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**Email:** [info@TorasAvigdor.org](mailto:info@TorasAvigdor.org) | **Telephone:** 732.844.3670

**Address:** 1273a 46th Street Brooklyn NY 11219

פרשת חיי שרה

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

**Man of Spirit**

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*Part I. The First Extremist*

**The Long Distance Shidduch**

In this week's *sedrah*, when we read the story of Avraham Avinu sending his loyal servant, Eliezer, to Charan to find a *shidduch* for Yitzchok, we are faced with a question. Maybe it doesn't bother you, but it should; it's an important point worth getting snagged on.

What is this whole business of sending Eliezer to a far-off country to find a wife for Yitzchok? Charan after all is in Aram Naharayim – Naharayim means the place of two rivers, between the Euphrates and the Tigris – and if you're traveling on the ancient roads it's more than a thousand miles from Avraham's tent in Chevron. That's quite a long camel trip if there are good candidates available locally.

Now anybody who learned a little bit of Chumash-Rashi, so they'll tell you right away that Avraham had no option; he just *couldn't* make a *shidduch* with a local Canaanite girl. Like he said about Eliezer's daughter,



“אַתָּה אָרוֹר – You are from the seed of Canaan and so you are accursed, וְאַנִי בְרוּךְ – And I’m blessed, Avraham said, “We come from the seed of Shem, the son that Noach gave a special blessing to.

“And in addition, Hashem said to me, וְאַבְרָהָם – ‘I’ll bless you!’ So we’re doubly blessed – we’re blessed by Noach and even better, by Hashem Himself. וְאֵין אָרוֹר מִתְדַבֵּק בְּבְרוּךְ – And the one who is accursed cannot be joined to the one who is blessed. When it comes to the building blocks of what is going to be the future Chosen People, there can’t be a union between Shem and Canaan.”

And so you’ll say that there’s no question at all. If the Canaanite girls were off limits, so Avraham therefore *had* to seek a girl from Shem’s family in Aram Naharayim. Where else would he find his family?

### **No More Chamas**

The only problem is that it’s not true. Because we know that among the people who lived in Canaan, right near Avraham, was a very important personality, an old righteous sage, called Malkitzedek. You know who he was? It was Avraham’s grandfather. Because Malkitzedek wasn’t his name; he was Shem ben Noach only that he acquired that title, מֶלֶכִּי-צֶדֶק – *The King of Righteousness*. And he and his family lived right down the road from Avraham, in ancient Yerushalayim.

What was he doing there? After the Mabul, when Shem came out of the *teivah*, he made up his mind that he had to do something now to make sure that such a disaster should never happen again. “I’m going to start fresh now and rebuild the world with *tzedek*, righteousness,” he said. “The old generations from before the Mabul, they destroyed the world by their mistakes, but we’re going to build a new community now where we won’t repeat those mistakes. No more *chamas*, no more injustice. From now on, only *tzedek*.”

And so he came to a certain place in Eretz Canaan, the site which later became Yerushalayim, and he founded a town and gave it the name Shaleim. מֶלֶכִּי-צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם – *He was Malkitzedek, the king of Shaleim* (Chayei Sarah 14:18). Shaleim, that’s the ancient name of Yerushalayim. *Yeru* means ‘city’ in the ancient language; *Yeru*, the city, *shalayim*, of Shaleim.

### **A Very Frum City**

Why Shaleim? Because it was a town that was built with one purpose in mind – *shleimus*, perfection. It was a community dedicated to perfection of behavior and character. Now, that’s quite an idealistic name! A remarkable thing! A small kingdom where the slogan was *tzedek*, righteousness.

And Malkitzedek made it his business to make it happen. In those days, the man who ruled the town was in full power – he wasn't elected; he didn't have to worry about getting votes – and so he saw to it that the entire town was conducted with the principles of righteousness. He had the traditions from the ancient times, from Noach. He knew the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach* and all the great and true ideals that were transmitted from Adam Harishon; and so if he was in charge, we understand it was a marvelous community.

Just like when there's someone wicked in charge, the citizens become wicked, *מִשָּׁל מְקֻשִּׁיב עַל דְּבַר צָדִיק* – *when there's a righteous ruler, כָּל מְשֻׁרְרָיו* – *all those who serve him are righteous too* (see Mishlei 29:12).

### **The Perfect Shidduch Resume**

So we understand already what Shaleim was; it was a town of *tzaddikim*, an exceptional place with exceptional people from the family of Sheim. And so we come back now to our question, why didn't Avraham make a *shidduch* with the family of Malkitzedek?

We know that Avraham respected him very much. He recognized him as *בֶּהֱוִי לֵא-לֵה עֲלִיּוֹן*, *a kohen of the Most High Hashem* (Bereishis 14:18) it means he was dedicated to the worship of Hashem. And *וַיֵּתֶן לוֹ מֵעֶשֶׂר מְבִל* – *Avraham gave him a tenth of all the spoils that he captured in battle*, like you give to any *kohen* (*ibid.* 20).

So not only did Avraham have family right nearby but he knew that it was a family of *ovdei Hashem*, of good people. And so he should have made his way over to Shaleim – it was right down the road – and found a wife for Yitzchok from his own family. And you can be sure Malkitzedek would have jumped with glee at such a proposal, to marry into the family of Avraham Avinu, the *נְשִׂיא אֱלֹקִים* (Chayei Sarah 23:6). And so it's a big question. Why did he look so far away, to Charan? It's a *kasha* that should puzzle us.

### **Too Close for Comfort**

And the answer is that Avraham couldn't afford to make a *shidduch* with somebody close by. He couldn't afford to acquire a *mechutan* like that, because as great as Malkitzedek was, he wasn't great enough to understand Avraham's dedication to serving Hashem.

I'll give an example. You remember when those wandering Arabs came by Avraham's tent on that hot day? Remember now, Avraham was a very wealthy and powerful man, a famous man, and he's sitting now at the door of his tent and he sees people coming. So what would we expect of such an excellent personality like Avraham Avinu? He should call out to the

passersby, "Please come in. I'll take care of you. I'll give you whatever you need."

Excellent! That would be excellent. But no, he didn't do that. He jumped up and ran towards them. To run towards guests? A hundred year old man and he just had a serious procedure, an operation. Who does such a thing? To run into the street?

They weren't even stopping at his tent; they would have kept on going. Only that Avraham didn't let them go. He fell down on his face in the street and he begged them, **אַל תָּעֲבֹר** – *Please don't go away*, **מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ** – *from your servant* (Vayeira 18:3). He called himself their servant.

### **Wild Behavior**

Now we are accustomed to the Chumash so we think that's how it has to be but that's a mistake. It's absolutely not normal to do what Avraham did! It's wild behavior! Wake up now! We're talking about pre-Chumash times when we didn't have any Rashi yet. We know that they were *malachim*, but Avraham didn't know that. They were regular Arabs, traveling nomads; and he threw himself down in front of them.

How would anybody look at such a display? It's strange. If someone is in need, alright, so you'll offer him something. But if he's reluctant to accept your hospitality, you have to throw yourself on the ground? You prostrate yourself and beg him to come? A fanatic; *mammesh* a wild man!

### **Imitating Hashem**

But Avraham had his ideals; he knew what he was doing because he saw that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is even more fanatic. Hashem is a bigger fanatic in doing *chessed*. He serves food even to people who rebel against him; even to *ovdei avodah zarah*. People are worshiping idols, they're bowing down to the sun; when they are finished, they take a drink of water. Who gave them that water? Hakadosh Baruch Hu. They're spitting in His face, *chas v'shalom*, and it still rains; He brings down rain! People do crimes and food still grows on their farms.

And He does *chessed* with a measure far beyond our ability to picture. **הֵן אֶת הָעוֹלָם בָּלָא** – *He feeds everybody*, **בְּחֶן וּבְרַחֲמִים** – *and He does it with kindness*. He delivers packages of food wrapped in beautiful red wrappers, hanging from trees, and beautiful gold wrappers hanging from trees, and beautiful yellow wrappers. Apples and oranges and bananas are packages of food that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is delivering to us. To whom? Not only to you; to everybody, all the time.

And so when Avraham was doing these things, he wasn't doing anything extreme as far as he was concerned. In a small measure, he was trying to emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And not only in *chessed*. Everything Avraham did, he did it to an extreme. That's how a *tzaddik* operates, he wants to serve Hashem to his utmost. A man who loves truth, when he discovers the truth so he follows it all the way. He has a feeling that stirs inside him, "I must excel in the service of Hashem. I'm only going to live once and so I'm going to go all out."

### ***Seeking Shleimus***

Now I don't say that I'm such a psychologist that I can analyze the mind and the feelings of Avraham Avinu. We're talking now from an ant's point of view but after all we have our own minds and we're *mechuyav* to think. And there's no question that one of the greatest forces in Avraham's greatness was his desire to excel, to be great in service of Hashem.

Not that somebody should praise him – Avraham didn't care for the compliments of human beings. But Avraham wanted that he should become the best possible Avraham in the Eyes of Hashem, and so it wasn't extreme to him; it was *avodas Hashem*.

And not only himself; he wasn't satisfied with that. If you look in the Chumash you'll see wherever he went **וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' הֵשֵׁם** – *he proclaimed in the name of Hashem* (Bereishis 12:8). He wanted as many people as possible to be convinced of the truth that he himself had discovered. He wanted that everyone should be imbued with a keen awareness that Hakadosh Baruch Hu not only had made everything, but that He was conducting the affairs of mankind and all the history of the world *constantly*. Avraham gave his life for that one purpose. Again and again the Torah tells us that's what he did. **וַיִּבֶן שָׂם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה'** – *he built an altar to Hashem where people would gather*, **וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' הֵשֵׁם** – *and he called out in the name of Hashem* (ibid.). He spoke to people about the Creator.

### ***No Settling for Less***

Now, I'm sure Malkitzedek thought about these things a little bit too. Malkitzedek was a *lamdan*, a *tzaddik*, no question, but he didn't think about these things on the same level. If he would have seen Avraham Avinu stopping to look at a dandelion and then the next day doing it again, he would have scorned that. It's too much. And to make lectures about it, to gather people together and tell them about apples and the Creator? No, that was too much in the eyes of Malkitzedek.

And so when it came time to find a *shidduch*, to bring a new mother into the home and to acquire a *mechutan* – a *mechutan* you have to know means a new relative, and a close one; you're attached at the hip now – so Avraham Avinu was very wary.

He saw this beautiful community of *Ir Hatzedek*, *Ir Hashalem*, a city of perfection and righteousness under the rule of the *kohen leKel elyon* and he admired it no end. But he decided, "It's not for me. I need more than that. And if I attach myself to them it'll be an encumbrance on us. It'll be a shackle on my legs because everything I do will be looked at with slanted eyes and it will make it difficult for me to move any further than I am." And that's why Avraham couldn't have done it. Because he had to live his one life to its fullest and his life was built on certain principles that were far superior to what Malkitzedek could appreciate.

## Part II. The Extremist is Chosen

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### **The Bearded Meshugener**

That's a very important point we're studying now. Avraham's actions were considered irrational by many people! Like the Navi Hosheia states (9:7), *מְשֻׁגָּעַת אִישׁ הָרֹחַ* – *The man of the spirit seems insane to other people.*

Anybody who demonstrates some idealism is considered a lunatic by people who lack that attitude. I remember about thirty years ago (1945), a man who wore a beard was considered a *meshugener*. If you walked through the streets of a Jewish district, they called you *meshugener*. Now, you're not much of an idealist just because you wear a beard. But for the beardless, that was already *meshuge*. I remember that!

And don't think that it's any different today. A person who's less idealistic than you, thinks that you're an extremist. And the person just below him thinks he's an extremist. If you go out to some far-off Jewish community, the wife of the rabbi, she's an extremist because she covers her hair. And if you go further out, then the one who won't drive to shul Shabbos, he's the extremist.

But I want you to know something; it's much more than that. Because even among the good ones, the best ones, the great *tzaddik* looks at a *tzaddik* that is greater than him and he thinks he's too extreme.

### **Scorning The Better Ones**

That's what the Chachomim say in Medrash Rabah, Shir Hashirim on the *possuk* (8:7), *אִם יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת כָּל הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה* – *if a man will give away all*



the wealth of his house for the sake of love on an ideal, בּוֹז יְבוֹזוּ לוֹ – other people scorn him.

It means that when one person makes a big sacrifice for something that he desires – let's say he goes all out for *limud Torah*; he gives up opportunities to make a good *parnassah* because he wants to stay in *kollel*. Or maybe he doesn't travel places or run to every *simchah* because he wants to learn in the *beis medrash* every night – so other people will look down on him because for them it seems excessive to make such sacrifices.

Now, who is it speaking about over here? So we would think maybe the *am haaretz*; the man who never opens a *sefer*, and he sees the *talmid chochom* who learns till late at night in the *beis medrash*, or he stays all day Sunday in the *beis medrash*; he scorns that. He thinks the *talmid chochom* is an extremist.

### **Scorning Wealth**

But that's not it. It is, but it's more than that. Listen now to the story that the Medrash uses to illustrate this *possuk*: Rabbi Yochanan was walking down the road with Rabbi Chiya bar Abba, his *talmid*, and they passed a farm where a lush crop of standing grain was swaying in the wind. It meant a successful year, a lot of wealth. A big crop sometimes means for a farmer success for years and years.

And so as they passed by, Rabbi Chiya commented on this field, about how beautiful and valuable it is.

So Rabbi Yochanan said, "It was once mine."

"Yours?" said Rabbi Chiya. "So what happened?"

He said, "I sold it to learn Torah."

Rabbi Chiya kept quiet.

As they continued down the road they passed a vineyard. And Rabbi Chiya again noted the big luscious grapes that were hanging in profusion and he made some remark about them. He admired the big clusters of grapes.

So, Rabbi Yochanan said, "This *kerem* was also once mine but I sold it in order to study Torah."

### **Scorning a Rebbe**

Then they came to a *pardes*, an orchard with all kinds of trees bedecked with fruits hanging from their branches; big juicy luscious fruits.

Rabbi Chiya was already afraid to say anything so Rabbi Yochanan said, "That was also mine once and I sold it to study Torah."

This time Rabbi Chiya could not contain himself – he burst out weeping. He was thinking “How could it be? The rebbe was once so wealthy. His family bequeathed to him such a lavishness of wealth and today he is penniless. He sold it all so that he could learn Torah?!”

Now, Rabbi Chiya didn’t say to his Rebbe “Why did you do that?” He didn’t criticize him but in his heart he could not understand such extreme action. “To become pauperized in order to study Torah? You could study Torah without that. You can remain a wealthy man and still study Torah too. Maybe not as much but this is too extreme, to give away such wealth!” Reb Chiya wouldn’t say anything but he couldn’t control himself and he cried.

And the Medrash explains that this is the meaning of **בוז יבוזו לו**. Rabbi Yochanan wasn’t understood, even by his closest *talmid*. Now, Rabbi Chiya was a big idealist in his own right and he made great sacrifices for learning Torah. You know, Rabbi Chiyah came all the way from Bavel to learn Torah; he forsook his home to come to Rabbi Yochanan’s yeshivah in Eretz Yisroel to learn Torah. Nevertheless Rabbi Yochanan was far superior to his *talmid* and the fire that burned in Rabbi Yochanan’s heart, the fire of *ahavas haTorah*, was too great even for Rabbi Chiya to understand.

### ***Hunting Idealism***

It means that the great idealist is misunderstood even by other idealists because what is in his heart is unknown to them. His love for his ideals and his desire to achieve *shleimus* is so powerful that it cannot be imagined by other people – even though they themselves are also great personalities. They don’t understand him! That’s an important rule to remember. When the big idealist meets somebody who is far above him, who towers with his head in the clouds far above him, he can’t understand him.

And that’s what Avraham was worried about when he thought of a *shidduch* with the family of Malkitzedek. And because he knew that the future of his family, the future nation, was being guided by the Hand of Hashem, Avraham had full confidence that somewhere there’s a girl who is worthy of this family of extremists. There must be someplace one pure perfect soul who was fit to be a mate for Yitzchok.

Now it could be that she would not be in Avraham’s family; but Avraham thought if it’s probable to find her anyplace, the most likely place is in my family. Because that family had never cast away its allegiance to Hashem and therefore the great traditions of decency, of kindness and all the other aspirations of mankind for perfection could more readily survive in

Avraham's family in Aram Naharayim than anywhere else. It could have been not so, but Avraham was thinking 'that's the first place to go.'

### **Devising a Test**

What happened when Eliezer arrived in Charan? You remember what he found there? He found a girl just as extreme as his master. בְּרֶדֶךְ שְׂאָרָם רֹצֵחַ לִילָד בָּהּ מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ – *In the way a man wants to go, Hashem helps him* (Makkos 10b). And if Avraham was willing to forsake the local, convenient *shidduch* because he didn't want to be encumbered with half-hearted, or three-quarters hearted servants of Hashem, so Hashem was going to help.

Eliezer decided on a test – it was his own idea – only that he prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu to help him succeed with his test. And the test was to see if he could find someone with a measure of idealism fit for this family, someone worthy enough of the house of Avraham.

Eliezer offered the following suggestion: "I'm going to ask one of the girls who come to the well to give me to drink and if she will offer to give water not only to me but even to my camels, then You, Hashem, should see to it that the right girl is there at that time to accept my offer."

### **Not Looking For Politeness**

Now what was the reason that Eliezer chose this stratagem, this idea of giving his camels to drink too? If he would request a drink of water and the maiden would graciously comply, that already would be a sign of good character. If she would have said, "Mister, I'm happy to share my water with you. And here, you can use my bucket too," that would have been good enough. After all, why shouldn't Eliezer draw it himself? He was able bodied and he had at least ten able-bodied men with him. And so if she would be polite enough and kindly enough to acquiesce, that's enough – that's a good sign.

But it would be a good sign only of politeness, of kindness, and Eliezer was looking for something else. Politeness and dedication and *chessed* he could have found by Malkitzedek. No, he was looking for much more than that. He was looking for somebody who would be extreme and enthusiastic, someone who would be strange and over the top. That's the one who would be befitting to be the mother of the Am Yisroel.

### **Magical Words**

Now when he came to the place he saw a girl at the well and he put the fateful question to her, "Can you let me drink a little water from your pitcher?"

And she said, "Drink my master, drink." And she lowered the heavy pitcher from her shoulder and she gave him to drink. She didn't say "Take

it off my shoulder please.” She lowered the heavy pitcher off her shoulder and held it into his mouth and he drank.

And when he finished, she said the magic words. גַּם לְגַמְלֵיךָ אֶשְׁאָב. – “Could I have the privilege of drawing water for your camels too?” (Chayei Sarah 24:19).

And she didn’t say “I’ll give them a drink.” She said “Can I water your camels עַד אֲם בָּלוּ לְשִׁתָּת, *until they finish drinking*” (*ibid.*). A camel never finishes drinking, you know. You have to force a camel to go away from the well; otherwise he’ll burst, he’ll founder.

And she didn’t wait for an answer; it doesn’t say that he said anything. Right away she ran to the well again and drew water and she began to give it to the camels. And she ran back and forth, again and again. She couldn’t walk because she had a big task ahead of her – she had to fill the troughs with water incessantly. As the camel approached, it dried up the trough with the first gulp. And so, she ran back and forth. There were ten camels and so it took her a long time.

### **Gasoline Jerry Cans**

I must tell you a little secret. Don’t tell anybody I said it; but she looked crazy. It was actually like a *meshuga’as*. If we had been there, we would think she was off her head. בּוֹז יְבוֹז לוֹ! Here is a man with a whole company of able-bodied servants, husky men, and they’re not doing a thing; this young girl is running back and forth drawing water for his camels. For ten camels! Would a normal person do such a thing?

If there was a girl like that today, a Bais Yaakov girl, a *frum* girl, and she saw a group of *tzaddikim* coming along and she would run out and say, “Let me feed you.” And she runs back to her house and starts carrying out trays of food and bottles of water. And then she says, “Let me run to the gas station and fill up containers of gas for your automobile.” And she’s dragging buckets. So she’d be crazy in our eyes. We’d think she belongs in a *meshuga’im* house. No question about it.

And so I’m sure that the other people who were there – there must have been townspeople present – they were thinking, “What is going on here?” Maybe they said it too. They were looking on and they thought she was a lunatic. It’s the most crazy thing to do. Here are ten camels and able-bodied men, a whole caravan that came along, and she was a young girl and she volunteered to draw water for them.

### **Despised and Chosen**

“Tell the man that he has plenty of workers, he has his own servants.” They were looking at her with scorn, contempt. We learn Chumash, we

don't realize how it looked to somebody else. It was actually בּוֹז יָבוֹז לוֹ. They scorned her. But she was deaf to all that. She ran back and forth, back and forth, pouring water like mad.

Now it states that Eliezer was standing *mishtaeh* – he was astonished; to go all out despite the fact that she was despised by the onlookers?! When he saw that, he saw she fitted in with his master's house; a house where people were wild over serving Hashem. And not only wild about it, but willing to ignore what others might think or say.

That's how Rivkah became the mother of the Jewish people. That's exactly what the Torah tells us without any embellishments. She was scorned by her friends for her queer behavior, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "If you're the type of person who is willing to go all out, to serve Hashem even over the top without concern for the scorn of others, then you're going to be chosen forever."

## Part III. The Extremist is Quiet

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### Developing Desire

Now, the question is how do we accomplish that? After all, what we're learning here tonight about Avraham's desire for greatness and his keeping away from Malkitzedek in order that it shouldn't cramp his style – and about Rivka too, about her strength of character – it's not intended to be just a story, something that we read and forget about. These are the Avos and Imahos, our models, the ones we want to emulate. And so we need to know what and how.

Number one is that you have to develop a desire for greatness, a desire to excel. There's a fire, an *eish shel Shamayim* in all of us – the drive for *shleimus*, for perfection, is a fire that Hashem kindled in the human soul and we have to constantly stoke that fire: "I wish to get better! I wish to be great!"

Like it was said about a great man, וַיִּגְבֶּה לִבּוֹ בְּרִדְכִי ה' – his heart became proud in the ways of Hashem (Divrei Hayamim II 17:6). Proud? *Gaavah*? The answer is he had the instinct for greatness. "Hashem put me here to become great, to become the best that I can be, and therefore I'm going to do it. Not the *pshat* that I'm going to belittle other people, that I'm going to try to make them smaller than I am. No, *chas v'shalom*. I want everyone to be great too. But I'm not going to let myself get lost in the herd, among people who are satisfied with being a plain Orthodox Jew. I want *shleimus*!"



## Don't Be a Nobody

I once told this to a *frum* Jew. He said “*Shleimus*?! To become greater? What about serving Hashem *lishmah*, *leshem shamayim*? You're going to run after *shleimus*, after your own perfection?!” He was upset at me.

You must understand that there's no contradiction. On the contrary, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the yearning for *shleimus* in order that we should achieve *leshem Shamayim*. If a person is going to say “I'll be a nobody. I'm not looking for my own perfection. I'll just serve Hashem *leshem Shamayim*”, oh no, that's not what Hashem wants. Hashem wants you to serve Him by utilizing this instinct, this craving for greatness. “Yes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I'm trying to come close to You. I feel the urge to be different from others, to be better and to excel.”

That's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu found in Avraham and in Rivka and in all of our great ones and that's why they were chosen. Hashem is looking for people who are idealistic and enthusiastic enough to become better than the rest of their environment. He's looking for the **אִישׁ הָרוּחַ**, the man of spirit, and **מְשַׁנֵּעַ אִישׁ הָרוּחַ**, the man of spirit is usually looked down at by those not as idealistic as him.

## Together and Separate

Now it's not a bad thing, *chas v'shalom*, to be part of a *frum* community, to be *meurav im habrios*. Everyone should move into the *frummet* community he can find and become one of them. Very good! You live together with them; you follow their customs, their standards. It's not bad at all, *chas v'shalom*; it's very important. And you should utilize the *tzibbur* for that, to make sure that you're living up to their standards and you get along with everybody. That's a very important part of successful living. You'll live happily according to their standards and you get *Olam Haba* too.

But you have to know that it's only the minimum and when you come to the Next World you'll see there's a difference, a tremendous difference, between those who lived according to the standards of the *frum* community around them and those who went above and beyond; those who didn't let the **כּוּץ יְבוּדוֹ** of the environment, the lack of appreciation for greatness, hold them back from that *shleimus*.

Why is Avraham all the way up front? Because he was a man who sought to be different; he sought to be better. He was an *akshan* – he was the ancestor of *am kasheh oref*, a stubborn people – and he refused to be limited by the criteria of those around him. He refused to be cramped and encumbered by even the good ones. That's what made him great; it's what made all the Avos and Imahos great too – the desire for *shleimus*, to disregard the lower ideals of the environment and make something out of

yourself that is way above, way higher, than the standards of your *chaveirim*.

You know, they tell about the Gra that when he was young, he disregarded his environment. He lived in a very good environment but he disregarded them and he did what he thought was right. It doesn't mean he disregarded them completely; certainly not. But if you want to go further than your environment, if you want to be great, then to a certain extent you have to not care what the world will think about you. You have to not be cooled off by the less idealistic people that surround you.

### **Keep Secrets**

And now we come to a key, to an important part of this program. And that is the advice of Shlomo Hamelech: בְּאָזְנֵי כְסִיל אַל תִּדְבֹּר - *Don't speak into the ears of a fool* (Mishlei 23:9). Don't tell other people about your ideals.

You know why? Because יָבוֹז לְשׂוֹכֵל מְלִידָה - *he'll disdain your sensible words* (ibid.) Once you tell it to him, then you have ruined the whole program. First of all he might say, "Who needs it?" and then it's goodbye ideal. The whole thing lands like a dud; he erased it with his reaction.

But even if he didn't say anything like that, he just looks at you – that look is enough to ruin all your hopes. He looks at you with a deadpan face and right away it discourages you. You see he's not *nispa'el*, not excited, and you get cooled off too. Now it could be he's very polite. He won't say "It's nothing." And he listens too. But he won't be excited; he'll be bored. What you're excited about, what you're interested in, he's not so excited about and it turns out to be a dud. You see there's no response, that it fell flat, and so you're weakened in your enthusiasm. He's throwing water on you and extinguishing the fire of your enthusiasm.

### **Sharing Secrets**

That's what it means 'Don't speak into the ears of a fool.' Anybody who doesn't have your ideas is a fool, that's the truth. He doesn't understand what you are really thinking about; and even though he understands it a little bit, but he doesn't understand it in the way you understand it. You tell it to him and you look at his face and there's no reaction there and it cools you off.

You know when I speak to you, the thing that I have in my mind is not reflected in your mind entirely; only part of it is reflected in your mind. Your face shows that it's not reflected fully and so I'm cooled off. I lose out by telling it to you. Now, I take my chances with you; after all you're my guests here. You came here so I'm not going to not talk to you, but still it's a dangerous thing.

You know there was a great sage who lived about eighty years ago, Rav Simcha Zissel, and had the practice that when it occurred to him some important Torah idea, a noble idea, a *derech* in *avodas Hashem*, so for a long time he didn't tell it to anyone. Even from his disciples in the yeshiva, he kept it hidden. He waited weeks and weeks and weeks to enjoy it himself. Then, when he was ready he said it in the *shmooz*.

And he said that had he taught it right away he would have lost it because of the lack of enthusiasm of his listeners. Now, when he spoke to the public, he was speaking to very good *talmidim*. They were great men, his students; all were *talmidei chachomim*, *lamdanim*. But still they could never understand it with the same enthusiasm that he understood it.

### Only an Angel Can Rise Up

You know it states that when the *malachim* are saying *shira* so there are two kinds of *malachim*. There are the *serafim*, the higher *malachim*, and they're saying "*kadosh kadosh kadosh*"; they're praising Hashem. And there are lower *malachim*, the *ofanim v'chayos hakodesh*. And when they hear the *serafim* praising Hashem, they are so great that not merely do they accept part of the enthusiasm of the higher *malachim*, but **קוֹמְנֵשׁוּאִים לְעֶמֶת שְׂרָפִים**, they raise themselves up to the same level of the speaker.

You hear that? When the *serafim* say *kadosh kadosh* so the other ones below are listening to them; they're disciples. But the disciples are so inspired that *misnas'im*, they raise themselves up *li'umas serafim*, to the same level. Oh, that's a great thing! But only *malachim* can do that. Human beings are not like that. A human being will not achieve that inspiration of the *mechadesh*, of the one who is telling him his ideals.

### For You Alone

And so we're learning now that not only do you have to nurture within your heart the ideal of becoming great, you also have to keep it in your heart. **יְהִי לָךְ לְבַדְּךָ** – *It should be for you alone*, **וְאַיִן לְזָרִים אִתְּךָ** – *and you shouldn't share it with strangers* (ibid. 5.17). Let's say you're going to come home and tell your mother that Rabbi Miller said that you can aspire to *shleimus* by shunning the environment that wants to hold you back; she'll look at you like this (*the Rav made a blank face*) and it's finished. Could be she'll call the psychiatrist too. That's what mothers do today when their children become too *frum*.

Even in the yeshivah. Let's say, what you hear in this place you'll tell somebody in the yeshiva. "You know, it's a good idea to say 'I love You Hashem at least once a day.'"

So first of all you see in his face that he thinks you're crazy, that's number one. The second is, he might even say something. "Oh, that's nothing," he'll say, "It's *devarim beteilim*. He's wasting time talking about this subject. You have to learn Torah, Gemara and Tosfos. You have to be *mekayem hilchos Shabbos* and other *halachos*. What are you busy with these things?" And once you see how silly he thinks it is, it ruins the whole business. So keep it to yourself.

Don't even tell it to your wife. Your wife might ridicule you, "Oh all of a sudden he's becoming a *tzaddik in de alter yahren*." Don't say anything. Like the police say, whatever you say will be used against you.

### **Nurturing Greatness**

And therefore it's very good to keep the great ideals to yourself. Sometimes you can't help yourself. After all, you're a teacher, you're a parent; you must tell others. But at the beginning try to hold it as long as you can and suck out all the inspiration you can get out of it; only then tell it to people. That's the way to become great.

Of course you have to want it. You have to want it very much! You have to want to follow in the footsteps of Avraham and Rivka and all the great ones who desired to become greater and not be shackled by the environment around them. And then you have to nurture these ideas in your mind. Nurture all of these ideas that we speak about here in your mind, as you walk in the street, when you're sitting and eating, as much as possible. That's the way forward for the *ish haruach*, the man of spirit!

### **Have a Wonderful Shabbos**

## **LET'S GET PRACTICAL**

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This week I will *bli neder* spend one minute a day thinking about this *middah* of *meshuga ish haruach* that made Avraham and our founding family so great, and I will think of ways to apply its three aspects in my own life: 1. The desire for *shleimus*, 2. The willingness to raise myself above the run-of-the-mill Judaism that surrounds me, and 3. Being careful to keep my idealism to myself in order to keep the fire burning.

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך



**What is your opinion about celebrating the holiday of Thanksgiving with a turkey dinner?**



Thanksgiving is a holiday that was manufactured by gentiles for the purpose of going to church. That's what the original purpose was. It's only recently that it became a 'legal holiday.' But it used to be a Christian holiday and that's what it is all the way down till today.

And because it's not a legal holiday alone, therefore it's *avodah zarah* and Jews are forbidden to participate in such a thing, to eat a turkey dinner. Even if the turkey doesn't have religious symbolism, because it's connected with the holiday and the holiday itself has religious symbolism, that's enough to make it forbidden. There's a Gemara that says it's forbidden to wear laurel leaf on the day of a certain gentile *avodah zarah*. Now, laurel leaf has no religious significance. But because the gentiles wear laurel on that day, it's forbidden.

And so if you eat turkey especially for Thanksgiving, you're an *oved avodah zarah*. That's my opinion. Some people are weak in this matter but I think it's real *avodah zarah*. I think it's **יִהְיֶה וְאֵל יַעֲבֹר**, that a Jew should make a sacrifice not to eat turkey.

However, like I told you earlier there are those who permit it and even though I say it's all wrong I'm not going to force my opinion on you. But if anybody in my synagogue would ask me such a question, I would give it to him. But since you're not in my synagogue, I'll let you go.

TAPE # R-30 (November 1972)

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