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SEFER BAMIDBAR - THE RAHMANI FAMILY EDITION

FOR THE HATZLACHA, HEALTH, AND HAPPINESS OF OUR FAMILY AND ALL KLAL YISROEL

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At Someone's Table

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Year 3 | Issue 36

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פרשת קרח WITH R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

At Someone's Table

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Part I. Korach's Table

Korach and The Great Ones

Everybody knows that when Korach approached Moshe Rabeinu to stake out his claim, he didn't do it alone – he wasn't the only one involved in the deadly quarrel. ... וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח ... וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם ... וְאוֹנִן בֶּן פִּלֵּת ... – And Korach gathered Dasan and Aviram and On ben Peles and they stood defiantly before Moshe, and with them were two hundred and fifty important men from Bnei Yisroel (Korach 16: 1-2).

It means that Korach was successful in gathering to his side a considerable number of people who were willing to face off with Moshe Rabeinu. And they weren't little people, rabble rousers who are easily persuaded to rebel against the leaders. They were the *ne-siei eidah*, the men who were elevated over the congregation, and

anshei sheim, men distinguished with a good name (ibid. 2). And yet, it was these important people who were persuaded by Korach to join him in his rebellion; and eventually they joined him in *Gehenom* too – they went lost with Korach.

Now, there's a big question here. Why would these two hundred and fifty people join Korach? We're talking now about the wisest of men who surely knew that there was nothing to gain by attaching themselves to Korach in challenging Moshe; the one chosen by Hashem to lead the nation. And therefore it seems strange that such wise people would join in a rebellion that was doomed to end in disaster. It's a big question: How were such great men persuaded to join a losing battle?

Swallowing the Cake

Now pay attention to how it happened. There's a mysterious *possuk* in *Tehillim* that states as follows: **בְּחִנְפִי לַעֲגִי מְעוֹג חֶרֶק עָלַי שְׁנִימוֹ** – *With flattery and mockery of cakes, he ground his teeth against me* (35:16).

It's a queer *possuk* and we don't know what it means. So we look into the *gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 52a) and we see that this *possuk* is talking about our *parsha*; it's answering our question. Reish Lakish taught: *Mai d'chshiv* – What's meant by “the flattery and mockery of eating cakes”? And he explains it as follows: **בְּשִׁבְלֵי חֲנֻפָּה שֶׁהָחֲנִיפוּ לְקֹרַח עַל עֵסְקֵי לְגִימָה** – *Because Korach's guests flattered him when he gave them things to eat and to drink*, **וְהָיָה שָׂר שֶׁל גִּיְהֵנוֹם שְׁנִי** – *the chief of Gehenom gnashed his teeth against them*.

Swallowing the Bait

It means like this: Korach arranged banquets for his friends and his neighbors; he was a wealthy man and he found occasions to make celebrations. All kinds of repasts he made – *seudos mitzvos* too – and he invited people to eat at his table.

And it was at these feasts, when his guests were seated at his table eating and drinking, that's when their host brought up the subject of a certain person whom he didn't like – Moshe ben Amram.

Now, there was no reason to dislike Moshe Rabeinu. He was a very likable person – what's there to dislike about Moshe? But Korach

had his reasons, and in order to persuade his guests he made sure to bring up the subject while they were partaking of his pastries and of his wine. As they were sitting at his table eating he said something to ridicule the one he considered his nemesis, Moshe Rabeinu.

The Agreeable Guest

You know, if you're a Shabbos guest at somebody's house and he says a piece of Torah, so you have to admire his words of wisdom no matter how much wisdom they're lacking. You're eating his *challah* and his *chulent* so when your host will say some remark on the *sedra*, you admire it. "Ooh, ah, that's so nice!" Now the truth is that had you heard it from someone else, you would have perhaps said, "It's no good," or "How do you know it's true?" But at your host's table it's good; it's very good.

And what do you do when your host brings up a joke? You laugh. If you're a Shabbos guest at somebody's table and the master of the house says a joke all the guests have to laugh. Now, had you been on the street – if you weren't eating at the table – and he would make a joke, it would fall flat on you; you might even criticize the joke; but he's the host now so it's different.

Isn't that the truth? That's how it is when you're a guest; when you sit at a man's table you're in his hands. You're eating from his food so you're enslaved to him. Now, the truth is that to a certain extent that's how guests should behave; he has to demonstrate a certain appreciation. It's not good manners for a guest to tell the *ba'al habayis*, "Your *psbat* in the *chumash* doesn't make sense". Are you going to make a quarrel with your host at the table?!

When he's singing *zemiros* and his voice is a little bit rusty and his tune is monotonous are you going to tell him, "You're off tune! What do you think you are, a Caruso? A Yossele Rosenblatt?" That's no way to talk to your host; you admire his *zemiros* no matter how poor a singer he is. Because you're his guest, everything is beautiful to you.

The Overly Agreeable Guest

You can't say what you think. He's the host and so whatever he says goes. So as you're both sipping the scotch and you're saying

l'chaim, he's palming off on you his old Torah jokes that he said for all the other guests before you; he hauls out the moth-eaten ideas that he'd been saying for a long time, and you're a slave; you're nodding your head, "Yes, yes, yes, yes." What can you do? You're eating from his hand! And so you consent and you approve. Along with his scotch you imbibe his ideas too.

Now, that's a big problem because what happens when you see that your host is slipping in *loshon hora*? It happens sometimes that you're sitting at a table – you're a guest – and the host is criticizing let's say the *rabbonim* or the *roshei yeshivos*; he's criticizing *Satmerer* or he's criticizing *Lubavitcher* and you're in a very tight place now.

You're in a terrible bind now. The man is feeding you *loshon hora* now and you're a helpless prisoner. You have to become tongue tied. You have to watch yourself; you can't agree with him. You shouldn't even look into his face because when you look in his face as he opens his big mouth against the *Satmerer Rav*, it's like you're saying, "Yes, yes, go on." The truth is that even if you keep quiet, you're encouraging him. Because if you weren't sitting there, if he didn't have the audience, he wouldn't talk.

The Loshon Hora Cake

And not only are you in danger of encouraging him but because you're his guest his words begin to settle on your heart. "Because of the cakes he's feeding you, you flatter him and his mocking words," and the ideas begin to percolate in your mind.

So if you could excuse yourself and go to the bathroom for an extended stay until the time comes to *bentch*, that's the best thing. If necessary, you can say, "Oh, I forgot. I left the water running in my apartment. Excuse me – a flood!" and you run home *and forget to come back*. It's an emergency. You're stuck!

And don't think it's an extreme act to run out. If you don't have the presence of mind to think of something better, just run out – period. That's all. So he'll say you're crazy. He'll never invite you again, but you saved your life. The *gemara* (see *Eduyos* 5:6) says, מוטב להיות שוטה בפני הבריות כל ימי – *better to be considered a lunatic all your*

life in the eyes of human beings, וְאַל יְהִיָּה רָשָׁע שְׂעָה אֶחָת בְּפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם – you shouldn't be considered in the eyes of Hashem a rasha even once.

Nodding Along

And the Gemara is telling us that that's how Korach persuaded his guests; that's how they ended up in Gehenom with him! Because when Korach opened his big mouth to speak against Moshe, they were sitting at his table and so they kept quiet. Some of them even nodded their heads yes – that's how it is when you're a guest. They were nodding their heads, yes, yes. What else could they do? A guest at someone's table can't be rude. בְּחִנְפֵּי – They were flattering their host, לְעֵגִי – so they also ridiculed the one who the host wanted them to ridicule, מְעֻעֹג – because they were eating his pastries, his ugos.

There's a certain amount of flattery that the guest pays to his host, and that's what happened to Korach's guests – he used his table to suffocate the opinions of others and persuaded them to come to his side in the machlokes against Moshe and Aharon.

The Sharp Teeth of Gehenom

At that time it says, הָרַק עָלַי שִׁנָּיִמוֹ – He gritted his teeth against me. Who gritted his teeth? So the gemara says, charak aleihem sar shel gehinom shinav; the master of Gehinom – it means the one who is in charge of Gehinom – ground his teeth against them in anger; he was preparing now to have these people as his future guests. “Aha!” he said. “Now you're mine!” Because they ate cakes with Korach the end was that when the earth opened up and swallowed Korach – they were destroyed; they were lost too.

So what do we learn from this? That when people eat at somebody's table, they have to be on guard because it's very easy to fall into a trap. When someone is feeding you that's the time you're most susceptible to persuasion. The gemara (Chullin 4b) says that: אֵין הַסִּתָּה אֶלָּא בְּאֲכִילָה וּשְׁתִּיתָה – The only real persuasion is the persuasion done with food and drink; and the gemara there proves it from pesukim. It's like the world says, “The way to a man's heart is through his stomach”, only that the gemara there demonstrates from pesukim that it's true; it's a Torah principle!

You married women should listen to this well – girls too; you'll be married one day so listen to a good piece of advice from the Gemara. If you want to ask your husband that he should buy you something that you have your heart set on, don't do it before supper. That's a very serious error. Don't jump the gun. Even worse is before breakfast – that's terrible. You're hearing something that's very valuable. Never bring up any subject that you have to discuss before breakfast. The best time is after supper. **אין הסתה אלא באכילה ושתיה** – To persuade, you need eating and drinking.

Food For The Mind

Parents who understand this will know to utilize the time that the children are in their home in order to influence them. While you're feeding your little boy and your little girl at the table that's the best time to teach him the *yesodos haemumah*. When children are eating at your table, that's the opportunity for you to mold them and to make something out of them. Even when you have a big son and daughter still living in your house, you can still teach them all the elements of life because they're still eating from your table. They're not so independent yet so you can utilize that to teach them how to behave. The truth is that you're giving them a lot of future happiness by conferring this instruction on them and if you do it at a time when they're more willing to listen, by means of the persuasion of food, that's when you'll see the most success.

And just because of that; just because “*the only real persuasion is the persuasion done with food and drink*,” that's why it's also the most dangerous of times. That's one of the lessons the Am Yisroel learned from the episode with Korach – beware of the persuasion and flattery brought on by eating the food of your host. The *yetzer hora*, the *sar shel Gehenom*, is waiting to put you into his net because now you're an easy prey; your discretion is not as operative – your free will doesn't function so well when you're eating at somebody's table. And the *sar shel Gehenom* is waiting to see what you're going to do. If you sit back and allow the words of the host to enter your mind along with his food, the *sar shel Gehenom* will begin to grind his teeth against you and that means you're looking for a lot of trouble.

Part II. Someone Else's Table

The Living Dead

Now, this subject is more serious than we think; eating at somebody's table is not just a danger that you might do this or that – that you might nod your head when your host sings off tune or when he says something improper about a *gadol*. The truth is that's already a big enough danger to be very afraid of – sometimes with one little nod of the head you can acquire for yourself a whole lot of *Gehenom*. But we're going to see now how big the subject really is – it's actually a matter of life and death.

The *gemara* (Beitzah 32b) tells us that שְׁלֹשָׁה חַיִּימָן אֵינָם חַיִּים – *There are three kinds of people whose lives are not lives*. They're breathing; they're walking and talking, but it's all a facade – in a certain sense they're not living anymore.

The first one is *mi she'ishto mosheles alav*, someone whose wife rules over him. Here's a man who can't make a move without his wife's permission. She's *oimed al gabav* – it means she stands over him to see what he's doing; she knows everything about his finances. When they make an appeal in the *shul* for an important cause he can't participate because the “boss” didn't give him permission. He's a slave to his wife – that's not a life!

The second on the list is a man who *yisurim moshlim alav* – a man who is subjected to great suffering. He is suffering so much that his pain rules over him; he can't go where he wants to go and he can't do what he wants to do because he's in pain all the time. He's not able to learn properly or to *daven* properly. It's a great pity on him because he is a slave to his suffering. His life is not a life.

Happy Meals

And the third is what we're talking about now: *Hamitzapeh l'shulchan acheirim* – someone who looks forward to the table of other people; it means he's always dependent on others for his meals. Now, this man doesn't have a wife who gives him orders and he's not suffering *yissurim* either. Life is wonderful; he's eating well and he's not even paying money for the food – he's eating at someone else's table. And yet *Chazal* are telling us that he's a dead man.

Now, we have to understand if these three are bunched together there must be a common denominator in all three of them. What is it that makes these three people have “lives that are not really lives”?

What Is Life?

To answer that question we have to first understand what does it mean to live? What are we here in this world for? Now, I know you’ll tell me Torah and *mitzvos*; *chesed* too. And that’s true; but those are the details. I’m talking about encapsulating it in one word – what are we here for?

And the answer is *bechira*! Free will! That’s the only thing we can really get out of this world! The gift to do according to the dictates of our *seichel* – that’s true life. And it’s more valuable than anything else we possess; it’s a gem that cannot be equaled – you can’t find it in the best jewelry shops. *Bechira* is the rarest gift in creation and that’s what we live for – to be free to choose.

True Freedom

Now when we talk about freedom in America we’re just aping words; we don’t understand what it means. When that man got up and declared, “Give me liberty or give me death,” he was following a true instinct – there’s an instinct that if you’re not free it doesn’t pay to live. Only that he didn’t understand it. In America they think that freedom by itself, freedom without any purpose, is an ideal – to be free to do whatever we want! A *meshugas*!

Freedom is only valuable because you’re free to choose to be an *eved Hashem*; you have the freedom to create a Torah mind: וּבְחִירָתְךָ בִּיהוָה – You should choose life (Devarim 30:19). The purpose of life is to exercise our free will. That’s what we’re here in this world for – to make use of this great gift and spend our days, our minutes, choosing between good and not good, and between good and better.

120 Years To Choose

We’ll only have this gem for a short time – ninety years, a hundred years. Even if you live to a hundred and twenty, after you leave this life you’ll be for millions of years in Gan Eden – you’ll be rewarded with a happy existence and every kind of pleasure will be afforded to you – but free will you won’t have. And you’ll miss it –

you'll regret that you can't choose to do good once you pass out of this life.

Now, what that means is that anything that's going to interfere with your free will in this world, anything that will shackle you is the greatest danger because it makes you lose that precious gift that you have only now while you're alive. A wife who won't let you serve Hashem – she drags you to every *simcha* so you can't learn at night, she wants you to work overtime so you can buy luxurious carpets, and you can't mail out a check to the *yeshiva* unless she signs the check – so you're not alive anymore. And if a person is suffering *yis-surim* he is a fettered man; he's in chains because he can't activate his free will as he wishes. Anything that limits your free will, it's like limiting your life.

Chained To The Dinner Table

And the same is if you're eating at someone else's table; it means that you're accepting benefits from somebody and so you're no longer free to choose. You're shackled to your host. And if your *bechira* is shackled, it's the same as being dead. He's not actually dead, because a lot of things he can still do. He can still *daven* a good *mincha* and *maariv*. He can do a lot of good things, even learn Torah. But he's not a free agent any more; he's already given away his gem of *bechira* because the food and drink is enslaving his mind; he cannot say other than what his host wants him to say, and eventually the ideals of his host become his ideas too – even when he's not in his host's home he cannot think independently anymore.

And don't tell me any stories that you can be a taker and still be free! It's false! It's all excuses and alibis. Once you take, you're sold out; you're enslaved to the giver! You're not the same!

The Rabbi Who Died Young

We see it all the time; young rabbis leave the *yeshiva* full of idealism and they go to places where the congregation is made up of materialistic people, *Olam Hazehdikeh* people, and after a while the rabbi becomes the same as them.

How does it happen that the rabbi now has the same mentality as the Sisterhood? Don't tell me it's the environment; of course it is,

but it's more than that. It's because he's eating from the table of the Sisterhood; they're the ones who come in every year and make a motion to give him a raise. The Sisterhood have a say in how much to pay the rabbi and so he becomes enslaved to them.

When a congregation gives a big salary to the rabbi, you have to know that no matter how *frum* he is, no matter how honest and idealistic he is, he's no longer the same. Every raise that they give him makes him become lower and lower. And when the president of the Sisterhood comes let's say and brings him a gift, a trip to Israel, so he's sold out; he's an abject slave – he's shackled in the heaviest chains and his mind cannot rise above the level of his new "rebbe." Instead of being a slave to his old *rosh yeshivah* where he learned as a *talmid*, now he's enslaved to an old lady.

Selling The Bechira

And the end is that he loses his free will and whatever he says thenceforth is only platitudes – because nobody is going to be ungrateful enough, nobody will be mean enough to attack the people that are good to him. It's impossible! He would have spoken with vehemence against the things they're doing wrong. He would speak with venom against those who need to be spoken against. But now he's not free anymore. He won't open his mouth because he sold his *bechira* for a pot of lentils.

And anybody who thinks that he can be an exception is *aino ela toi'eh* – it's nothing but an error. He's fettered and shackled to the ideals of those who are feeding him. Unless he goes out of the *yeshivah* at an advanced age –he learned in a *kollel* and he has a wife and children already; he grew up in *shas* and *mussar* and now he's in his thirties. Now he's more fortified; he's hardened and stubborn. Maybe he'll be able to avoid the pitfalls – *kulai hai, v'ulai* – maybe he'll continue to live; maybe he'll continue to choose life!

The Dead Family Magazine

Not only rabbis. Everyone is susceptible. When a Jewish magazine accepts ads from the United Jewish Appeal or some other non-Torah organizations, so even though they have pictures of *tzadikim* on the cover and articles of *yiras Shamayim* plastered all over the inside, you have to know that it's not the same; they're already

slaves. It's not a Torah magazine because they are pulling punches. There are a lot of things that they're not saying anymore. No matter how good they are, no matter all the good intentions they have, they're sold out already to the table they're eating at.

And that's what happened to Korach's people. They were good people but once they enjoyed Korach's cakes they were shackled to Korach's ideals. They could no longer see the greatness of Moshe because *בְּחִנְפֵי לֶעֱגֵי קָעוֹג* – *when they were sitting and eating pastries so there was chanifa, there was flattery and there was also mockery, jesting.*

The Rabbis' Land

Now this brings us to a story. The *gemara* (Kiddushin 59a) tells about an empty lot that stood in the middle of a town and was never used. It was a good piece of real estate; it was arable and capable of cultivation but it was a queer thing – nobody ever used it. And that lot had a name. It was called *Ara D'rabanan* – the piece of land that belonged to the rabbis. That's how it was known.

Now, what does it mean, "The land of the rabbis"? There's a story behind it and here's what happened.

There was a certain sage who had purchased a lot that he needed. But a little while after he bought it somebody complained to him: "How could you buy this piece of land? It's not right! There was another sage – a poor man – who was trying to buy it; he was negotiating with the owner and you snatched it from right under his nose."

Now, when this first sage discovered that the second sage had already been negotiating and wanted to buy it, he was distressed. And as soon as he heard he went over to the poor sage and he said, "If that's the case, take it. I'm giving it to you. I want to give you the field as a gift."

But the second sage said, "A gift?! I don't take any gifts." He refused to take it. It went back and forth; the sage who bought the field refused to use it because it was a case of *Ani hamehapech b'charara* – *a poor man had negotiated for it*, so he felt it was wrong for him to take it. But the poor man refused to take it – he didn't want any gifts.

A Waste of a Field

So this one didn't take it and this one didn't take it – they both retired to their corners and nobody used it; it remained bare and uncultivated for generations. A remarkable thing! The field remained unused for generations. It was a big plot of land that stood empty in the middle of the town like a monument. People called it *ara d'rabanan* – the land of the two rabbis, and they always used to talk about the story of the two *rabanan* who had an argument about who should take the field – it's an argument you don't find today.

Now this story needs commentary which will not be forthcoming now but one point that's important for us to know – the poor sage refused to accept gifts. The question is why? The first sage said, "I'm not going to use it anyhow! Just take it please." But he wouldn't take it. It's a question: What's so wrong with taking a gift?

The Gift That Kills

So we look in the *gemara* and study the words of the *chacham*. He said like this: *Lo nicha lach d'echyeh* – "You don't want me to live?! You want me to take a gift?! Are you trying to kill me?!" And he quoted the following *possuk* in Mishlei: שׂוֹנֵא מִתְּנָה יָחִידָה – He who hates gifts is going to live (15:27). A good piece of advice from Shlomo Hamelech: You want to live? Then hate gifts! That's what Mishlei is telling us: "He who hates gifts is going to live."

Now, if you're about to become *bar-mitzvah* or you're getting married soon it may be a little bit difficult for you to hear this. So we'll say an excuse that in a case like that it's not really a gift. The giver is paying a debt because your family gave gifts to them at their *simchos* so they're paying back. It's like a debt. So we have some justification, some excuse.

But whatever it is, it's an excuse because there's a very big principle we're learning here. What is it? It's what we said before – that life means the opportunity of *bechira*, the precious gem of being an independent person who can choose between good and bad. And the fact is that once you accept a gift you're sold out to the giver – you're giving away your life. And such an important principle deserves to be memorialized with a monument.

The Monument

And that's what happened. The empty lot remained a monument to this episode. For generations and generations people would speak about "the land of the rabbis." Children used to ask, "What's going on with this land?" and the fathers used to tell them the story: "That's not *stam* an empty lot," they told their children. "It's a monument to the sage who didn't want to give away his life by taking gifts." Everybody was told the story about how one sage who wanted to give a gift to another sage, but he wouldn't accept it because he didn't want to be indebted and lose even a little bit of his *bechira* — a gem like that you don't give up so easily.

That's how it was in the olden days — mothers and fathers didn't tell their children meaningless stories about talking mice, about Goldilocks and bears. They told stories about *ara d'raban* and everyone learned the lesson of *soneh matonos yichyeh* — that anyone who is a taker is in danger of losing his independence; he's giving up his free will which means he's giving up life.

Some Tishen Are Kosher

Now, we won't say that you can never eat at someone else's table. If it's up to me, there are many *tzadikim* who I would gladly eat in their homes because I'd become slaves to them. What's better than that? What's the purpose of having freedom of mind? In order to get the right type of mind. So if you take your freedom of mind and use your *bechira* to enslave it to a greater mind, a holy Torah mind, that's the best thing. So for us, it's no question. Let's say, Rav Aaron Kotler invites you to his house. He says, "On Shabbos come eat at my table." So forget about what you heard tonight and say, "Gladly!" because you'll become enslaved to the best. You'll sit at his table and whatever he says, you'll say, "Yes, it's good." You could be sure it's good and you'll be swallowing down all of the best attitudes of the mind.

But meanwhile we're not eating by the table of *tzadikim*. We're at the *shulchan acheirim*, at the table of others, and we're taking and taking; and that means we're giving up our minds to others — we're not guarding the precious gem of free-will.

Part III. America's Table

Eating at America's table

And this brings us to the very sad subject of being a guest at the table of the gentiles. Being in exile means that we're *somech al shulchan acheirim*; we're eating at the table of others. Now, before we begin I want to clear the decks for action; I want to make one thing clear – exile doesn't mean only America. Exile means *Medinas Yisroel* too and don't make any mistake about that; geography doesn't make any difference. Tel-Aviv is just the same as Paris and New York. In New York you're eating in the home of Mayor Koch and Governor Cuomo and in Tel Aviv you're eating in the home of the Zionists, the Marxists, and that's just as bad as anybody else. The truth is it's worse.

Wherever we are, we are the guests and they are the hosts. And even though you might never even think of going into the home of your Italian neighbor to sit down and eat supper with him, we're actually sitting at the table of the gentiles. They give us a place to be. They give us freedom, other benefits too. We make our livelihood among the nations – they're your clients and your patients and your customers – and that means we rely on them.

Blue Lives Matter

We're benefiting in many ways from them. They drive the buses; they take us and our children to the *yeshiva*. We're taking from them government benefits, public services, other things. We're protected by the law; there are police who will come to our aid if we call them. A gentile policeman will come in his car, with a siren, and he'll take up for you. Even if the police don't do anything, at least they're present on the street to frighten some people from doing crimes. We gain from that.

If *chalilah* there's a fire so who's coming to save your life? It's the Italian firefighters who come. The Italian is the one who might revive you. They come in their big trucks and they might even pull someone out of a burning building and revive him with mouth-to-mouth breathing.

And that means there's a certain affection you have for them; a *kiruv hada'as*. It's impossible any other way. I remember once when an Irish policeman came to help me out. There was a man, a neighbor of ours, who had a dog and he let it run wild and once the dog bit me. So I called up the police station to make a complaint and the owner of the dog was standing there cursing me. A big tall Irish cop came and stood up for me; he told the man to keep quiet: "Close your mouth," he said, and he wrote down his name and address and told him he has to report to the Health Department with the dog. At that moment I felt that this Irish man is my protector. To a certain extent I was sold out to him.

We're eating from the table of the gentiles and so we're sold out to them – *because* of all the benefits we get from their table we begin to swallow their ideals as well. And there's nothing more dangerous than selling out your mind to a gentile.

Don't Protest Against America

Now, don't go out of here and tell people that Rabbi Miller is not a loyal citizen! Far from it! Absolutely we're loyal to the country we live in. "*Bira d'shasis minei – If you drink from a well, lo tishdei bei kolo, don't throw dirt into it*" (Bava Kama 92b). A well from which you drank, don't spit into it; just the opposite – you have to do what you can to preserve it. That's a principle of the *gemara* – you must show gratitude even to an inanimate object. And so certainly we have to be loyal and grateful to America.

Shouldn't you be loyal to the one who gave a roof over your head and a place to stay dry? Absolutely! After all, America is a good country. We came from countries where we were persecuted, and this country gave us all the rights. When the immigrant Jews came to America they were overjoyed; they kissed the earth in happiness. Not only those who came as a result of Hitler, but even those who came earlier, from Czarist Russia and other European countries – they came to a land of equal opportunity and they were amazed at the friendliness here. I was in Europe for some time when I went to study in the *yeshiva* in Slobodka and when I came back I saw even more that this was a blessed country; it's a gift from Hashem to us.

Old Glory

That's why I say that a Jew should hang out the flag on July 4th. I won't say you're a sinner if you don't, but I think it's a good thing to hang out the flag today. It's not a contradiction to being a *frum* Jew by any means; it's not a *goyishe* thing.

Walk down Ocean Parkway this week; no flags on this side, no flags on that side. But here, we hang out the flag on July 4th. The flag is a symbol of all the privileges that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving us in this country. And therefore it's not a bad idea – even if you never did it before – to hang out a flag on the Fourth of July.

The Destructive Left

Let me tell you something, Fifty years ago I wouldn't have spoken about that. I have been speaking more than fifty years in public but I didn't speak about American flags. It wasn't necessary. But if you want to do it today, I say *yasher koach*. Do you know why? Because all the *reshaim* are trampling on the flag; they're trying to desecrate America. You know why they're burning the flag? Not because they're good *goyim* trying to improve America; it's because they are *reshaim gemurim*; they are liberals who are trying to ruin everything.

You have to know that the liberals and the leftists are ruining America. They are wicked people and wickedness has no calculations. That's why we do the opposite. They want to destroy the moral fabric of America and so the least we can do is show that we appreciate the great gift of America.

The American Birthday Cake

America is a very big *bracha*; it's like a very big birthday cake, or a very big *yontif* cake with lots of ice cream and a lot of toppings. There is so much freedom, so many opportunities to make a living, and when a person is given such a big cake of happiness he should appreciate what he's getting.

The American flag is a sign of decency and compassion. That's what it is. Of course, it's only a symbol, but it's a symbol of what Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing to us. America is a great gift to us from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And therefore it's not America that we have to

love; we have to love Hashem who gave us America! And if Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives you Australia, then you have to love Hakodosh Boruch Hu who is giving you Australia.

And so all of us should be grateful to America. But it's not America – who is America after all? This goy or that goy? America is Hakodosh Boruch Hu's gift to us and we show appreciation for that gift by cooperating with America and preserving it as much as we can.

Pas Akum

But *sof kol sof* we're eating that cake at the table of the gentiles. Let's say the mayor considers the Jewish community a friend of his. He doesn't by the way; he doesn't care about you at all. Only that he wants the Jewish vote so he makes believe. But the mayor is giving gifts to the *yeshivos*; other things he's giving us too. So what happens? You're not going to put up a big fight when the mayor is making a proposal to give gay rights to these degenerates. When the mayor wants to give them affirmative action status so that they should get the first chance to get positions in the schools and in government jobs you keep quiet. After all, the mayor is your man; he bought the Jews for a little bit of money.

And because of that – just because we're eating that cake – so we have to know that we are losing our free will; we're abdicating our free will to America. It's a sin to be Americanized. You can be a good, loyal citizen, but don't sell yourself out and Americanize!

America Is Gevaldig

Don't I remember when the families first came to America in the early 1900s; I was a little baby then, but I saw what was taking place. Jews came from small towns in Europe where they didn't have automobiles. Some Jews never saw an automobile in *der heim*, and now he saw for the first time he saw an automobile. It wasn't a real automobile – if you remember the old Fords, the Flivvers, they were very far from being an automobile, but they were so remarkable that the Jews were overwhelmed.

They came and saw electric lights. They never saw electric lights before. Ooh wah! Street lights! I remember when I was a little

baby. I was born in America, but I was in the company of European Jews – Baltimore was almost all European Jews then. The streetlights in the stores were burning on and off, on and off. Ooooh, what's this? America, *ah gevaldige* place! America!

They went crazy for America. Streets filled with stores! Besides everything else, you could buy everything here. Everything was available here. And most of all, you were a free man in this country – at least that's what they thought; they thought they were free.

A Gevaldige Nisayon

It was this freedom, this freedom to eat at the table of the gentiles that enslaved their minds because when you sit down at somebody's house and he tells you things while you're eating, it goes down together with the food. In the beginning your mind is saying no, no, no to all the ideals of America and Tel-Aviv, but your body is saying yes, yes, yes, and little by little your mind readily acquiesces and agrees.

That's what happened to many of the Jews; they stopped thinking like Jews because they were swallowing all the American ideals – baseball and Thanksgiving and equality – along with the cake. The wealth of America so overwhelmed these people who came from the little towns in Europe, that they sold out. They came from agricultural countries; from the backwards civilizations of Poland, Galicia and Lithuania. There wasn't much to eat at the table of Eastern Europe; no freedom, no *parnasa*, no equality – and so when they came here they were so overwhelmed by the good cake of America that they collapsed; all their principles collapsed. They forgot everything that they ever learned and they swallowed the ideals of America along with their new found freedoms.

We're Losing Our Minds

And that's why we have to be on guard always. Of course, we're grateful to be sitting at the table of America; absolutely. But just because of that, just because we're eating from their hands, we have to be extra vigilant and guard our minds always. We shouldn't be like animals who follow only the instinct, like the herd who follow the editorials of the newspapers or listen to the radio and the television and what monkey sees, monkey does.

That's the great danger of *shulchan acheirim* – there's a certain price we pay by sitting at their table; we are becoming *meshubad*, enslaved to their ideas. It can't be helped. We're eating their cake but we're losing our independence of mind; we laugh at their jokes and we approve of their mannerism. Instead of Korach talking, the President is talking to us. The mayor and the newspapers and our gentile neighbors are talking to us. And we're lapping it all up because we're sitting at their table.

The Real Independence Day

And so, the first step to reclaiming our freedom – our freedom to think in the ways of the Torah; our freedom to acquiring Torah attitudes – is to become aware of the danger of giving up our *bechira* by means of taking.

We don't want to be like the *adas Korach* who gave up their minds – it means they gave up their *Olam Habah* – for some cake. *U'vacharta ba'chaim!* We want to retain our free will – all of it – and live only according to the dictates of what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants. And therefore, all of our lives, wherever we go, wherever we eat, and wherever we achieve happiness, we always remember that our minds – our ideals and attitudes – are sold out only to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Whatever good we get in this world, we remember always that the One who is providing for us is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. We remind ourselves that everything we have is only from Him; we are eating at His table and it is only to Him that we are sold out.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

There is a *gemara* that says that the entire Torah is taught to a child just before he is born. My question is, suppose it's a girl, does she also learn the Torah?

A:

And the answer is that she is taught the Torah of a girl. There is a big Torah for a girl to learn, a tremendous Torah. A girl doesn't learn technicalities of the Torah that are not *l'maaseh* but the things that she has to know are endless. She has to know the Torah of good character; *middos tovos* is a tremendous subject. The Torah of *emunah* and *daas Hashem* is an endless subject.

You know, the *malachim* are never finished speaking the praises of Hashem: תמיד מספרים כבוד קל – *They are always speaking about the glory of Hashem*. Now, *malachim* have very good heads; in one minute they can see more than we see in a whole lifetime. And they are always busy talking about the glory of Hashem! They never run out of what to say! So that's something that everybody has to study. Men and woman have to know that one of the most important of their life functions is to recognize Hakodosh Boruch Hu in this world. There is so much to learn about that; so much to study, so many things to learn. Like the Gra used to say to his daughters; he told them that they should always learn *mussar seforim* – all the *mussar seforim* are available to girls.

And so, if a girl learns all these things then she's a *gaon*; she's considered the same as if she became a *gadol hador*; she has learnt her Torah, she has achieved success. And therefore, absolutely the Torah is taught to girls just like to boys, each one according what he or she needs to know.

TAPE # E-182

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