

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

YOM KIPPUR

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

INSCRIBE US FOR LIFE

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Part I. Desiring Life

Desiring Life

During these Aseres Yemei Teshuva, a few times each day, we approach the King and ask Him, זְכֹרְנוּ – Remember us for life, and כְּתֹבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים – inscribe us in the Book of Life. It's one of the great themes that we're busy with now. Included in our teshuva is that we want to find favor in Hashem's eyes; that He should grant us *kapparah* not only for the Next World but for right now. We're very interested in another year of life in this world. And therefore that will be our subject tonight, the subject of 'life'.

We'll introduce our talk with a *possuk* that everybody knows. Dovid Hamelech was talking to his listeners, his disciples, and he said, מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ, מִי הָאִישׁ – Who among you is a man who wishes to live? (Tehillim 34:13). And so right away we hear something new: 'Who wishes to live'. You hear that *chiddush*? You have to *desire* life.

I used to walk on Ocean Avenue and I saw a man, a *frum* man, sitting in front of an apartment house puffing on a cigarette. Every day I passed by he was

smoking. So one day I walked over to him and said, "If you would stop smoking, you would live longer."

So he said to me, "Who cares to live?"

When I heard that, I walked away from him.

It's very dangerous to make such a reckless statement. Hakadosh Baruch Hu hears that. "You don't care," He says, "so why should I care?"

A Full Year Program

And so the first step in our program, the prerequisite to asking, is to be a *chofetz chaim*. You are not meant to be stoic, to be *parveh* about it. You have to *desire* life. Not only during these days—all the time, always. Always you have to ask Hashem, "Please, let me live!"

When you fall down by Tachanun, you're begging for your life. Some people think you fall down to take a nap. Oh no! You're crying out, חַלְצָה נַפְשִׁי – Save my life! I want to continue living.

When you say in Maariv, שְׁמֹר צֵאתֵינוּ וּבֹאֵינוּ – Guard our going out and our coming in, לְחַיִּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם – for life and peace, you're asking for life. You're praying against accidents that might *chalilah* happen.

They're waiting on the road, these accidents. Here is a successful *frum* man, a college teacher. A

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young man, not fifty yet. He was driving home from his college in his car—a good driver, an experienced driver—all of a sudden a huge block of cement worked its way loose from the overpass and fell down and crushed him in his car. He died in a second.

There are sicknesses. All kinds of diseases, *machlahs*. So even though you're well. You're young—you're not even thinking of leaving this world yet. You have at least fifty years, you think, or sixty years; nothing to worry about. No! Here's a young man, a young fellow, in our neighborhood. He's not even forty. He dropped dead all of a sudden. Nobody expected it.

No Guarantees

Even if you're still a child. There was a boy I knew, fourteen years old! He was in my class—I remember his name still. A healthy husky boy. He ran out to play. It was a hot day and after a while he went back in and drank some cold water from the faucet and he got pneumonia. Pneumonia from drinking water. And he fell dead the next day. He died.

Again and again we hear stories, and so, all the time we have to pray for life. Like Dovid Hamelech said, *תְּחִי נַפְשִׁי* – Hashem, give me life (Tehillim 119:175). Always he was busy asking, “Let me live another day!” A regular Wednesday afternoon, Dovid davened for life. But when the Aseres Yemei Teshuva comes along, that's when it's most urgent, and so, you have to say it with all your heart. “Ay yah yay! *Kasveinu b'sefer ha'chaim.*” And if you can shed some tears, if you can weep, even better. *שַׁעְרֵי דְמַעוֹת לֹא נִנְעָלוּ* – The gates of tears are never closed (Bava Metzia 59a). It's important if possible.

So what, if your friend, the one standing next to you, thinks you're overdoing it? No matter! You have to mean business! You're like a beggar standing in the doorway, pleading, “Please, Hashem, write me in the Book of Life,”

The King Grants Life

Now, if you don't beg, if you don't weep, then it's one of two things. It could be you don't care for life—you're not a *chofetz chaim*. But it could be you do, only that you think it'll come anyhow. It came last year and so it'll come again. He thinks it'll come by eating vitamins, by jogging. Well, you know there's a man who wrote a book all about jogging for life. He dropped dead while jogging. And so if you think it will come from somewhere else, that's a very grave error.

And so we shout to the King, *תְּחִי נַפְשִׁי* – I want to live!” With all your *koach* ask Hashem for life. “I know that You're the only address! You, Hashem, are the One Who gives life, and so I'm begging You.”

Pray by Action

But it's more than just calling out to Hashem to give you life. Because asking sincerely means that you put your money where your mouth is—you do things that will keep you alive. Otherwise you're not calling out in truth. It says *כִּרְוֹב ה' לְכֹל קוֹרְאָיו* – When is Hashem close to all those who call out to Him? When does He want to hear your prayers? *לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרְאוּ* – Only if you call out in truth (*ibid.* 145:18). It has to be backed up with action.

If a man puts himself into danger by running across a traffic street—he wants to come to shul on time in order to pray for life—that man has already announced that he's not sincere. If you're a reckless fellow, so that's not 'calling out in truth.' It's not sincere.

And so, the man who smokes but he claims that he wants to live—and he prays too—he's not serious. And even if he'll say, “Oh no, of course I want to live,” that's not enough. Because it's not enough to say it—you have to stop smoking too. Otherwise, you don't really care; the fact that you're puffing away on the cigarette demonstrates you don't care to live.

Hashem says, “Look, you're taking a pack of cigarettes and it says openly on every pack a warning from the Surgeon General that smoking is dangerous, that it causes cancer, it causes this and that. And

you're ignoring that and you puff away, so what do you want Me to do for you? You're not serious; you're not a *chafetz chaim*."

Sincere Desire

And so even if we're constantly asking for life, but there's a very big question about our sincerity if we take risks with our lives. It's necessary to back up your desire to live with action, by showing that you want life, by taking care of your life.

You know, Rav Yisrael Salanter when he was ill he went to a professor of medicine in Germany, in Koenigsburg. Later, the professor told someone that he has thousands of patients but not one was as careful in carrying out his directions as this rabbi. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Rav Yisrael Salanter was most *medakdek*, most careful, in following the directives of the doctor.

The answer is he was sincere when he asked for life and so he did everything necessary in order to maintain his existence.

Safety First

And therefore included in *Kasveinu b'sefer hachaim* is listening to what the Torah tells us about the subject of staying alive: **לֹא תָשִׂים דָּמִים בְּבֵיתְךָ** – *Don't put blood into your house* (Devarim 22:8). Don't do anything that could lead to blood being spilled. You must take every precaution that there shouldn't be any accidents in your house.

Like the Gemara says on that *possuk*, **נֹשֵׂא יַעֲמִיד, סֵלֶם רְעוּעַ בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ** – You shouldn't have a rickety ladder in your house. If you have a wobbly ladder, take a hammer and smash it, right away when you get home tonight. Smash it, put it out with the garbage, and tomorrow buy a good new ladder in the hardware store.

If there are things on the stairs that can send a person for a ride, that's also a wobbly ladder. If you have frayed electric cords, get rid of them right away. Call the electrician! Don't take any chances. Desiring life means you don't want to take any chances; you're going to take all the necessary steps that you shouldn't get burned up. You don't go out

without a coat in cold weather. You don't sit in front of the fan and let the draft blow on you and catch a cold. Otherwise you're not a *chofetz chaim*.

The youth who like to drive cars on the highways recklessly, they don't care. If they cared, they wouldn't go speeding. Someone who means it when he says *kasveinu b'sefer hachaim* won't take risks on the road when driving. He wears a seatbelt when he goes in the car. He's especially careful when he crosses the street. You have to look back and forth on both sides and take your time before you cross. You lose a minute and save a life.

Planning for Winter Vacation

Other things too. I know that you won't listen to me—you think I'm being excessive—but I'll say it anyhow. Someone who means business when he's davening for life in Tishrei, so when January comes around he won't go skiing either.

"Oh, Rabbi Miller," he tells me, "you're overreacting. It's not really dangerous to go skiing. I go every winter. Nothing ever happened." Well, not everybody gets killed, that's true. It's like the man who is sitting outside of his windowsill, three stories up, washing the windows. So somebody yells at him, "It's dangerous!"

"I never got killed yet," he says. That's a good argument. He never got killed yet. He wants it to happen a lot of times before he's convinced.

You know, in the laws of the city of New York there is a provision that every house has to have exits, proper exits. Now why do you need it? Because in case of a fire, you should be able to escape. But how frequently do fires happen? In a block where people ordinarily have lived for many years, it's possible there never was a single fire. So isn't it excessive to worry about it?

The answer is that even the stupid people who run the city of New York understand that if once in many blocks a fire takes place, it's a lesson that we have to tighten the fire regulations everywhere. We don't wait for it to happen in every house. Life is too important.

Common Sense Safety

And therefore, the fact that so many people are crippled by skiing, should be enough reason for common sense people to avoid it. The fact that a number of scuba divers have never surfaced anymore should be enough for people to avoid it. The fact that a girls' group went for an outing to the top of a mountain last year and one girl fell down means that mountain climbing is a dangerous proposition. She had to have twelve operations before she got well again. And so we avoid dangerous places. That's included in asking for life!

You want fun? Go jogging on the mall outside, on Ocean Parkway. It doesn't cost any money and it's much safer. By day of course, not by night. There's a lot of fun available without risking one's life.

And so, our first commitment of the new year has to be, "Hashem, You give me another year of life and I'll guard it. I'll be more careful than last year." That's the first *teshuva*! I'm going to take care of the gift You give me." And each time I keep that in mind, every time I'm careful with my life, that's part of our *tefillah*. That's how you back up your *tefillah*: "You see Hashem! I want to live! I'm a *chofetz chaim*."

Part II. Life's Desires

A Squirrel's Life

Now, when we talk about this subject of asking for life however, we must understand it in a much more profound way than what the outside world considers life—breathing, functioning, eating three meals a day. That's important of course because without that there's nothing to talk about; but if we're going to be serious about our *tefillos* for another year of life we have to appreciate *chaim* as something that is a preface to a future life, to a great existence that is eternal.

After all, squirrels also want to live. But just to live like a squirrel, just to continue to exist, that's not called *chaim*. Because they don't look forward to anything after death. They become acorns. They

become oak trees. They go into the earth and help fertilize the soil so that more trees can grow in the places where the squirrels used to roam beforehand. That's the end of a squirrel.

A Jew's Life

But we, not. We live in this world, but that's only the beginning. Because after 120 when the body is put into the earth, we continue to live. We discard the overcoat of the body and continue to live. And therefore when we say **בְּתַבִּינוּ בְּסִפּוֹר הַחַיִּים** it means both worlds; we want to be inscribed for a long life in this world in order to prepare for the Next World. We want to live just because of that. That's what makes life worth living—otherwise, it's the life of a squirrel. That's not a life worth living.

That's what it says **יָפָה שְׂעָה אַחַת שֶׁל הַתְּשׁוּבָה וּמֵעַשָׂים הַבָּא** – **טוֹבוֹיִם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה מִכֹּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא** – that one minute of living properly and thinking correctly, doing right deeds in this world is better even than the Next World. Because that one minute is going to redound to your benefit forever and ever. That's why a man who dies early *chalilah* and goes to Olam Haba, even though he's a *tzaddik* and he's being rewarded very greatly there, but he's going to regret the fact that he didn't have more chance in this world. He'll be sorry. He'll be very sorry he died early.

Never Enough

Even not early. You remember when Moshe Rabbeinu at the age of 120 was told by Hakadosh Baruch that he was going to die? Did Moshe say, "Well, I lived enough. One hundred and twenty years. What do you expect already?"

No, he didn't say that. *Va'eschanan*! He put up the biggest protest that anybody ever did against dying. The *medrash* says that Moshe Rabbeinu went around praying and crying and protesting; "*Zachreini l'chaim! Kasveini b'sefer ha'chaim!*" Again and again and again he prayed.

It's strange—it sounds like he was being taken away in the prime of his life. Didn't Moshe know about the greatness that was waiting for him in the Next World?

And the answer is Moshe Rabbeinu knew more about the World to Come than we do, and just because of that that's why he wanted to continue to live more than we do.

That's the truth—those who are more aware of Olam Haba, they appreciate this world more. Certainly, you want to live when you know you can accomplish things that will be forever. The longer you're here, the more opportunity you have, to enter the Next World with a greater capital. And if you come with a bigger capital, then you're going to have a much greater eternity of happiness.

Weeping Tzaddikim

I remember when Rav Aharon Kotler, *zichrono livracha*, was on his deathbed, he was weeping. He said, “Ribono Shel Olam, let me live! I can do so much in this world!” He wept.

The Vilna Gaon also wept. It was Chol Hamoed Sukkos and when they brought the *esrog* and the *lulav* to him for the last time on his death bed where he was lying sick, he was sobbing: “It's the last time I'll be able to *bentch lulav* and *esrog*.” He burst out weeping. That was the whole wealth of his life and now it was coming to an end!

And therefore to be a *chofetz chaim* means of course that you want to live regularly. You want to be healthy. You want to be able to function. But it's of the utmost necessity that your *tefillos* should be always be with this thought: **הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דוֹמָה לְפֶרוֹזְדוֹר** – *This world should be regarded only as a vestibule,* **לְפָנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא** – *that leads into the Next World.*

And so, why do I want to be written in the book of life? **הֲתִקּוּן עֲצֻמָּה בְּפֶרוֹזְדוֹר בְּדֵי לִיבְנִים לְטָרְקִלִין** – So that I can have the opportunity to prepare myself in the vestibule in order to enter the palace.

The Value of Time

And so in order to qualify to be written down for life, you have to be a person who understands the value of life; you prize your hours and your minutes. I told you this story once. The Gra, *zichrono livracha*, had a son and on Yom Kippur he saw his father with a *talis* over his head and he was saying *viduy*. Now,

when you say the *al cheits*, you don't say only the things that are printed in the *machzor*. Every person has to add his own individual sins. Whatever you remember, you have to add between the lines. You were fresh to your mother when you were a boy. Put that in there. You were fresh to you *rebbe*. You did this or you did that. Put it in the *al cheit*, when you say *vidui*.

So the son wanted to hear, what sins did his father have? Now, our sons shouldn't do that to us, but he thought it's safe to listen to his father's sins. So he stuck his head under the *tallis*. And he saw his father weeping bitterly; weeping bitterly that he once wasted five minutes. Now, I don't know how he wasted five minutes—I can't tell you—but he was crying; for wasting the gift of five minutes of life, he was weeping.

Love Your Days

And therefore **מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים** – *Who really wants life?* **אוֹהֵב יָמִים** – *The one who loves the days.* Every day is valuable. He counts every day. When he goes to bed at night he looks back and thinks, “What did I do today? What did I gain today?”

He gets up in the morning and thinks, “I'm not going to waste this day. I'm going to watch every minute of it. I'll think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu. I'll think in *tefillah*. I'll smile at people. If I have a few minutes I'll open my Gemara.”

I want to explain something to you people; if you're ambitious, I want to tell you something. If you utilize your spare moments, you can learn an entire *Mesichta* in these few minutes. Have a Gemara ready and whenever there's a few minutes, learn that Gemara. If you understand it well, good. If not, make a mark on it in pencil along the side, so some other time, you come back and look it up and think more about it. You'll be amazed how much you accomplish with the time that people waste otherwise.

Real Life

And you must! Otherwise, all of his *tefillos*—“Give me life! Give me life!”—are nothing but talk; it's just

the idle vapping of an unthinking mind. *Zachreinu la'chaim*?! What kind of *chaim* are you thinking about? To sit on the couch and read the newspapers, *frum* newspapers?

Zachreinu l'chaim so that you should stand around in the back of the shul and talk *devarim beteilim*? So that Shabbos after *davening* you can run to this kiddush, that bar mitzvah, this bar mitzvah, that *aufruf*? *Kasveinu b'sefer ha'chaim* so that you can go and sit until 2 o'clock eating and stuffing yourself and wasting time? Or so that you can climb into your pajamas Shabbos afternoon after the *seudah* and climb out just for Mincha?

You're committing suicide. That's *לא תרצח*. You're a murderer. You're killing yourself for nothing. *לא תרצח* means you shouldn't waste your life. And what is life? Life is an opportunity to accomplish for the Next World!

A Wasted Life

And so, if he drives around in his car on Sundays looking for fun, it means he doesn't understand what *chaim* is. "This is what you were asking for when you begged Me for life?" Hashem says. "To sit behind the wheel of a car and to drive around just to make a trip someplace? For enjoyment, for pleasure? A trip for just to spend time?"

Here's a man and his wife. They have time, a long *motzei Shabbos*, so they go visit somebody else. They sit down in the dining room, you and your wife and he and his wife and you talk and talk and talk. For what purpose? You're going to waste part of your life on nothing? You know how much greatness, how much Torah, how much *chessed*, how much *daas Hashem*, can be accomplished on a *motzei Shabbos*? And instead he's shooting the breeze with cousin Jake. That's a *rotzeiach*, no question about it.

And so, when we say *kasveinu*, included in that is an understanding, a commitment. This year on *motzei Shabbos* I won't run around visiting relatives. I won't stay up till one in the morning munching on peanuts reading a newspaper. I won't go to the *aufruf* of my second cousin. Forget about relatives.

You have one relative you have to visit, that's yourself! It's not selfish because life is only for the purpose of making something out of yourself.

Writing for Eternity

That's what it really means *כְּתִיבֵנו בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים*. It's a promise, a commitment: "You, Hashem, write me for life in Your book and I'll write my own new book of achievement." Like the Chovos Halevavos says, *הַיָּמִים מְגִלּוֹת* – *the days are pages*. Life is a *megillah*, a scroll, and every day is a new page in that scroll for you to write on. *כְּתִיבוּ בְּהֵם מָה שֶׁתִּחַפְּצוּ שְׂיוֹזֵר לָכֶם* – *Write in the megillah every day what you want to be remembered for you*.

A new year of life means a new book; blank, clean, fresh. Ah, it's so inviting, so enticing. You remember when you were in school, in the beginning of the year, your mother bought you a new notebook. When you put it into your book bag you were ambitious. "I'm going to keep this notebook neat and clean. Every page I'm going to write neatly." What it looks like at the end of the term is a different story, but at the beginning of the term you're full of ambition: "I'm going to make it the best notebook ever."

And so we have to keep that in our thoughts because that's what we're asking for now in our *tefillos*. "Give me a new clean book this year. Give me another opportunity and I'll write the most beautiful things there."

Kasveinu: One Day at a Time

And so, you'll get up in the morning and you'll remind yourself that it's the beginning of a new writing page. And you'll make the very best you can because you're writing from the early morning. You open your eyes and say, "I thank You Hashem that You restored my life to me." That's a good beginning for today's page.

And then you'll pour water on your hands three times like you're a *kohen* about to serve Hashem; a *kohen* washes his hands before he serves Hashem. Another good beginning to write down. And before you go downstairs you'll think, "Will I write down

now something that I don't want be remembered about me, that before breakfast I had a quarrel with my mother? This I don't want." So erase it before you write it down. And so, you'll say 'good morning' to your mother, and other nice words.

As you go from step to step, all day long, write good things. You meet people and you deal with them, smile to them. Make people feel good all day long. Say kindly words all day long. Think about Hashem once in a while during the day too. Learn Torah, *daven* with *kavanah*. Every *brachah* you're writing in your book. Every time you say 'Atah, You' think that you're standing in front of the King.

And at the end of the day, if you take out your *megillah*, "Ah! I'm proud of this *megillah*. It's a beautiful *megillah* I wrote today." That's called living! That's the one whose prayers, "*Kasveinu b'sefer ha'chaim*", meant something.

Part III. Holy Desires

A Borrowed Body

And now we come to one more of the considerations that are required for us to implement in our *tefillos*; another idea that we should keep in mind when we come to Hashem now and ask Him for another year of life. Because when we ask for life, we should keep in mind that we're not asking merely for a vague idea, for life in a general sense. We are asking for a body of flesh and blood—'*Kasveinu b'sefer ha'chaim*' means we want Hakadosh Baruch Hu to loan us our body for another year.

That's our wish right now that He should once again lend us the body. "Please Hashem! I don't want to return it just yet. Lend me this head again, these eyes and this mouth. Lend me this torso and these legs. Lend me this stomach. All the organs, lend me for another year."

Terms of the Loan

Now suppose, let's say, you borrowed a car from a neighbor, and you gave it back a little bit dented in a few places. You were supposed to keep it in tip-

top shape, but you didn't. And now you come back; you're asking again that he should loan the car to you. So he's thinking it over this time. He's not so sure he wants to lend it to you now. You have to promise him this time you'll make a good job of it. "I'll give back the car perfectly."

And so, we're asking Hashem to give us a body again and He says, "What will you do with the body?"

Ooh. We're scratching our heads. We didn't realize that we're just borrowers, that there are stipulations. But that's the plain truth—we're coming to Him asking for a body, and He wants to know what's going to be with it. "You want a healthy, functioning body in all its details? What is it going to look like a year from now?"

Holy Stipulations

And so, let's promise Hashem that we're going to do what He wants us to do with the body: We're going to make the body *kadosh*, holy. You have to understand that part of our function in life—not our entire function but still an important part of our function in life—is to make something out of our bodies. That's what Hashem wants from us; that we should take our bodies—nothing but materials and chemicals—and we should make them holy; we should transform them, elevate them.

It's a metaphysical idea, but it pays to understand it. What is a human being, after all? We are chemicals. We are 70% water and some chemicals. We're hydrogen and oxygen. Also some nitrogen—that's one of the main components of meat—and carbon and calcium. Some phosphorus too. All these materials, and some others, Hashem combines by means of various chemical changes into a body that we borrow from Him. And the *tnai*, the borrowing agreement, is that you'll take this piece of clay and transform it into something holy before you return it.

Not the soul! Oh sure, the soul becomes holy, but we have to understand that the body also becomes holy. Just as there was a change that transformed the original oxygen and carbon and

nitrogen into something entirely different, a physical body, now something else is being added and that's the spirituality of the mitzvah. The *kedusha* of the mitzvah goes into these materials and makes them holy, elevated.

The Eternal Body

That's why, eventually, a person's soul and his body will be reunited. The Jewish body, is not just the chemical elements, even when it's laid in the grave to disintegrate after 120, it doesn't go lost. That's one of the great teachings of the Torah, that **וְנִאֲמַן אֲתָהּ לְהַחְיִיתָ מֵתִים**. When the time comes, Hashem will gather together all the atoms that once formed part of the original body and it will be reconstituted in a brand new edition, a better edition than before.

That's one of the fundamentals of the Torah. And it's based on the idea that not only is the soul indestructible, but the body, if it is invested with certain qualities, is also eternal.

But that's on condition that you catalyze that change. When you do *mitzvos*, it makes a chemical change—call it a 'chemical' change, an 'idealistic change', a 'metaphysical change'; call it what you want but it actually changes the body. It makes the body live forever because the chemicals of the body are not just chemicals anymore—they were *niskadeish*; they were invested with a spirituality, an eternity.

Holy Tzedaka

That's included in the queer story the Gemara tells about Mar Ukva. Mar Ukva used to give charity to a certain poor man in his neighborhood, but he did it in a way that the recipient shouldn't know it's him. He didn't want to embarrass him, so he sent it with messengers or sometimes he used to go at night and slip money underneath the door and then run away. Sometimes he would go out with his wife in order that nobody should suspect him, and he would make a secret drop-off.

Finally, this poor man decided he wanted to discover who is this fellow giving him money secretly. So he hid behind his door and when he saw

that a man and his wife were coming stealthily in the darkness and slipping money under his door so he approached to see who it was. But Mar Ukva and his wife, they didn't want their secret to be discovered so they started running away. But this person was persistent; he was running after them and there was no place for Mar Ukva and his wife to hide until they saw a hot furnace where the fire was just put out. They quickly ran into the furnace and shut the door so they shouldn't be seen.

Holy Feet

But the floor was very hot and Mar Ukva's feet were burning. So his wife said, "Stand on my feet." And that's how they remained hiding; they were in a hot furnace and Mar Ukva was standing on his wife's feet and that way his feet weren't touching the hot floor.

So Mar Ukva was distressed. His wife has more protection from Hashem than he did—her feet didn't burn in the hot furnace and his feet were burning. And so he was downcast. There must be something wrong with him.

So his wife said to him, "There's nothing wrong with you. Only that my feet became especially holy because hungry people come to the house all the time for *tzedakah* and I'm busy all day with the preparations. I'm walking back and forth in the kitchen all day long, back and forth, back and forth, in order to give them good meals to eat. I'm doing it with your money—it's your mitzvah—but I am doing with my body more than you do. And so my body was changed more than yours."

A Holy Chosson

And so we see, that it's not just a mitzvah. It's not just the reward in *Olam Haba* and it's not even just that your *neshamah* is changed—your body itself is transformed!

That's what the Gemara says **מִצְוָה בּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִבְּשָׁלוּחוֹ** – if you have a mitzvah to do, it's better to do it on your own than by means of an agent. Let's say if you have to get married but you're too busy to go to the wedding. You decide to stay home that night and

you'll send an agent instead. It's perfectly valid. You'll send an agent of yours to the wedding, and he stands under the *chuppah* and he says to the bride, "harei at mekudeshes, I betroth you to Mr. Chaim So-and-So who sent me here with this ring, *k'das Moshe v'Yisroel*."

The *kallah* also, if she finds out her *chosson* is not coming to the wedding so she says, "I won't come either." She wants to take a walk with the *chosson*—both can take a walk on the avenue whereas in the hall, her proxy and his proxy are at the ceremony. His agent gives her agent the ring and he says, "The one who sent you is *mekudeshes* to the one who sent me *k'das Moshe v'Yisroel*." Perfectly legal.

But the Gemara recommends that they should be present. *מִצְוָה בּוּ יוֹתֵר מִבְּשִׁלּוּחוֹ* – Why is it more a mitzvah to do it yourself than to do it by means of your agent? Because when you do a mitzvah yourself, it makes you *kadosh*. The more your body is involved, the better. You're making your body even holier.

The Holy Hand

That's what we say before a mitzvah: *אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיִךְ* – You make us holy with Your mitzvos. That's the idea that your body becomes ennobled when you do something good. Let's say, you moved into a new apartment and you have to put up *mezuzos*. So you can call somebody. It makes sense; you can call a carpenter and he'll do a neat job—you'll pay him to put *mezuzos* on your doors.

Or if you'll hear this lecture, you'll decide you'll do it yourself. Why? Because before you put the *mezuzah* on you say *אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ* – You're making us holy with Your mitzvos, *לְקַבּוֹעַ מְזוּזָה*. The body, the hand that nails the *mezuzah* to the doorpost is becoming elevated. It's being changed. It's becoming ennobled.

Now that's a very important point that most people never thought about. Whatever you can do personally is going to change, not only your *neshamah*, not only it will change your intellect, but it will change your physical being. When you put on

tefillin and *tzitzis* and eat kosher and dress *b'tznius*, you're making your body eternal. Without any special thought, without the slightest intent, just by doing the legalistic bare fundamentals, you become different. You're bestowing on the body an eternal quality.

Transformed by Shabbos

And so when we ask for life, we're asking for that opportunity to make our bodies holy. We say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Hashem we're going to make our bodies holy during the coming year, whatever we can. We want to borrow this body again in order to live through another fifty plus Shabboses. We'll keep Shabbos in all its details; my hands will keep Shabbos and my feet and my mouth and I'll make myself more holy."

It's a fact—every Shabbos, a change takes place in your physical being, an added *kedusha* that doesn't go away. That's why an old Jew is more holy than a young Jew; because he kept more Shabboses. It adds up; the *kedusha* that you gain each time adds up. It's not lost. Even when you sit on the couch; you sit all Shabbos and don't do anything, you become a *kodosh* when you're keeping Shabbos. Your body is not the same body it was before Shabbos.

Our Prayer

And so we say to Hashem, "Give us our bodies back for another year, and we'll do our part. We'll see to it that nothing wrong gets inside of the body. Only a reliable *hechsher* I'll eat. I'll use my eyes only for seeing good things—I'll look in the Gemara always—and my mouth, my tongue, only for good words. My ears and my feet and my hands, only for mitzvos. All the details of life that You'll lend to me again, I'll make them holy *bli neder*."

And that is one of the arguments that we come with before Hashem when we ask for life. "Hashem," we say, "*Kasveinu b'sefer ha'chaim!* Please give us our bodies for another year. Not only we'll guard our lives in the physical sense but we'll make use of it for eternity, for *יְפֶה שְׁעָה אַחַת בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה*. And one of the

ways we'll do that is by being *mekadesh* the body you gave us—we'll make it more and more holy this year."

And Hashem says, "Oh, that's already a very big *teshuva*, a big *kapparah*! Because I see that you're not only asking for life. You're asking for the best life possible. You'll be to me an *Am Kadosh*? You'll make your bodies holy? Oh, that's what I want. I see you mean business and therefore I'm going to give you your bodies; not only for this year, but for many, many years and for long and happy years."

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Let's Get Practical

Praying for a Year of Life

During the Aseres Yemei Teshuva we entreat Hashem for a year of life. But when we ask for life, we ask for a life of eternity, a life in Olam Hazeih that is directed towards earning Olam Haba and gaining eternity for the body by investing it with holiness. This week, at least once per day, I will *bli neder* be extra careful when I cross the street, thinking to myself that I hope to preserve my life, because I desire life. After crossing the street I will spend thirty seconds thinking about how I can direct the life I've been given toward eternity.

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QUESTION

What should be the first thing one should correct before Yom Kippur?

ANSWER

To be facetious, I'll say the first thing is to correct yourself. But of course you'll ask, "But in myself, what's the first thing?"

The very first thing you must do is to make sure that all the wrongs that you committed against your fellow man are righted. Other things could perhaps be rectified during Yom Kippur—for many things you can do *teshuva* on Yom Kippur—but if somebody has an outstanding complaint against you, then you have to realize nothing is going to help until you get forgiveness from that person. אין יום כיפור מכפר עד שירצה את חבירו.

That's why it's so important to learn to say, "Forgive me." The *am ha'aretz* doesn't do that. The *am ha'aretz* insults people and never thinks to beg forgiveness. The *talmid chochom* on the other hand is always careful with people, but if he *does* step on somebody's feet, he is quick to admit the error and ask forgiveness. So it should be a habit constantly to be asking people to forgive you.

Now, really it's a small matter to get forgiveness because most people are willing to yield once they see you are contrite, but you have to ask for it. Even calling up on the telephone is worthwhile; and it should be done to as many people as possible with whom you've had dealings with if there's the slightest suspicion that you wronged them in any way. That's the number one requirement before Yom Kippur.

September 1985