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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

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PARSHAS CHUKAS–BALAK

LIVING FOR HIS FAVOR

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PARSHAS CHUKAS–BALAK

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

LIVING FOR HIS FAVOR

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Part I. The Happiness of His Favor

A Well of Flavor

We'll begin by going to a scene in the Midbar. If you have a Chumash, look together with me and you'll see something that's surprising. It's Bamidbar 21:16 and it's listing off the travels of the Bnei Yisroel at the end of their forty years of traveling through the Wilderness: וּמִשָּׁם בְּאֵרָה – *And from there, from Arnon, they traveled and they came to a place called Be'eirah*; it was given that name because they found there a spring, a *be'er*, of clean, refreshing water.

Now, a water spring in the desert, especially with enough water for an entire nation, that's something! Today, you have faucets in your home, indoor plumbing, so you're not impressed by that, but for the Bnei Yisroel

in the Midbar it was a big happiness. Ah ah ah! The sweet flavor of fresh water! And so אָז יָשִׁיר יִשְׂרָאֵל – *the Bnei Yisroel sang a song of gratitude to Hashem* (*ibid.* 17).

Now Rashi holds — it's a *maamar Chazal* too — that this *be'er* was the *Be'er Miriam* that always traveled with them in the Wilderness, the spring of water they were given after they had complained for lack of water many years before. And so according to this they were saying *shirah* now, thanking Hashem for the *Be'er Miriam* that traveled with them all this time.

A Well of Favor

But pay attention now to something that people don't know. The Ramban on this *possuk* says that even though the *be'er* of Miriam is included in this *shirah*, but the original intention of the *possuk* is referring to a new kind of a *be'er* altogether. What was new about it? So look in *possuk* 17: הִוא הַבְּאֵר – *This is the well of water*, אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' לְמֹשֶׁה – *that Hashem said to Moshe*, אֱסֹף אֶת הָעָם – "*Gather the people together*, וְאֶתְּנָה לָהֶם מָיִם – *I'm going to give them water.*" It means, this well — nobody asked for it. In the other cases when they wanted water, the people complained first. Moshe even criticized them for that, "שִׁמְעוּ נָא הַמֹּרִים – *Listen, you rebellious ones*" (*ibid.* 20:10). They complained and Hashem said, "Okay, if you're grumbling, so I'll give you water."

But this well at *Be'eirah*, the Ramban says, was given to them without their asking. All of a sudden, Hashem said to Moshe, "אֱסֹף אֶת הָעָם – *Bring the people together and I'll give them a matanah.* I want to give them a gift even though they didn't ask for it."

That's what the Ramban says and if you look in the Ibn Ezra he says the same thing even more clearly; the Rishonim understand that this is the plain *pshat* that the Torah is talking about here. The *be'er* was a new kind of a spring that they didn't have before; a gift that was bestowed upon the nation without their asking for it.

The Pleasure of His Pleasure

Now, before we go on, we must know that thirty-eight years had passed since the preceding *parshiyos*; the stories of the Meraglim and of Korach. Chukas follows right after Korach, but actually thirty-eight years passed; thirty-eight years that Hashem was displeased with them. And so when this happened now, the Bnei Yisroel were very much surprised. Hashem was upset with us and now, suddenly, He's showing us favor! And

so they became so intoxicated with happiness that they began singing a song at that time.

Now, that song, you have to study. It's a pity that people hear the *ba'al korei* read it and they don't know what it's all about. אָז יָשִׁיר יִשְׂרָאֵל – *Then they began to sing*, אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת – *this following song*; it means that at that time, they began singing this song, and subsequently they sang it always in the Midbar. Because they said, "This well is not only a well of water. It's a well of *ratzon* Hashem."

A Song Worth Singing

What did they sing? עֲלִי בְאֵר עֱנוּ לָהּ – *Come up, O well*, עֲלִי בְאֵר – *come up, O well, cry out to it*. Cry out that it should continue to produce water. But not only because of the water; it's His favor that matters! "Oh, we see finally that we are favored by Him. Up till now, He criticized us so bitterly and we felt very much ashamed of ourselves; we had no favor in the eyes of Hashem. And suddenly it's been shown to us by a demonstration that finally we have become perfect enough that Hashem is satisfied with us!"

Ooh, now that's something to sing about! Hashem is happy with you? He's showing you His favor? That deserves a song of happiness! אָז יָשִׁיר יִשְׂרָאֵל! *Then* you should sing! You can dance, too! If you gained the favor of Hashem, that's the only approval that really means anything.

Service for His Favor

You never thought about that? So we must study now a big principle we find everywhere, that we are living for the achievement of Hashem's favor. In Vayikra, for example, it states, וְכִי תַזְבִּחוּ – *when you bring an offering to Hashem*, what's the purpose? לִרְצֹנְכֶם תִּזָּבֵחוּ – *You should offer it to gain His favor upon you* (19:5). You hear that? All of the *dinim* — the *shechitah*, the *zerikah*, being careful with *piggul* and *nossar* — it's *lirtzonchem*, for the purpose of your gaining His favor! It's not merely a literary phrase, something flowery. It's saying that's the purpose; that's what an *oveid Hashem* wants to achieve.

We say it every Shabbos, too, רְצֵה בְמְנוּחָתֵנוּ. Just like we bring offerings to Hashem, so when we keep Shabbos, when we refrain from all the forms of *melacha*, we say to Him, רְצֵה בְמְנוּחָתֵנוּ – "*Favor our menucha, Hashem.* Look with favor upon what we are doing. Because of our service to You, You should love us, You should look upon us with *ratzon*."

So we see that one of the purposes of Shabbos is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should look upon His people who are observing the Shabbos

punctiliously — everybody is now well dressed; we're all bathed and clothed in *bigdei Shabbos* and we're eating the three *seudos* and fulfilling *oneg Shabbos* and doing all the other requirements — and that should find favor in His eyes.

Praying for His Favor

Not only Shabbos. Every day in Shemoneh Esrei we say, רְצֵה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ בְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל – *Favor us, Hashem.* Now we don't mean, "Accept our prayers" because that we already asked in שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ; the *tefillah* before *Retzei* is talking about listening to our prayers and accepting our entreaties. *Retzei* is talking about a different subject. It's a *tefillah* that our *avodah*, our lives, our prayers, our service of You, should find favor in Your eyes. That's the point of this request. It's intended to mirror our desire; we want that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should find in us what He desires to see in those who serve Him.

And that's why we find again and again in Tanach how our great men, from the beginning of time, yearned for the favor of Hashem. And if He was displeased with them, that was the biggest tragedy, the worst thing that could happen in their lives. Because they lived for His favor! Like we say in *Mizmor Shir Chanukas Habayis*, חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ - *all of life is dependent on the favor of Hashem* (30:6). That's what we want from life.

The Life Project

Of course, to sit back in your chair and say, "I desire Hashem's favor," that's nothing yet. You have to put before your eyes a goal: "I want to find favor in the eyes of Hashem. I want to accomplish the things that will gain His favor." And so it means, number one, that you have to practice acquiring an attitude that Hashem is not just an idea, a word in the Siddur. Oh no! Hashem is *Chai v'Kayam!* He's more real than anything! And He's looking at you; He's looking intently and with great interest. And you want to impress Him.

It's an attitude that's included in *ahavas Hashem!* When you love someone, you want to find favor in their eyes! You try to have a good impression in His eyes; in order to show your *ahavas Hashem*, you have to desire לִמְצֹא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה'.

I'll give a *mashal.* Let's imagine a *kallah* who just married. So if she's a wise woman, she won't let her guard down. Whatever she could do to find favor in his eyes, she tries. It's a good idea, by the way. There are some silly girls who were on their best behavior but soon after marriage

they relax and they begin behaving naturally to their *chosson.* They show impatience, anger. They're careless with his honor. They're not trying to find his favor, and they don't realize that they're taking a potentially good husband and spoiling him at the beginning of their marriage career.

Impress Your Spouse

That's why it's important to not stop trying to impress him after the first month or half year. If you'll be careful for the first sixty years instead of just the first six months, you could preserve that favor forever.

Whatever you can do to find favor in his eyes, do it. You'll make a good recipe, a good supper sometimes. You try to look good, to dress properly. That's important, by the way. I very much disapprove of women who go outside dressed to kill but at home they're lazy about that. Just the opposite. On the street be plain. In the home, look your best. Your husband is the one man to whom you have to make a hit.

Also, if you open your mouth and you talk and talk, and talk and talk, that's irritating to him. A chatterbox! Now, he's a nice husband so he keeps quiet, but you're selling yourself down the river with your wagging tongue, by endlessly *hacking ah tschainik!* I'll take the liberty of repeating one of my aphorisms, advice to married women; I've been saying it for many years already: "Smell good and keep quiet." It's possible to live a life of favor but it needs the tactfulness and diplomacy of a wise wife.

Impressing Our Chosson

Now, we have to remember always that we are the bride of Hashem; Hakadosh Baruch Hu is our permanent *Chosson* and we want to find favor in His eyes. We want Him to smile at us always. It's not so easy because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is concealed. We don't see Him. יוֹשֵׁב בְּסֵתֶר עֶלְיוֹן – *The Most High sits in concealment* (Tehillim 91:1). But we have to learn to picture that Hashem is looking upon us fondly and He's hoping that we should do things that will cause Him to like us more.

And it's an ideal that should never go away from before your eyes. It's something to think about from time to time. Imagine such a picture: A man is walking to his business and he's contemplating that question; "Am I living in a way that is causing Hashem to smile upon me?" A woman is walking down the sidewalk, she's going shopping and she's thinking, "What can I do to find His favor?"

A Nation that Seeks His Favor

And that's how our forefathers in the Wilderness lived; they yearned only for that. You remember after the story of the *eigel*, Hashem said that He's forgiving them but that He wouldn't favor them anymore by going with them Himself; instead He'll send an angel to accompany them and that angel would bring them to the land and give them everything that was promised to them. So they said, אִם אֵין פָּנֶיךָ הוֹלְכִים – *If Your face* — it means if Your favor — *doesn't go with us, then* אַל תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה – *don't take us out of here* (Shemos 33:15). "If that's the case," they said, "we don't want to budge from the Wilderness. We're finished; we'll just remain here forever."

You hear such words?! All the great promises of a fertile land flowing with milk and honey, all the happiness of conquering our enemies, all these things are meaningless to us if You don't go along with us. Because in those great days they understood that that's the success of a man, to gain the favor of Hashem; more than just serving Him, doing right in His eyes — the craving of the soul is for Hashem's approval. "Oh, if only Hashem would like me."

That's our success; to develop our character, our minds, and do the right deeds that Hashem looks upon us with favor. And that's why the Bnei Yisroel sang a special song of happiness from then on. Because they saw they had achieved the great success of אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה׳ – *I have gained the favor of Hashem.* "Ooh wah! Hashem favors us! He's smiling at us!"

Part II. Forty Years for Favor

A Great Nation

Now how did that happen? What changed now that Hashem favored us? Remember, they were traveling for thirty-eight years in the Wilderness. What took place during those years that the entire nation should accomplish this greatest achievement of obtaining Hakadosh Baruch Hu's favor, of making Him happy with us?

Now, don't make a mistake; you have to know that the Bnei Yisroel were already an excellent nation when they left Mitzrayim; Hashem loved them already then. They had become great by all the tests and the *tzaros* in Egypt and they had achieved a remarkable level of *daas Hashem*, of *emunah*, from seeing so much of the *Yad Hashem* — the ten *makkos*

and Kriyas Yam Suf. And so don't make any mistake about it; the nation was very great already.

A Demanding G–d

Nevertheless, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted still more of them. Remember at Matan Torah, what He said about us? מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבָבָם זֶה לָהֶם לְיִרְאָה אֹתִי... כָּל הַיָּמִים – *I want that this attitude of theirs that they had at Kabolas haTorah should always continue* (Devarim 5:26). *Kol hayomim*?! So you'll say that's almost impossible! That the nation always should be in the state of inspiration that they were at Matan Torah?!

"Yes!" Hashem says, "*Kol hayomim*! That's what I want. I didn't take you out of Mitzrayim to be the Polish people, the Italian people. You're Mine, you're Hashem's people, and for the Am Hashem I'm pushing for that level of greatness."

Living With Daas

Now, how is that going to happen? An entire nation should become so great? It wasn't a little desert tribe; it was a few million men, women and children! How can you expect that from us?

So pay attention. Here you have a nation that for forty years they were encamping around the *Ohel Moed*. In the center of their camp, they saw the dwelling where Hashem dwelt: וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Imagine such a thing: Every day you wake up and you see a building not too far from you; and you're thinking, "That's where Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Creator of the world lives."

Your little boy asks, "Totty, He really lives there?"

And you say, "Yes. That's His address. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has forsaken the high heavens, all the billions of space miles, and He has come down to live among us. He's traveling with us. You understand, my son, how we have to live now."

For forty years, they saw *Ananei Kavod* overhead. You know what that did for them? For forty years, they ate bread that fell from the sky. Forty years, they had no contact with the *goyim* at all! Only *frum* Jews! You understand now how they became the *Dor Deiah*, the Generation of Awareness of Hashem?

The Excavators

But it's more than that. Because listen to whom the Bnei Yisroel gave credit when they sang that song: בְּאֵר – *This is a well*, חֲפָרוּהָ שָׂרִים – *that*

the princes dug out; כָּרוּהָ נְדִיבֵי הָעָם – *it was excavated by the generous-hearted people of our nation.* It doesn't mean they actually were digging the spring, but they were the ones who caused the story. The favor of Hashem that we achieved was only because of generous-hearted princes.

And who are these "princes"? So listen to what the Navi states in the name of Hashem: כִּי הֶעֱלִתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמִבֵּית עֲבָדִים פְּדִיתִיךָ – "*I took you out of Mitzrayim and then,* וָאֶשְׁלַח לְפָנֶיךָ – *I sent before you Moshe, Aharon and Miriam*" (Micha 6:4). It means redeeming you from Mitzrayim was only the beginning, because what happened in the Midbar, the changes that took place in the nation, that was the real purpose. "I sent special messengers to change the character of the people; to perfect their *middos* and their attitudes. I sent these great personalities, these princes, to transform the nation."

The Influencers

You know what it means to be with Moshe Rabbeinu? If we saw Moshe Rabbeinu just one day, one time, one minute, it would change us. But they saw him all the time! He spoke to Hashem and then He came and spoke to us! He was always teaching them and they saw the light shining out of his face! The fire of his words entered the souls of the people. The people were changed from the top to the bottom.

Now, Moshe alone would be enough, but Aharon was helping him too — Aharon *kedosh Hashem*, the holy man of Hashem, was dealing with the people always. His life was devoted to that: אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת – *He loved the people,* וּמְקָרְבָן לַתּוֹרָה – *and therefore he brought them close to Torah* (Avos 1:12).

And Miriam? Miriam had a tremendous influence on the women. Remember at the *shiras hayam* how she went out and the women began to sing together with her, "A*shirah laHashem*"? She was the teacher of the women. And she was sent by Hashem for that purpose!

These three great souls, princes, generous-hearted leaders, worked together all these years — almost forty years — and they dug out that well, the well of perfection of character, of *shleimus hamiddos*, *shleimus hada'as*, and we became greater and greater in the eyes of Hashem until we gained His favor! They worked on us! They changed us! They improved us "until the waters of the well rose!"

Of course, it wasn't them alone. They were the leaders, but there were other great people. Yehoshua! Nachshon ben Aminadav! Others too.

With leaders like that, the people couldn't settle for halfway measures, for a *parveh* Judaism. We were trained to aim for the stars.

Super–Supervision

And the system in the Midbar was set up for success because it didn't allow for slacking off. You know, besides for the leaders, there were 72,000 *mashgichim* guiding the people. Every ten Jews had one of them as a supervisor, a *sar asarah*. Imagine – every nine Jews were supervised by a supervisor who was always poking his nose in their affairs. Are you arguing with your wife? Are you learning Torah all day long? Are you talking *lashon hara*? Is the father teaching his son Torah? Are the children obeying him? Are they reminding themselves of what happened at Har Sinai? What about *middos*? Are your *middos* better this week than last week?

He watched every step of your daily routine. That's what he was there for. It's an unbelievable thing! Every ten Jews, one *mashgiach*! If you go into a yeshiva today, there's one *mashgiach* sometimes for 200 boys. His eyes are roaming, so when he's not looking at you, you can loaf a little bit. But a *mashgiach* who has to watch only nine boys, he can do a super-perfect job; you can't stop learning for a second because his two eyes can cover nine people constantly.

And over every fifty there was a super-*mashgiach*, a *sar chamishim*. It means that the *mashgiach* himself was being watched. The *sarei asarah* constantly reported to the *sar hachamishim* and he gave him an accounting of his nine people. Then there were *sarei mei'os* over every hundred, and *sarei alafim* over every thousand.

There were over 70,000 judges! The nation in the Midbar was swarming with supervisors. And they didn't just sit back and relax. They were doing the business of supervising. And the supervisors tattled all the time. They were busy bringing reports.

Program for Perfection

So you realize now what it meant to be in the Midbar. Do you understand how purified they were? If they quarreled with their wives, it was reported. If a child was disobedient, it was reported. For forty years, everybody behaved. Never again in the history of the world was there any nation in the world — even our holy nation — that was subjected to such close scrutiny. And little by little, under these circumstances, we changed; we became better and better.

They lived according to Hashem's rules: Every *shevet* remained in its own restricted area. Everybody came every day and picked up the *mann* and ate it. All day long they reviewed what they had heard from Moshe Rabbeinu, the lessons of the previous day. They had nothing else to do, and they all were expected to feel that the purpose of life is the happiness of knowing that Hashem is satisfied with you. We are gaining Hashem's favor because we are walking in the paths of the Torah that He taught us. We're behaving according to His program.

We became so different, so perfect now, that finally Hashem said, "Now I'm going to show you how much I appreciate you, how happy I am with you." And when that happened, when the spring of water was given to them without asking for it, so it wasn't the water that mattered most; it was the great happiness of knowing that they had gained Hashem's honor! That was the reason for the *shiras habe'er*.

More and More Favor

They began singing: עֲלִי בְאֵר עֱנוּ לָהּ – "*Rise up, O well,*" *they cried out.* What did they want should rise up? It means the *ratzon Hashem* should continue. Because that's the biggest desire of Hashem's people, that we should become more and more favored in His eyes. וּמִמִּדְבָּר מַתָּנָה – "From the *midbar* where we had traveled for so many years and we never had water given to us unless we cried out for it, *matanah*, now it was given to us as a gift." And that's why when they came to the next place they called it "Matanah" to memorialize the gift of Hashem's favor.

And then וּמִמַּתָּנָה נַחֲלִיאֵל – *from Matanah they went to higher places and they had more favor in the eyes of Hashem*; still more did they succeed with Hashem, and that's why they called that place "Nachliel" – *Hashem has shown us that we are His inheritance.*

The Spring that Flowed Up the Mountain

And because that was everything to them, so they continued to make progress the longer they were in the Midbar. They traveled from one place to another until they encamped in Bamos; הַגַּיְא אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׂדֵה מוֹאָב - in the valley in the fields of Moav, next to רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה, the top of the summit of the mountain. The perfect nation became so great that the waters rose till the *rosh hapisgah!*

Now, what does it mean "the favor continued to *rosh hapisgah*"? What mountain? What happened at the top of the mountain?

So it's not an accident that right after this, in Balak, that same *melitzah*, the same expression, is used. וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שְׂדֵה צֹפִים אֶל רֹאשׁ הַפִּסְגָּה – *Bilaam went to rosh hapisgah to the top of the summit, a lookout, from where he gazed down upon the Bnei Yisroel* (23:14). And he said a *nevuah* in the name of Hashem.

The Unequalled Encomium

Now, what he said then was a tremendous surprise. לֹא הִבִּיט אָוֶן... לֹא רָאָה עָמָל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל – *Hashem sees nothing wrong in Am Yisroel.* Nothing wrong?! Moshe Rabbeinu never said such words. Up until now we have the impression it was a generation of troublemakers, *mislonenim*, *misonenim*, complainers, rebels. But along comes Bilaam and he says, "They're a perfect people!"

Take a few minutes and read the *pessukim* in the *parsha*; Bilaam is praising them to the sky! But it's not Bilaam! אֵת אֲשֶׁר יָשִׂים ה' בְּפִי אֹתוֹ אֶשְׁמֹר לְדַבֵּר – "*I'll speak only what Hashem tells me to say!*" Hashem was speaking! Bilaam was standing on the top of the mountain uttering praises that were unequalled; it's an encomium of such greatness, such praise, such adulation and admiration of Am Yisroel that there's nothing equal to it anywhere in the Torah.

Filling the Soul's Desire

The answer is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is now telling them that they had succeeded by being forty years in the Midbar. "I'm happy with you!"

"Ah ah ah! Hashem is praising me?!" You melt away in happiness!

They had worked on themselves and changed themselves, and they achieved such greatness, such perfection in every way, that they gained Hashem's favor in the most overwhelming manner!

It wasn't easy; good things don't come easy and surely the best thing, the favor of Hashem, doesn't. But when you're living for that purpose, when you know that's what you want out of life, so it's possible. And the *Dor Hamidbar* is our model! When we live in this world accomplishing what our *neshamah* craves most — Hashem's smile, His favor — that's the real happiness, the satisfaction of success, of Olam Hazeh.

Part III. Achieving His Favor

The Applause of Olam Haba

I want to tell you a little *chiddush* now that is important for our subject. You must know that this *ratzon Hashem* that we're talking about, the pleasure of achieving the favor of Hashem, is really what the great reward of Olam Haba is all about. Because when you come to the Next World after living successfully and you see Him smiling at you, that's the most tremendous happiness you could imagine. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when He looks upon you with favor, when He applauds you for what you accomplished, it's not only the pinnacle of achievement, but it's the pinnacle of pleasure.

I'll give a *mashal*. Suppose you're giving a performance, a symphony let's say. Or maybe you're a *chazzan* singing or a *talmid chacham* saying *chiddushei Torah*; and you're doing it before an audience of a hundred people and they're applauding you.

"Beautiful," they say, "Ooh ah!" They're clapping, smiling at you. Ahh! It feels good.

But suppose now there's 10,000 people. That's heavy! 10,000 people who are applauding you, that goes right to your head. Oh yes! It's intoxicating! And if it's a grandstand where you have 50,000 people looking at you and they're all cheering at your performance, you might totter. Of course, it passes by and in a few minutes, everybody goes home and the lights go out and the whole thing is over. But it's tremendous while it lasts. It's invigorating.

The Applause of Hashem

But suppose it's forever and ever. Forever and ever and ever! And it's not plain people. Imagine your great-grandfather, Avraham Avinu, sitting and smiling at you. "Ah!" he says, "I have *nachas* from you, my boy. You lived successfully!" And also Yitzchok and Yaakov and Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen. All the great people; Shmuel Hanavi and Dovid Hamelech and Chizkiyah Hamelech are there. And also Ezra and Hillel and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. All the great people, they're all sitting there together and applauding you.

But that's nothing yet! We have to know that the grandstand is Hashem! And Hashem is not 20,000 or 50,000 spectators — Hashem is billions of spectators! If you're fortunate enough to come to the Next World and it happens to you, it's the most tremendous of experiences! You'll need a special, supernatural *koach* in order to survive.

It's like the man who gets a certified letter, "Your great-great-uncle in France died and left you in his will a hundred million dollars," so before the messenger gives you the letter, he has a bottle of aspirin to give you some pills because you might have a heart attack from the happiness, the excitement. There's a true story like that. A man suddenly got such news and he died on the spot. In "Believe It Or Not," Ripley reports that story.

And so the Gemara says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has to give the *tzaddikim* strength to survive the happiness of the Next World, to withstand the happiness of Hashem's favor (Sanhedrin 100b). And that's the reward we look forward to: His favor, that's the best reward imaginable.

Ridicule is Gehenom

Now while we're on the subject, we must know that the worst kind of punishment is *disfavor* in the eyes of Hashem. יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׂחָק – *Hashem will laugh at them*, ה' יִלְעַג לָמוֹ – *He'll ridicule them* (Tehillim 2:4).

So we think, "Whoa?! That's the whole punishment? Hashem will laugh at them?"

Oh no! When Hashem laughs at someone and ridicules them, there's no greater Gehenom than that! Nothing worse than that! You must know that Hitler is in Gehenom right now and he's being burned up every day. They're poking out his eyes. No question that they're poking out his eyes every day and putting them back again and poking them out again tomorrow. Same thing again and again. Every day they scrape the skin off him and they hang him up and they cut off pieces and pieces of him. And he screams and screams. He screams all the time. And then they revive him. They make him alive again with his flesh and his nerves and do it again. Not only Hitler; all the other *reshaim* are in Gehenom and they're suffering terrible punishments, things that are far and beyond the ability of a human being to describe.

The Pain of Ridicule

But that's nothing yet! We're underestimating it when we think of fire and torture. Because whatever we'll say is nothing compared to the unspeakable torture of ה' יִלְעַג לָמוֹ, Hashem's ridicule. That's the most terrible thing, to be ridiculed by Hashem. The *reshaim* turn over in convulsions at such *yissurim*.

Even in this world, ridicule from flesh and blood, embarrassment, is very painful. Suppose a person will come before a crowd of people, a

hundred people let's say, and they'll ridicule him; it's a terrible experience. Sometimes a person might commit suicide rather than be ridiculed.

I told you once the story of the Borough President of Queens; he was caught taking bribes for parking violations. He was a nice fellow, by the way, and he was terribly ashamed. His name was in the papers and he was going to have to go to prison. He killed himself.

Now, I wrote him a letter beforehand. "Don't do anything rash," I wrote. "So they'll put you in prison for a little while. You'll come out of prison; I'm sure you have plenty of money stashed away. You'll go to Switzerland and you'll live in style."

But he didn't read my letter. Foolish fellow, *nebach*, he killed himself. Because of embarrassment! The shame of being embarrassed was too much!

The Real Ridicule

But that's nothing yet. Because suppose Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the One that ridicules you; that's a million times worse. It's the greatest suffering you can think of. ה' יִלְעַג לָמוֹ! Hashem will ridicule the wicked ones! He'll say to the liberals, "You fools! You made gay weddings?! Even dogs don't make gay weddings!"

That's the worst of all punishments; the frown, the disapproval of Hashem. Hashem, the One Who loves everybody is deriding me? Oy, there's no Gehenom as terrible as that! It's such a fire of *tzaar* when Hakadosh Baruch Hu scorns you and shames you — He'll point and say, "Hehehe, you *shotim*, *kemochem*." Oh, we have no idea what a terrible suffering it is when Hashem disapproves of a person! When we say the fire of Gehenom is sixty times fire (Brachos 57b), it's only a *mashal!* There's no limit to the burning sensation, the searing shame when Hashem looks at a person with disapproval.

The Real Approval

But our subject is Hashem's approval. And that's the greatest sensation, the greatest pleasure. You can never get any greater pleasure than Hashem looking upon you favorably. It's an excruciatingly happy experience, a delirious ecstasy. That's why Olam Haba is הָעִדּוּן שֶׁאֵין עִדּוּן לְמַעְלָה מִמֶּנָּה; the pleasure, *the joy that has no joy greater than it*.

And that's why this subject of finding *chein b'einei Hashem* is so important. Utilize all the opportunities that you find available to learn, to gain more information, and never stop desiring.

Of course, it means you have to study what Hashem wants of you. What would He like to see of you? If you don't have that model in your mind, then there's nothing for you to follow. That's why it's so important to study the cases where Hashem demonstrated His favor. It pays to learn what the *Dor Hamidbar* did for forty years to achieve that. There are other models too. In the Torah, Neviim and the Kesuvim, you can see what Hashem likes, what He wants. When you learn Gemara too; you find models of people who achieved the *ratzon Hashem.*

It's a lifetime of work. But it's the best type of work because there's nothing better than working for Hashem's smile. Oh, that sweet, sweet smile! That's what we live for. Achieving the favor of Hashem, *ratzon Hashem*, should be the central theme of our lives and the motivation of everything we do.

The Final Sleep

Now, since this is what we're living for, I'm going to conclude now with a recommendation. I'm not saying you must do it always, but it's a good idea as much as possible.

Everyone goes to sleep at night — I hope so, at least. So let's say when you go to sleep tonight, you're taking off your clothing and you're thinking, "There'll come a time when they'll take off my clothing for the last time. There'll be a final sleep and it'll be a sleep that nobody wakes up into this world again."

Even if you don't like to think about it, it's still true. After you're 120 years old, the *chevrah kadisha* will come and they'll begin preparing you; they'll come to take off the *begadim.*

"Please!" you'll say to them. "Hold up! Why are you here? I never signed up for the *chevra shtarbers*! I'm not ready yet."

They'll say, "We're sorry, mister."

"Please! Just one more day! I still want to accomplish some things to find more favor from Hashem."

"Sorry, we can't do that. We're just following instructions. It's your time now."

And therefore, now, while you're still functioning, while you're still alive, is the time to remind yourself. It doesn't mean we dwell on the subject of death. No. We don't emphasize morbidity. In this place, we emphasize happiness. We say enjoy your meals! Enjoy breathing! Revel in all the functions of your body! Do everything with zest and live happily! But in the back of your mind, there should always be the idea that life is not forever.

How to Fall Asleep

And so when you're going to sleep at night, it's a good opportunity to remember that sooner or later everybody goes to sleep for the last time. You won't get out of it. And so it makes sense to think: "Did I utilize today to find favor in Hashem's eyes? Did I make full use of all the hours of today? Did I learn Torah? Did I smile at my fellow Jews? Did I say thank you to my wife or my mother for supper? Did I think about the *ikrei emunah* today, about Matan Torah, about Yetzias Mitzrayim, about Kriyas Yam Suf, about the *mann*?"

Because the time will come when it'll be too late. Too late?! Ay yay yay! Too late! The saddest words in the world — *too late to find more favor in the eyes of Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. It's only while you're still alive that you can achieve that; and therefore, before you go to your final sleep, you have to live for gaining His favor.

Facing His Face

Now, that's only the first part of the story; you can practice in the morning too. Because what's going to happen at the end of that last sleep? You'll wake up! And our greatest desire is that when we wake up we'll feel a gentle hand stirring us, and we'll open our eyes and look at the kindly, loving Face of our Father in heaven. And He'll gaze at us with the splendor of His Countenance. It'll be such a happiness!

That's what Dovid Hamelech *davened* for always: "אֶשְׂבְּעָה בְּהָקִיץ תְּמוּנָתֶךָ – *When I wake up, may I be satiated with the splendor of Your Image*" (Tehillim 17:15). That's what we hope for, too! We want that one morning we'll wake up and open our eyes and we'll see Hashem smiling at us. Oh, it'll be such a happiness! There's no happiness, no pleasure, no exhilaration like it! That's how we want to wake up.

How to Wake Up

And so every morning you can practice that. Every morning when you wake up, open your eyes and think, "Today is my opportunity! Someday

I'm going to wake up in the Next World, and instead of seeing merely the sunlight coming in from the window, instead of seeing the face of my mother waking me up, I'll open my eyes with such a happiness because I'll be gazing into the Face of the Shechinah, into the light of His Face.

"But it won't happen by itself. It depends on me! And therefore I'm going to make today great. I'm so happy to be alive! There's so much to accomplish today, so many opportunities to gain Hashem's favor!" Oh, that's the way to wake up in the morning! Instead of waking up crabby, grouchy — "Just another humdrum day" — you're ready for another day of אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי ה׳.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Do Yourself a Favor

In this week's parsha, Hakadosh Baruch Hu demonstrates His satisfaction with Am Yisroel by granting them an unsolicited gift. Their spontaneous song was not merely a celebration of the water itself, but of the realization that they had found favor in His eyes.

Each night this week, *bli neder*, I will take a few moments to review my day and ask myself whether there was at least one thing I did with the intention of finding favor in Hashem's eyes. And when I say Retzei in Shemoneh Esrei, I will have in mind that I am asking Hakadosh Baruch Hu to help me continually strive for this most important goal — to seek and attain His favor.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:
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מנוחה ושמחה אור ליהודים

Shabbos Inspired

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Members Only

Let's imagine the following scene: In the time of Shlomo HaMelech, a Gentile from Italy arrives at Jaffa Port. The guards ask him, "What are you doing here?" He pulls out his Italian passport and says, "I'm a tourist. I want to go through Israel and get to Babylon." Rambam rules that if they let him in, they transgress a negative Torah mitzvah. Why such ethnocentrism? Why should he need a special "visa" just to pass through the country?

The following allegory provides the answer. A just-married *chasan* and *kallah* step down from the *chuppah*, enter the *yichud* room, and sit together at the table. Suddenly they hear a knock on the door. They open it a little and ask the fellow standing there, "What do you need?"

"I just want to pass through the room in order to get to the balcony," he says.

"No," they say firmly. "You have to go around."

Eretz Yisrael is like the *yichud* room for Hashem and His people. *Klal Yisrael* dwelled in Eretz Yisrael, the location of the Beis HaMikdash, and they lived there with Hashem, with His *kedushah*. It was an indescribable personal relationship with God. That's why a Gentile idolater was not allowed to pass through even for a moment.

But as time went on, what did the Israelites do? They "modernized." Why live just with Hashem? They brought all sorts of Gentile things into the "*yichud* room" and thereby destroyed their relationship with Hashem. As they brought other things into the room, they themselves were eventually thrown out, into a bitter exile. Even nowadays, after two thousand years of exile, we must know and remember what Judaism was like in its original form: living in a *yichud* room with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

The above-mentioned *halachah* about not allowing a Gentile idolater to walk through our "*yichud* room" applies even more when it comes to Shabbos. As the Rambam writes, a non-Jew is allowed to observe most of the mitzvos and will even receive a certain amount of spiritual reward for doing so. But he may not keep Shabbos. It says that a non-Jew who keeps Shabbos is liable for the death penalty.

Why is Shabbos off limits for non-Jews? The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Ki Sisa* 391) explains that Shabbos is compared to a king and queen who are sitting down together. Whoever passes between them and disturbs them is deserving of punishment. On Shabbos, Hashem wishes to spend time alone with His beloved people Yisrael. He doesn't want the privacy to be disturbed. The greatness of Shabbos requires privacy. A non-Jew may not enter Shabbos! Thus we say in the Shabbos morning prayers: "*You did not give it, Hashem our God, to the nations of the world, nor did You, our King, give it as an inheritance to the idol worshippers; it is not the uncircumcised that dwell in its rest, but it is Yisrael, Your people, that You gave it in love.*" Shabbos is not for them. It's only for us - with love. Shabbos is love. Shabbos is a kiss. Shabbos is the relationship between a Jew and Hashem.

לעילוי נשמת
מאיר נחום בן וואלף משה ז"ל

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

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QUESTION

With the summer here now, I'm reminded that I wanted to ask you this question: Why do bees sting?

ANSWER

And the answer is that it's a great *chessed.* Bees are *gizbarim* of Hashem; they are in charge of the honey. If anybody who wants could come along and take the honey, there wouldn't be any honey left for us. All the animals know that the bees sting, and therefore they keep away from the honey.

The sting of the bees is a miracle. You know, when a bee stings, it dies. It stings and leaves the stinger in your body. When it flies away it leaves part of its body over and it dies. So, he can't sting twice. It's a miracle. A bee can't sting twice.

But it has to sting. It's like a man working in the street, for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company. He takes off the lid and there is a hole in the ground. He has to uncover that hole. He's doing good work, important work, so he puts up a sign: "Watch Out! Men at Work." The bee is the man at work and so he stings. He is at work for Hakadosh Baruch Hu; he's supposed to sting. It means, "Watch Out." Keep away from the bees, that's all. You can't blame the bee for stinging.

But the Queen Bee can sting and sting and remain alive. You hear that? Because the Queen Bee has to be able to protect herself more than the other bees — she is the one who makes all the babies, the Queen Bee. And she stings again and again and doesn't die. You see the *Yad Hashem!*

So now you know why bees sting; to learn the *chochmas Hashem* in the *briyah.*

June 3, 1999

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