TORAS AVIGDOR
AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

SUKKOS
WITH
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L
BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE YOM TOV OF HUMILITY

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Part I. Bowing in Humility

The Yom Tov Bow

One of the glorious experiences of the *Yom Tov* of old was when the Jew came into the Beis Hamikdash and bowed down before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Every male was obligated to be *oleh regel*, to travel up to Yerushalayim and be seen in the *azarah* and bring certain *korbanos*; but included in the procedure was to bow down to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That was part of the old-time system of celebrating a *Yom Tov* — to fall down on the ground.

And it's so important that we mention it every day in the *Yom Tov* Mussaf. We're describing the various things that went lost with the Beis Hamikdash and we say, וְאֵין אֲנַחְנוּ יְכוֹלִים לַעֲלוֹת וְלֵרָאוֹת – *We can't go up today to fulfill the mitzvah of re'iyah.* We're sad about that because it was a tremendous experience! We don't realize what we're missing. Three times a year, the nation went up to Yerushalayim. They packed what they needed and they forsook their homes and began marching on the road to the Mikdash. And as they went down the road, from every village new groups came down to meet them and the crowd became bigger and bigger. After a while, the road was mobbed with people, everyone singing *shiros v'sishbachos* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. A beautiful sight!

And finally they arrived in Yerushalayim and came into the Mikdash to fulfill the mitzvah of יֵרָאֶה כָּל זְכוּרְךָ (Shemos 34:23). Ah, to visit the Beis Hamikdash and see the כֹּהֲנִים בַּעֲבוֹדָתָם וּלְוִיִּם בְּשִׁירָם וּבְזִמְרָם! When people came and saw the *avodas Beis Hamikdash*, they were transformed from head to foot. And all that is included in what we're missing out on: וְאֵין אֲנַחְנוּ יְכוֹלִים לַעֲלוֹת וְלֵרָאוֹת.

Coming to Bow

But we shouldn't forget the next part in the *davening*. We're looking forward to all of that but we mention also וּלְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹות לְפָנֶיךָ – *that we used to bow down in front of You.* "Hashem, please rebuild for us the Beis Hamikdash so that once again we'll be able to bow down to You."

It's an interesting thing because on our own we might not have realized how important that is. It's an adjunct, an accessory to the experience, but is it so important that it should be one of the few things we specify in our *tefillos*? The Anshei Knesses Hagedolah who instituted the words of *davening* were very wise men and if they included these

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words in the Mussaf we must say that bowing down is considered a very important form of *avodah*.

Elkanah Makes Aliyah

And I'll prove it to you. You remember how Elkanah, the father of Shmuel, went up every year to the Mishkan in Shiloh for *Yom Tov*? So the Navi says he had three purposes in mind (Shmuel I 1:3):

One of them was לִזְבֹּחַ לַה' – *to bring korbanos*. You couldn't bring them anywhere else; in those days, it was *ossur* to bring *korbanos* on a *bamah* because Shiloh was the Mishkan and so you wouldn't be *yotzei* your obligation anywhere else — you had to bring the *Yom Tov* offerings to the Mishkan (see Zevachim 112b). A very important reason for Elkanah to travel.

Another reason was וְשָׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי עֵלִי חָפְנִי וּפִנְחָס כֹּהֲנִים לַה' – *the two sons of Eili, Chofni and Pinchas, were there*. Eili, their father, was the *kohen gadol* and a *shofet*, too — the leader of Sanhedrin — and his two sons were very important *talmidei chachomim*. And therefore, Elkanah went up in order to talk things over with them. Maybe they spoke in learning. Maybe Elkanah had certain questions that came up during the year; he wanted *eitzos*, counsel. Whatever it was, to go up to talk to the *kohanei Hashem* was a purpose in itself — they didn't have telephones in those days.

Aliyah for What?

So you have here two very good reasons; to bring *korbanos* and to speak with the *gedolei hador*. Each one by itself is a good enough reason to travel up to Shiloh. But pay attention now. Those were the second and third reasons on the list. You know what the first reason was? The first on the list, before *korbanos* and before meeting the *gedolei hador*, was לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹות לַה' – *to bow down to Hashem*.

It's a queer thing. Is it *so* important — the number one purpose?

Absolutely. Because listen to the word *lehishtachavos*. The word *hishtachavah* comes from the word *shachah* which means to be low. But *hishtachavah* is *hispael*; it's reflexive – *to make yourself low*. You don't say "bow" in *lashon kodesh*; you "make yourself low to Hashem."

Aliyah L'tzorech Yeridah

Lehishtachavos means to put your face on the ground and lie there because you want to lower yourself before Hashem. And so Elkanah threw himself onto the floor and he didn't get up right away. He wasn't in a hurry. He took his time and he was thinking, "I'm bowing down *lifnei Melech Malchei Hamelachim*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He rules the entire universe, as far as space goes and beyond! He created it and וְלִגְדֻלָּתוֹ אֵין חֵקֶר, there's no searching out His greatness (Tehillim 145:3). And I, what am I? A little man, a tiny speck of protoplasm that He created."

And for that alone it was worth making a big journey to the Sanctuary — just to fall down on the ground on your face and feel that you are low before Hashem.

Who, Me? Yes, You!

"Oh, please," you say, "Is that really necessary? I don't have to bow down. I know already that Hashem is bigger than I am. Who isn't humble to Hashem? Unless *chas v'shalom* he's an atheist. But a man who believes in the Creator certainly is humble before Hashem. Who in the *frum* world will be arrogant towards Hashem?"

And the answer is: everybody. Every human being is arrogant towards Hashem. And even though with his lips he may say words of pious hypocrisy, in his heart he doesn't back down even before Hashem. That's human nature because actually Hashem made man endlessly great. And he knows it; naturally he knows, subconsciously, that he has a *neshamah*, a *chelek* of Hashem that was breathed into him. Every man is tremendously great! And that's why a man must work on himself to be humble to Hashem. It takes work, effort, to learn that attitude.

A Passing Dream

It's so important for a man to realize that without Hashem, he is nothing. You cannot do a thing to help yourself. הַכֹּל בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם – *Everything is in the hands of Heaven!* (Brachos 33b). כְּחֹמֶר בְּיַד הַיּוֹצֵר – *We're like a piece of clay in Hashem's hands* (Yirmiyah 18:6). People are born and they die and nothing is remembered of them. What are we? כַּחֲלוֹם יָעוּף – *We're like a dream that goes away* (Iyov 20:8).

And that's why the bowing down of *hishtachavah* is so important. Because we have to take action to realize the greatness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that it shouldn't be וְרָם לְבָבֶךָ – *You shouldn't feel elevated in your heart* (Devarim 8:14). רוֹמְמוּ ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ – *Only Hashem we elevate!* (Tehillim 99:5). And how? וְהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְהַר קָדְשׁוֹ – *We bow down to Him* (*ibid.* 99:9). *Hishtachavu* is the opposite of *rommemu*. You make Hashem high in your mind when you make yourself low in front of Him.

A Modest Beginning

That's why one of the most important functions in our prayers is something that most people overlook. You're beginning to say Shemoneh Esrei so you give a prefatory bow. You think it's not so important. *Baruch Atah Hashem*; the words you're going to say, that's important — but the bow? That's just the signal that you're starting now.

No; you're missing the whole point. It's a law in the Gemara (Brachos 34a) you *must* bow down at the beginning of the *Amidah* because that's the first lesson. That's number one; the most important thing is the bowing down and acknowledging that there's Somebody higher than you are.

And so, don't be in a hurry. While you're bowing, take your time and get the full benefit of that. The bending of the knee is only a motion of the body, but its purpose is in order to influence the mind; you bend your knee in order to bend your mind. And therefore it pays when you bow down to utilize the opportunity, "I'm humbling myself to You. I'm bowing before the greatness of the King of the universe."

Mind Over Motion

Of course, it matters what's doing in your head, what you're thinking. There are all types of good attitudes that have to be attached to the physical act of bowing down. Otherwise, what is it just to bow? You see that sometimes in the shul, a man jerks down, he jerks up, like a robot. He's not thinking at all. No, we are humbled in gratitude. So much You are giving me! מַה אָשִׁיב לַה' כָּל תַּגְמוּלוֹהִי עָלָי – *What can I pay You back, all that You did for me?* (Tehillim 116:12).

Of course, if you don't think, so it's nothing. He says, "I bow down to You Hashem," but in his heart he is bowing down only to himself. He thinks *he's* the one who helps himself. He imagines himself a self-made man.

No; the one who bows is "making himself low." "I'm helpless," he says. "I'm on the receiving end and I can't pay back anything. One thing I can do and that is to generate this feeling of humility."

It's so important to humiliate yourself before Hashem, to acknowledge your littleness, your nothingness, that merely to bow down is an achievement of the first magnitude! Isn't it a pity people don't understand that? You're lowering yourself before the Master. You're acknowledging Him as the King.

Taking a Bow

That's what the first word of Shemoneh Esrei is telling you: *Baruch*. What does that mean "we bless Hashem"? Now, no matter what others will tell you, the real meaning is that it stems from the word *berech*, a knee, and *baruch Atah* means "You are the One to Whom the knees are bent."

And therefore, it shouldn't be a genuflection, a jerk bending down. No. Utilize that first bending of the knee. It's a great service of Hashem. We don't stand up straight in front of You; we kneel to You. We don't kneel today; we bend our knees, however. That's a sign of *hachna'ah*.

Not for Him, by the way. Our humility is meaningless to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He doesn't

need it. He doesn't feel elevated or honored if we weak little human beings demonstrate our humility to Him. It's for us, for *our* perfection to generate this feeling of humility. So don't be in a hurry when you bend over. Remain for a little while. Make use of the opportunity every day.

Yom Tov Humility

But in the ancient days, it was something much bigger, much more. *Yom Tov* meant that שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל זְכוּרְךָ – *three times a year we present ourselves* אֶת פְּנֵי הָאָדוֹן – *before the Master, Hashem* (Shemos 34:23). That word אָדוֹן is remarkable; it's not used ordinarily on Hashem. But it is used here to emphasize that basic function of *Yom Tov*, that we come to the Beis Hamikdash to demonstrate that we are *nichna* to a Master. A nation left their homes to trek along the byroads and main roads until they reached Yerushalayim, traveling up for miles in order to come into His Home. And for what purpose? לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹות לַה' – *To make themselves low to Him.*

That's the *avodah* that was reinforced every year on *Yom Tov*. Of course, each *Yom Tov* has some more purposes. If it's the *chag* of *Chag Hamatzos* or if it's *Zman Matan Toraseinu*, whatever it is, each one its own *avodah*. But this *certainly* is a function of every *chag*; we reinforce this feeling of humility by lowering ourselves before Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Part II. The Sukkah of Humility

The Sukkah Academy

Now, as much as every *Yom Tov* has this function, when we come to the *Yom Tov* of Sukkos, we have to understand that these seven days are especially dedicated to this principle. Because on Sukkos we have the mitzvah of living in a *sukkah* and one of the fundamental lessons that the *sukkah* is trying to teach us is humility.

All the *mitzvos*, you have to know, are a form of teaching. Besides for just fulfilling the command of Hashem, לֹא נִתְּנוּ הַמִּצְוֹות אֶלָּא לְצָרֵף בָּהֶן אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת – *the mitzvos are intended to refine our minds and our characters* (Bereishis Rabbah 44:1). It means if you go into a *sukkah* and you're happy — it's a *Yom Tov* atmosphere, ornaments are hanging in the *sukkah*, your family is there and they're serving a nice meal also, so you make a *bracha leishev basukkah* because you're fulfilling the mitzvah — very good! But there are purposes there, too, and if you'll think about them, that's the best way to sit in the *sukkah*. And the more you put into it, the more you'll achieve, the more you'll be refined.

The Proud Nation

The purpose of the *sukkos*, it says openly, is לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹּורֹותֵיכֶם כִּי בַסֻּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם – *that your generations should know that I caused your forefathers to dwell in sukkos when I took them out of Egypt* (Vayikra 23:43). And one of the reasons why Hashem did that was so we should learn to be humble. After all, they were going into Eretz Yisroel where they would live like aristocrats, in big stone homes on their own land, and that would be dangerous.

Dangerous to what? To their character. Because there's a warning in the Torah: Hashem says that when you come into Eretz Canaan and you'll disinherit the previous inhabitants and dwell in *batim tovim*, nice homes — an emphasis on good homes, strong and secure — so you must beware of וְרָם לְבָבֶךָ, *that your heart might become proud* (Devarim 8:14).

Now what does it mean "your heart will become proud"? Does it mean you'll walk around boasting of your home? It could be, but that's not what it really means. If somebody has a nice home, to some extent it may contribute to his arrogance, it might make him conceited, but that's not the point here at all. וְרָם לְבָבֶךָ – *Your heart will become proud,* וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' – *you'll forget about Hashem.*

Forget Hashem?! That's impossible! They're not going to forget Hashem in Eretz Yisroel! They'll continue to do *mitzvos*. They'll separate *terumah* and *ma'aser* from their grain. They'll keep *kashrus*

and *taharas hamishpacha*. Even the *dinim* of *tumah v'taharah* and everything else they'll keep. So what does it mean they'll forget Hashem?

Feeling Too Secure

It means that you won't think about Him as your Benefactor, as your security. It's possible to do all these *mitzvos* and still to forget that you have a Master over you. Because if you're not busy with humility, you'll begin to imagine that you're good without Him. Of course, you won't *say* that — you won't even *think* it — but your character will change.

When you live in a beautiful, comfortable home, you tend to forget that there's Somebody over you. In the desert, you didn't have any permanent dwellings; you only had tents, temporary makeshift huts that at any moment when you heard the trumpets blow you had to put them together quickly on the back of a donkey and set out on the trek in the desert to some other place, so you couldn't feel too arrogant. You turned around and looked back where you had encamped for some time and you see there's nothing left except a little bit of garbage, and you're traveling again, so you didn't feel a permanence at all.

But when they came to Eretz Yisroel and they settled in, it was a different story. Not only they settled permanently, but they were living in beautiful dwellings — houses that they didn't have to take apart and transport on the back of an animal to someplace else. And so, naturally, people tend to forget that really they're not so important.

Deflating the Proud

And therefore, in order to prepare for that test, Hashem said, וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת כָּל הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הֹלִיכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר לְמַעַן עַנֹּתְךָ – *I took you into the Midbar for forty years to humble you, to prepare you* (Devarim 8:2). In the Midbar, they were always reminded that they were entirely dependent on Hashem. They were secure, yes, but you can't feel like a big shot when you're living in a desert in a tent. And that was the purpose. That was the intention.

And that's why we go into the *sukkah* — to be humbled before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We leave our nice homes, our carpets and our chandeliers, our brick walls and sturdy roof, and for seven days we go into a flimsy little hut, a weak kind of protection.

The Revoked Citizenship

That's what the *possuk* says, כָּל הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשְׁבוּ בַּסֻּכֹּת – *every citizen of Yisroel should dwell in sukkos* (Vayikra 23:42). That's a queer word to use, *ezrach*. You don't find it in other places. It doesn't say "every *ezrach* should eat kosher" or "every *ezrach* should keep Shabbos." It doesn't say "every *ezrach* should refrain from shaving with a razor blade." Only when it comes to the *sukkah*, the *possuk* says *ezrach*. What's that about?

And the answer is *ezrach* means a bona fide citizen. You're established. You have a nice home and it's not even stucco; it's brick. You think you're pretty important. You feel that you're an *ezrach*, a permanent burgher, an important fellow? Then you need a reminder: צֵא מִדִּירַת קֶבַע וְשֵׁב בִּדִירַת עֲרַאי – *Move out of your nice home into a temporary dwelling* (Sukkah 2a).

A Humbling Hut

That's why the *sukkah* has to be built in such a way that it's not a permanent type of home. You can't make it so high a construction that you're forced to have sturdy walls. No. It has to be flimsy. That's a halacha of *sukkah*. Also, the Torah insists that the *schach* cannot be a regular roof. Even though the roof will be of things that grow from the ground, if it's made in such a way that it is a *permanent* construction, then it's *possul*.

And so you see the insistence on the theme of something that is temporary, something which humbles the one who dwells there. It's a very weak kind of protection. Some sticks, some *schach*; sometimes it rains into your soup.

A *goy* can even heave a brick into the *schach*, *chas v'shalom*, and it will fall through. You know sometimes your neighbor, a gentile, makes trouble

for you on Sukkos? He wants to call the city inspector because you're making an illegal structure. Or he makes other trouble. I once was visiting a rabbi of a certain shul in East Flatbush and he was making his *sukkah*. He had a Puerto Rican neighbor who liked making trouble for him. And this rabbi went next door to him and he said, "Please, please," he said, "don't break down my *sukkah*." He was begging him. "Please don't break down my *sukkah*."

In his house, this rabbi was an important fellow — and he was, by the way — but outside on Sukkos he didn't feel so important any longer. I was comforting him; I told him that he should be happy that he was fulfilling one of the purposes of the *sukkah*. You go into the *sukkah* to remind yourself that you're not as important as you thought. You're insecure, unprotected. Without Hashem, you're nothing.

Homeless Citizens

And that's why the *ezrach* is emphasized. That weak kind of construction is for the purpose of teaching the one living there that he's not so important. Even if you're a permanent, real bona fide Jew, you should also move out because you have to be reminded that you're not as important as you imagine. You look up and see overhead nothing but *schach*. The people passing by won't give you much privacy there. You can't sit like a *melech* when you're in a place that has two walls and a *tefach*. "I'm like a homeless man, *chas v'shalom*."

Now, you don't see a homeless person who's arrogant. How can he be arrogant if he's living on a park bench? Maybe he's rude, he never learned any manners; he's bitter — but arrogant he's surely not. And in a small way, that's what you're doing in the *sukkah*. It's for the purpose of humbling you.

The Great Unhoused

And now we understand something puzzling about the practices of Avraham, our father. וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב – *He was very heavy with wealth, with huge herds, huge flocks, and trunks full of silver and gold* (Bereishis 13:2).

Now, a wealthy man could have built himself a beautiful home. He could buy a plot and build a brick house surrounded by gardens and orchards. That's what we would have done. Even if you're a *tzaddik*, so you're not going to build a palace maybe, but at least a home, something. It's interesting, however, that Avraham always dwelt in a tent.

Now, you could say, there was a reason for the tent. Avraham was always traveling: הָלוֹךְ וְנָסוֹעַ – *He was always on the move* (Bereishis 12:9). Because he had a purpose and that was to preach to everybody that there is a Master of the World. Wherever he went, that was his business – וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' קֵל עוֹלָם (Bereishis 21:33). There's a Ribono Shel Olam! That was Avraham's business; he went around from place to place preaching that. So you might say that he couldn't build a palace for that reason.

Practice What You Preach

But that wasn't the only reason. It was a principle: he should never become arrogant. He should always remind himself that he's not so secure, that he's bowed down before Hashem. It wasn't only that he preached about it — he practiced it. And living in a flimsy structure helped.

It was only Lot who finally broke with his *rebbe*, Avraham, and went away to Sedom. At first it says וַיֶּאֱהַל – *he pitched his tent* (*ibid.* 13:12). But finally, he gave up Avraham's way of life and he moved into a house. It says openly that he lived in a house in Sedom (*ibid.* 19:2). So he gave up the ways of his *rebbe*.

But Avraham and Yitzchak, they dwelt in tents. Even Yaakov, who built a house, moved out soon and went back to the tents. They lived in tents always. And so we see that it was a principle of the Avos that they should never forget this great principle: to live with the attitude of *hishtachavah*, to make yourself low before Hashem.

Emulating Our Forefathers

Now, we don't do that. We're not as great as our forefathers. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't

require it either. "Live in a nice home," He says. "I want you to be happy and comfortable. But once a year, for seven days, I want you to be like the *Avos* and like your forefathers in the Midbar. And therefore, on Sukkos, צֵא מִדִּירַת קֶבַע וְשֵׁב בְּדִירַת עֲרַאי, and practice up on this great *middah* of humility."

And therefore, isn't it a *rachmanus* when people sit in the *sukkah* and don't think about what the *sukkah* is about? To walk into the *sukkah* after making all preparations and the mind should be blank? A very great loss.

When you sit in the *sukkah*, immediately the first result should be you're *nichna*, you're humbled before Hashem. It's very important to keep that in mind when you come into the *sukkah*. At least for seven days, to go through the motions, to practice this ideal of לְהִשְׁתַּחֲווֹת לַה', to make yourself low before Hashem.

Part III. Practicing Humility

Raising the Bar

Now, we'll take it one step further. How do you work on this *avodah* of humility in the *sukkah*? So we said that when you come into the *sukkah*, immediately try to remind yourself of this purpose: "I'm here now because I want to practice being *nichna*, humbled before Hashem." It's a good idea to keep that in mind anytime you walk into the *sukkah*. Even if you do it a little bit you're successful because you're superior to anybody else.

But let's climb the ladder of *anivus* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, another rung. Here, you're sitting in the *sukkah* and everyone is talking. Wonderful! It's *simchas Yom Tov*. But you have to remember what the *sefarim* say, that you have to be careful what you say in the *sukkah* (Mishnah Berurah 639:2). You can't fool around. You can't make jokes. The *sukkah* is no place for *leitzanus*. A *moshav leitzim* in the *sukkah* is entirely contradictory to the purpose.

Superfluous Speech

Of course, תֵּשְׁבוּ כְּעֵין תָּדוּרוּ – *You have to live normally in the sukkah* (Sukkah 26a). But you have to be careful, too. A *makom kadosh* like a *sukkah* requires more vigilance; you can't talk *leitzanus*, *lashon hara*, in such a place.

But it's an interesting thing the *sefarim* say that even *superfluous* words you shouldn't speak in the *sukkah* (see Mateh Efraim 625:65). A remarkable idea; it's a good practice to be careful not to say unnecessary words in the *sukkah*. And it pays to understand why that's so.

Healthy for Body and Soul

Now, we have to know that there are various benefits of silence. One is that you'll sin less — כָּל הַמַּרְבֶּה בִּדְבָרִים מֵבִיא חֵטְא (Avos 1:17). If you have any kind of long conversation, you're certain to do some sin in order to continue the run of the conversation. You'll look for other things to say, and you'll bring in names of people and you'll find some faults in them. Or you might say some *leitzanus* against something that's *kodesh*. That's how it is in the course of time; בְּרֹב דְּבָרִים לֹא יֶחְדַּל פָּשַׁע – *in a multitude of words you cannot avoid a sin* (Mishlei 10:19). Even a person who is a *lamdan* who studied the Chofetz Chaim's *sefarim* will be *nichshal* if he talks at length. And those who *didn't* learn, no question about it. So that's enough of a reason to keep your mouth closed.

It's also healthier. לֹא מָצָאתִי לַגּוּף טוֹב מִשְּׁתִיקָה – *I found nothing better for your health than silence* (Avos 1:17). There are a lot of things you can do to protect your health. Exercise is important. Proper sleep is important. Eating properly is important. But this Tanna examined them all and he found that silence is the best thing for your health.

By the way, people will like you more, too. Absolutely. People who don't speak much gain friends. It's a fact that quiet people are well-liked. I myself know a number of quiet people who are quite popular; people are happy to be in their company.

Displaying Your Insides

But there's something else in *shtikah* that is more than all of that: Silence is a sign of a humble person. And we'll explain that in two ways.

Number one: In Mishlei (18:2) it states, לֹא יַחְפֹּץ כְּסִיל בִּתְבוּנָה – *a fool does not desire understanding*, כִּי אִם בְּהִתְגַּלּוֹת לִבּוֹ – *he desires to reveal his own mind*. It means that the foolish fellow is not interested in listening. He wants to talk. Why does he want to talk? He has an instinct of turning himself inside-out to people, of displaying his emotions and demonstrating his thoughts.

Sometimes you watch a man sitting on a park bench; he's talking for hours. You might even envy him; he's a fountain of speech while you'd fall short of words. Or maybe you see people sitting in shul talking and talking from *Mah Tovu* until *Aleinu*. What do they have to talk about so much? Why is it that the *k'sil* is so interested in telling people so many things?

The answer is, he's talking about himself — what he saw, what he heard, what he thinks. It's the *middah* of egoism. He's interested in himself and he wants to show himself to others. Now, the truth is that often it doesn't compliment him too much when he starts taking off his clothes and displaying himself to other people. He empties out the contents of his mind and he doesn't realize that people ridicule him for that. But that's what his instinct is; his ego drives him to talk as much as he can.

And to a certain extent, it applies to everyone. It's an effort to be silent. You're fighting against this animal within you that wants to bark or meow or make noises, to show that it's there, to demonstrate *anochi*, that "I am here." And therefore, when a man is able to keep his mouth closed, he is forcing that quality to be repressed.

The Silent Treatment

Especially if you have what to say. Let's say somebody talks to you about a certain subject which you know a good deal about, but you keep your mouth closed and listen to him; that's good practice. Share the limelight. Let other people chatter; you just listen. Nod your head, smile, be friendly, but keep your mouth closed. It's a tremendous training of character.

Here's a man, he likes to stop me on the street to tell me his *vertlach*, his *pshetlach*. So I'm quiet. I nod and listen. Now, actually I have a hundred times as much as he has to say, and better things — I listened to my *rebbeim* for years in Slabodka and they had very good things to say. But I keep quiet. I don't say anything of my own. I just listen. I'm practicing.

Silent Awareness

But there's something much more. Because you can add the thought: *why am I quiet?* You have to listen to what Shlomo Hamelech says in the beginning of Chapter 5 of Sefer Koheles, a very important function of keeping quiet:

אַל תְּבַהֵל עַל פִּיךָ – *Do not be hasty with your mouth*, וְלִבְּךָ אַל יְמַהֵר לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר – *and your heart should not be in a hurry to utter a word*, לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים – *before Hashem*. Whatever you say, you're saying in the Presence of Hashem. כִּי הָאֱלֹקִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם – *Hashem is in Heaven*, וְאַתָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ – *you're down here on earth, you're standing in front of Him*, עַל כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים – *Therefore, your words should be few*.

And so he's introducing to us a new motivation, why you should be quiet: because you're in the Presence of Hashem.

So now we begin to understand that silence is not merely a good quality that keeps you away from sin. It's not merely something that will keep you healthy and will cause you to be more appreciated by people. Silence makes you humble! Hashem is greater than you are! כִּי הָאֱלֹקִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם – *Hashem is here above you*. He's looking at you. Where do you get the authority to open your mouth in the Presence of the King? You need silence in order to be humble to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Silent Humility

And this is based on the principle of חָכָם אֵינוֹ מְדַבֵּר בִּפְנֵי מִי שֶׁגָּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ – *a wise man does not speak in the presence of somebody bigger than him* (Avos 5:7). Silence means that you know you are standing in the presence of someone.

Let's say Governor Cuomo would be visiting here. I wouldn't open my mouth. Now, Cuomo is a nobody. He's a *shlemazel*; a *shlepper* and a bum, a low character. But if he was here, I'd keep quiet. After all, Hashem gave him authority for the time being. Let's hope he'll lose the next election, but for the time being he's the governor and so a wise person keeps quiet in the presence of that tramp.

A normal person feels humility before someone in authority. Even when I visit a doctor, I have so much respect for him so I keep quiet. He knows so much in that field of which I know nothing at all. I'm humbly quiet. That's old-fashionality; that's how we were brought up. We're *supposed* to find it difficult to talk in the presence of someone bigger than us. It's only a fool, an idiot, who will prattle in the presence of מִי שֶׁגָּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ.

And therefore, Koheles is saying we can measure the extent of your humility to Hashem by the looseness of your mouth. If you actually felt you were standing in the Presence of Hashem, you couldn't talk that much. If you could open your mouth and talk freely, it's the clearest proof that your belief is only a superficial stereotype. It's not real.

Sukkah Silence

Now, this *middah* is something especially good to practice up in the *sukkah*. It's the little humble hut teaching you humility, that you're not the *ezrach* you imagined yourself to be. And so this is an excellent place to train yourself.

So imagine Cousin Jake comes over on Chol Hamoed to visit. "Aha!" you're thinking, "A chance to remind myself that I'm standing in the Presence of Hashem. I'll keep my mouth closed as much as possible."

He walks into the *sukkah* and starts talking, and you're very polite, of course. "How are you, Jake? Long time no see! How's the family?" Whatever it is, you say something — but then you stop because you're standing in front of Hashem. You might have to open your mouth here and there to say a word or two, but that's it. You smile pleasantly but you can't talk much when you're in the Presence of the *Melech Malchei Hamelachim*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Of course, he shouldn't know. If he's here at the lecture, so practice on someone else. But whoever it is, it's a wonderful training in *anavah*; it's a very big achievement to practice humility in the *sukkah*.

Practice Makes Perfect

Now, actually you're not an *anav* yet. But just by keeping your mouth closed, you're influencing yourself toward the *middah* of *anavah*. That's a big principle in the Torah psychology which the Sages teach us. It's the famous principle: הַחִיצוֹנִיּוּת מְעוֹרֶרֶת אֶת הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת – *your outwardliness stirs up your inwardliness* (see Mesillas Yesharim, Ch. 7).

Each one of us aspires to gain more humility; we want to feel the Presence of Hashem more and more as the days and the years go by. And now Koheles tells us how to get it. The more you keep your mouth shut thinking that you're standing in the Presence of Hashem, the greater you become.

Try it once. There's a kick to it. It's like taking vitamins. Try and you'll see. I suggest doing it a few times a day in the *sukkah*. With *chaveirim*, your wife, your father-in-law, whoever. "I'm going to try to keep my mouth closed because I'm standing in front of Hashem. Even if I have to say something, I'll count my words." Chop short your sentence.

That's an achievement. That's vitamins for your soul. It puts into you such an awareness that you're standing in the Presence of Somebody bigger. That's a good exercise. It's externality but הַחִיצוֹנִיּוּת מְעוֹרֶרֶת אֶת הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת. It will stir up in you such a wave of *emunah*.

That's how you learn humility. It's like bowing down to Hashem. In your mind, you're laid out flat, prostrated in front of Him.

The Secret of the Sukkah

And so it's something you can do always — if you do it all year long once a day you're a very wise person — but the *sukkah*, that's the place made for that. You're exposed to the sky, to Hashem; you're not such an *ezrach* when it's two walls and a *tefach*, and therefore don't waste the opportunity.

Here you built a *sukkah* already. It was a big job — maybe it was a big expense, too. But finally, the *sukkah* is standing. You even asked the rabbi to come down and inspect it and he gave his *hechsher* — everything is *kasher v'yashar*; the *schach* is sufficient, the walls were made to the *din*.

So maybe you think you can lean back and relax now. No, you can't relax. Now you have to get busy utilizing the *sukkah* to produce from yourself what the *sukkah* was built to produce.

Have a Wonderful Sukkos

Let's Get Practical

Put Yourself On Mute

Sukkos is the Yom Tov of humility, a time when we forgo the comforts of our homes and dwell in a humble hut for one week.

This Sukkos, *bli neder*, I am going to make a conscious effort for at least ten minutes each day to zip my lips in the *sukkah*. I will maintain cordiality, letting others have the spotlight, while keeping in mind that I am basking in the Presence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:
R–53 – Great by Silence | **271 –** Tenants in This World | **614 –** The Sukkah | **664 –** Perfection of Humility | **776 –** Service by Silence

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QUESTION

What should we think when we shake *lulav* by *Hodu* in Hallel?

ANSWER

So when you do the *na'anuim* tomorrow by Hallel and you say, "הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי טוֹב – *We thank You Hashem for all of the good You've done to us*," you have to be prepared to thank for something. You'll go into *Hodu* with a blank head, with nothing?

So you'll think, let's say, like this: "Didn't I marry off my daughters well?" Did you ever think about that when you say *Hodu*? It wouldn't be a bad idea to make one *na'anuim* for each son-in-law. "*Ay-yah-yay*! I'm thanking You, Hashem, for this son-in-law." And by the next *na'anuim*, הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי טוֹב, "I'm thanking You, Hashem, for the next son-in-law." That's how to work it. It's such a very big thing to have married off your children well that you can never thank enough for a good son-in-law or for a good daughter-in-law. And that's how you should think when you make the *na'anuim*. It shouldn't just be a mechanical thing.

You think it's silly! It's not silly at all. I do it. Many times I think like this: One *na'anuim* is for my oldest son-in-law. "*Baruch Hashem*, I have a good *eidim*! *Baruch Hashem*!" And then, "*Baruch Hashem*, I have a good second son-in-law. And *baruch Hashem* for the next *eidim*. *Baruch Hashem*, there's no trouble there. I never hear any *machlokes*. My daughters live in *shalom* with my *eidim*. *Baruch Hashem*, I'm happy. Such good *eidims*."

That's why we make *na'anuim*. That's what it means *Hodu*: "I'm thanking You for what You've given to me." September 1989