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IN MEMORY OF MRS. CLARA CHOPP A"H AND MENUCHA MARKOWITZ A"H

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

CHODESH NISSAN

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PARSHAS VAYIKRA

THE SALT OF LIFE

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לזכות

נתן יוסף בן שהלה תמר חיה

ודבורה בת מלכה

Important

See page 11

A reader wrote me a letter. Among other things he writes:

Harav Shia Cohen in his sefer Kerem Yehoshua writes from the Vilna Gaon:

It could happen, that a person learns his entire life with great diligence and is confident that when he will be standing in front of the *bais din shel malah,* the entire *pamalya shel malah* will rise in his honor, and honor him for all the Torah that he learned with great diligence his entire life. But, instead, they will tell him in a very degrading manner, "Why did you disgrace the Word of Hashem? Why didn't you learn Torah?" This person will be astonished and ask, "Did I not learn Torah? Here are millions of *malachim* that were created from the Torah that I learned. They will all testify that I learned Torah with great diligence my entire life – my learning Torah never ceased."

The Vilna Gaon said, they will answer him, that since you learned without any plans to know many parts of the Torah, you therefor are included in the ki d'var Hashem baza, and will be held accountable for the bitul Torah.

I was very not at ease with myself when I saw this Vilna Gaon. This was an exact description of myself. I spent most of my wake hours learning Torah. I was sure that I, (and thousands like me), would prance my way straight into Gan Eden. I might have to deal with some of my other shortcomings, but as far as learning Torah – I'm in. For lack of knowing what to do about this, I just tried to ignore it, but it really weighed on me often. Then Reb Chaim Kanievsky was niftar and kol haTorah kulah was in the forefront of everyone's mind, and this Vilna Gaon shook me up once again.

I recently read your book Kach Magi'im and feel empowered since, to answer up to a Kol HaTorah Kulah challenge. I now have working plans to gradually get to Kol HaTorah Kulah, and none of my existing sedorim had to give.

Excerpt from REACH! (Kach Magi'im) A best seller book guarantying a learning upgrade for everyone. Available at most bookstores (or call/text 732 691 2907). You'll thank Hashem that you did.

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PARSHAS VAYIKRA

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE SALT OF LIFE

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Part I. The Mitzvah of Salt

Salting Meat

We begin with the mitzvah in this week's *sedrah*, עַל כָּל קָרְבָּנְךָ תַּקְרִיב מֶלַח – *on every offering you must put salt* (Vayikra 2:13). It's a *mitzvas aseh* that every *korban* that is put on the *mizbeyach* must be salted first. That's the *halachah*; before the Kohanim throw the meat of an *olah* or the *eimurim* on the *mizbeyach* they have to season it first with salt.

Now, there are various reasons offered for this mitzvah of putting salt on *korbanos*, and we'll mention just two right now. One reason is that salt causes meat to taste better. Everybody knows that the taste of meat and starches is enhanced by the addition of salt. And so it's like a *hiddur mitzvah*; you're making the meat more tasty. And even if it's not being

eaten by us, like the *korbanos olah*, still it's לֶחֶם אֱלֹקֶיךָ הוּא מַקְרִיב – the *mizbeyach* is compared to the table of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and we are serving the King, *kavyachol*, with delicacies; that's one reason.

And another reason that's given for the mitzvah of salt is that salt preserves the meat from putrefying. It's a benefit for the meat. It prevents it from decaying. And so, not only does it make the meat taste better, but it makes it more valuable too; it preserves it.

Salting Bread

Now, although the *possuk* is talking about the Kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash, to this day we memorialize that mitzvah by salting our bread. That's the *minhag*; when you sit down to eat, you dip your bread three times in salt. Even if you don't like salt, you dip one, two, three, just to show that you're doing it for a purpose. Your wife says, "Chaim, not so much salt," so you can shake some off; you're doing it to memorialize the mitzvah in this week's *parsha*.

You're following the model of the *korbanos* because a Jewish table is a mizbeyach. פְּתַח בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ וְסִיֵּם בַּשֻּׁלְחָן לוֹמַר לְךָ – *There's a possuk in Yechezkel (41:22) that is talking about the mizbeyach but then it switches over to Shulchan.* What's that about? It's to tell you that בִּזְמַן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּם מְזַבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַכְשָׁו – *when we had a Mikdash so the altar would atone for us,* שֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מְכַפֵּר עָלָיו – *but today our tables are instead of the mizbeyach* (Chagigah 27a).

Holy Chow!

You hear that idea? A Jewish table is *kadosh* like a *mizbeach*. Only kosher things are put on the table and everything you eat with a *bracha* before and after. And so what's put on the table is like *korbanos*; what enters the holy body of the *Am Kadosh* is like putting something on the *mizbeyach* to burn.

I remember once a professor in Long Island University told me that when he was a little boy and he was romping around in the dining room so his mother — she was an old European mother — she drove him off the table. "You can't sit on a Jewish table", she said. "The table is *kadosh*, the Jewish table."

Suppose it was an Irish table *lehavdil*, or an Italian table, who cares? But a Jewish table is a *makom kadosh* and so we don't sit down like Mr. O'Conner or Mr. Libertino sits down at his table. We sit down like Kohanim sit down; we're accomplishing the same thing the Kohanim did

on Hashem's table and therefore we dip our bread in salt as a parallel to the *korbanos*.

Salt: A Mashal for Life

But we're going to study now how important this mitzvah is, not only for the mitzvah itself, but we have to understand it as *dugma*, as an example of the way Hakadosh Baruch Hu conducts the life of men in general. And we'll see that it's a very important and essential principle that explains a lot of how Hakadosh Baruch Hu deals with people in this world.

So pay attention now. The *possuk*, when it describes this mitzvah, says as follows: לֹא תַשְׁבִּית מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹקֶיךָ – *You should not fail to fulfill the salt covenant of Hashem* (*ibid.*). Now, the word ברית, covenant, is a very unique word to say about a mitzvah; you won't find it everywhere. And the Gemara (Brachos 5a) says something about that: נֶאֱמַר בְּרִית בְּמֶלַח – *We find the word used by salt, that's the bris melach of korbanos*, נֶאֱמַר בְּרִית בְּיִסּוּרִים – *and also by misfortunes, the same word is found.* Because after the *tochachah* where Hakadosh Baruch Hu foretold various kinds of disasters, *chalilah*, that would come, it says, אֵלֶּה דִּבְרֵי הַבְּרִית – *these are the words of the covenant*. So the difficulties that Hashem brings on man are also called a *bris*, a covenant.

The Covenant of Chastisement

So the Gemara (*ibid.*) says there is a connection between the *bris* of the *melach* on *korbanos* and the *bris* of chastisement and suffering: מַה מֶּלַח מְמַתֶּקֶת אֶת הַבָּשָׂר – *Just like salt causes the meat to be more tasty, more sweet, more delicious*, אַף יִסּוּרִים מְמַתְּקִים דִּינוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם – *so too chastisement, hardships in life, difficulties, sweeten a man's judgment.*

Now instead of the word judgment, we're going to say it sweetens a man's 'character'. And because it sweetens his character, that's why his *din*, his judgement, becomes different.

So we learn now from the Gemara that not only our tables, but the world is compared to the *mizbeyach*. And just like the meat that's served on the *mizbeyach* is improved by something which in itself would be very bitter — salt by itself would burn your tongue, it would burn your stomach, but it enhances the taste of the meat — the same thing is chastisement. Life has some bitterness, some salt, but it enhances the meat of life. The difficulties make life so much more precious, more

valuable, because it's מַמְתֶּקֶת דִּינוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם; a person is improved by his *yesurim*.

Gan Eden: Not a Model Life

Now, we're going to talk tonight about this principle and what it means for us — it lifts the curtain for us and we begin to see how we should respond to the difficulties in life — but before we begin the subject I want to first talk about Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. Gan Eden we know was a place where there was no salt; it was all good times. That's an exceptional kind of existence, meat without salt. Unless it's very delicious meat, an especially prepared unusually appetizing meat so it might not need any salt. But ordinarily, there's no such thing. And so the existence in Gan Eden without any difficulties was an extraordinary form of life.

And the truth is, although many people won't agree with me, I'll tell you what I think is the truth; I think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended from the beginning that Adam should not be long in Gan Eden. Hashem wanted פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ, to fill the whole world! Only He put man in Gan Eden in the beginning for certain reasons, and one of them was to provide this lesson forever. Because sooner or later Adam would make some misstep, he would do some *chet*, and because of that Hakadosh Baruch Hu would say, "I'm going to bring the sadness of death upon the world and other forms of sadness because of what you did."

And so it was a temporary 'set up', a 'frame up' in order to teach us how important it is to keep in mind the word of Hashem and not to transgress His commandments. But actually Gan Eden was *not* a model of how mankind was supposed to be in this world. No. In this world there has to be some salt. In this world there's going to be בְּזֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹּאכַל לָחֶם – *sweating to make a living.* There's going to be בְּעִצָּבוֹן תֹּאכֶלֶנָּה – *difficulty with your boss and your customers.* In this world we need בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים – *all the difficulties in having and raising children.* All these things are salt and even though this salt didn't exist in Gan Eden, actually Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended this should be the way of life. In this world Hashem turns over His salt shaker and pours salt on people's lives.

More Sugar than Salt

Now, before we continue, we have to say one *yesod hayesodos*, a fundamental principle we should not forget during the entire course of today's talk or ever afterwards. אָמַרְתִּי עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבָּנֶה — *I said the world was*

made for kindliness. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to understand that important information: He made the world for kindliness! And make no mistake about it.

And even if you will consider the unhappy parts of life as an unkindliness which it is not – we'll soon see that it's not – nevertheless like the Rambam says, הַטּוֹב הוּא יוֹתֵר מֵהָרַע – *the happiness of life is always more than the unhappiness.* And so as we study this subject in its various aspects, always keep in mind that life is full of various opportunities for happiness. Sleeping is fun. Eating is fun. Walking?! There's nothing like it! Breathing is a big *simcha.* You have running water in your home? You're functioning normally? You're not sleeping on a park bench? Ooh ah! Fun times!

Only like the Chovos Halvovos says, טוֹב ה' לַכֹּל – *Hashem is good to everybody*, but רוּבָּם כְּעִוְרִים – *the majority of mankind are blind and don't recognize it.* Who's the majority? It means even *frum* Jews are blind to this great principle because it requires some study, some work. We have to throw off the blanket of habit that blinds us and doesn't allow us to see the truth that most of our lives are spent in happiness.

Not a Bowl of Cherries

But as much good times as you'll have in life, and you'll have plenty, life is not Gan Eden. It's not all sugar and spice and everything nice. It's salty too. Life is full of all forms of enjoyment but it's salted with difficulties too. If you study even such a happy thing as getting married. *Chosson*, *kallah*, *mazel tov*, music is playing, everybody is happy, congratulations — right after the *chasunah* begin problems. All kinds of problems. Right away. Some you can't say in public. There are problems.

Then the *chosson* has to make a living. You think every couple is supported by parents? He has to go out and make *parnassah.* And *parnassah* is somewhat salty. It's not just all honey.

And then, when this *kallah* with whom you rejoice so much has to go through pregnancy and childbirth. All these are difficult experiences in life. Of course we're happy with the results, *mazel tov*, a *bris*, *pidyon haben*, we're happy. But you have to get up at night with the baby; he doesn't let you sleep. You have to run to the doctor with him for this and that. There are problems. Life is seasoned with salt through and through.

Seasoned With Salt

Nothing comes easy. There's illness in life. Oh yes. There are worries, health problems and then people grow old. יְמֵי הָרָעָה אֵלּוּ יְמֵי זִקְנָה – Old age is not easy; even to bend over and pick up something from the floor becomes a big affair. In the old days, you didn't have any false teeth. You couldn't eat anymore without teeth. And then came the great tragedy of death, the sadness of death.

Now, certainly mankind enjoys life. People eat and sleep and enjoy each other's company. Sometimes people have some difficulty temporarily but life in general has a great deal of pleasure. And even the difficulties are minor compared to the happiness of life. Most of the time people are not ill. Even sometimes let's say you're disabled for a little while, most of the time you're able to walk. Most of the time the weather is pleasant. Most of the time you have water to drink, food to eat. Most of the time you have clothing. But despite all the happiness there is always some salt in life and Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "That salt is very important." And that's what we're going to study now, the *hanhaga* of Hashem and the *bris melach* of life.

Part II. The Salt of Life

Suffering Angels

Now we have to remember what was mentioned before that everything in this world is *chessed* — even what seems like unkindliness — and we'll explain it as follows: The Chovos Halevavos in Shaar Avodas Elokim (9) tells us that one of the great purposes of life, one of the primary achievements we came to this world for, is to become like the מַלְאָכִים הַסּוֹבְלִים, like the angels who can tolerate things (Avodas Elokim 9). That's a phrase coined by our great teacher, the Chovos Halevavos.

Now, I know that most people have never heard that before, so I'll repeat it. The Chovos Halevovos teaches that there are three purposes that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had in mind when He created mankind. Now we don't have time to study all three, but one of them is לְהַעֲלוֹתוֹ לְמַדְרֵגַת הַמַּלְאָכִים הַסּוֹבְלִים – *to elevate man to the greatness of the angels that are able to bear and tolerate everything.*

Pay attention because it's a very important statement you're hearing now. We're in this world to learn how to tolerate things, to suffer. It

means to be able to overcome our own reactions, to learn self-control. Sometimes it's too hot, sometimes it's too cold, sometimes things are too hard, sometimes things are boring, whatever it is, you must learn to control yourself, to be like the *malachim hasovlim* who are able to tolerate and to bear difficulties.

And so you understand now why in every person's life Hakadosh Baruch Hu is pouring some salt from His saltshaker. It's not an accident or bad *mazel* — it's the plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu giving you opportunities to become more and more like the *malachim hasovlim*. It's a perfection of character, a greatness of the soul, and it's our preparation for the great reward that comes after this life.

A Salty Start

And it's so important that Hakadosh Baruch Hu does it from the very beginning. Like you heard more than once here, the Chovos Halevavos explains why little children undergo the pain of teething. It seems to be against the regular procedure of Hashem's world, where most of a child's growth happens painlessly. Even though it requires a great deal of adjustment of the skeletal structure and adjustment of the tissues to accommodate new additions as the child develops, it doesn't hurt in most cases. So why does it hurt when a child begins to develop his teeth?

So the Chovos Halevovos gives a reason. It doesn't mean it's the only reason, but if he gives a reason it's a *svara* that's worth studying. He says that it's in order that the child shouldn't be deceived in this world that it's going to be one long Gan Eden, so he's introduced even as a baby to some salt in this world. It hurts him. He's crying. Parents experience that. They stand by helplessly, and the child weeps in his crib because his gums hurt him. They try to soothe the pain by smearing the gums with something, but it doesn't help much.

Subconscious Salt

And so right at the beginning, at the threshold of life, everyone learns that lesson and it remains embedded in his awareness that it's not always happiness. It's an experience that teaches the child that this world has to have a certain amount of difficulty and thereafter whenever something comes along that may cause him some unhappiness he'll remember subconsciously that that's part of life. Don't kick the bucket.

Don't become so discouraged and say there's no use. No, that's life. There is some difficulty in life.

It doesn't mean the world is nothing but difficulty. After he gets his teeth, he enjoys them. He eats with them and they become part of *simchas Olam Hazeh*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't make this world a place of suffering, but He injects that one experience into the child's life and now it's in his subconscious mind. To a certain extent, it prepares him for life.

And then comes the trouble with siblings. The mere fact that you have to associate with your brothers and sisters forces you against your will to cooperate. You'd like to have everything your way, but sometimes they don't let you, especially if you're a younger one. When the older ones dominate you there's a great perfection of character there, a certain humility, a certain ability to cope with circumstances is created. And that's a *shleimus*, perfection. You know, if you're the only child in the family, it's a big problem. And even though you learned *mussar*, it's not going to accomplish the *mussar* that an older brother can give you. An older brother gives you a hit and it's worth more than ten pages of Orchos Tzaddikim.

By the Sweat of Your Brow

That's also why you must go to work for a living. You can't just sit around. Who will pay your bills? Rent, grocery, tuition. Shoes for the children cost a lot of money. You have to work, and that means you have to overcome your desire for the good old days when you were a *bochur* and you had no obligations. Now you have to take upon yourself the *ol*, the yoke of supporting your little family.

Now when you take upon yourself a yoke, you must know you're doing something to yourself. You're gaining the ability of self-control! You have to get up and go to your job. And maybe the boss is not so polite to you. A boss is sometimes meaner than an older brother, and you have to swallow your pride. He tells you to do extra things. Sometimes he asks you to stay over longer hours. And you keep quiet and listen to him – you need the job.

The Real Mashgiach

In the home too; you go home from the office and your wife is also telling you things. When you were a yeshivah man in a dormitory you came at night from the *beis hamedrash* and maybe you threw your coat

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in the corner. Your socks you left on your bed, your shoes you put on the chair, and you lie down immediately to go to sleep after saying all the *tefillos*. You were doing what you want to do. You turn one page in the telephone book and that's your milchigs placemat and at night for supper you turn the page again for fleshings. But now somebody proposed a *shidduch* to you and finally you got married.

So now you comes home from the *beis hamedrash* and your wife says "Don't put your shoes there." "Don't put your socks there." You're being policed at every move. You're trammeled. So you could become angry and rebel against your wife's discipline. "I'm not a child," or some other excuse, "I'm so busy." But instead because you came here tonight, so you practice the Chovos Halevavos. You're thinking, "I'm here in this world to become more and more like מַלְאָכִים הַסּוֹבְלִים. Self control, tolerating, is one of the three purposes why I'm in this world and so I have to suffer from a wife." Now, the ladies who hear this, it doesn't mean you should overdo it. No, there's enough without that, but at least we should understand the principle.

Raised by Children

And she? You think it's easy? You know what it means raising children? It needs *kevishas haratzon*, a lot of self control. You have to restrain your own desire for liberty to be a mother, to take care of children. You have to sacrifice so much of your own convenience for a child. What does that do to a girl? It makes her a more perfect character. You have to diaper this child, you have to humor your child, you have to tolerate your child's tantrums, you have to go along with your children and play with them. You have to do all kinds of things for them and you give your life for somebody else and not for yourself . That's self control. And she's becoming more and more perfect. She's fulfilling one of the primary purposes of life, of transforming yourself into a *malach hasovel*.

Sometimes there are collisions with the husband too. Like the Gemara says on the *possuk* in Tehillim, מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בַּכּוֹשָׁרוֹת – *Hashem leads forth those who are bound up in chains* (68:7). It's talking there about Yetzias Mitzrayim but the Sages make a play on words. Who are bound in chains? Husband and wife. They're in chains. They're married forever. But why call it בַּכּוֹשָׁרוֹת, in chains, instead of saying בַּזְקִים, the more common way to say chains? So בַּכּוֹשָׁרוֹת, the Gemara says, is בְּכִי וְשִׁירוֹת – *weeping and singing* (Sanhedrin 22b).

Number one it's singing. You sit at the table with your wife and your children, Shabbos. No question it's a *simchah*, it's *nachas*. You're enjoying the family whereas if you were a bachelor sitting by yourself, you'd eat something cold and you wouldn't have anybody to talk to. Now there's a wife near you and children near you and *nachas* and happiness and *zemiros* and company, friendship, no question about it.

Marrying for Mayonnaise and Salt

There are various forms of happiness in marriage. A husband is a great happiness! If you don't have a husband around and you have to open up a jar of mayonnaise, it's not so easy; you're not strong enough. But if you have a husband nearby so he can reach high up on the shelf to get the mayonnaise jar and then he can open it too. And so, a husband is very useful to have in the house. A wife is useful too. A wife provides various forms of happiness. There's a lot of sugar and spice in a wife.

But there's salt too. Marriage is *bechi* too. There's some weeping in marriage. I told that to a man recently. He told me he's suffering from his wife. I said everybody suffers from wives. And the wives suffer from their husbands. They suffer from each other. That's the perfection of character that you gain. לֹא טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ – *It's not good for a man to be alone.* Alone you can do whatever you want, but when you have somebody whom you have to consider, each one has to yield a little bit to the other one, and that yielding brings more and more perfection of self-control. It's a great *tov*, the perfection of character.

Marrying for Success

There's no question that people who marry and remain married a long time, the years weld them into decent people. People who would want to do things wherever they want, to eat whatever they want, the wife says "Nothing doing! Don't eat that. Eat what I'm making for you." He brings home from the fast food store food that they cooked for him. "No," she shouts! "I don't want that in the house. I'll cook other things."

He wants things that are more tasty and sharp and burn in the throat, but she wants more healthy foods. She wins out. He wins too because he eats a more healthful diet, but a bigger win is that he practiced more self-control again. He has learned to control himself. He controls not only his anger and his arrogance. He controls his lust for eating tasty things and does what's good for him. And so in the long run, both of

them are more successful as a result of a career of being forced by each other to yield and to control themselves.

And so life is full of salt. A spouse, a neighbor, a boss. There are aches and pains. Sometimes there's *parnassah* trouble, sometimes the children give you trouble, sometimes the parents. Sometimes there's illness, other troubles. And it makes you better! If you learn to yield, to be *sovel*, that's a perfection of character that you came to the world to achieve.

Part III. The Salt of Mitzvos

The Yoke of Mitzvos

Now, included in the salt of life, in becoming *malachim hasovlim*, is a subject that might surprise you when you hear it for the first time. Because when we study the subject of *mitzvos*, of Torah, we'll see that one of the purposes is what we're talking about tonight.

Although there are various purposes for *mitzvos*, a common denominator is what Chazal teach us that לֹא נִתְּנָה הַמִּצְוֹות אֶלָּא לְצָרֵף בָּהֶן אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת – *mitzvos were given only in order to refine and purify the Jewish people* (Bereishis Rabbah 44:1). By keeping *mitzvos*, you have to practice self control; you have to tolerate the *ol mitzvos*, the yoke of *malchus Shamayim*, the constant burden of authority. And it's not always easy.

It's not easy to make Pesach. It's expensive. Not only the money; it's hard work too. To clean a Jewish home — you know, if you're going to have a Jewish house, it means you're going to have children. And if you have children, it means one, two, three, four, five, six; various ages. In a house full of children, it's *near* impossible to make Pesach. It's not simple at all.

But not only Pesach. All the *mitzvos* involve some difficulty. It's not easy to go out three times a day to the synagogue to *daven.* Sometimes you'd rather just stay in bed. It's not easy to make a *sukkah* and to eat and live in the *sukkah*. It's not easy to have kosher food. *Kashrus* is expensive. And some people even say, "*Yashan*; I have to make sure it's *yashan*."

The Purification of Mitzvos

And all these things are *letzaref*, it purifies us. Self control! "I can't eat any place I want."

"But there are bargains over there; you can buy food cheap."

"No, I can't eat that kind of food. It has to be glatt kosher. I can't eat it."

You know what that is? It's a little salt from the salt shaker. Some difficulty you have to tolerate. It doesn't mean a Jew doesn't enjoy life. No. Today there are plenty of kosher foods to eat. Haddar cookies and Lieber's chocolate and all kinds of good things you can eat now, all perfectly kosher. Still, when you are limited in what you can eat, when you walk in the street there are all kinds of restaurants, all kinds of food stands, various delicacies are being advertised and you cannot use any of them, so each time you pass by you're practicing self-control! You're being *mitzaref* yourself.

Happiness and Heaviness

Now, the fact that you cannot eat what the Italian can eat is not only salt. It's happiness too. It's a tremendous pride when you live with a royal diet, when you can't eat snails or bugs. In the *parsha* of the forbidden foods, it says, "I am Hashem, הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם – Who took you *up* from the land of Egypt (Vayikra 11:45)." And the Gemara (Bava Metzia 61b) says, "Not I took you *out* of Egypt; I took you *up*, I *elevated* you from Egypt. When I made you My nation I elevated you by giving you an aristocratic diet." Ooh! So it's a big happiness, a pride, to keep kosher.

But in addition to the happiness, there's a burden too. And so you pass by all of these delicacies that you see in the windows, crabs and lobsters, you should know not only is it a sign of your aristocracy that you can't go in there, but it's a sign that you're being given the gift of being able to say no to yourself. The fact that you can't eat those things means that you have an opportunity to make something out of yourself.

When you have to go to the *shatnez* laboratory to check your wool coat or suit if the filling inside is linen so there's a certain difficulty involved. There's the trouble of checking it. It's time and expense. Sometimes you might find that it is *shatnez* and it's another expense. All these things are the great opportunity that a Jew has of constantly being refined. He constantly has to overcome the lethargy, the opposition of the body. לְפִיכָךְ הִרְבָּה לָהֶם תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת – we were given very many rules and restrictions, and therefore we have opportunities without end to become great!

The Secret of the Details

And that's one of the secrets of the details of the Torah, of *halachos*. Shabbos let's say; there's so much scholarship to learn about Shabbos, so many details. It's not enough to sit down and commemorate the creation of the world out of nothing. No. There's *hilchos Shabbos* without end; you can't do this, you must do that. It's a straitjacket. And all the *halachos*, all of the Torah is like that.

It's so much that sometimes the ignorant Jew, the *am ha'aretz*, he feels it's excessive. "Why did the Torah put so many difficulties upon us?" But he forgets the whole purpose of Torah; the purpose of such a plethora of *dinim* and abundance of procedures is לְזַכּוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל – to make them perfect. לְפִיכָךְ הִרְבָּה לָהֶם תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת – *That's* why it's so much. Because it's by means of all these details that you become a *malach hasovel*.

All the *dinim* of the Torah, besides whatever purposes they have, also teach us to have self-control, to force our *yetzer hara* to bend, to yield to what's right. We're not going to revolt against the authority of the Torah, and so we train ourselves against impatience and laziness, and to tolerate difficulties. The details of the *halachos* mean we have to use a certain amount of circumspection, caution and foresight. And sometimes we have to sacrifice some comfort. And because we're willing to be a *sovel*, to suffer if necessary, in order to bear the burden of עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, the *mitzvos* are making something out of you that you weren't before.

Torah Tavlin

Now, you have to understand that *limud Torah* is the same thing. Certainly every line of Torah that you learn gives you a new mind. Even if you may not understand how this specific statement in the Gemara will affect your character, very many times it gives you an insight you didn't have before, an attitude you didn't have before. But even if you don't appreciate that result, the mere fact that you must harness your mind to study something that's not so easy at first sight, it needs a little bit of thought, that's learning to control yourself.

You know, the lazy man doesn't study anything unless he actually needs it. A college student, let's say, he won't bother his head with anything except what's useful for his career. But to do something that he doesn't see any monetary benefit from or glory that'll come to him from it, he wouldn't bother. But the Torah student, *l'havdil*, the one who learns

Torah, the Jew who opens a *sefer*, he's doing something not because he's looking for money; he's doing something to force himself to comply with the command of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Oh, that's a big achievement. And therefore, as enjoyable as learning Torah is, it's always seasoned with some salt.

Learning the Hard Mesichta

And the more difficult it is, the more you struggle, the greater it is; that's what the Chachomim say. עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה – *By the mouth of these words*, כָּרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְּרִית וְאֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל – *I made a covenant with Yisroel*," Hashem said (Shemos 34:27). And Rabi Yochanan says it means, "I made a covenant with you only because of *Torah sheba'al peh*." (Gittin 60b). Chumash is very important, but My covenant with you is *al pi hadevarim*; because of the Gemara.

So some people will say, "Gemara? I'll study *bakashot*. I'll study *Pirkei Avot*, I'll study Tehilim. I'll study Chumash."

Gemara, my friends! It's Gemara that a Jew is created for.

Why is Gemara more important than Chumash? מְשׁוּם דְּתַקִּיפִי לְמִגְמְרִינְהוּ – *Because it's hard to learn* (*ibid.*). Today it's easier because it's written down but still, it's not so easy to look in the Gemara. It's difficult. And in the olden days when everything was by memory so it was a double job. You had to memorize the words besides understanding them. It's hard enough looking in the Gemara trying to understand them, but to understand something that's memorized is five times as difficult.

And the ancient Jews sat on the ground and they studied Torah *sheba'al peh* and they became great as a result. Sometimes Gemara causes a person to gnash his teeth in despair! And so, of course, the lazy man says, "I don't want to bother. Why do I need this *tirchah*? I'd rather sit on the couch and let my mind wallow in the cesspool, in the bilge water of television. It's so much easier." But the Jewish nation says no; we accept the responsibility of learning. And they became more and more, people who were in full control of themselves.

Sugar and Salt

Now it doesn't mean the life of a Jew is not fun. There's nothing better! Learning Torah is fun! Pesach is fun! The joy of being a *frum* Jew! The joy of sitting Shabbos around the table with your family singing *zemiros*! You know what a *geshmak* that is? Here's a man with ten children. And they're all singing; it's a choir. Ah, a pleasure, a *taanug*. It's

Gan Eden in this world. And of course, the housewife, she's enjoying all the *nachas* besides for putting all of her talents into making delicious viands for Shabbos. And everybody is smacking their lips and diving into it; they're enjoying the Shabbos. Shabbos is so delicious!

Who has *nachas* from their children if not us?! Our children are not bums. Our children aren't hanging out on street corners. We have *frum* children, *frum* grandchildren. Ah! What a happiness! Certainly the Orthodox life is the happiest life!

But still we understand that there's some salt too; besides for the happiness of *mitzvos*, it's also dipped in salt. There's some *tirchah* and expense and difficulties there. And that's the salt that is מְמַתֵּק אֶת הַבָּשָׂר; it sweetens the meat. We become sweeter as a result of the *mitzvos*. Not only we become more *kadosh*; we become better. And that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it so.

A Refined Couple

That's why after Pesach is over, everyone, especially the women, are better than before. All the effort you put into Pesach doesn't go away. Sometimes when Pesach finishes and you put away the dishes, so the lady of the house will give a sigh and say, "Now it's all over." It's not all over! All that she did made an effect on her. Her *neshamah* was so purified, so elevated, she's not the same person at all.

And the husband, he's working extra hours to pay for the wine and matzos; it's not easy. And then he gets on his knees and he's looking under the bed for *chometz* with the candle; to be *boidek chometz* every year, it's a job. Sometimes he's an old man already and it hurts his knees. His back hurts him when he bends over. But he does it every year *because he has to*; and every year he becomes better and better.

Everything is for the purpose of making something out of you that you weren't before. All the *dinim* that we practice and we study are for the purpose of *l'zakos*, to make you better, *l'tzaref*, to refine you by means of the difficulty.

A Nation that Seeks Perfection

And so now you know why there's salt in this world. Absolutely you taste better because you have difficulty being a Jew. A little bit of salt is added to the meat of our lives in order to give us the great accomplishment of learning to be able to tolerate and serve Hashem

despite everything. That's how we become more and more refined. The salt of life, the difficulties, and the salt of mitzvos, is also *chesed* Hashem.

And therefore, next time when you sit down and you dip your bread in salt, think of these two things. "Oh, it tastes better with a little salt. And I also taste better because of a little bit of salt in my life."

"Oh," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says. "I see that you understand why you're in this world. You're here to gain *shleimus*; הַתְקֵן עַצְמְךָ בַּפְּרוֹזְדוֹר – *You're preparing yourself in the lobby*, בְּדֵי שֶׁתִּכָּנֵס לַטְּרַקְלִין – *in order to go into the banquet hall, the seudah, of Olam Haba.* And every good *seudah* needs a little bit of salt."

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Remembering the Salt

In this week's parsha, we learn that every *korban* required salt. Chazal teach that just as salt enhances meat, the "salt" of life — inconvenience, restraint, and obligation — enhances the person. The *bris melach* teaches us that difficulty is not an interruption of life, but part of the covenant that makes us better.

This week, *bli neder*, once each day when I dip my bread in salt, I will pause for a few seconds and think about this lesson. I will remind myself that just as the food tastes better with salt, I become better through the small difficulties and restraints in my life. I will try to accept at least one inconvenience that day calmly, remembering that it is part of the salt that refines me.

This week's booklet is based on tapes
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Double Portions

Shabbos has the most modest *musaf* offering of the Torah: no bulls, no rams, and only two lambs. Why? The Midrash (*Da'as Zekeinim* on *Bemidbar* 28:9) says that Shabbos complained about this to Hashem, and He answered that two lambs are in fact the most appropriate *korban*, since everything about Shabbos is double: Shabbos has a double expression of song: "A *hymn, a song for Shabbos*;" (מזמור שיר ליום השבת) a double expression of *oneg*; "*and you declare Shabbos as a time for delight, and the holy day of the Eternal as honored*;" a double expression of punishment: "*Those who desecrate it must be put to death* (מות יומת)", and a double portion of bread, לחם משנה. Thus it is appropriate that its *korban* also be double - two lambs.

The Midrash then compares it to a king who asked his servants to prepare a meal for his son. They prepared certain foods. Then the king ordered that they prepare a meal for him. The servants asked, "What should we prepare for the king?" He responded, "And what did you prepare for my son?" They said, "Such and such." He replied to them, "Prepare the same for me, no more than what you prepared for my son."

From this we learn that the two lambs of the Shabbos offering are actually one lamb for Hashem and one for us. What is the significance of this? Shabbos is called a *bris olam*, an eternal covenant. This covenant is the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people.

The relationship is so close that Hashem does as we do, so to speak. The above allegory recounts how the king was so fond of his son that he passed up a grand repast so he could be together with him and eat the same food.

This is why everything about Shabbos comes in pairs: one for Hashem and one for us. *Shabbos Kodesh* is like the *Kodesh HaKodashim* of the *Beis HaMikdash*, where the *keruvim* embraced one another. One *Keruv* represented Hashem, and the other, the Jewish people, demonstrating the great love that exists between Hashem and His people. Even nowadays, with the Beis HaMikdash destroyed, this love is seen in *Shabbos Kodesh*.

This is why we must be so careful about Shabbos - not to desecrate it through any forbidden act, not to take our minds off it, and not to occupy ourselves with mundane matters on this day. We are together with Hashem on *Shabbos Kodesh*, and we should devote the entire day to matters of Torah and *kedushah*. In this way we will see doubled and redoubled blessings in everything we do!

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

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QUESTION

I was approached on the street by a gentile, a neighbor, and he said that the reason why the gentiles dislike Jews is because we keep our laws and we remain separate — we wear different clothing and things like that. What should I answer him?

ANSWER

Answer him, "Do you hate the Amish?"

Have you ever seen the Amish? They look like Satmerers. They have big beards and black hats. Their women wear long dresses, and their hair is tied up with kerchiefs. Who hates the Amish? Nobody.

And so the answer is it's not true. It's only an excuse. The hatred against Jews comes from an entirely different cause, not because they're different. Actually, it's the opposite. When the Jews are different, Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees to it that the hatred is minimal. Of course, there's always going to be, to some extent, animosity against the Jews because if not, the Jew might mingle with his environment and get lost. It's always going to be there as a -wall until Moshiach comes. But if we look and act differently, it's kept to a minimum. Because then it doesn't always require such a big wall — it can be kept on a low flame.

The hatred increases in proportion to the way the Jew begins to resemble the gentile. That's why in Germany — I'm talking about before the Holocaust — it became virulent. In Germany, the Jews did their best to resemble gentiles. The German Jew spoke perfect German. He acted like a German gentleman. He mixed with them and their culture. And once in a while, he even intermarried with the Germans. And that's where the real hatred originated. Because the more the Jew comes close to the gentile, the more Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to erect a fence of hatred to keep him away.

And so these are only excuses — that we dress differently, that's why they hate us, that's only an excuse.

Of course, when the Nazis portrayed Jews in their newspapers, they showed Jews with beards holding a Talmud, but that wasn't the reason they were hated. If all the Jews in Germany had beards and held a Talmud, there wouldn't have been any Hitler, that I can guarantee you.

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