

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Bamidbar The Chopp Holdings Edition

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The *ba'al korei* is reading - וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ, וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ, וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ - they left one place and settled in the next place. And then they traveled from that place and settled in the next place. From *Chatzeiros* to *Rismah* and then from *Rismah* to *Rimon Peretz*. And on and on they traveled.

NO REASON TO YAWN

And now there are people in shul who are yawning already. It's a little bit boring and they're waiting for it to be over - they're hungry; they want to go home and make *kiddush*.

But we don't go home; we listen to the journeys of the *Am Yisroel* because we understand that these travels were written down *al pi Hashem*, by the command of Hashem. And if it came from the mouth of Hashem it means that it's not boring at all. And according to the principle that all of the national episodes are intended as lessons for each person's individual life (See sefer *Dor Deiah* p.219), it's more than not boring; it becomes very significant.

And we have to study that: Why was it so essential to record these journeys in the Torah? What's it all about? Let's say in the summer you traveled from Flatbush up to the country, and then from the country to Manhattan for work, and then back to Flatbush. And in the morning back to Manhattan again, and then back to Flatbush. And then before Shabbos you travelled back up to the country. So you're going to start writing down your journeys and studying them? What's so important about these travels anyhow? What's this business with looking back and writing down all of the journeys?

THE MITZVAH YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT

So we'll take a look into the *Sha'arei Teshuva* (3:17) and see what Rabeinu Yonah has to say about this. He's speaking there about the importance of the *mitzvos asei*, the positive commandments given to us in the Torah; and among all of the very important *mitzvos asei*, pay attention to the one that he chooses to expand on.

He quotes from *Dvarim* (8:2): וַזְכֹּרֶתָ אֵת כָּל הַדֶּרֶךְ - *You should remember the entire journey*, וְאֲשֶׁר הִלִּיכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר - *that Hashem lead you for forty years in the wilderness*. That's what the *mitzvah* is; *V'zacharta*, you should remember, *es kol haderech*, everything that happened. At the end of the forty years, as they were preparing for the next journey, this time the journey over the *Yardein* into *Eretz Yisroel*, they were commanded to think back and spend time considering their journeys.

FROM THE CRADLE TILL THE GRAVE

Now, Rabeinu Yonah considers these words of Hashem as a *mitzvas asei*, which means it's a command just like *tefillin*, like sitting in the *sukkah*. He's telling us that this subject we're discussing here – remembering the journeys, is a *mitzvah* for us as well.

The national episodes are intended also as lessons for each individual in his own life – but here it was actually given to us in the form of an obligation. Just as the nation journeyed from station to station for forty years, so too every person is journeying from the cradle to the grave and he's passing through the stations, one after another. And Rabeinu Yonah says that remembering our own travels, is a *mitzvas asei min hatorah*.

IT'S NOT ONLY FOR CHASSIDIM

And so, like any other duty of the Torah, you're obligated to think back about *your* journey. You can't shirk your duty: שְׁמַצוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְזֵכֶר חַסְדֵי ה' – *it's an obligation upon each one of us to remember the kindness of Hashem* (Sha'arei Teshuva, ibid.).

Listen to those words – he doesn't say it's a *middas chassidus*, an especial way of serving Hashem that *tzadikim* should take upon themselves. It's a *mitzvas asei*, he says! We're *obligated* to remember our own life journey. It's not just a small *mitzvah*, of course no *mitzvah* is small, but among all of the great commandments of Hashem, Rabeinu Yonah considers this from the most important because it is *fundamental* to living a life of *avodas Hashem*. It's a *mitzvas asei* of the highest degree.

So while you're listening to the *ba'al korei*, וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ, while you're listening to that, besides for thinking about the journeys of *Bnei Yisroel*, you should begin to think of *your own* journeys. Let's say you're in Brooklyn and your name is Chaim ben Dovid, or you're Rochel ben Sarah in Monsey – whoever you are, your own travels are now being written down; and it's important to spend some time thinking about *your* journey through life. If you want to make something from yourself, if you're looking for opportunities to serve Hashem, here is one of the most important: וַזְכֹּרֶתָ אֶת כָּל הַדְרֹךְ.

THE INTERNATIONAL TRAVELER

Everybody is making journeys through this world. Let's say you were born in the East Side and then from there you traveled to Brownsville. וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנּוּ. And then from Brownsville you traveled to Crown Heights and from Crown Heights you traveled, let's say, to

Flatbush. וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּהְיוּ, וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּהְיוּ. Maybe later you'll travel to Monsey, I don't know where you'll go – maybe you'll go to Eretz Yisroel. *Eileh masei bnei yisroel* – you're *mechuyav* to think about these things, all the things that happened along the way – all of the journeys and encampments of your life.

Forty years of experiences, forty years of traveling through life and you're still here to tell the story. And therefore, there's a lot to remember. If you're forty years old, look back on your last forty years. If you're not forty years, look back on your last thirty years or twenty years. Whatever it is, you have to look back. Just the fact that you're sitting here capable of looking back means a lot of things happened to you that were good. And it's a command of Hashem that you should remember, וְזָכַרְתָּ.

The tragedy is that this is one *mitzvah* that people aren't fulfilling. They've become hardened by habit and they don't take the time – it takes time after all – to think back to their lives and recognize what they've received. And that's how you remain all your life, a hardened old fellow who still never learned to appreciate Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Tefillin you wore, absolutely! And Shabbos you kept, no question about it. But if you haven't yet fulfilled the *mitzvah* of remembering *kol haderech*, your *entire* journey, then you still have a big job ahead of you.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

And that, the sages tell us, was the lesson that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wanted to teach Moshe Rabeinu and the Am Yisroel. The *medrash* on our *parsha* (Rabbah Ma'asei 23) says as follows: אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה – *Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to Moshe, כָּתַב אֵת הַמַּסְעוֹת* – *write down all the journeys that Bnei Yisrael journeyed in the wilderness, כְּדֵי שִׁיְהִי יוֹדְעִים מַה נָּסִים* – *in order they should know how many miracles I did for them.*

Because if you don't stop to write them down, if you don't make the time to look back at all of the journeys, then you'll never recognize what I've done for you, says Hashem. הִיִּיתִי מְפִיל שׂוֹנְאֵיכֶם לְפָנֶיכֶם – *I caused your enemies to fall down before you; you were always victorious in the wilderness.*

And it wasn't only the peril of human enemies! וְלֹא עוֹד אֲלֵא כַּמָּה – *In the wilderness there are many serpents, many poisonous reptiles, וְכַמָּה עֲקָרְבַיִם הָיוּ שָׁם, and there were scorpions in the desert.* “I want you to think about what could have been,” said Hashem, “because that's one of the most vital ways to appreciate what you have.”

EVEN THE ARABS WON'T DO THAT!

This wilderness was not an easy and safe place to travel – it may seem safe when you're sitting in shul listening to the *ba'al korei*, but it was dangerous territory. Only seasoned desert travelers would even attempt such long journeys and even the Arabs who knew how to travel the deserts, were careful to avoid the wide-open dangerous expanse. They had their special traveling routes through the wilderness and they wouldn't make any side trips – there were no back roads in these places. And yet, the Bnei Yisrael didn't follow any regular route; they went *al pi Hashem* and survived for forty years in a place where no others would even venture.

They could have been attacked by predators! There are plenty of traveling brigands in the desert. In the desert, besides the scorpions and snakes and other poisonous reptiles, there were plenty of lions too. All kinds of things could have happened. In the desert, there are sandstorms that could bury people. And rains, there are sudden rains that come down and make floods that drown people. It happens in the desert – flash floods that drown out entire caravans.

NO SMALLPOX IN THE MIDBAR

Every kind of illness travels through desert camps. There's a prevalence of all kinds of illnesses. When people are crowded together in one small place, all you need is one ill person to set off an epidemic. And then it speeds like lightning through the whole camp where everybody's crowded together. And yet, nothing happened! Nothing ever happened!

That's exactly what Hashem wanted them to remember: כְּדֵי שִׂיחֵי יוֹדְעִים מֵהַ נִסִּים שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי לָהֶם, “So that you should know about the miracles I did for you,” says Hashem. Now, where are all these miracles? Nothing is said there about miracles. It says only that they traveled from Ramses and they came to Sukkos, and then from Sukkos to Eisam, and then from Eisam to Pi-Hachiros. It's not written here that anything happened! So what remembering of miracles was there to do? Nothing happened; they came from here and went to there.

THE BORING NISSIM

And *that* is the answer. That's actually one of the greatest lessons – the fact that nothing happened is the greatest kindness! When things *don't* happen, that's good news! It's tremendous news! That itself was a great *neis*. They were able to travel from one place to another and they finally arrived despite all the possibilities that could have happened.

And therefore, when we read about the *masa'os*, that they traveled from there and they came to here, all of these are miraculous demonstrations that Hakodosh Boruch Hu was hovering overhead and protecting them from every kind of mishap – because in the wilderness anything and everything could happen! And so Hakodosh Boruch Hu told Moshe Rabeinu, “Write down the journeys and spend time speaking it over with the people – you have to spend time remembering that it was Me who took you on those journeys for forty years in the *midbar*.”

WHAT'S WORSE THAN A SCORPION?

And every one of us have to realize that our own lives are no different. Every mishap, every pitfall, every misfortune could happen. Maybe there are no scorpions and snakes in Flatbush, but there's worse. I don't want to say what but there's worse than scorpions in New York.

And there are drunk drivers, and sicknesses; there are ill people who cough in your face. *Anything* is liable to happen; and Hakodosh Boruch Hu tells us that it's a *mitzvas asei* for each one of us to remember our journey and how He hovers over us always.

Part II. Your Journey

IT'S NOT FOR THE BEIS YAAKOV GIRLS

Now, if you think that sounds queer, if it sounds like just something nice to say, maybe something to say over to the girls in the Beis Yaakov, that means you're far away from thinking according to the Torah. People who fail to look back and appreciate all the good things that they had in their lives, their minds become stultified, hardened by the daily grind, and they're missing out on one of the great achievements of life.

And that's why Rabeinu Yonah quotes Dovid Hamelech; he backs it up with a *possuk* from Tehillim (107:42): **הַשֵּׁם יִתְבּוֹנֵנִי הַסִּדִּי** – *Let them meditate on all the kindnesses of Hashem*. And the Chovos Halevavos talks about this too – pages and pages about remembering the *chasdei Hashem*. And so, wherever we turn we see that it's considered an obligation to look back; you can't be ignorant of your past.

A MOST DANGEROUS JOURNEY

I'll tell you a *chiddush* now but don't laugh – even as far back as the months of his conception he has to reminisce. That's also part of your

journey in this world and it's important to reflect on that too. You know how many people don't survive that dangerous era? And that's why Dovid Hamelech said - it's in the *gemara* that he said that (Brachos 10a) - that you have to get busy singing *shira* to Hakodosh Boruch Hu *even for those nine perilous months at the beginning of your journey.*

It was *you* who was in that situation – it wasn't a stranger. And the stages of development before you were born, one after the other, were of the greatest concern for you, not only at that time, but for the rest of your life! The slightest mishap, *chas v'shalom*, before a person is born would leave him a *ba'al mum*, he would be blemished forever. Sometimes so seriously that he is incapable of living normally like most others. And sometimes his entire life is ruined because of just *one* wrong development inside his mother.

What could have happened *chalilah*? A thousand and one things. You could have been born with a thousand and one different defects, *chas v'shalom*. When you were born normally, it means that hundreds of thousands of things went perfectly – it's *nissei nissim*.

BE HAPPY THAT YOU'RE NORMAL

And therefore, if you are a normal human being - even if you're almost normal - you don't realize how much you have to be happy. If you're here right now, that means that you've seen miracles; it means that you've gone through it all and come out a success. That's also included in the *derech* you have to remember; it's the first of the journeys of your life.

So now you *tzadikim* can test yourselves – are you grateful to Hashem for that part of your journey? Don't say, "I don't remember; how can you bother me with such things that I wasn't even aware of at the time." That's called negligence! The benefits that accrued to you in those early years are benefits for which you're held indebted all your life.

JOURNEYING ACROSS THE DINING ROOM FLOOR

And that was only the beginning. Because when you finish considering all the endless *nissim* of that nine month journey, then you started your journey into this world. That itself was a *neis*! *And so much happened when you were a baby!* How many things you could have swallowed? You could have swallowed needles while crawling on the floor.

And when you began toddling as a little boy, now you're moving around even more and the dangers only increase. You know

how many times you could have broken things – including yourself?! You know how many windows you could have fallen out of? Do you know how many accidents you were prevented from having?

THE PERILS OF CHILDHOOD

Look back on your life and think how many times, *chas v'shalom*, in your childhood, you could have been subjected to crippling illnesses? How many times as a child, you ran into the street without looking. You were romping around in the street – you know how many car accidents could have happened?

How many times were you a little child sitting at the table holding a knife and or a fork and you fell off the chair and nothing happened? It wasn't only once!

By the way, little children shouldn't be allowed to hold forks, because if they fall off the chair, it could go into the eye, *chalilah*. You could have lost your eyes, *chalilah*. It has happened – and not once.

RAV MILLER ON GUN CONTROL

Let's say when you were a little boy and you found a bullet. It's a true story – I once found a bullet when I was a little boy. I took it and stuck it between the boards of a wooden fence because I wanted to experiment. So I took a hammer and a nail, and I banged it against the back of the bullet. It exploded in my face! My face was full of blood. Full of blood! I *chalilah* could have lost my eyes.

It wasn't the only time. I remember when I was four years old I fell off a pile of wood. They were building something near my house, and I was playing there. And I fell off a pile of wood and landed on my face and I had to have stitches. But that piece of wood could have poked into my eyes. How could I ever forget such a thing?! Hashem saved me!

All our lives are filled with *sakanos*, with dangers just like those, and we've been rescued again and again. וְאַל תִּשְׁכַּחַי, *Don't forget*, כָּל גְּבוּרָתוֹ, *all of His kindness*, says Dovid Hamelech (Tehillim 103:2). Most of you still have both of your eyes, *boruch Hashem*. Look back!

If you're sitting here that means you've survived journey after journey, one encampment after another. *Nisei nissim!* And you have to write down in your mind, *al pi Hashem*, what He did for you.

THE DANGER YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT

And what else could have happened, *chas v'Shalom*? Don't ignore the *chasdei Hashem* just because you didn't see the peril that came. Don't

think you have to see the danger and then be rescued in order to appreciate it. No! *בְּמָה לֹא חָלִי וְלֹא מְרַגֵּיִשׁ גְּבֵרָא דְּמָרְהַ סִּיעָה* – *How common is it that a person doesn't feel, is unaware, when he's being helped by Hakodosh Boruch Hu without the danger ever being known by him (Yoma 22b)!*

Here's a man standing on Ocean Parkway, on the corner - it's a true story - and a car jumped onto the curb and he was crushed. He was struck down right there on the corner. And that means *you* have something to think about!

How many times were you standing on a corner waiting for the light to change, *and nothing happened to you?! וְזָכַרְתָּ* – *you have to remember those times you encamped on the corner waiting for the light to change.*

THE MASA ACROSS SIX LANES OF TRAFFIC

And then you have to think back and remind yourself of your journey across the street. How many times did you make it across the street safely?! *וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנו* and then *וַיִּסְעוּ וַיִּחַנו*. You went from this side of Ocean Parkway to that side and you made it! And not only once - hundreds of times! You have to take time to remember those journeys when nothing happened.

And in order to give a tip, a hint of how lucky you are, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives you examples of people who didn't make it. On our travels through life, things are always happening to others and now we understand one of the purposes - to wake us up, so that we'll remember how lucky we are that we're here.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

I look back on my history. I saw so many people pass away young, *nebach, nebach, nebach*. A friend of mine was fourteen years old when he passed away. You should think about that - not every fourteen year old wakes up in the morning. Another friend was a little older when he got sick and he also passed away after a painful illness.

We're expected to learn from what happened to others - friends, neighbors, acquaintances - and it didn't happen to us. "Boruch Hashem, it didn't happen to me!" We should look back now and count the myriads, tens of thousands of blessings Hashem gave us; how many times even the small misfortune did not happen; how many times everything went right in our lives. Hundreds of thousands of times things went right!

THE BLESSING OF NO EXCITEMENT

And therefore, Hakodosh Baruch Hu says, "Don't neglect that." I know – I know the nature of human beings; they're too lazy to think about the many years of boring days, days and days when nothing at all happened. Night after night when all that happened was that you slept peacefully.

That's all?! You know what a pleasure a peaceful night is?! You want excitement? Hashem could give you lots of excitement. In the middle of the night you'll get up to use the bathroom and you'll find that nothing comes out; you can't urinate, *chalilah*. Or your heart might stop pumping *chas v'shalom!* And now *Hatzalah* has to come with sirens and lights. Excitement, lots of excitement! *Uch un vey*, for that kind of excitement.

Peace and quiet are very great blessings. Boring days are a blessing! You're walking down the street in the summertime and you're perspiring and you're thinking maybe of some cool place – you'd like to be in Maine or some other place. Who needs Maine?! Think of the peace you're enjoying now! *Shalom!* A very great happiness! Don't make any mistake about it, quiet is a great happiness! Your daughter didn't call you in the middle of the night that she's having trouble with her husband? There's peace by your children? It's a tremendous *simcha!*

THE HAPPY DRAFT DODGERS

You know what a pleasure it is to live *b'shalom*? You're sixty years old already and you were never drafted into the army? That's part of the *derech* you traveled! You traveled from birth till age sixty and you never were in a foxhole with bullets flying over your head? You should thank Hashem for that! Wars are no fun.

I remember World War I. So many boys didn't come back. They died like flies in battle – even Jewish boys didn't come back. Maybe you don't remember but I was watching when they took young men together in a public square, men of all ages, and they all had to march out to fight wars.

ONEG SHABBOS INSTEAD OF WAR

So instead of the excitement of marching to battle, you're sitting in your house on Shabbos with your wife and children and you're eating meals - big meals - and singing *zemiro*s. It's a happiness! The truth is, we are *the* happy people. אִשְׁרֵי הָעָם שֶׁבָּכָה לֵוֹי – it's a happiness to live for a

purpose. Going to *shul* in the morning is a happiness – it’s fun to go to *shul*. It’s a pleasure to *daven* with your *chaveirim* together.

It’s a pleasure to keep Shabbos. You bathe in warm water and you put on a *begeh naki* and then you sit down with your family and eat a special *seudah*. And then some people take naps, nice long naps. Only, that we don’t think about it at all and so we remain blind. Stop and think about how many *shabbos seudos* you ate in your life – mountains of *chulent*, mountains of *kugel*, barrels and barrels of chicken soup.

And most of you eat during the week too. If it would be possible to take all the food you ate this year and pile it up next to you, it would be a mountain of food, a mountain taller than you are. A mountain of food was consumed by you in just one year – expensive good food! Not to mention all the delicacies and dainties that you downed and all the things you drank. So not only are you journeying, but you’re being provided with refreshments along the way.

DAILY ROUTINE IS WHAT WE WANT

A person who thinks back to the journeys, the *Eileh Masei* of his life, so he begins to understand the great happiness of daily routine. The fact that nothing has happened is in itself *shalom*. The fact that you woke up in the morning is a *simcha*! You went to work every day – that’s a happiness.

Look back at your life and say, “I spent so and so many years working.” More or less, you made a living. Once in a while you even received a promotion! You’re married? You have children? You live under a roof, don’t you? You’re not living on the street with all of your worldly belongings next to you in a shopping wagon. You have to think about that.

How many nights did you spend sleeping on a park bench? For most of you, the answer is none. That’s a lot of nights; many, many, many nights that you slept in a bed!

GOING BACK TO HARLEM

Imagine now, you’re a successful man. You built yourself up a big business, you have a beautiful home, you have a big family. It’s a good idea – go back to where you were as a boy, someplace in Harlem, let’s say – if it’s not safe to go there, so get a bodyguard, and stand there for a little while and think, “Look where I was so many years ago! And look what happened to me all the way in between.”

Take the time to think over all the things that happened to you. You were worried for the future – who knows what could have happened to you. You could have become a nobody. Don't forget what Hashem did for you – that's the point. It's the great principle, **זָכוֹרְתָּ אֵת** **כָּל הַדְרֹתָי** – you have to remember.

Now, once a person begins to fulfill this obligation, once he begins to take this *mitzvas aseï* seriously, he begins to view the entire panorama of his life the same way the Am Yisroel did in the *midbar* – you'll also see that the *ananei kavod* of Hashem were protecting and guiding you even at times when you thought you had what to complain about.

FOUR FULFILLING FAILURES

If you look back at your life's history you'll be amazed at the things that happened that protected you and caused things to turn out in the best way for you. So many things that at the moment seemed to be an unhappiness, a disappointment, and you look back now and you see that it turned out to be a very great kindness for you. I don't want to take up your time but I could tell you stories that happened to me again and again.

I have at least four instances when Hashem did something and at the time I thought it was a terrible loss for me, a failure for me, and these four failures saved me! Four times in my journey through life – there's much more than that of course, but I remember right now four times when I tried to do something and I failed. And now I look back. Every day I look back and I say, "Boruch Hashem that I failed!" If I would have succeeded I wouldn't be here today. I'd be ruined!

THE NERVOUS BREAKDOWN SAVES THE MAN

I just received regards from a man in Eretz Yisroel; he called me yesterday. He grew up as a youth in a midwestern city. He was an *am ha'arets gamur*; he knew nothing about *yiddishkeit* at all. And then he became sick. He had a nervous breakdown and ended up in a hospital for a long time. And in the hospital, the chaplain gave him a copy of Rejoice O' Youth. This boy had never heard about anything! And he read the book and became a new person.

One day he shows up at my door. That's how I found out about him; he showed up at my door and told me this story. So I sent him to the Satmerer shtiebel and they took care of him. They gave him a job and

he grew a big beard and now he's in Yerushalayim. Besides the big beard he now has a big family too.

How did he jump from a midwestern city, a *bur* who knew nothing, and now he's a talmid chochom in Yerushalayim with a big beard? Because the nervous breakdown saved him. Now he has to look back on his journey and say, "I thank You Hashem for the nervous breakdown that saved my life." Once a person learns that Hashem is guiding him on his journey, so he can spend a lot of time reviewing his travels in life.

RAV MILLER AND THE BOMB

There are many things like that in life. We had a man here in our shul; a hardworking man who never had a chance to come to any of the shiurim in gemara. Even to davening he couldn't always come. He was working like a slave in his shop.

One day he took an order for merchandise from a huge store, a big order from a Stop and Shop store, a chain store. And he didn't know that this store was already a customer of someone else, someone in the Mafia. By accident he took away a customer from the Mafia. When they saw that he took away their customer, so at night they came to his shop and they exploded his store with a bomb. So he came running to me early in the morning, "What should I do now?!" He was afraid for his life! The Mafia was after him for stealing away a customer.

So the first thing I said was, "Where's your car parked?" "In front of my house; in the driveway." So I said, "Right away, hurry up. They'll bomb your car!" Take it and park it five blocks away from the house."

THE MAFIA MAKES A LAMDAN

And then I said to him, "Do you know who this person is whose toes you stepped on?" He said he knows, he knows who it is. I said, "Call him up right now and tell him you're quitting business. Tell him that as of now you've resigned - you're closing up shop."

He called him up and the Mafia man said, "Oh, is that so? I'm so sorry to hear that. If I can be of any help to you in the future, please let me know."

So now he's out of a job. You know what happened? He had to get a city job. And now he started coming to shul every day. He started coming to shiurim, and after a while he became a *shtikel lamdan* too. And now he's teaching others gemara! He's a different personality now. He

probably should call the Mafia man once more to thank him. If he could find that Mafia man today he would have to run over and kiss him. He saved his life.

SINGING LESSONS

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, **שִׁירֵי לֹוּ אֶת כָּל הַדְּרָךְ** – spend time thinking about what you have, remembering all the benefits I gave you. We all have our stories! You survived so many things and you're still here today.

And therefore, we begin to realize that one of the most important of the achievements of a Jew, besides doing certain *mitzvos mesuyomos*, certain specific *mitzvos*, is the very great mitzvah of **שִׁירֵי לֹוּ** **זְמַר לֹוּ** – you have to say *shira*, you have to sing to Hashem and make music to Him. You have to spend time thinking what you had from all the way in the beginning of your journey.

Part III. Journeying On

WHY IS REMEMBERING SO IMPORTANT?

And so the man who fulfills this mitzvah of *v'zacharta*, of thinking *kol ha'derech*, his journey through life, has fulfilled a great *mitzvas asei*, the obligation to remember always the kindness of Hashem. And yet it's a question: Why does Rabeinu Yonah consider this mitzvah so fundamental to *avodas Hashem*? It's a *mitzvah*, yes and it's a happiness too, but why does he say that it is from the **מַעְלֹוֹת הָעֲלִיּוֹנוֹת**, *the highest of virtues*, and the reason **שֶׁנִּבְרָא הָאָדָם**, *that man was created*?

And the answer is as follows: the reason why we serve Hashem – the catalyst for our *mitzvos* and *Torah* and all of our *avodas Hashem* – should be a feeling of gratitude to Hashem.

It's not what I say – that's what the *Chovos Halevavos* says: that remembering all of the *chasdei Hashem* is *fundamental* for anyone who wants to be an *eved Hashem*. Gratitude is supposed to be *the foundation* for all of your service of Hashem.

Why do we do *mitzvos*? Only as a way of thanking Hashem! Every *mitzvah* is an expression of gratitude. That's what the *Chovos Halevavos* says and it's a very important point – the real *avodas Hashem*, means serving Hashem out of gratitude.

When you are grateful to Hashem you serve Him! **מִה אֲשִׁיב לַהֲשֵׁם**
- *What can I pay back to Hashem, כָּל תְּגִמְלוּהָי עָלַי*, for all the good things He did for me? How am I going to pay back Hashem for my whole life? And so, the most you can do is serve Him with everything you have.

DON'T FORGET TO READ THE PREFACE

Now all this, if you tell it to people who learned, they might laugh at it. Because they didn't learn these things. They learned that *avodas Hashem* means you have to be careful with *shmiras haloshon*. They learned that it means doing *ma'asim tovim* and learning more Torah. All that's true, but they never learned the *hakdamah*, the preface to everything. Before everything else, number one is to say, "Thank you Hashem for everything You've done for me on my journey."

You have to realize the beginning of *avodas Hashem* is to think what Hashem is doing for you. That's the foundation, the rock foundation of serving Hashem. The first thing is to realize, **כָּרִיבְךָ אֵתָהּ הָשֵׁם** - what You did for me! That's number one!

If you want to be an *eved Hashem* you have to first feel a gratitude to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And you can't feel gratitude if you never thought about what you have to be thankful for, if you never spent time remembering the details upon details of the *chasdei Hashem*.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

And once you begin studying the *Eileh Masei*, all of your journeys, you'll see that the details are endless. We're talking about the *mitzvah* of remembering *kol haderech*, your entire journey through life.

How many days passed by without anything serious happening to you! Thousands and thousands of days that you didn't have any car crash. You didn't have any serious illness. No litigation in court. How many times you went to your job and you succeeded! You did business! It's a happiness to do business! Boruch Hashem!

How many days went by without a broken bone? Thousands and thousands of days! And even to the doctor you didn't have to go too often. Even if you're a hypochondriac who likes to give business to physicians - there are some people like that - but still, in between, there were days you didn't go. And most of us, sometimes months or years pass without going to a physician for anything serious.

FRESH HERRING AND CLEAN SOCKS

Not to mention all the laundry that you used up, all the days when you were able to put on fresh clothing, fresh underwear and socks. How many apples did you eat in your life? How many cherries? How many peanuts? How many herrings did you consume? How many eggs did you eat? How many tomatoes, how many chickens?

All this has to be considered – and not just with a fleeting thought. You have to spend time thinking about your life. You're walking in the street tomorrow? So spend one minute fulfilling this *mitzvas asei* of *v'zacharta es kol haderech*.

Think about all the days of your life that were free of headaches. There are people who live all their days with headaches – they're migraine people. They live under a shadow, under a cloud, all their lives. They get up with a headache, go to sleep with a headache. Some people are suffering from arthritis constantly. Even the slightest movement pains them. Yet you are walking around, your joints are lubricated and they swing freely in the sockets. Think about how many days you lived pain free, again and again.

HOW TO GET OUT OF DEBT

You *can't* pay Him back for all that – it's impossible! You're mortgaged to Him, you're up to your eyeballs in debt! And you could never pay Him back. So you want to find favor in His eyes – something you have to do – so the least you can do is to serve Him. That's called *avodah*.

And therefore we're obligated to feel at all times, that all the *mitzvos* we do are only an expression of *hoda'ah*; that's the *pnimiyus* of all the *mitzvos*. You want to know the *sodos*, the *toras hanistar* behind all the *mitzvos*, that's it – *hoda'ah*, gratefulness. Paying back; that's the *yesod ha'yesodos*. If you want to know why we have to do everything, then you have to know that.

This is a requirement of a servant of Hashem and there's no way around it! That's the *klal* from the Chovos Halevavos – the more a person receives benefits from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the more he's required to produce *avodah* to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

HOW TO AGE WELL

As you get older you have to become better. *You have to become better and better!* Every day you owe more and more of a debt to

Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and so, the older you are, the bigger is your obligation to thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu and to serve Him.

And now we understand that a man who is older is required to become better. Look; you lived to thirty? Think about other people you knew who didn't make it to thirty. You're thirty years old? Boruch Hashem! What are you going to do as a result? You must do something to show your appreciation to the One who kept you alive! Something you *have* to do!

You hit forty? You should be even more excited! "I made it - I'm forty!" Forty; *ben arba'im l'binah!* Fifty? You're almost an aristocrat already. Many people didn't make it to fifty. So Hashem expects more and more of you.

Sixty is *zikhnah*. You reached *zikhnah!* So more and more is expected of you. And so, you'll have to spend more time in *avodas Hashem*; how else could you show appreciation?! You have to go to more *shiurim* than ever before. Not like some people think, now they reached a certain age, maybe they can retire now, travel to Florida, sit by the boardwalk and waste away.

RAV MILLER'S BIRTHDAY GREETING

I met a man yesterday who told me he was seventy years old. I congratulated him: "Seventy years old! *Seivah!* Think about what a *chiyuv* you have now of "*v'zacharta*", the obligation to remember your *masa'os*, your journeys, and thank Hashem. You have to get busy thanking Hashem." *Shiru lo, zamru lo;* He gave you seventy years. You can't just say seventy years and that's all. Even to rattle off the years one at a time is not enough.

Seventy years you had breakfast, lunch and supper. Seventy years you used your eyes to see well. For seventy years you've been breathing, filling your lungs with Hashem's oxygen. Seventy years you've had sunlight and the pleasure of seeing a blue sky. Seventy years of having clothing every day. Seventy years you had a bathtub and a *beis ha'kisei*. You had running water in your house for seventy years.

Suppose you pass seventy; you're eighty now. So you should become *wild* over Hashem - you have to begin doing all kinds of things for Hashem, things that you never thought of before. The older you get, you have to become more and more devoted to Hashem because of the journeys He led you on.

THE EIGHT YEAR OLD AND THE EIGHTY YEAR OLD

But nobody should wait till they're eighty. Even if you're an eight year old, or eighteen or twenty eight year old, you're already heavily in debt to Hashem. Only that we walk through life without thinking at all.

It's a tremendous lesson you're hearing right now. If you want to see a picture of a man who serves Hashem, don't think that if you walk into a place where a man is shaking a mile a minute and his face is very serious, that's the man who's serving Hashem. It could be it's the man who's walking happily in the street, and his mind is involved in looking back and trying to recall all of the *chasdei Hashem* from even before he was born. That's the *oived Hashem*!

And how many are there like that? We must admit, not many. And that's why we're hearing it tonight – because it's so important to learn that this is called *avodas Hashem*.

THE SIN OF BEING FORGETFUL

Not remembering, we have to know, is not merely that we are lacking a certain *middas chassidus*, lacking piety. No! It's a very great iniquity – it's a very great sin not to remember.

That's the lesson of *eileh masei*. You must think back and remember because the biggest of all of our sins is the failure to recognize what Hakodosh Boruch Hu is doing for us all the time – the daily success that he gives us; the good fortune that causes our lives to continue in the regular unbroken routine without accidents, without misfortunes. That's a very important lesson.

It really is a *neis* and you can include that in **על נסידך שבבכל יום עמנו** – Hashem does *nissim* constantly that things are always turning out right; only the ungrateful person is always concentrating on the other things and he's always displeased. He's angry and upset because like the Rambam says, **אֵת הָרַע זֹכְרִים וְאֵת הַטּוֹב אֵינָם זֹכְרִים**, the *tov* is always more than the *ra*, but it's the bad that people spend time considering while the good is always forgotten.

THE WRITING YOU CAN DO ON SHABBOS

And therefore, as much as you can, you have to spend time writing down all the journeys that you traveled from the beginning of your life until now. Write it out in your mind! All the *masa'os*, all the journeys you've been through.

And as you fulfill this mitzvah more and more, you become more and more perfect in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And the more you spend time thinking about everything that He's done for you, the more you've built the foundation for a life of true *avodas Hashem*, serving Hashem with gratitude.

HAVE A WONDERFUL SHABBOS

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Q&A

With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

The Rav told us tonight that the Jewish communities in the times of the *Beis Ha'mikdash* were communities of *kedusha*. You said that there were many *tzadikim* who counted every word that came out of their mouths. Were the women of ancient Yerushalayim really better than the women of today? Did they really speak less than the *frum* women of today?

A:

Absolutely. No question about it. What do you think?! If there is a society in which people are striving for perfection, a society in which the men are counting their words, do you think that only the men are counting their words?! Their wives counted their words. Their daughters counted their words. Their mothers counted their words. Everybody became better. You should know that, in general, when men are good, the women are also good. There's no such thing as men having *shleimus* without their wives. *Shleimus* is contagious. All good *midos* are contagious.

So you be sure to do your part in making your home a *beis ha'mikdash* and be sure to lead yourself *bi'derech ha'torah* and *bi'derech ha'kedusha* and it will be contagious. And therefore, you must know, that whatever good things *chazal* tell us about the men, you can be sure that the women and girls in the Jewish homes shared in all the good qualities of ancient times.

TAPE #E-207

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