdirect their longing for Hashem. Maybe they take a plane to Eretz Yisroel, back and forth, back and forth. They're trying as hard as they can to satisfy the yearning in their souls. But that's not how to come closer to Hashem. Cling to *chachomim*! Cling to Reb Yankev Kaminetzky!

Now, as you walk with him and you're clinging to Hashem, you have to beware. Here is a great peril because you can make a misstep. It's like walking with a 50,000 volt electric machine. Watch out! Because if a person becomes familiar, if he becomes a little too close, he might break through the barrier around *Har Sinai*.

The first thing is you might open your mouth to give your opinion. You're standing in front of a sage like Reb Yankev Kaminetzky and you're voicing your opinion?! Is he your friend?! Who are you?! You can love him very much, but still you won't break through the barrier – you keep your mouth closed and your eyes and ears wide open – you try to soak up every word and every movement of this Torah sage!

How Much Of A Man Are You?

However, at least you *want* to live near Rav Yankev Kaminetzky; if you don't have the desire to be close to Hashem, so you're not worried

about stepping over the boundaries because you're busy wasting your life seeking empty dreams. Some people are almost not *mivakshim* at all. *Maaveh zeh adam* – if you want to be an *Adam*, you have to seek Hashem – that's the measure of a man.

The one whose soul thirsts, he wants to know more Torah, he's dissatisfied with his present state and he's looking for opportunities to come closer to Hashem, that's the sign of an *adam*. The more of a seeker he is, the more *adam* he is. And if he's content, he is less *adam*; he's more *beheima*.

And therefore to utilize this world to fulfill our tremendous urge to come close to Hashem is our career. Everyone must feel within him an intense unrest. Let's say you have a chain of stores, a chain of department stores all over the city and the money is coming in. The cash register is ringing all day long without end and you have investments everywhere and you're growing rich by the hour. If you're a happy and satisfied man because of that, then you are not an *adam*. The fact that you have so many customers and that business is increasing should not satisfy you; it shouldn't stupefy this urge in you, this longing.

True Happiness

The wise person directs his urge in the right direction; he seeks Hashem. And so, if you're a *mivakeish Hashem*, get busy learning. Learn *chumash*, learn *gemara*, learn the *seforim* – there's so much to learn. There's a *mesikus*, a sweetness, to learning a piece of *gemara* well and reviewing it and knowing it. You feel it in your body, you feel in your soul a certain happiness. **דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה מְשֻׁמְחִין אֶת הַלֵּב** – Keeping the Torah, thinking about Torah ideals, doing *mitzvos*, living a Torah life, that's the true happiness because that's what you're truly seeking.

Changing your character too! There's a sweetness in studying the *mussar seforim* and training yourself to be a more perfect person. Even a mother raising children – maybe she didn't learn any *seforim* – but she's raising children, bringing up Jewish children to become members of the *Am Kodesh*; that's a fulfillment of the *neshama*. It brings a mother so much closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu – it's a tremendous *shleimus*.

Those who seek Hashem in the right way are the happy people because the true satisfaction is only when the *neshama* is fulfilling its urge to come close to Hashem. It's only **יִשְׁמַח לֵב מְבַקְשֵׁי ה'שָׁם** – If you know what you're seeking, if you know that your *neshama* is actually seeking Hashem, so you get busy working on that and you become a happy person.

And Hakodosh Boruch Hu is looking for happy people like that. הַשֵּׁם מִשָּׁמַיִם הַשְּׁקִיף – Hashem looks down from the heavens, לְרֹאוֹת – to see, הֲיֵשׁ מִשְׁכִּיל הֲיֵשׁ אֶת אֱלֹקִים “Is there any wise man down below? הֲיֵשׁ אֶת אֱלֹקִים is anyone seeking Me?” (Tehillim 14:2) He’s looking down on us right now and He’s saying: “Who is seeking Me? Who is a *doiresh* Hashem?” And if He discovers you, you can be sure that you will be rewarded because of that and find true satisfaction in this world and eternal happiness in the World to Come.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**How can a person refrain from speaking lashon hara
without becoming a social outcast?**

A:

It means, this person thinks in order to be a me'urav bein habri'yo, to be acceptable to people, he has to speak lashon hara. But it's not true; on the contrary he'll be more acceptable when people see that he guards his tongue against criticism. When people see that you don't belittle anybody, people will like you for that.

You should know, that a man who shows good character, or a woman who shows good character, is well liked. If a woman sits on the telephone and is catty and talks against people, so all of the other parties may be polite to her, but they're thinking, "What a nasty person she is." Therefore, middos tovos always pay off; good character pays off. So the question is entirely out of place. By refraining from lashon hara you become socially acceptable and popular, and people will love you.

Of course, if you'll keep your mouth shut when you should say kind words, then of course you're not me'urav bein habri'yo. When people are in distress, you should say a few kind words. You should encourage somebody, even if they didn't ask you for it. People need encouragement and therefore kind words always are in place.

And so, silence is required sometimes when there's a peril that you might be saying the wrong thing, but when the right thing is required, good words are certainly rewarded by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Like it says: הנותן פרוטה לעני מתברך - בשש ברכות, והמפייסו ברבים מתברך בי"א ברכות - When you give a coin to a poor person you receive six blessings from Hashem, but if you encourage him with words you receive eleven blessings.

And so, if you keep your mouth closed and avoid lashon hara and criticism, people will love you - you won't become an outcast. And if you open your mouth only for good things, you're even better off.

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