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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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Yankel was not going to use an *esrog* this year. He was used to investing hours into finding the perfect and most magnificent *esrog*, and paying the price to buy it. This year he spent more time than ever canvassing the entire area, but could not find the *hadar*, the beauty that he was accustomed to. "Therefore," he said, "I won't be using an *esrog* this year."

This is a true story with the exception of one detail, the word *esrog* should be replaced with the words learning Torah. You might even know such a person. He knows what real learning Torah means. In the *bais hamedrash*, with the *chavrusah*, with full concentration, that's genuine learning. Right now, he cannot learn like that, so he doesn't learn anything.

Why is it **not** normal if it was the *esrog* but it is perfectly normal and acceptable when it is learning Torah?

What a shame. Only learning Torah gets that kind of approach. People don't just skip *davening* when it lacks perfection. They would never pass up the *mitzva* of *daled minim* for lack of a real *haddar.* Nor do people say, "I will only work if I can rake in the millions." Yet when it comes to learning Torah, many people live with that, "I only learn my preferred way." Any short or long timeslots that are not conducive for picture perfect learning are to be written off.

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ZACHOR AND PURIM

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE ART OF LISTENING

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Part I. Listening to Hashem

Shaul Hamelech Versus Amalek

Soon after Shaul became the first king over the Am Yisroel, Shmuel Hanavi came to him and told him about one of the most important functions he would have to carry out as the *melech* Yisroel. And that was to fulfill the Torah obligation of destroying Amalek.

That's a mitzvah of the Torah: זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמָלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם – *Remember what Amalek did to you as soon as you left Mitzrayim*; and as a result of that memory, תמחה את זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם – *you should wipe out any zeicher of Amalek from under the heavens* (Devarim 25:17-19). Because when we went out of Mitzrayim, שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים – *all the nations heard* what Hashem did to Pharaoh and his army, how He made miracles for them

and split the Yam Suf, and יִרְגְּזוּן – *everybody trembled.* All the nations were afraid. Only one *chatzuf* remained unimpressed. וַיָּבֹא עֲמָלֵק – Amalek was the insolent one, who disregarded what he saw was the will of Hashem to help His people, and he came and attacked us.

And so Hashem says, "I will not forgive and forget! Such effrontery? Such boldness? You saw all the things that I did for My people, and you had the boldness to attack them? I'll never forgive you. And therefore תִּמְחֶה אֶת זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם."

Now, in order to fulfill this mitzvah and destroy Amalek entirely, or even partially, we needed somebody who has power, someone who can muster the entire nation to battle and complete the job, and so they waited until there was a *melech*. Once they have a king, so now it's his function to fulfill this mitzvah, to attempt to wipe out Amalek. And so Shaul was commissioned now *al pi Hashem*, by means of Shmuel Hanavi, to attack Amalek.

Shaul's Successful Campaign

So we'll say first the story as it's told by the *Navi* — it's read in the shul on Parshas Zachor, the Shabbos before Purim — and then we'll begin with our subject.

When Shaul received the command, he didn't hesitate. He gathered troops and went out to meet Amalek on the battlefield. And he fought a successful campaign. וְאֶת כָּל הָעָם הֶחֱרִים לְפִי חָרֶב – *The entire nation he destroyed by the edge of the sword* (Shmuel I 15:8).

Now, don't think that it's an easy mitzvah. You have to know that to kill little children, Amalek or not, is not an easy task. Take, *l'havdil*, a typical American Orthodox Jew off the street, give him a sword and tell him he has to go kill women and children, little babies; a mitzvah. He couldn't do it. He'd turn tail and find a place to hide. He can't help it — it's against his nature.

Shaul did it, however. He was a very great *tzaddik* and so וַיַּךְ שָׁאוּל אֶת עֲמָלֵק מֵחֲוִילָה בּוֹאֲךָ שׁוּר – *he struck down Amalek from Chavilah to the approach to Shur* (*ibid.* 7). It means he did a very comprehensive job. A lot of Amalekis were sent to warmer climates that day.

And yet the Chachomim tell us something that we wouldn't have known on our own. They say that when Shaul went to battle, in his heart there was a little bit of regret that he had to kill little children too — he was thinking that it's not so right.

Shaul's Unsuccessful Campaign

And so, even though he fulfilled his duty and וַיֵּרֶב בַּנָּחַל – *he battled with Amalek*, the Gemara (Yoma 22b, Shabbos 56b), however tells us that the words וַיֵּרֶב בַּנָּחַל are only superficially explained that way. That's the plain meaning. וַיֵּרֶב – he carried on a fight. But there's another deep and profound meaning to these words. עָשָׂה מְרִיבָה עִם קוֹנוֹ – He was quarreling with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It doesn't mean he was fighting with Hashem, *chas v'shalom*, but there was a war going on, inside of Shaul's mind! He had a certain distaste for the mitzvah of killing women and children, and according to our Chachomim that's enough to be called quarreling with your Creator.

Now Shaul didn't say it. Nobody knew about it. Only the *ruach hakodesh* of our Chachomim were able to look into his heart, and they saw what nobody else knew, that in his heart there was a certain reservation, a certain feeling of unhappiness. After all, Shaul was a kind-hearted man, a man with excellent *middos*. It was against his nature to do it. To cut down women and children?

And that's why he didn't finish the job entirely. He went out to the battlefield, a brave general leading his soldiers, and he did his duty, but something happened. When he came back from the war, he brought back the *meitav*, the choicest of the livestock of Amalek. And he also brought back Agag, the king of Amalek. He brought him in chains, but he was alive. His heart couldn't allow him to kill this poor man who had lost everything now. He lost his people; he lost his power, and Shaul was a big *anav*, you know. The Gemara says that. He was a *tzaddik* and an *anav*. And he was thinking, "What would I do if I was conquered? Would I want to be killed?"

And so he brought back Agag in chains instead of killing him on the battlefield. Now what he intended to do, I cannot tell you. Maybe he intended to imprison him, and he should die, maybe of starvation, but the story is that he brought him back alive.

Shmuel Hanavi Campaigns for Hashem

And so Shaul was returning now from his big victory full of happiness at fulfilling the mitzvah — he destroyed Amalek, all the people, men and women and children; all he did was leave the cattle and the king — and he said to Shmuel, "'הֲקִימוֹתִי אֶת דְּבַר ה – See, I fulfilled the word of Hashem".

So Shmuel said, "You said you did the will of Hashem, but what's this I hear the noise of the cattle lowing in the distance? I hear the cattle you brought back. You were told to destroy everything, including the cattle."

So Shaul said, "Well, the people wanted to bring the cattle as *karbanos* to Hashem. Instead of destroying them there, we can *shecht* them as sacrifices of gratitude to the One Who achieved victory for us."

Talking Truth to Power

Now, to us that seems like a beautiful idea, but when Shmuel Hanavi saw this, he became very greatly disturbed. Not only disturbed — he told Shaul that he's in rebellion against Hashem. The command was to wipe out all the possessions of Amalek too, and you didn't listen fully. Offerings? No! "הִנֵּה שְׁמוֹעַ, מִזֶּבַח טוֹב – *It's better to listen to Hashem than to bring offerings*, לְהַקְשִׁיב, מֵחֵלֶב אֵילִים – *to pay attention to the words of Hashem is more important than the fat of even the most expensive oxen that are sacrificed.* And so you rebelled against Hakadosh Baruch Hu when you allowed the cattle to remain alive. The fact that you want to bring now offerings to thank Hashem for the victory, that's no excuse. And why did you leave Agag alive? You had pity on Amalek when Hashem said מָחֹה תִּמְחֶה, that you should destroy them?!"

And the *Navi* criticized him as follows: "כִּי חַטַּאת קֶסֶם מֶרִי – *When a person is rebellious against Hashem it's the same as the sin of sorcery*" (*ibid.* 23). It means this. Shaul was famous because he fought against *kesem*, against witchcraft. Some people practiced sorcery in those days and Shaul made it his business to eradicate the whole business. To him, it was a disgusting thing and so he investigated and searched and he cleansed the entire nation of sorcerers. If he found one, he didn't let him remain alive. And we praise him for that. He was a very *frum* man, Shaul Hamelech, a very pious man!

But the *Navi* was criticizing him now. "חַטַּאת קֶסֶם מֶרִי – *What you did by rebelling against the word of Hashem, is the same as sorcery that you hate so much.* וְעָוֹן וּתְרָפִים הַפְצַר – *Because if you have to be persuaded and urged to do the devar Hashem, because it's in conflict with your character, your ideas, it's the same as avodah zarah* (*ibid.*)."

Shmuel's Exposé

Shmuel was saying a big principle here. A person who is subject to his own ideas, his *shittahs* — even to his good *middos* — and he has to be pressured therefore to do something that's required by the Torah, that's already like worshipping idols.

Idol worship?! Yes; because if you're a servant to your character, even a good character, if you're a slave to your emotions, even good emotions,

and you have to be therefore urged and pushed to toe the line of the *devar Hashem*, that's already *avodah zarah.* You're worshipping yourself instead of Hashem!

And now he told Shaul the sad news. "Hashem has rejected you from being a king. You're a *tzaddik*, a great man, but this flaw is too big to ignore; it's something that has to be exposed so that the entire nation can learn a lesson from the story."

And what did Shmuel Hanavi do? He picked up a big ax and he walked up to Agag who was in chains. He lifted the ax up over his head and he leaped up and he split Agag in half. וַיְשַׁסַּף שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת אֲגָג – He split him in half, from top to bottom. The most cruel kind of death.

Bending the Good Character

Now, when American Jews hear about what Shmuel did, it's distasteful to them. They would like to hear that Agag was given, let's say, a job, maybe as a servant. Or he should promise to be on good behavior, and then we'll put him on parole. "We have better ways, better ideas, how to deal with it," they think. "A man with good character doesn't do such a thing."

So along comes Shmuel and he says no and no and no. Because what Hashem says, that's the right way to think, that's the right way to do, that's the right character to have. Shmuel Hanavi, you should know, was a man of excellent character. No question about it. Every *Navi* was a man of perfect character, and Shmuel was one of the greatest *Neviim.* He was a kindhearted and humble man. But he took an ax and he chopped Agag in half, from his head to his feet, to demonstrate that his feelings, his principles of character, cannot be an obstacle to fulfilling the words of Hashem.

The Missing Title

And that's the answer to a big puzzle. You know, if you look in the Tanach, you can look far and wide but you'll never find that Shaul is called '*eved Hashem*'. Moshe Rabbeinu is called *eved Hashem.* Yehoshua is called *eved Hashem*, Dovid is called *eved Hashem.* But Shaul, no. Nowhere in the Neviim is he called *eved Hashem.*

You'll find that he's called *bechir Hashem*, the chosen one of Hashem, yes. And he's given other titles of praise by our Sages too. The Tosefta says about Shaul that he was a *ben Torah* and an *anav* and a *chas al mamonam shel Yisrael*. He tried his best to save the money of the people, not to impose

any heavy taxes. He didn't require them to support him in royal style. He wanted to bother them as little as possible.

This you have to know, that first *melech* in Am Yisrael was chosen because of his virtues. He was a very big *tzaddik* and a big *talmid chacham* too. We don't have anybody like Shaul today – we haven't had anybody like him for many many generations. And still it's important to note that he wasn't called *eved Hashem*. And it's not an accident. There's something there.

And the answer is because Hashem saw — great people are inspected by Hashem with a magnifying glass — and He saw that Shaul was an *eved* to his good character, to his emotions and his principles. His mind veered a little bit from the path of Torah onto the path of his own reasoning. He yielded to his mind instead of to the Word of Hashem.

That's what it means עָשָׂה מְרִיבָה עִם קוֹנוֹ. He had *rachmanus* on the fallen king and he couldn't bring himself to destroy him because he was a servant of his kindly emotions. And that's why he's criticized, so that the Am Yisroel should learn this lesson forever — he was punished because he was subject to his good character.

Part II. Listening at Har Sinai

Who Rules Who?

Now to us today, that criticism is not so understandable. We would say, on the contrary, a man who is ruled by good character, that's our model! And so along comes the *Navi* and tells us that it's not so. A man who is ruled by Hashem, *that's* called good character. Of course you have to have *rachamim*. וְרַחֲמָיו עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו (Tehillim 145:9) You must have all the good *middos*. Certainly! And yet, when it's a conflict between the Word of Hashem and your character — your ideals or your attitudes or your principles — Hashem's Word comes first.

And that's what a genuine *eved Hashem* is, someone who has nothing of his own – מַה שֶּׁקָּנָה עֶבֶד קָנָה רַבּוֹ. Like Moshe Rabbeinu, let's say. Moshe Rabbeinu is called *eved Hashem* because he had no emotions except what Hashem told him about emotions. He had excellent character, absolutely. And yet when he was commanded לֹא תְחַיֶּה כָּל נְשָׁמָה – you shouldn't allow anyone to remain alive, what did he do? וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְׁמֵד – He set out to destroy every one of them. He wiped them down to the last man.

מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה' (Devarim 34:5) – He wasn't a slave to himself, to his character and emotions. He had no emotions except what Hashem told him about emotions. Of course you have feelings and emotions — you're not a log, you're a person — but the one who wants to succeed most at being a servant of Hashem is always guiding them, manipulating them, according to what Hakadosh Baruch Hu says they should be.

Bending Nature

Now this is something we don't have today; it's very difficult for us. I remember once, a Rosh Yeshiva called me up — I knew him from Europe — and he wanted that I should go with him to a rich man to raise money for the Slabodka Yeshiva. He wanted me to call up and make an appointment to go ask him for money for the yeshiva.

I said, "Please, don't ask me that favor. To ask people for money, no, I don't like to do that. Anything else, ask of me, but not this. It's not my nature. I never did it before."

So the Rosh Yeshiva said to me, "Suppose you were called to destroy Amalek, to kill an Amaleki. What would you do? You never did it before? It's not your nature? A servant of Hashem bends his nature to what's right."

I didn't do it. I didn't go but I learned a big lesson then. I learned that this is something to strive for. I'm too bashful? You can't have bashfulness if it's not the right place for it! It's a good *middah*, bashfulness – בּוֹשֶׁת פָּנִים לְגַן עֵדֶן (Avos 5:20). But still, when it comes to a mitzvah, you have to be bold for Hashem.

Not only bashfulness. Everything! You have to give up all your private character traits for Hashem! A person cannot be an *eved* to anything except the *ratzon Hashem.*

Hashem Before Love

Let's say you have a relative. You love the relative but he's a *kofer*, *chas v'shalom.* Maybe he's married to a *goy.* Then he's not your relative any more! You don't love him anymore! If you're an *eved Hashem* then your love is subject to who Hashem says you should love. People have to break off relations, even with a mother. There's a man who has a mother, an immoral mother. His father is dead and his mother – I won't say in public what it was, but she was very immoral. So I told him, "She's not your mother anymore." He gasped. Absolutely, she's not your mother. He did it. He was a strong fellow. He did it.

Because when it comes to serving Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we have to be servants of Hashem and not servants of our emotions. You feel bad? It's hard? You have 'principles'? You have good character and so you don't want to do that? No matter. That's the requirement of being a Jew. Whatever you are — whether you're a patient person, or you're shy or you're talkative, or maybe you're easily excited or you're more phlegmatic — whatever it is, it's excellent. But it's a matter of subjugating it to the will of the Torah.

Kabolas HaTorah: Avdus

That's included in the Torah we accepted at Har Sinai. I say 'included' — the truth is that's what Kabolas HaTorah was primarily about, to give up our minds, our character and our emotions, to Hashem.

I'll explain that. You remember when Hashem appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu at the burning bush and told him to go back to Egypt and take out the Bnei Yisroel? So He said like this: "וְזֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת – I'm going to give you a sign, a remarkable sign that will show you that I'm going to carry out all of My promises. What's the sign? When you'll come to the Mount Sinai with the people, תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה – *you're all going to worship Elokim on this mountain* (Shemos 3:12)."

Now, some people think it means you'll bring *karbanos* on the mountain — which they did — but that's not it. That wasn't the sign of 'You will serve Elokim on that mountain.' And so it pays to understand what happened by Har Sinai that was so remarkable that proved that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was carrying out His promise to redeem the Am Yisroel and make them His people forever.

A Nation of Seichel

Pay attention because this is the subject now. When the Bnei Yisroel stood at Har Sinai, you have to know that they were a people who had a tradition of relying on their *seichel.* After all, s*eichel*, a pristine mind — it means the unspoiled original mind before people started reading literature and corrupting the mind — is a very good source of Torah. And Avraham Avinu therefore had developed a system of living that came out of the mind and his descendants lived according to that system. The Bnei Yisroel listened to the voice of the conscience; they dilated upon it, they preached it, and it became a whole Torah for them — they served Hashem with their *seichel.*

And so when this nation gathered at the foot of Har Sinai and they were now presented with the Torah, it wasn't a mob of unthinking people. It wasn't like the people in Europe who were presented with Christianity. The king, a Roman king, decided to become a Christian and so he made a proclamation to all the dumb Romans: "From now on, you're all Christian." And they said OK. That's how they became Christian. Why not? *Mai nafka mina* this *avodah zarah* or that one.

Overcoming Seichel

Now if you have no mind to sacrifice, it's not difficult. But the Bnei Yisroel had minds. They had minds and consciences that were highly developed through generations of use and they lived by their conscience and nothing but their conscience. The mind was the sole arbiter of what was right and wrong and they lived successfully for hundreds of years like that. And now they came to Har Sinai, and a proposal was being made to them that they're going to be given a code of *chukim* and *mishpatim*, various ways of living and thinking. So they should have hesitated. "מָה כָּתוּב בָּהּ - What's written there? You want to sell us a bill of merchandise? Let's see the merchandise first."

But they didn't say that. The people all spoke up and said "נַעֲשֶׂה, we're going to do everything, וְנִשְׁמַע, and later we're going to listen to what You have to tell us. We promise beforehand no matter what it's going to be, we promise to do it anyhow. We'll give up even our minds and think according to Your Mind."

Miracle on the Mountain

A tremendous achievement! You know, when a person accepts the Torah today, let's say a convert or *baal teshuvah*, so we don't have to suspect that when he lived as a *goy* that he had any big principles. A little bit like the New York Times he thinks. A little bit he also picked up in the bathrooms in the public schools or from the television. But whatever it is, it's nothing big; he has no real principles. And so when he gives up his gentile ways and is *mekabel* the Torah, it's not a tremendous sacrifice. It's a good thing and we honor him for coming *tachas chanfei haShechinah*, but it's not a big sacrifice.

The Bnei Yisroel, however, they had a whole system of Torah based on *seichel*, and they were being told now to stop the *seichel* business and begin the Torah business. And they collide with each other sometimes. Kabolas HaTorah means that the Jew says, "When the Torah comes into direct collision, or even a side collision, with my ideas, my character, it's

only what the Torah says that matters. I'm *batul*, I'm nothing in front of the mind of the Torah."

That's called *avodah*, sacrificing your mind for Hashem. And that was the sign, the miracle, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu said would happen. At that time, they fulfilled the prophecy and became true *avdei Hashem.* An entire nation of thinkers, a stubborn and thoughtful nation who had lived by their minds should suddenly give up their minds? A miracle! That's called תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה.

And that's what's expected of the Bnei Yisroel forever. מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבָבָם זֶה ... כָּל הַיָּמִים – *If only this mind of My people that they achieved at Har Sinai should be forever* (Devarim 6:26). "That's what I want, that My people with great and reliable minds should be so loyal to Me that no matter what I'm going to tell them to do or think they're willing to do it anyhow. They're willing to give away all of their own considerations, just for Me." That was the *madreigah* they reached at Har Sinai and the *madreigah* that Hashem wants from us always.

Gratitude and Kabalah

Now, how did such a miracle happen that a nation of millions — a nation of people with minds — should say, "Ok, we'll give up our minds to You"? There's a reason why it happened. In one word, it was gratitude. The Bnei Yisroel were so overwhelmed with gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for all that he had done for them. He had taken them out of Mitzrayim and given them freedom, He had punished their oppressors, and He gave them *kesef v'zahav* too.

And so when they came to that mountain not only were their bags loaded with wealth but their hearts were loaded with gratitude and love of Hashem. They were so happy with their newfound liberty they were thinking what can we do for Him? We'll give our lives for Him!

But not only our lives. The biggest sacrifice that Hashem wanted of them was not merely that they should be willing to give their lives for the service of Hashem, not merely they should be willing to keep *kosher*. Yes, it's a big job to have *kosher* kitchens, *milchig* and *fleishig*, Shabbos, Pesach, and everything, but all that is a minor thing. The major sacrifice Hashem wanted was they should give up their own ideas and think like Hashem.

The Straightjacket for the Sane

And that was the mistake of our great *tzaddik*, Shaul. Shaul certainly was a man who served Hashem. No question. We ourselves would call

him *eved Hashem* without any question. But the Tanach wants us to know that there was something lacking. Because Shaul had in his mind a certain distaste at destroying Amalek, it means he was harking back to his own feelings, his own *seichel*, instead of the *seichel* of the Torah. And that's not what Hashem is looking for.

An *eved Hashem* has to remind himself always that He's in a straitjacket. Of course *rachamim* is a good *middah* – when the Torah tells you it's prescribed. Sometimes the Torah wants you to act with *achzarius*, with anger. Patience is good too. Sometimes not. All the *middos*, all the attitudes of the mind, are like that. And therefore an *eved Hashem* has to put on the straitjacket of the Torah. A*vodas Hashem* is best expressed when someone is willing to sacrifice his mind for Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Part III. Listening on Purim

Accepting a New Torah

And so we come now to the story of Purim and we'll see now how it's connected to this subject. Everyone knows the *possuk* in the Megillah, how after the great *neis* of Purim קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם – *they accepted upon themselves to celebrate every year, forever and ever, the yeshuas Hashem* (Esther 9:27). That's why we still keep Purim today, because קִבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם; they were so happy, so grateful to Hashem, that they accepted to fulfill the *mitzvos* of Purim forever.

But we're going to speak now about what the Sages said on that *possuk*. Because they tell us that included in that acceptance was more than just Purim. קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים means they accepted the entire Torah again. קִיְּמוּ מַה שֶּׁקִּבְּלוּ כְּבָר – There was a new *kabolas haTorah* after the Purim story (Shevuos 39a).

A Scattered Nation

Now, we'll understand that in two ways, and both are included in the *poshut pshat* of that *maamar Chazal*. First, from a historical perspective: You have to realize that the time period during which the story of Purim took place is very significant. When the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah after the Churban Bayis Rishon gathered, they saw that the Am Yisroel was going to be scattered and dispersed now. We were in Bavel now, in Paras u'Madai;

we were spread out מֵהֹדּוּ וְעַד כּוּשׁ in 127 provinces. And even though some of the nation were able to return to Eretz Yisroel, it was only a small amount.

And so now for the first time in history the Jewish nation wasn't all together in one place and it was going to be like that for a long time. And the Chachamim understood that it was an emergency. They're scattered; what's going to happen to our people? How are we going to keep them unified in keeping the Torah? Emergency times require emergency measures.

Uniting the Scattered

So Ezra and the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah came together and they said, "We have to make a *siyag laTorah*, fences around the Torah", and they began to make new *dinim*, new Torahs. It wasn't actually new; it's *ossur* to be *mosif* but they said all this is *d'Rabanan*. It's a fence in order to protect the Torah and to give a more stable *tzurah* to a nation that is dispersed among the *goyim*.

And so they introduced many new things that never existed before; a whole list of *takonas Chachamim* they wanted to foist on the nation. They started saying on Shabbos not only you cannot do thirty nine forms of work, but there are going to be other things now, various forms of *muktzeh*, other *issurim*.

They changed the *tzura* of Shabbos in other ways too. Ezra said you have to make *kiddush*, a certain formula. Once upon a time, *kiddush* consisted of saying, "It's Shabbos!" That's all. To announce that it's Shabbos, that was the *kiddush d'Oraysa*. But to make a *nusach* of *Kiddush*? That was new. They said, "You cannot eat without *havdalah motzei Shabbos*," and they made a *nusach* of *havdalah*. You have to say this and this kind of *havdalah motzei Shabbos*.

Brachos and Shemoneh Esrei

Brachos too. They made a *takanah*, you cannot eat unless you make a *bracha rishonah*. That's something new. Until then if you wanted, you thanked Hashem when you ate. If you didn't, you ate without thanking. Except for after eating bread; that's the only Torah obligation. But now they said, "On everything you have to make a *bracha* before and after."

It was a revolution! Of course, there were very many in ancient times who made some sort of *bracha*, they thanked Hashem, but not in this certified *nusach*! Now there's a certain version that everyone has to follow! It was *mamash* like a new Torah.

They decreed that the Jews must *daven* three times a day — some say two times a day, and Maariv was optional — and with a certain *nussach.* Every man and boy, and some say women too, were *mechuyev* to say Shemoneh Esrei, a thing that was not done before.

Now don't make any mistake. People were *mispallel* before Ezra. Even Dovid HaMelech said, עֶרֶב וָבֹקֶר וְצָהֳרַיִם אָשִׂיחָה וְאֶהֱמֶה – he prayed three times a day. Daniel also prayed three times. But it was optional; there was no *chiyuv.* But now Ezra wanted it should be a *takanah*; everybody must do it.

The Impossible Revolution

Now, all this was a tremendous revolution. Why should the people accept that? A people, an old nation, so many years they lived with a certain system and all of a sudden they're being forced into a new way. "You're giving us a new Torah? We accepted the Torah once already. We've been following the way of our forefathers since the days of Moshe Rabbeinu! All of a sudden you're coming and telling us new things?"

It should have been impossible. Try to get a whole nation, millions of people, suddenly they should stop *motzei Shabbos* when they want to eat, and wait for *havdalah.* Who *havdalah*? When *havdalah*? My grandfather didn't make *havdalah.* What kind of new idea is this? *Brachos*? An entire nation, laborers, men and women, boys and girls, nobody is allowed to eat unless he makes a *bracha* first?! You're accustomed already to the idea but you think that's such an easy thing to accomplish, to foist that on a nation, a nation that already kept everything?

But these changes that Ezra made were vital. We couldn't exist without them. We wouldn't be able to keep the original Torah otherwise. And so the question is how could Ezra succeed? How can you get the Klal Yisroel to accept a whole new Torah? To make a nation now of *daveners*, a nation with *batei kenessios*, with *minyanim*, with *tefilos*, *brachos*, *muktzeh*, hundreds of other things? You think it's easy?! It's a tremendous change!

But the people *did* accept it. And that's a question: How did it happen?

Haman's Credit

And the credit goes to Purim. When Achashverosh took the ring off his finger and put it on Haman's finger, which gave Haman full authority to do as he wished, the Jewish nation was horrified! It was a cataclysm! They saw death staring in the face. The worst enemy, the *tzorer haYehudim*, now has absolute power over us! What's going to happen to us? We're goners!

And when the *neis* of Purim happened, the whole story in the Megillah, and finally they saw Haman hanging they became wild. At that moment the Am Yisroel went crazy from happiness. "V'*nahapoch hu*! We're alive! Hashem saved us!"

They were so delirious with gratitude and *ahavas Hashem* that the Gemara says it was like the explosion of gratitude at Har Sinai that took place almost a thousand years previous. It was such an explosion of emotions in them, that they willingly accepted everything. And that's how Ezra's *takanos* finally came to be accepted. Without the Purim neis, it could never have happened such a revolutionary change. Nothing else could have accomplished such a great metamorphosis in their lifestyle.

And so the story of Purim was made by Hashem for this purpose too, in order to reinforce all the *takanos* of Ezra. Because of the *neis* Purim the *takonos* of Ezra were finally given the *chizzuk* that they remained with the Klal Yisroel. A tremendous achievement! It was a קִיְּמוּ מַה שֶּׁקִּבְּלוּ כְּבָר; they accepted it all in order to protect the Torah that they accepted at Har Sinai.

Accepting the Torah, Again

But you should know — and we come now to the subject we began with — this that the nation accepted all the *takanos* of Ezra, that's only *agav urcha*. It's true but that's not the only *pshat*. The *poshut pshat* in this *maamar Chazal* is that they were *mekabel* to be *mekayeim* the Torah, the same Torah, the original Torah, they got on Har Sinai — they were going to start keeping the Torah again.

Now, don't make any mistake; the Jewish nation always was a pious nation. They kept everything. Like Haman testified about us: יֶשְׁנוֹ עַם אֶחָד – *There's one nation*, מְפֻזָּר וּמְפֹרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים – *dispersed among the nations* … , וְדָתֵיהֶם שֹׁנוֹת מִכָּל עָם – *and their laws are different from all the nations* (Esther 3:8). He's a kosher witness, Haman — if he said that, you can believe him. It's like the man who was accused by someone who didn't like him, of being too *frum*, too pious. So the accused one said, "Please, when you come to the Next World, I want you to testify to that. That's a good *eidus* for me, if you speak up then." So here you have the backhanded testimony of a witness and he tells us that the Jewish nation dispersed as they were, stubbornly clung to the Torah, the same Torah wherever they were.

Kabalah Forever

So what does it mean that they were *mekabel* the Torah again? The answer is Kabolas HaTorah is not a one time experience, that it was done

once by our forefathers and now we can forget about it. Kabolas HaTorah is every day because it means an attitude of *avdus*, of being entirely subjugated to the Torah and that requires constant *shemira*; to always be aware that our minds, our characters and emotions and ideals, are lining up with the Torah.

And on Purim, the entire nation fulfilled that! When the *neis* Purim happened it caused such a wave of gratitude that they rededicated themselves to the greatness of the first Kabolas HaTorah, what the nation had achieved at Har Sinai, of giving up their character and their minds and their attitudes to Hashem. "Not only will וְדָתֵיהֶם שֹׁנוֹת מִכָּל עָם, will our laws be different, but our *minds* will be different. We'll be such *avdei Hashem* that we'll give up even that for Hashem."

Relighting the Lamp

And so as good as they were before they became a hundred times better now. From now on it was לַיְּהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה – *the Yehudim had light* (*ibid.* 8:16). And the Gemara (Megillah 16b) says *orah* is Torah. They had Torah before, they learned Torah always, but when they were rescued from destruction now Torah was to them a new kind of a light. From now on when a Jew looked into the Torah it wasn't just *mitzvos*, *chukim u'mishpatim*. It was a light for the *seichel* – כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אוֹר. Everybody knows that *possuk*. וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ – Without the Torah, we walk in darkness.

And especially at that moment in our history it was important to accept it on ourselves again. Because if we're going to be spread out and there'll be all types of gentile influences, so not only do we need the *takanos* of Ezra; we need also to strengthen ourselves in being *avdei Hashem*, a nation that is willing to give up not only their way of living, but their way of thinking — to subjugate their mind and character to the Toras Hashem.

Purim Thoughts

And so when you're dancing on Purim, or maybe when you're sitting down at the *seudah* and you're in a good mood — you're thinking about how happy we are that Hakadosh Baruch Hu saved us in the days of Mordechai v'Esther — so what should be a result of that? A lot of things. We have to know that the purpose of Purim is to acquire *da'as*. If you don't think on Purim, then you wasted the day.

That's why when a person becomes so intoxicated that he is already *b'geder beheima*, he's out of control, I don't approve of that; it's very wrong. Very wrong. Sometimes in order to raise the airplane off the ground, you

have to put high octane fuel into the tank to help get liftoff; and so there's nothing wrong with imbibing a little bit of *mashkeh*, but it's only for the purpose of getting more *daas*. Purim is for thinking!

And this subject that we spoke about tonight is absolutely one of the important Purim thoughts. Purim is Kabolas HaTorah! But not just doing. That's not a question; of course we're going to keep everything. But today we think about what the nation accepted upon themselves by the story of Purim, that we're going to subject ourselves to the Torah Mind no matter what. That's maybe why we drink a little bit; we're reminding ourselves that we're giving away our minds. We're giving away our minds and substituting for it the Mind of Hashem.

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During the story of Purim, the Jews accepted to bend their minds to the will of Hashem. This week I will *bli neder* try to identify one area in which my mind is not in agreement with Daas Torah and Ratzon Hashem and I will ask myself whether I want to be like Shaul Hamelech whose emothions superseded the command of the Navi, or whether I'm ready to learn from the Jews in the times of Mordechai and Esther.

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On Shabbos Hashem Raises Man to the Heights

There is a basic principle in physics, and in Chazal, that to comprehend the true nature of something, we must ascertain its original state. Let's take Formica, for instance. It is a synthetic wood, actually produced from petroleum, whose form may be transformed in various ways. But it retains its true nature even after its form changes. It may look like wood, but it will never really be wood.

Accordingly, if we want to know what man really is, what his true nature is, we must find out what he was like in his original state. Many changes have taken place in man's form over the generations, but if we want to grasp man's true nature, we must go back to the beginning and find out what the first man, Adam HaRishon, was like. Then we will understand the true nature of ourselves as well.

Adam HaRishon was created a giant. According to some Torah sources he was as tall as the heavens, and according to others he was as broad as the earth. After he sinned, Hashem shrank him down to one hundred *amos* (180 feet) tall. With each ensuing generation he grew smaller, until he reached his present size.

What are *Chazal* telling us here? That man's true nature is to be tall as the heavens or broad as the earth.

Although we don't see ourselves that way, that is our real nature. And this remains true in all generations.

A hundred fifty years ago, every person had his feet on the ground and his head in Heaven, so to speak. He lived with *kedushah* and *ruchniyus*. He lived with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. He was immersed in spiritual worlds. He didn't feel limited and constrained.

Years went by, and man fell from this *madreigah*. His feet used to be on the ground, and his head in Heaven. But his nature didn't change. So what did Hashem do? He gave man the telephone and radio, cars and planes, enabling him to reach from one end of the world to the other. For this is man's nature. If a person cannot reach the heavens, nor can he span the world, he feels as if cramped in a tiny prison cell.

Our grandparents didn't have the tremendous breadth that the modern world affords. Yet we are basically the same as they. The only difference is that our grandparents reached great distances in *ruchniyus* and in living with Hashem, while we do not. But man's nature hasn't changed a bit.

Some people feel that Shabbos is the worst prison possible. Why do they feel this way? Because on Shabbos, a person capable of circling the world is restricted to the narrow confines of his immediate environment. One of the worst punishments you can give someone who drives every day is to take away his driver's license. His natural field of action stretches from north to south, giving him a feeling of control. Then Shabbos comes, and he feels imprisoned. But in truth, Shabbos is tremendously expansive. On Shabbos, Hashem expands us vertically. Instead of reaching from here to China, man expands upward until his head reaches the heavens.

This Shabbos, instead of reaching from one end of the world to the other, let us reach from the earth to the heavens! This is the true gift of Shabbos!

Le'iluy Nishmat
יצחק בן אדל ע"ה
The Yedid Family

Adapted by R' Y. Levy from Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh, Rav Shimshon Pincus, Feldheim

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QUESTION

Why was the Amaleki nation worthy to have geirim as their descendants? The Gemara (Gittin 57b) says that the descendants of Haman converted and learned in the yeshivos.

ANSWER

And the answer is Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to demonstrate the inherent greatness in human beings. מַיִם עֲמֻקִּים עֵצָה בְלֵב אִישׁ – *There are deep waters of counsel and wisdom in every man's heart.* Every human being is capable of endless greatness. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu breathed into humans His breath, the breath of life, the soul, He breathed from Himself which means that endless nobility and wisdom were breathed into the human breast by Hashem. It's waiting there. It's waiting to be drawn out.

And even Haman, had he become a *baal teshuvah*, he could have become a *rosh yeshivah*. Imagine! Haman becoming a *rosh yeshivah*. He could have become a *tzaddik hador*. Everybody up to a certain stage has free will. Haman probably was deprived of his free will after he passed a certain point but his grandchildren, his great grandchildren, weren't deprived.

Now, although had our nation been able to fulfill the command to wipe out the Amalekim, then nobody would have remained to become *geirei tzedek* and that would have been alright too because Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave that sentence that they should wipe them out. But since they didn't do so, those who survived still have a chance.

Same thing with the Germans. If a German becomes a *ger tzedek* and he acts according to the Torah, so we have the greatest respect for him. And he could become a *gadol baTorah*. I know such a case. A son of a German *ger* who was a *tzaddik gamur*. Because every man possesses endless greatness within his capabilities.

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