

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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PARSHAS VAYERA

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE PITFALLS OF LEITZANUS

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Part I. Rejecting the Leitz

Sarah the Seer

It would be interesting – I shouldn't say only 'interesting'; it would be informative and instructive too – to take note of the name of our first mother, Sarai, or Sarah as it became later, and to study what her name tells us. After all, the name Sarai wasn't given to her by accident; Hakadosh Baruch Hu made them give her this name and there's something important there. It's teaching us something very fundamental about this great architect of the first Jewish home.

'Sarah' means 'one who looks'; from the word 'sar', to look. An officer in *lashon kodesh* is a 'sar' because he looks, he inspects to see what's doing. The Gemara also says about a *shochet* who must use a perfectly smooth knife, *sar sakina* – he has to inspect his knife before slaughtering to see if there are any nicks, any imperfections. *Sar* means to look, to inspect.

And so it was arranged *m'Shomayim* that the parents of our first mother should give her the name Sarai because one day that would be one of

her greatest features: She would be a looker; she would always be looking.

The Home Mashgiach

What does it mean that she was looking? So concerning Sarah our Sages quote the *possuk* in Mishlei (31:27) about the *eishes chayil*: **צופיה** – *She watches, oversees, הליכות ביתה* – *what goes on in her house*. It means that the *eishes chayil* is not just a *balabuste* who keeps the house, making sure that everything is taken care of; that everyone should have food and clean clothing and everything else. That's a very big thing but it's not everything. An *eishes chayil* is also the *mashgiach* of the house. Like a *mashgiach* in the *yeshivah* – his job is to look around to see, "Is everything going all right here?", "Are the *bochurim* coming on time to *davening*, to the *sedorim*?" – that's also the job of the mother in the home.

Of course the father too – the father also must keep his eyes open – but he's usually outside, in the office or the *beis medrash*, and so to a great extent the *mashgiach* of the home is the mother. And that's what Sarah epitomized. **צופיה הליכות ביתה** – *She was watching what was doing in her*

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house, looking constantly to see if everybody is behaving properly.

That's the model, by the way, for every Jewish mother. She's always *tzofiyah*, always looking over the shoulders of her children, always keeping an eye on the children. It doesn't mean they have to know that you're watching them – it's unhealthy that they should think you're suspecting them, that they're under surveillance; but they are.

Constantly you have to be on guard. Where is your child when he walks out on the street? You must train your child to be willing to reveal to you and be open with you. "Where were you when you went out on the street tonight?", "Where are you going now?" There must be specific answers; a certain destination. "I'm going to Chaim's house," or "I'm going to Rivka's house to do homework." And you have to find out who Chaim and Rivka are because the friends are very important.

Seeing in the Dark

Especially when it's dark. Children should be in the house after dark, even older children. No such thing as children on the streets at night! Everybody must come home by a certain hour – just to wander on the street is out of the question!

And in the home, the same thing. Constantly *tzofiyah*, constantly. A mother must always keep her eyes on the children. Are they doing anything dangerous? Are they looking into books or magazines that they shouldn't be? Boys and girls in the same house must be watched constantly. Constantly!

Now, exactly how to do it, it's impossible to give any exact prescriptions; everything depends on the circumstances. But at least we should know the general rule – no *hesech hada'as*! A mother and father shouldn't remove their minds from their children at all! At all times they should be thinking about their children and watching them,

keeping an eye on them. That's how you walk in the footsteps of our first mother, Sarah.

What Sarah Saw

Now, in this week's *sedrah* we find one of the incidents where Sarah was looking and saw something she didn't like and she took action. And it's a model we should study because it's teaching us something: **וְתָרָא שָׂרָה – And Sarah saw, אֵת יִשְׁמָעֵאל מִצְחָק – that Yishmael was laughing; he was joking around (Bereishis 21:9).**

Now, what exactly Yishmael said or did we don't know. Everyone knows what the *meforshim* say; they include in the word *metzacheik* all kinds of things: **עַבְדַּת זָרוֹת – He did idol worship, גִּילּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת – and also immorality, וְשִׁפְכַת דָּמִים – and even murder.** But that's not the *pshat*. Because we know that Avraham didn't want to expel Yishmael. **וַיֵּרַע אֱבְרָהָם – It was bad in the eyes of Avraham, only that Hashem told him, "אֵל יָרַע בְּעֵינַיִךְ" – It shouldn't be wrong in your eyes. Listen to Sarah. She sees better than you" (ibid. 21:11-12).**

Now, if Sarah had seen Yishmael killing somebody you think Avraham Avinu would have tried to protect him? If Sarah told him that Yishmael is **מִצְחָק**, that he committed crimes of immorality and he worshiped idols, so why should Avraham hesitate? Even a regular Orthodox Jew today in Boro Park, if *chalilah* he heard that his son had done these things he would pick him up by the scruff of the neck and kick him out. "Get out of my house! You'll worship idols in my house?! Out!"

She Saw the Future

No; Sarah didn't see anything like that. We follow *peshuto shel mikra* and we understand that Yishmael was 'jesting'; he was laughing, guffawing, that's all. That's what *mitzacheik* means. *And that's what the Sages meant too.* Because Sarah was thinking that if somebody is always in a jesting mood *in my house*, if he's not going to be serious

about life, that's already *avodah zarah* and *gilui arayos* and *shefichas domim*. Eventually, it could be, he'll even do those things.

You hear that *chiddush* of our first mother? If a man is laughing and joking in my holy house – if he is always in a light frame of mind – then such a person, who knows what can happen to him? He is capable of the worst things! Someone who doesn't take life seriously – and life is *very* serious – so he's a candidate for big trouble.

The Hilarious Shidduch

Now, we might think it's too extreme – what's wrong with laughing in a house? So listen to this story. They tell about Rabbi Akiva Eiger that he was making a *shidduch* with someone in Warsaw. One of his children was being *meshadech* with the son or a daughter of a wealthy Varshiva Jew – a *frum* Jew.

So Rabbi Akiva Eiger was in Varsha for the *tenoyim* and when they sat down at the table together, Rabbi Akiva Eiger leaned over and whispered to the *mechutan*, “Are you satisfied with the *shidduch*?”

The *mechutan* said, “Everything I'm satisfied with, only one thing not.”

“What's that?”

“The *mechutan*,” the man said.

He was making a joke; he was saying he wasn't satisfied with Rabbi Akiva Eiger. It was just the opposite; because actually that's the whole reason he made the *shidduch*. That was the whole *yichus*, that he's getting Rabbi Akiva Eiger as a *mechutan*! It was a jest. “The *mechutan* is the one problem.”

“What's the matter?” Rabbi Akiva Eiger said, “What is it?”

So the man said, “I'm just joking. Just a *leitzanus*.”

“Joking?!” Rabbi Akiva Eiger was frightened. How can you joke? *Leitzanus*?!” He wanted to break the *shidduch* off. You can't make a *shidduch* with a *letz*. Finally the man persuaded him he didn't mean anything.

The Great Men Understand

So we hear such a story and we think he was a fanatic, a silly fellow. But you have to know that Rabbi Akiva Eiger was a very smart man, a *talmid chacham* of the highest *madreigah*. He was very far from being silly. We're the silly ones. We don't have any idea what *leitzanus* means, how dangerous it is. Such an innocent *leitzanus*, a *sagi nahar* language – the man really was saying admiring words: “That's the whole reason I wanted the *shidduch*!” But *sof kol sof* it was *leitzanus* and a great man like Rabbi Akiva Eiger understood that *leitzanus* is perilous! Even the words! It's a ruination of character! Even though you don't intend it!

Now, I can't expect that we should understand that right away. To us it seems extreme because we're in America too long already. America after all is a country of laughter. If you pass down the block at night, you hear everybody laughing at the same minute at the same joke they heard on the radio. The whole block is laughing at the same minute. All laughing. You see pictures of the politicians, they're all laughing. People on the street corners, they're all laughing. It's a laughing country.

The Gentile Great Ones

It's a national tradition. You know, Abraham Lincoln, one of the things he's famous for is that he used to tell jokes. I mention him because he was a great man among the gentiles, one of the best; look at a picture of Abraham Lincoln – a distinguished man, a sage of the gentiles. So this sage is sitting, let's say, in a tavern and he's telling jokes. That's how the history books describe the

scene. And as he comes to the punchline, the people become hysterical. They fall on their feet on the floor laughing. “Oh, Abe! That was a great one!”

Did you ever hear about such a thing among Jews? Did you ever hear in the Gemara of the great sage, Rabbi Meir, telling jokes and all the sages fell off their seats laughing? But that's a picture of a gentile sage. That's a picture of America.

And so what do we expect? Of course we can't understand Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Our guffawing American heads should understand such greatness? And surely not the greatness of Sarah Imeinu. Sarah Imeinu was much greater than Rabbi Akiva Eiger. And so we can't expect to understand it completely. But at least we should know that the fault is with us.

Happiness and Mitzacheik

In Sarah's house, everybody had *hadras kodesh*. There was holiness in that house, a *yiras Hashem*. And so when she saw that Yishmael was jesting she was so stunned by what she saw. In her house, somebody should be so unserious?!

Now, I'm sure Sarah smiled in that house all the time. She was a woman of good cheer; always smiling and friendly. **קול רינה וישועה באהלי צדיקים** – *In the tents of the righteous there's always the sound of song and joy* (Tehillim 118:15).

But to jest? In such a house? It's like somebody should come into your synagogue dressed like a clown and dance around – not on Purim. Everyone is *davening* and he's wearing a big red nose, laughing, and doing cartwheels. You'd be overcome by indignation.

That's what it was here; the same thing. Sarah, in her *beis hamikdash*, when she saw that take place, so she told Avraham, “He can't be here.”

Because great men don't joke around. They're cheerful, yes. They're friendly. They smile. They're happy. *But they're not jokers!* Because when you're a joker, the boundaries become impossible to guard. You'll joke about this, about that, and everything becomes unserious – it's very easy to become an unserious person *ingantzen*.

And therefore when Sarah saw Yishmael fooling around she knew he had to be sent away. Because she had sharp eyes, she saw the results of such a thing. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu approved of her decision: **ויאמר אל אברהם** – *And Hashem said to Avraham, כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקולה* – “Whatever Sarah is telling you about Yishmael's jesting, listen to her voice” (*ibid.* 12).

Part II. Rejecting Leitzanus

The Righteous Road

Now in order to understand this subject of *leitzanus* a little bit better we should listen to the words of the Mesillas Yesharim. The Mesillas Yesharim, you know, is a *sefer* of instructions on how to travel the path to success. That's why it's called Mesillas Yesharim, The Path of the Righteous; because that's what it's intended to be.

And he tells us that the first step, the first step in the right direction, is to acquire the quality called *zehirus*. *Zehirus* means awareness; from the word *zohar*. It means illumination of the mind, to develop a certain awareness. Because you cannot travel anywhere unless you know where you want to go. If you're setting out in a certain direction, you have to know, “Where am I headed?” That's the minimum awareness.

And even if you know already, even if you're already on the right path, it's a path of twists and turns, so you need to be focused. There are also obstacles that might cause you to trip, and so *zehirus* is the first requirement. Like the world

says, 'Keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel.' That's *zehirus*.

Obstacles on the Road

Now, the Mesillas Yesharim explains that there are three *mafsidim*, three big obstacles, for those who begin this career of traveling towards Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Now, we're going to deal with one of them tonight but the other two we'll enumerate briefly. The first one is **הטיפול והטרדה**, when you have no time; when you're too busy to think. You must take some time out to think. When people are busy with many things, their minds are occupied and it becomes impossible to see clearly. That's the first big hurdle that everyone must overcome.

Another obstacle he says is **החברה הרעה**, *wrong company*. Whom you associate with is of the utmost importance in shaping your character and your *neshamah*, your *nitzchiyus*; because a person is what his associates are. He thinks according to his environment. It's not impossible but it's next to impossible to be independent of your environment and the people around you – your friends, your employees, your neighbors – and therefore, unless you choose very carefully, your environment will be an obstacle to your success.

The Difficult Obstacle

Now, these two are very important and they deserve a great deal of talk, but tonight we're going to discuss the one that the Mesillas Yesharim says is **קשה מאד**, *very difficult*. It means that this *mafsid*, this obstacle, is very serious; it's the most perilous of the three. It makes achievement very difficult to gain and it's difficult to overcome.

What is it? **הוא השחוק והלצון** – *It's laughter and jesting, leitzanus*; what we call in English kibbitzing. But the Mesillas Yesharim tells us that it's much more than that – he says it's *sakonas nefashos*. **כי מי שטובע במ** – *Because someone who is sinking in leitzanus*, **הוא כמי שטובע בים הגדול** – *is like a man*

sinking in an ocean, שקשה מאד להמלט ממנו – *which is very difficult to escape from (ibid.)*.

Who Are the Jesters?

Now, before we speak about what it means that a *leitz* is drowning, first we have to understand whom he is referring to here. Is he talking about vaudeville players, street corner men who are always standing around and joking? Is he talking about the jesters who like to pull out a chair from a man who's about to sit down?

No. He's talking about us. He's talking about the majority of Orthodox Jews today who are going lost in an ocean of *tzechok v'lotzon*. It's very prevalent everywhere, an attitude of laughing, joking, of sense of humor and making light of everything.

That's why you'll find that you walk into some synagogues and before they start *davening* they're sitting and talking. What is it? It's a *moshav leitzim*. This one makes a joke and this one comes back with his own wisecrack. Whatever it is, there's always laughing. Always an unserious attitude. Always chewing the rag.

The Sin of Unseriousness

Even at the *mikveh*; there's always something to say. He'll make a quip about the rabbi or about something that happened yesterday. Another one will speak about this and that. They come out of the *mikveh* worse than they came in. If you'll listen to me you'll go by yourself. Dunk yourself in the *mikveh* and then go out and go home. Don't sit around talking. Don't sit and talk and joke.

But it's not only in the back of the *shtiebel* and in the *mikveh*. I'm only pointing out those places because even in the places of *kedushah v'taharah* you find such things. But it's everywhere today; everyone loves a good joke, a good laugh, and if you're the one who's able to crack a sharp one, or better yet a quick comeback, a rejoinder, so you're

already from the 'special' ones. And that's a big problem. We're turning ourselves into *leitzim*.

Now, we have to ask the question that is niggling our minds: *What's so bad?* What's so bad about kibbitzing, about being a humorous person? And that it should be so bad that it's like drowning in the ocean without a life-preserver? It's a good question.

The answer is that *leitzanus* makes it impossible for a person to see anything clearly. When a person is a jokester, in a light frame of mind, that causes him to forget his purpose in life. The light frame of mind, the steady and constant unseriousness, ruins a man's mind so that he's no longer able to feel, to taste the things of idealism. If you're not in a serious frame of mind, you can't grasp the seriousness of life. And life is serious. Very serious! There's nothing more serious!

Don't Laugh, Be Happy

Now we're not talking about being sad. Our subject has nothing to do with not having a happy disposition; it's not connected *at all*. A man should be cheerful and happy always. You must be happy because that gives you the dynamo, the energy, to make progress.

And you should make others happy too. You should smile at everyone. Not a stupid American grin – a warm smile. You should say words of cheer, even humor sometimes. If there's a special purpose for it, a *chessed*, then it's not wrong.

Let's say if somebody is downcast and by saying a joke you can cheer them up. So it's like taking licorice and mixing it with some sugar and putting it in a bottle and putting a label on it and making it look like some important medicine, and now the person who takes it feels good. You're deceiving him into making him feel good. So the joke, although in itself it's nothing at all, it's a *leitzanus*, but if it makes a person's spirits rise, it's a *mitzvah*.

The Funny Father

So, if you come home in the evening from the office, let's say, and your wife is worn out raw. The children were frazzling her nerves all day long. And therefore every little problem is magnified in her eyes. Little Chaim'l, he doesn't eat, and it becomes such a major problem, that all the problems of the world are dwarfed in comparison.

And so the father has to make a joke out of it. Of course, he has to be careful to do it in such a way that his wife doesn't become the butt of the joke. But it has to be a joke – "It's not so serious; Chaim will one day be a big fat rabbi anyhow." When it's necessary to cheer up a fellow Jew, so you say some kind of *bedichasa*.

So it depends on the circumstances. Everything we say here has to be taken with a grain of salt – it means you have to know how to apply it. When and where and how. Even at home you have to be very careful not to be a *leitz*.

Because if it's not needed – if nobody needs your *milsa debedichasa* – then keep far away from *leitzanus*. You want to be the life of the party? Or maybe someone else is cracking jokes and you want to show you can also crack them yourself? That's a 100% waste of effort.

The Heavy Obstacle

And worse, it's a 100% obstacle to greatness. Because the superficiality of *leitzanus* keeps a superficial froth on top of the mind so you think there's something there but underneath it's empty. And that ruins the ability to think. It takes away your concentration and makes you forget the purpose in life. It murders your mind.

It's not an exaggeration! It murders your mind because you won't take anything serious in life. When a person becomes lightheaded and silly then all of his great ideals tumble away into nothing. Any *zehirus*, any illumination of the mind, goes out the window. If you're always grinning,

always ready to crack a joke about anything, anyone, any subject, always saying foolish things, that attitude of unseriousness means that you'll never amount to anything.

A Davening Ruined

Here's a man who finishes *davening*. Let's say he put in a good hour *davening*, whatever it was, forty five minutes *davening*. On the way out he stops and cracks a joke by the door. It's all wiped out. The Gemara describes *davening* as **דברים העומדים בראש עולם** – *words that stand at the top of the world*; it means it's a very noble and exalted thing, the highest of the high. But the *leitz* underestimates it. He's from the **בני אדם מזלזלין בהן** – *from the people who underestimate that opportunity* (Brachos 6b). And so his kibbitzing ruins it; that man doesn't even realize that the *leitzanus* upended everything he accomplished.

You should take your *davening* with you as you walk out of the *shul*. After the last *kaddish* don't stand around joking. You can't laugh. You were speaking to Hakadosh Baruch Hu all this time. Such an achievement you'll let slip away? And so, as you walk out, on the way home try to retain the effect as long as possible.

In case there was no effect, make it your business next time there should be an effect. That's the purpose of *davening*. Otherwise what good is it? And when you walk out retain that effect as long as possible, and then the next time you *daven* you add on top of that another effect. It grows more and more each time if you're careful not to lose it in between by *hatzchok vehalatzon*, by jesting and kibbitzing.

And it's like that with everything! All of the important issues of life have to be taken with utmost gravity. Everything is important in this world and when we understand that we all can become great! All of us, men and women, boys and girls, we can walk on the Path of the Righteous.

Part III. The Biggest Leitzanus

Unfocused Living

Now I'll ask you to be tolerant of me because I'm going to expand the subject now. I hope you people will accept the following idea and not think it's too far off. It's another level of understanding this subject, a deeper look into *leitzanus*.

Up until now we said that the *leitz*, whether he realizes it or not, takes his mind off the seriousness of life and all the important things don't make much of an impression on him. Because his mind is always frothing with a mood of lightheadedness, of unseriousness, so he lives an upside down life. The unimportant things become important and the important become less important.

Now that leads us to a very big subject, because you know what the most consequential thing in the world is? The Next World!

I'll say that again because it's so important: *The most serious thing in this world is the Next World*. In this world our minds have to be most focused on what's going to be with us in the Next World. And so the person who removes his thoughts from *Olam Haba* – instead, he's living for this world – that's already a *leitz*.

Even if he's not cracking a joke or laughing, but if he forgets that he's in this world only in order to be successful in his preparations for *Olam Haba*, that's the biggest *leitzanus* there is; because to live for this world means you're ignoring the most serious thing in life.

Leitzanus About Coats and Cars

Here's a lady; she has to go buy a coat and she's talking to her friend on the telephone. "You know I was running all over New York today looking. I'm so worn out. I couldn't get a coat." She went even to Manhattan. She's waltzing around in a place of crooks and perverts, putting her *neshamah* in

peril for the sake of a coat. “But I couldn’t find one,” she says.

Around the corner there's a place where she can get a coat! But she couldn't find one. You understand already what the story is. She's an *Olam Hazedige* woman, a *leitz*. It's a certain type of coat she needs; certain buttons or a certain color.

A man is the same thing; only instead of coats it's other *meshugasim*. He's very interested in his car. On Sunday afternoon instead of being busy in the *beis medrash* preparing himself for *Olam Haba* he's busy cleaning his car; with sprays and waxes and vacuum machines.

And the poor fellow who can't afford a car? So he has other gadgets, less expensive toys, that he's interested in. And so he too is busy with the unimportant things of this world. Only an unserious mind could live like that. It's a life of *leitzanus*.

Legalizing Pot

And they train the children the same way. I see fathers and mothers buying their children expensive watches, all kinds of expensive toys. A father buys his child a \$95 toy. A *meshugeneh*! When a child comes and visits me I can't give him my 25 cent toys – it doesn't mean anything to him because his parents already made him into a *leitz*. So the parents are making the children into little *leitzim*.

What happens? So eventually they grow up into big *leitzim*. Because if that's the *chinuch* they grew up on, that *Olam Haba* is not the most serious thing, so other things become most important. Good times! Oh, of course! Good times! So when the big children are told that it's 'good times' to go to Manhattan, so these *meshugaim* go late at night to Greenwich Village and they sit on the floor – there's no furniture – they sit on the floor, and they smoke pot.

Now why do they smoke pot? Because they're told that that's called living, that's fun. It's fun like a hole in the head. Only that *leitzim* never learned what it means to be serious and so they're always adopting false ideals, empty dreams. Everything foolish becomes important.

Talking to Ourselves

But I'm not talking now to the bums in Greenwich Village. They're not interested in my words anyhow. I'm talking to myself, to us. The whole world is full of false ideals that have captivated our minds. Everybody is under the spell of *Olam Haze*h.

Here is a home which has a basement that's fitted out like a gambling den in Las Vegas. And one side of it is furnished like a Western bar room. It cost thousands upon thousands of dollars. And these people bring their guests to show off what is their pride and their ideal and that's the example they hold out to their families. The fact that they consider these matters important implies that all the important things of life are unimportant. Their ideals are empty as could be.

But even a regular Orthodox home. If you walk into an Orthodox home and you see chandeliers that cost many hundreds of dollars and sofas and rugs that cost thousands, these people are *leitzim*. That house is a *moshav leitzim* because they're putting the emphasis on what is not important.

Living With Both Worlds

I'm not saying that the desire for a nice home or a handsome dining room is a contradiction to *Olam Haba*. If you're a serious Jew, a Jew focused on *Olam Haba*, it doesn't mean you have to become a beggar. It doesn't mean you live in a cardboard box. No. You're justified in living a nice normal life. You're entitled to have *Olam Haze*h; why not?

After all, a person can be a beggar and a *batlan* and a *shlemazal* and still not live for *Olam Haba*.

One thing doesn't have to do with the other. Hashem wants you to live a normal life and to be happy.

Only you can't be a *leitz*; you can't ever lose focus of why you're here. You live happily but you live for Olam Haba. Even the Olam Hazeh you have is for that. You'll spend time thanking and singing to Hashem: "I sing to You Hashem, You gave me a nice home. I love You Hashem that you gave me a kitchen and a dining room."

A Happy Sober Nation

Oh, that's called being serious! That's the opposite of *leitzanus* because you're preparing for Olam Haba. If you sing to Hashem in happiness about all of the benefits He gives you so Hashem says, "Oh! I like to hear you sing. I'm going to let you continue singing in this world and in the World to Come too. And there you'll sing even more."

But it's not easy. If a person is not serious, if you're not sober and thoughtful always, it's impossible. Because then you'll live only with this world. You'll live with coats and cars and toys. You'll live with furniture and rugs. You'll live with politics, with the news – what happened here, what happened there; it means nothing at all but if you're unserious it means everything. The *leitz* is repeating always the things that people in the street are saying, all the unserious things of Olam Hazeh.

That's what Sarah Imeinu is teaching us, to throw away all of the *leitzanus* we find in ourselves. We have to learn that the Next World is what pays investing all your efforts into and you can't do that if you're unserious. And that's why Yishmael had to be sent away. Because the holy nation can only live successfully if they're a serious nation. That's what it means not to be a *leitz* – we are a serious people, a thinking and introspective people, a sober and pious people.

Cheer in Williamsburg

Now, that doesn't mean we're not a happy nation. The Am Yisroel is cheerful. The Am Yisroel is friendly. They smile at each other. If you ever pass through Williamsburg in a bus, what you see more than anything else is that people are all smiling at each other. I passed almost every day for a certain time through Williamsburg, and I noticed people standing at the corners and they were all smiling and laughing. A fact; I saw it every day. I didn't say Flatbush – I'm talking about Williamsburg because Williamsburg is more Jewish and so it's also more happy.

The *frum* Jew smiles and laughs in this world. He's happy when he sleeps peacefully. He's happy when he gets up in the morning healthy. He's happy there's peace in the land. He's happy with his food, his meals. He's happy with his family, with his children. His children, after all, respect him and give him *nachas*.

He's happy that he's succeeding in life, preparing for the Next World and so he doesn't need the entertainment of the *moshav leitzim*. He's not even interested because all it does is take his mind off the road, off the *mesillas yesharim*, the path of the righteous. The *frum* Jew doesn't need *leitzanus* to live happily – he lives happily and successfully just because he doesn't have it.

The Last Laugh

And then one day, **אז ימלא שחוק פינו** – *our mouths will be filled with laughter even more*. In the Next World we'll be the ones laughing! That's why when Yishmael went away, who was left in the tent of Avraham and Sarah? Yitzchok. He's not called *Sachak* – he laughed; Yitzchok means 'he will laugh'. The Jewish people, the descendants of Yitzchak, they're going to laugh at the end.

So let the gentiles laugh now. This is their world for laughing. The gentiles are sitting in the amphitheater, in the arenas, and they're watching

as human beings are being cast to wild beasts. That's how the Romans sat and laughed. It was fun! And it never stopped. The gentiles always laugh in this world. For centuries and centuries they're laughing at all wicked and rude things.

Hitler's cohorts laughed. As they led Jews to the gas chambers, they laughed. You see pictures of them laughing in the camps. And it never ends. The gentiles laugh at dirty shows. They laughed at foolish and empty things.

But we know **ותשחק ליום אחרון** – the *frum* nation who live today with a seriousness, a happy seriousness, will laugh on the last day. The Romans and the Nazis and the Hollywood people, they won't laugh in the end. But Yitzchak's descendants, we're going to laugh. The serious, happy, successful nation, we'll have the last laugh!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Living with Seriousness

Yishmael's great sin was the sin of unseriousness, of not appreciating the responsibility of living in the holy home of Avraham and Sarah. Indeed, Mesillas Yesharim says that the tendency towards jesting is a tremendous obstacle towards progress in this world. The greatest unseriousness is living life without thinking about the Next World. This week I will *bli neder* spend a minute each day evaluating my life, what am I doing that will bring me benefit in the next world and what am I doing that I will regret. Living life seriously will bring true happiness for myself and the people around me.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

213 – The Scoffers | **535** – Leitzim: Opposition to Idealism

597 – Avoiding Pitfalls | **695** – The Sad Jesters

953 – The Leitz is Not Excited

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QUESTION

You said that a person shouldn't be lightheaded and silly; that we should always have a pleasant but serious demeanor. So what is the purpose of the sense of humor?

ANSWER

A 'sense of humor' you have to know is a gentile expression. There's no such thing in the language of Torah, "a sense of humor".

Now, there is such a thing as *milsa debedichusa*, something that causes the mind to be happy. One of our great teachers, before he began his *shiur* he first said a *milsa d'bedichusa*. Now how he did it, it wasn't that he cracked a joke, *chas veshalom*, like we say. He said something that was a *freiliches*, to make people happy in order that the minds should open up. Your mind is more receptive to thoughts when it's in a good mood.

But then, right away, he settled down *b'eimah*, with fear, with *yirah*, and he taught them the *shiur* with absolute seriousness. In the olden days learning Torah was almost like *Shemoneh Esrei*, you have to know. They learned Torah *b'amidah*. Later they stopped it, but they still learned with tremendous seriousness. But before he began he had a *milsa d'bedichusa* to open up the minds of his students.

Now sometimes we can understand it in the following sense. If somebody makes a mistake, he said something wrong, so instead of ridiculing him which is a very big sin, so you make a joke and say "He meant well." You can even say a *peirush* on his mistake; you explain his words or his behavior that it also has a meaning. His wrong words have a meaning, a *remez*. But that's only in order to make him feel good. The ideal of having a 'sense of humor' however, you have to know we've taken a concept that's outside of Torah.

A girl was telling me she met a certain *bochur* but she doesn't know if he has a sense of humor or not. I don't know what that means. If he's *sameach b'chelko*, if he's *misameach es habrios*, that's good enough. That's a sense of *simchah*, a sense of living normally. Hakadosh Baruch Hu appreciates people who are happy with a good disposition, not *misonenim*. They don't complain, they're not grouchy; they have a friendly expression on their face. Absolutely.

And that's good enough as far as we're concerned *al pi Torah*: *Seiver panim yafos, sameach bechelko*. We have our own expressions and we don't have to borrow expressions from the *umos haolam*.
September 1996