

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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ELUL

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

TEN EASY STEPS TO GREATNESS

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Introduction: The Fool of Lips

The Wise and the Foolish

In Mishlei (10:8) there is an expression as follows:
מִצְוֹת יִקַּח לֵב חָכָם – *The one with a wise heart grabs mitzvos*,
וְאִוִּיל שׁוֹפְתִים יִלְבֹּט – *while 'the fool of lips' will stumble*. It means that the wise person gets busy with achieving while the fool spouts ideas and ideals but stumbles into failure.

Now, you have to understand that when Mishlei here is describing the “fool of lips” he’s talking about a person who is not such a big fool, because actually it’s a person who is making use of his lips; he is speaking about ideals, about great dreams that he hopes to accomplish someday – achievements in excellence of character, in finding favor in the eyes of Hashem, in perfection of service of Hashem. He speaks about all that, but יִלְבֹּט – *he stumbles*. He is *nichshal* because it never goes beyond talking. He’s אִוִּיל שׁוֹפְתִים – *he’s a fool because he only talks about these things*. Of course we welcome such fools who talk about great ideals – at least he knows it’s important – but it’s a pity on him because it never gets beyond his lips.

The Fool in the Mirror

Now, who is that fool? Very many of us. Of course, some of us are not even important enough to be such a fool; we don’t even dream of great aspirations. You must be a somebody to have ambition to become great. That itself is an excellence of character, to aspire to *shleimus*, to perfection.

But even the good ones, the ones who want to go beyond talking and achieve the full perfection, the true greatness of which good men are capable of attaining, the road is too steep and too long to traverse, and so they stumble too. They give up or push it off; they procrastinate.

There is, however, a substitute and it is a great pity that nothing at all is done. If you cannot become truly great, it is not difficult to become great on a small scale. It’s like a poor man – he can’t afford an expensive car so he buys a jalopy, and he gets there anyhow. By hook or by crook he arrives at his destination.

Greatness on a Budget

And so if people will at least make an attempt to begin traveling in the right direction, they will accomplish. But the אִוִּיל שׁוֹפְתִים he talks about great ideals and yet he doesn’t even make the first step in

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that direction because he thinks they are too far off. And what happens? יִלָּכֵט – He stumbles with his lips and he remains nobody all his life.

And therefore, little people like ourselves would do well to think about starting out right now, without any delay; without waiting until we go to a certain place where they'll talk about these things and teach it to us. We'll have to learn the whole Chovos Halevavos — and not once. And we'd have to study it profoundly. We'll have to learn Mesillas Yesharim and Sha'arei Teshuvah and the Kuzari and the Rambam Hilchos Deios and Hilchos Teshuvah. It's such a big job that if we wait for that we'll just give up and we won't do anything. And therefore, for poor little people like ourselves, it's important not to waste another day but to start out immediately. And so ten suggestions will be made which are not difficult to do and they will bring guaranteed results.

The Secret Program

Now, before we start, one important introduction, a warning: Don't tell this to anybody. Don't tell anyone about your program. That's the advice of Shlomo Hamelech. בְּאָזְנֵי כְסִיל אַל תְּדַבֵּר – *Do not speak in the ears of a fool*; and most people are fools. Why shouldn't you speak in the ears of a fool? כִּי יִבּוֹז לְשֹׁכֵל מִלִּיךְ – *He'll make your words into nothing* (Mishlei 23:9).

Now it could be he'll belittle it — “Oh, it's nothing. It's *devarim beteilim*. You're wasting time talking about these subjects.” Yes, you'll find people like that. He'll say poo poo, he'll ridicule it, and the whole thing is exploded.

But even if he won't say one word, you'll look at his face — a deadpan face. He's not interested. So you're cooled off by his lack of a reaction. You see he's not really interested, that he's not impressed, and you yourself lose your interest in what you have to say. And so don't tell him! It's valuable advice — keep your program hidden, even from good people.

Rav Simcha Zissel's Secrets

You know, the great sage Rav Simcha Zissel who lived about eighty years ago had the practice that

when it occurred to him some important Torah idea, some new thought of *avodas Hashem* entered his mind, so for a long time he didn't tell it to anyone. Even to his disciples in the yeshiva he didn't say anything. He kept it to himself; he thought about it, practiced it, developed it, and only later he told his *talmidim*. And he explained that by telling it to others it loses its effectiveness on you.

Now, when he spoke in the yeshiva he was speaking to very good *talmidim*. His disciples were great men, *talmidei chachomim*, *lamdanim*. But still, when he spoke to them and he would tell them his new thought that he was inspired with, they didn't understand it with the same enthusiasm that he understood it. So let's say he was inspired 98 degrees Fahrenheit; he would tell it to them and they'd be inspired 55 degrees. And that would cool him off. Human beings are like that. We're weak like that.

Even when I speak to you, the thing that I have in my mind is not reflected in your mind entirely — it's only partly reflected — and your face shows that it's not reflected fully. So I'm cooled off. Only that you came here already so I won't disappoint you. I lose out by telling it to you, but sometimes you can't help yourself. After all, you're a teacher, you're a parent; you must tell others. But even so, at the beginning, try to hold it as long as you can and suck out all the inspiration you can get out of it before you tell it to them.

The Lonely Climb

And therefore, when it comes to our program, the ten easy steps to greatness, we say יִהְיֶה לָּךְ לְבָדָּךְ – *It should be for you alone*, וְאֵין לְזָרִים אֲתָךְ – *and strangers should not share it with you* (ibid. 5:17). You want to remain inspired? So יִהְיֶה לָּךְ לְבָדָּךְ – *keep it to yourself*. Do it in secrecy. Even the closest people to you, you shouldn't tell that you're embarking on this program. By yourself you'll achieve greatness and perfection.

And so we begin now, *be'ezras Hashem*, ten suggestions for greatness; ten easy steps to greatness.

Step #1: Olam Haba

The Forgotten Subject

Number one is Olam Haba. We're going to accept upon ourselves, *bli neder*, that every day we will spend thirty seconds thinking about Olam Haba. A half minute on the clock, every day, I'll think about Olam Haba.

Now, a person hears such a thing and right away he's in a panic. Thirty seconds? What am I going to think about for thirty seconds?

Because today the Am Yisroel has forgotten about this greatest of all subjects. It's relegated to a *levayah*, a *shiva* home. But on a regular day, in a regular Jewish home, it's not discussed.

Listen in to a woman on the telephone. A half-hour she's talking, how she had to go all over Manhattan to find a winter coat, how she's having trouble with her maid, and this and that. All *Olam Hazeh'dige* things. But Olam Haba? Silence. Not a word.

Now, I don't mean to say anything especially about women because it's the same thing by the men. Here's a Shabbos table, a *frum* table; what's the conversation at the Shabbos table in a *frum* home? *Divrei Torah*, yes. *Vertelech*, very good. But *ha'ikar chasar min hasefer*! Olam Haba! The main course is missing.

A Sobered Nation

After all, what is it all about? Why are we in this world? We're here just to live? And even to do *mitzvos*! Everybody who learns knows that *עֹבֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יִבָּא* – *there's no payment for a mitzvah in this world* (Kiddushin 39b). You're not working for anything in this world — it's Olam Haba, that's the great joy we're all aiming for. Only that nobody thinks about it! It's not even mentioned; days and days pass by as if it doesn't exist.

The Chovos Halevavos says, *הוּא לְשִׁכְרוֹת הַזֹּאת* – *alas for this intoxication*. Alas for this confusion that people lose sight of that great fact that this world is only a preparation for the World to Come. And it's

so important that we have to understand it as one of the number one requirements for being a Jew. And don't say you knew it already when you were a little boy. You never knew it. Even now you don't know it. The intoxicated nation must sober up!

Living in Eternity

And so starting today, we're going to spend thirty seconds every day reminding ourselves that we're in this world only as a preparation for the World to Come. *הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דּוֹמֶה לְפְרוֹזְדוֹר* – *This world is just a vestibule*, *לִפְנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא* – *before the World to Come*, and therefore *הִתְקַן עֲצֶמְךָ בְּפְרוֹזְדוֹר* – *prepare yourself in the vestibule, in the lobby*, *כְּדִי שֶׁתִּכְנַס לְטָרַקְלִין* – *in order that you should enter the banquet hall* (Avos 4:16).

Ooh, that's a big statement: This entire world that we're living in — your home, your street, your family, your work, your shul — it's only a hallway that you're passing through! And you have to continue to remind yourself of that as you walk in Olam Hazeh. It's only a little lobby, a *prozdor* before the *traklin*.

We have to get the idea in our heads. When somebody passes away and the relatives are all broken, his friends are all sad, but they should know that now he is in the world for which he was created. Up until now he was just preparing. Whatever happens here is only a preface to the great career that follows. Because there's a huge banquet hall that everyone enters from this lobby. Unless he's stopped at the door. That could happen; some are stopped at the door for a while until they can enter.

Olam Haba in the Subway

And so immediately, the first thing in our program, we're going to think about the World to Come — what it's like there, how we get there. That's where Avraham Avinu is. That's where all the *tzaddikim* are. Adam Harishon is there, too, and Chava. Moshe Rabbeinu is there. It's the place of greatest happiness. Wouldn't we want to be there?

And so, starting today, every day for thirty seconds — on the clock — we're going to think about

Olam Haba. We'll spend a half minute thinking about the World to Come — about its importance in our lives. One time every day. So as you're hanging on a strap in the subway, you'll remind yourself, "Oh, I still have to fulfill my step to greatness." You look at your watch and start thinking about Olam Haba until thirty seconds pass. Keep your hand on your wallet meanwhile because the one standing next to you, he's not thinking about Olam Haba.

As you're driving towards work, or you're waiting at the corner for the light to turn green, or you're waiting to see a customer — whatever it is — look at your watch and let it tick off thirty seconds while you are now in the World to Come; thinking about the purpose of life.

That's number one. Isn't that easy? And results are guaranteed because you're already superior to everybody else. You are *יְהִי עַמְּךָ בְּרִבְּבָה* – You're one in ten thousand (Shir Hashirim 5:10). Who does that? You're a head taller than everybody else because you live every day for thirty seconds in the World to Come.

And not only you're doing your program but you know what's going to happen when you begin thinking like that? It will illuminate your life. It will bring a *simcha* into your life. Because no matter what happens, you know you're headed towards success.

And one day, when we come into the Next World and they'll say, "What do you want here?", so you'll say, "Well, I worked on Olam Haba. I reminded myself every day about this place, about preparing to be here."

"Oh," they'll say, "then *shalom aleichem*. We're happy to have you."

Now whether they'll give you a front seat or a middle seat or a back seat, it depends how much you put into it. But they are going to welcome you — it's guaranteed.

Step #2: Ahavas Hashem

Four Lovely Words

We come now to step number two on our list. And it's very simple. It's just four words. Don't tell anyone I told you this but once a day when nobody is looking and nobody is listening, say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "I love You, Hashem."

Did you ever say that in your life? There are even righteous people who never said it once in their lives! And it's a command in the Torah: *וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה'* – You should love Hashem with all your heart (Devarim 6:5). It's one of the greatest, most important of all *mitzvos*, and yet it's one of the most neglected of all. Every day, twice a day, we remind ourselves, *וְאָהַבְתָּ* – you should love Hashem *Elokecha*. You're always talking about it but when are you doing it?

Beyond Davening

That's why the Chofetz Chaim says in Mishnah Berurah (25:14) that when you're saying that *possuk* you should try to love Hashem. At least then — think for one second that you love Hashem. An excellent idea. Each time you say Krias Shema you think, "I love Hashem."

But it could be you're in a big hurry while you're saying that; you forget. Also, you can't speak then either; you can't say it with your mouth. And so we're going to suggest as follows. Every day, find a few seconds in solitude and say, "I love You, Hashem." Go into a telephone booth, pick up the receiver and act like you're talking; you're making a long distance call to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and you say, "I love You, Hashem."

A Lot of Love

Now, genuine *ahavas Hashem* is not as easy as that. Because to love Hashem means that we fix into our hearts an affection, an emotion of love towards Hashem so much so, that the heart is filled with intense love and affection for Hashem and there's no room for anything else. The Rambam describes it as follows: *וְנִמְצָא שׁוֹגֵף בָּהּ הַנֶּמֶד בְּאֵלּוֹ חוֹלָה חֲלֵי הָאֱהָבָה* – The one who loves Hashem is immersed in the love of

Hashem at all times as if he was sick with love, שָׂאִין וְעֵתוֹ פְּנוּיָה מְאֻהֶבֶת אוֹתָהּ אֲשֶׁה וְהוּא שׁוֹגָה בֵּה תָמִיד בֵּין בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ בֵּין בְּקוּמּוֹ בֵּין בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהוּא אוֹכֵל וְשׁוֹתָה – he can't keep his mind off Hashem; whether he's sitting in his house or walking in the street, when he's eating or drinking, he's always immersed in thoughts of Hashem (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:3).

There were people, even in our times, who lived like that. R' Yisroel Salanter, *zichrono livracha*, was once arrested for that. He lived in Kenningsberg and he used to walk on the outskirts of the town and he used to make motions talking to Hashem; and he was brought to the police station because of that. Then those who knew him came and explained to the police that this man is engrossed in a very great emotion of love; he can't help himself. So they wrote in his passport – in that place you had to carry around your papers with you all the time to show the police – so they wrote there: *Immer ferzunken in philosophische gedanken*. It means he is always immersed in philosophical thoughts. That's what the police wrote in his passport so they shouldn't bother him next time.

And so to achieve that requires a lot of work. It requires everything you have to love Hashem: בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֻדְךָ. It's the highest degree of perfection and it requires very great effort. The Chovos Halevavos tells us you have to go through all the preliminaries in his *sefer* – a long, difficult *sefer* – until you come to the summit of *ahavas Hashem*.

A Little Love

But this mitzvah is not given only to great *tzaddikim*. It's for everybody, every boy and girl; even an ignorant man is required to fulfill it. It doesn't mean they'll love Hakadosh Baruch Hu like Dovid Hamelech loved Hakadosh Baruch Hu or like the Chovos Halevavos loved Hakadosh Baruch Hu; but there is love for Hakadosh Baruch Hu that you can buy at bargain rates. And whatever you can achieve is precious.

You know, when you go into business, so everybody likes to become a millionaire; but it doesn't mean that you won't settle for less. Even the

man who has a peanut cart on the street corner – he sells peanuts because a little bit is better than nothing. That's a *klal gadol* in *hilchos* business – you try to make whatever you can. Similarly, everybody would like to be a most perfect servant of Hashem and to love Hashem with all his heart, like the Chovos Halevavos, like the great Avraham Avinu; אַבְרָהָם אֱהֵבִי – Avraham who loves Me (Yeshaya 41:8). But if you're not going to do that, at least a little bit you should love Him.

You can learn to love Hashem even on a small scale. Even if you love Hashem for one moment, it's also worthwhile. A diamond is precious no matter how small it is, and this is one of the most precious gems in our lives. And it's not too difficult. On a small scale, it's certainly possible. And of course, if you keep on practicing, you'll become more and more of an expert.

Words Work

And what we're proposing now is that just by saying it alone, הַחִיצוֹנוּת מְעוֹרֶרֶת אֶת הַפְּנִימִיּוּת – your exteriority bestirs your interiority (see *Mesillas Yesharim*, ch. 7). At first it may seem like a small thing but you should know that it's going to have a powerful effect on your character. הַמַּחְשְׁבָה נִמְשָׁכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַדִּבְעוֹר – The thoughts follow the words (Chovos Halevavos, Cheshbon Hanefesh 9). Saying it kindles at least a spark; it's going to kindle a fire in your heart. And it grows. Little by little, that love becomes part of your thoughts. You begin to actually love Hashem. And the more you say it, it can become an inferno, a blazing fire of *ahavas Hashem*.

Of course, the more the words are backed up with thoughts and emotion, the greater the flame will be. Just to be a robot, to say words that are devoid of any thought, that's nothing. So it pays to think, to prepare your mind. And one of the easy ways to learn to love Hashem is when you enjoy something in this world you should think of Hashem and love Him for it. If you're eating a delicious apple say, "I love You, Hashem – בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ." And learn to say it with *ahavah*.

You walk into a warm house on a cold night and you rub your hands together. You're thinking, "Aah! Nice and warm. I love Hashem for this. He gives me fuel and heating and all the machinery necessary to keep my house warm." And so if nobody is around when you walk in the door, say, "I love You, Hashem." Or when you sit down to supper, "I love You, Hashem." You can love Him for the tasty chicken and potatoes.

Stimulating Love

And so *ahavas Hashem* is not difficult in this way. When a person loves Hashem in return for benefits that are being showered upon him, that's also love. While you're healthy — you're walking in the street and breathing the air and you're full of food and your blood is coursing through your veins, love Hashem for that. You can love Hashem because you have two healthy eyes; not glass eyes. You'll love Hashem because you have your own teeth. And if you have false teeth, love Him because you have false teeth. Once upon a time there were no false teeth available; you're lucky to have that. So you can love Him for that, too.

If you'll learn to love Hashem because of your body which is functioning perfectly — you have good health — that's excellent. If you can move your bowels comfortably, love Hashem for it! There are some people who have great difficulty. They suffer from constipation to no end, and you don't. So each time you come out of the bathroom, say, "I love You, Hashem, for that."

And after a while you'll find many stimuli to cause this emotion of *ahavas Hashem*. And all of these emotions, little by little, will make the four words you say into dynamite. And therefore, that's step number two. Every day, when no one else is around — only Hashem is listening — we'll make sure to say these four words, "I love You, Hashem."

It sounds funny, doesn't it? Listen to me; it's not funny at all. It's the most serious thing in the world. Don't be the "fool of lips," the one who says, "Someday, I'll come to love Hashem. It needs so

much preparation. Oh yes, one day." And you stumble; it never happens.

And so instead, be a **יקח מציאות**. Grab onto it! Every day find a place, a corner, to be in solitude just for a few seconds; a secret place where nobody sees you and nobody is listening. And say it in English: "I love You, Hashem." You want to say it in Yiddish, very good: *Ich hob Dir lieb, Ribono Shel Olam*. Speak *lashon kodesh*. Speak Hungarian. Whatever suits you, but say it: "I love You, Hashem." I know it sounds silly, but if you won't be silly, you won't be anybody.

Step #3: Secret Kindness

Secret Supplier

The third in the steps to greatness: Every day do one act of kindness that nobody knows about. Do it in secrecy. Once a day find a way to do a *chessed* in secret.

If you can, buy a bar of soap and drop it in the lavatory of your *beis haknesses*. Nobody should know about it. Just unwrap it, sneak in and put it down, and run out; a big *chessed*. I'm not telling you what you have to do. It's just an idea.

There was a man in our neighborhood like that. In secret, he undertook to supply face-tissues in his yeshiva every day. Nobody thinks where they come from; the yeshiva doesn't supply them. This man comes in secretly and puts them down. He buys them from his own money. For years and years he has been doing that — nobody knows about it.

When the Wife is Away

Or let's say you walk in the house and your wife is not home. There are some dishes that have to be washed. Wash a few dishes — one or two dishes — dry them and put them in their place. She shouldn't know. She comes home and she remembers there was a sink full of dishes but she doesn't notice that it's less. Don't tell her you washed them. And that counts as your secret *chessed* for the day.

I once told this to a man and he said *this* idea he doesn't like. Dishes — he doesn't like. All right. So

there are other things you can do. Let's say you're walking in the house and you see something, a piece of dirt on the floor. You know your wife will get busy; she's going to bring a broom and try to shovel it up. Kick it under the sofa, she shouldn't see it. It's saving her all that work.

You think it's a small thing? No, it's a good idea. But have in mind the program; you're doing a *chessed* — when nobody sees you're trying to save someone unnecessary work.

Chessed on Purpose

Now, don't do a good thing and later say, "Well, today I have to fulfill my *kabalah* and so I'll use that retroactively." That's no good. No. You have to say beforehand, "I'm going to do this in order to fulfill my program — an act of kindness that nobody knows about."

Otherwise, everybody does kindness anyhow. But it's usually done out of habit or because we must. We usually do kindness to people because we're ashamed not to do it. If you're getting off the bus, you hold open the door for the man who is coming after you so that the door shouldn't slam in his face, because you'd be ashamed not to hold the door open for him. He'll look at you like an uncivilized person.

No; *gemilus chassadim* that you do to satisfy the requirements of civilization, that's not our program. It's good, but it's not for our step. We're doing it for Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You have to do one thing, not because you *must* do it, not because it's *expected* of you — you do it because it's the *middah* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. כִּי חָפֵץ חָסֵד – Hashem desires chessed (Micha 7:18). וְהָלַכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו – You want to be like Hashem (Devarim 28:9). Just purely for the mitzvah of doing a *chessed*.

Chessed Undercover

If you are the first one in the *beis hamedrash* — nobody is looking — try to put together the *sefarim* where they belong. Nobody should see that you did it. In the shul, if you can stay a minute after everyone else — make believe you're busy with something,

you're tying your shoelaces or something else — and after everyone leaves put some *siddurim* back on the shelf. You can pick up something from the floor, a tissue, or wipe down a table.

Maybe you're walking outside and you see there's a banana peel on the sidewalk. Before anyone looks, shove it off of the sidewalk with your shoe. Push it into the gutter, the sewer, so somebody shouldn't slip on it and go for a ride to the hospital. Or if there's a piece of plastic on the sidewalk — plastics are dangerous; people can slip on them — so you kick it to the side. Sometimes there's something greasy on the sidewalk; when nobody's looking you sprinkle some dust, some dirt there, to protect the passersby. Secretly you're doing a *chessed* so that people shouldn't get hurt.

Now, let's say it's the end of the day and you forgot. There's always something. Wait till your mother is asleep, or maybe when she's not looking, and you'll tiptoe into the living room and put something away. There's always something you can do in the house for your spouse or your children.

There are all kinds of acts you could do that will help the *tzibbur* or help private people. Whatever it is, make up your mind that once a day you're going to do an act of *chessed* secretly. But do it only with the intention that you're doing *b'seiser* an act of *chessed* to serve Hashem. That's easy. Every day, one act. It's only one *chessed* a day. It's not much. But do it with this intention in mind, that you want to fulfill this third point in your list of great objectives — a secret *chessed*.

Step #4: Encouragement

Donating Encouragement

Number four on the list of greatness: Every day, give some encouragement to your fellow man. Like it says, מְעוֹדֵד עֲנִיִּים ה' – Hashem encourages the humble (Tehillim 147:6). Just like Hakadosh Baruch Hu encourages us — people are downcast, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu constantly is offering them consolations and encouragement. We don't always

stop to notice them, but life is full of consolation, all around us. If not for them, we wouldn't be able to continue. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is fulfilling this in the best possible manner. And for step number four of your steps to greatness, go out of your way to encourage a fellow Jew; make a donation of a few encouraging words every day.

Now, the home is a prolific opportunity for this step. Encourage your wife and tell her, "The supper was very good tonight." Now I want people to listen to that — married couples should listen to this prayerfully because people are doing the opposite. Your poor husband, when he comes home tired from a day in the *kollel* or the factory, or your poor wife, after a day in the kitchen with the children making her crazy — if you are willing to donate one or two words of encouragement, you must know that you're accomplishing something tremendous!

Encouraging Children

Children also have burdens; they might not be *your* burdens but in their own eyes they have very big burdens. And you can put your shoulder under their heavy packages and lighten their load by encouraging them with kind words.

Now, this does not preclude giving a smack. A smack is a salutary thing — it has a benefit at the right time — but most of the time, a *glett*, a caress on the cheek, is the best option. A kind *glett* and words of encouragement can do wonders. Children who are encouraged in the home learn better. They are more neat in their habits. They are cooperative if they are encouraged. It's a tremendous mitzvah, a tremendous step to greatness, if you'll encourage your children.

But don't do it just because of your *wife* or your *husband* or your *child*. Have in mind you're doing it because of your *program*.

Now, even though the Jewish home is the scene where this can be carried out in the best possible way, for our program you can encourage a stranger, too. There isn't a human being who cannot use a few drops of balm on his heart. It's a world where

everyone has some troubles, some worries, and every human being appreciates some kind words of encouragement.

Say to somebody some encouraging words, but not with the intention of flattering them. No; you're doing it because it's a principle — in order to become great you must emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu Who encourages people. And you'll say some words that give that person a little more energy, a little more courage in doing good things.

The Letter-Writing Campaign

You can even write a postcard — don't sign it — and say, "Mrs. So-and-So, I must tell you that your little boys, when they come to the synagogue, are so well behaved and they're so well dressed. I see you're doing a good job." And don't sign it. Mail it. You're doing a very big mitzvah. She'll never forget it. She might even frame it. Anonymous letters of kindness can do a great deal of good to encourage people.

Spend a few minutes thinking, "Who can use a lift, a good word?" and write him a nice letter. Don't sign your name. Or sign a false name. I do that sometimes; sometimes people are discouraged, so I write, "You have a very good name in this neighborhood. People think well of you." I don't sign my name; I want them to think it's someone important.

Here's a *rav* who is trying his best to introduce in his *kehilla* certain changes to improve the atmosphere. But there are people there who are opposing him. He wanted to make a *chumrah* and people didn't want it. I sent a letter to him encouraging him. I said, "You're right! People admire you!" Do you know what it means to receive a letter of encouragement from a stranger? It's a big lift.

Try it once. Write to your friend and encourage him. Or to your *rebbe*. Every *rebbe* has enemies — that, you have to know. So write him a letter. Say, "Rebbe, we are all for you. We are all loyal to you." It will make him feel good. And so with 32 cents, you

can do a very big mitzvah of encouraging people secretly.

Success in the Yeshiva

Yeshivas are a wonderful place to encourage people. It takes some thinking, some planning, but you can always find ways and means of encouraging others. Your *chaveirim* need it; absolutely they do. There are a lot of boys in the yeshiva that need encouragement.

A *rebbe* calls over his *talmid* and gives him a *glett* on the cheek. He pats him on the cheek and says, “Chaim’l, you’re a nice boy I see. You have a good *neshamah*, Chaim’l, and I think you can make something great out of yourself.” If you’re a teacher, look around. Your pupils need encouragement. There are some who are not getting along well, some are sad, some are broken because of home conditions. Some have poverty. Some are not well. Some have difficulty keeping up with the studies.

You can practice on your *rebbe*, too. After the *shiur*, walk over to him and say, “*Rebbi*, I enjoyed your *shiur*” — even though you didn’t. Honor him and make him feel good.

A Child’s Memories

You see a boy who is *davening* and you stop and say, “I see you’re *davening* well. It’s something special to see that we have such good *frum* boys among us.” You know what that means? He’ll never forget you. I guarantee you! Sixty years later, he’ll remember your face and your voice.

I remember. I remember a *galach* told me something. When I was under thirteen years old, he said something to me, an encouraging word. A *galach*. I’m ashamed to say it, but I remember his face and his name. That’s the power of encouraging words. I remember even the color of his necktie. It’s almost seventy years already and I still remember him. And I want to tell you a secret. Hakadosh Baruch Hu remembers more, for a longer time.

Soothing the World

Certainly, even on the street, even on the bus, if you see somebody who is dejected and depressed and you could say a few kind words, there’s no question that you have done a great mitzvah. Say something to them to assuage, to soothe, to put some balm on their wounds. It doesn’t mean you have to waste a lot of time. Don’t give a lot of gab. A few kind words encouraging him. He’ll never forget it.

One of your functions in this world is to give other people encouragement, and so, for our step number four, we’re going to make sure to do that one time a day — *l’shem* the program.

Step #5: Cheshbon Hanefesh

Let Us Search

Number five on the program of greatness — this is not such an easy one — is *cheshbon hanefesh*; for one minute on the clock every day, think about what happened yesterday, about what you did right or did wrong and how you can improve yourself.

Constantly we are saying these words: “Let us search out our ways.” Again and again, “*נַחֲפֹשֶׁה דְּרָכֵינוּ*” — *let us search out our ways and investigate*” (Eicha 3:40). And *frum* Jews realize how important it is. “Certainly. *Cheshbon hanefesh*. Certainly.”

But the whole world is deceiving Hashem. *בְּפִי וּבִשְׂפִתָּיו כְּבוֹדִי* — *With his mouth and his lips he honors Me*. He says, “I will search out my ways,” *וְלִבּוֹ רָחוֹק מִמֶּנִּי* — *but his heart is far away from Me* (Yeshaya 29:13). He doesn’t think about it at all. Because let’s ask a pointed question: Did you ever stop even for a minute to search out your ways? Isn’t it ridiculous? It’s such a false world. Did you spend time thinking?

A Wise Guy

You should know that there were wise men even among the gentiles who understood how important this is for successful living. There was one wise *goy* who every Saturday night told his family that he was going into a room by himself; “Please don’t disturb

me,” he said. Every Saturday night, he spent time reflecting on his life. A true story — in recent history.

And so every person must keep his mind on what he's doing, on what his behavior was. What did I do today? Did I make use of my time? Did I behave properly? Did I *daven* properly? Did I do my job loyally to my employer? Did I do something to help my children succeed more in becoming decent Jews, *ovdei Hashem*? Did I behave properly to my wife or my husband?

The Tzaddik Nistar

Otherwise, it could be that people, *frum* people, live their whole life in sin. You think you're a *tzaddik* but maybe you're really an ogre. Every criminal thinks he's a nice fellow. A man could be trampling on his wife all of his days and he thinks he's a perfect example of a *frum* Jew. After all, who doesn't think they're a *tzaddik*?

Here's a man, he's trying to kill his wife by saying mean words to her and she's trying to shorten his life by saying mean words to him. They don't want to do it, *chas v'shalom*, but that's what they're doing — they're hurting each other. It affects the health; sure it does. And if a person never searches out his ways, he can go years and years and not change his ways. A whole life of *ona'as devarim*! Each time you say a mean word it's a terrible sin. And it's being done in so many houses! It's terrible what's going on in the houses.

And so *nachpesah* for one minute a day. If you search, you'll find — you'll remember what you said. Oh yes, there's plenty to find. There's no lack of things to discover.

A Rushed Inventory

And so spend one minute a day on *cheshbon hanefesh*, on making a calculation. Now, you need more than a minute for that. One minute is a very small amount of time to make an inventory on your business. A businessman who makes a one-minute inventory will go broke. He needs much much more. But at least one minute! At least you shouldn't be a *shakran*. It would be a great thing if somebody could

boast, “I'm a man! I fulfilled *יְחִינֵנוּ וְנִחְקְרָה*. I spent one minute a day thinking about becoming better.” It's a very poor, little boast, but *halevai v'halevai*.

There's so much to think. “What did I do when I got up in the morning? Did I say *modeh ani* with *kavanah*? When I washed my hands in the morning, did I wash them with *kavanah* like the *kohen* did before he began his *avodah*? When I made the *bracha* of *malbish arumim*, was I happy with my garments?”

Shoes, Belts and Holes

“When I said *שָׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל צָרָתִי*, did I look at my shoes?” Not only shoes — you have to be grateful for the laces, too. Imagine you're running across Ocean Parkway and you don't have laces — you're running, but your shoes are falling off your feet.

“When I said *אֲזִכֹּר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבּוֹרָה*, did I think of my belt which is holding up my pants?” You know how difficult it would be to walk around all day long holding up your pants in the street? A belt is a big *simcha*, a big *yeshua*.

And it's not only a belt — it has holes, too! One for before supper and one for after supper.

Or, “Did I fulfill the ten points of achieving greatness? Maybe I missed something.” That's something to think about before you close your eyes! That's *cheshbon*! Make it part of your routine every night.

And it's of the utmost importance to gain this knack, because once a man learns the art of thinking, he becomes a different man. If you make the time to think about what you're doing, where you're heading, you'll have insights into living successfully that others don't have — you become a different personality altogether.

Prepared for Olam Haba

So start now. Be a wise person and grab the opportunity. At least when you come to the Next World you'll be able to say, “I am a *ba'al cheshbon*. I

thought every day for one minute about the past day.”

One minute? So the *malach* will think “One minute for twenty-four hours, that’s not enough.” But still you’re superior to everybody else because everybody else didn’t even think for one minute. And so if you’ll give one minute of your life every day to think about the past day, I don’t know if you’re a great man, but you’re greater than most people in the world.

Step #6: Eating Lishmah

L’shem Shamayim

Number six. Here is something, it’s a *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch but nobody does it. It’s in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim (*Siman* 231). The name of that chapter is “That a man should do everything *l’shem Shamayim*.”

Now, if you learn that and think, “Ooh-ah! One day I’d like to achieve that. I’ll learn the *seforim* and study the subject,” very good. And if you *do* it, even better. But we can’t wait for that. We take seriously the advice of Shlomo Hamelech — “The wise man grabs mitzvos” — and therefore we’ll choose one detail from this big subject and we’ll add it to our program.

Eating for Him

And so number six in our program is that you should eat *l’shem Shamayim*. Did you ever do it? To sit down and eat *l’shem Shamayim*? At least to say, “I am eating *l’shem Shamayim*.” That, you can’t do? You can’t even say it? So you don’t care at all then. You don’t even try.

Now there are two *kavanos* in eating: One is in Shulchan Aruch. **יִתְבּוֹן שְׂיֹאכַל וְיִשְׁתֶּה ... לְעִבּוֹד אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ** – He should eat for the purpose of serving His Creator. After all, you need calories if you’re going to be working all day in the factory supporting a family. To support a Jewish family — even if it’s your own — is *avodas Hashem*. A mother raising children in the home, that’s *kulo avodas Hashem*. If you’re going

to be in the *kollel*, you need energy for that. And so, when you sit down to eat, does it cost any money to say aloud — your wife shouldn’t hear; she’ll ridicule you; or your husband shouldn’t hear, he’ll ridicule you — “I’m eating now in order to get strength to serve Hashem.”

You’re fulfilling a whole chapter, a whole *siman*, in Shulchan Aruch. You’re fulfilling a *mishnah*: **כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ יְהוָה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם** – Whatever you do should be for the purpose of Heaven (*Avos* 2:12). And you’re climbing one more step on the road up to greatness.

Eating to Know

Now, the Rambam in *Hilchos Deios* (3:3) says that you should eat for the purpose of **לְרַעַת אֶת ה'** – in order to know Hashem. In *l’shem Shamayim* there are a number of intentions and the Rambam chose the most important intention. The Rambam gives us a higher motivation because of all achievements in life, the most important is to come closer in knowledge of Hashem; to be aware of Hashem, to think about Him. And therefore, if you say, “I’m eating in order to become more aware of Hashem,” the Rambam says that’s the higher form of *l’shem Shamayim*.

Now I’m not going to specify which of the two *kavanos*. You can choose. But once a day, you should say it. And then when you eat, try to keep it in mind — at least for the first bite: “I’m eating *l’shem Shamayim*.”

Now, because you’re an **אִוִּיל שׁוֹפְתִים** just like I am — we’re all fools who talk with our lips — so you’ll say, “What’s the use of fooling myself? Am I eating *l’shem Shamayim*? I enjoy the food! I’m eating because I like to eat and I’m hungry. So why should I fool myself? One day, I’ll do it for real.”

That’s the **אִוִּיל שׁוֹפְתִים** he says one day he’ll do it, when he reaches that *madreigah*. No! **חֲכָם לֹב יָקָח** – The wise man takes mitzvos right away. Right away, it’s a mitzvah to eat *l’shem Shamayim*. So say it.

Now, how could you do that? If you’re enjoying it, what’s the *l’shem Shamayim* there?

Add-Ons

The answer is that even if it's not entirely *l'shem Shamayim*, but the *tziruf*, just to add the *kavanah* of *l'shem Shamayim* to your own *kavanos* of wanting to eat, that's already considered *l'shem Shamayim*.

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, **הָבָא לִיטְהָר מִסִּיעִין**, **לֹא** – I'm going to help you (Yoma 39a). If you want to get *l'shem Shamayim*, then **הַחֲצוֹנוֹת מְעוֹרֶרֶת אֶת הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת** – because of your outward act of saying it's *l'shem Shamayim*, I'll help you eventually do it even more."

So even when you're eating chocolate cake, you do it *l'shem Shamayim*. "I'm eating, Hashem, to have *koach* to serve You." That's what you should say. Now, it could be that the chocolate cake is not such a good thing for you, but say it anyhow. Say it anyhow! And after a while you start convincing yourself, and you'll be eating *l'shem Shamayim*.

The Chemistry of Bread

I'll tell you something else, another way to eat *l'shem Shamayim*. You're eating a piece of bread, a plain piece of bread, and you think, "Ah! What a miracle, a *neis* from Hashem, a piece of bread is." After all, you know what a piece of bread is? It's nothing but wind and sunshine combined.

That's the truth in chemistry. The wind has carbon dioxide in it and it goes into the plant and the sunshine, the sunlight, takes the carbon dioxide and makes it into starches and you eat that. And that becomes you.

The Chemistry of You

You know, once you were a little boy like this, this big. Your mother carried you on one arm. Now she can't carry you on one arm anymore. Now you're 180 pounds. Where did all the rest of the pounds come from? It came from what you ate. What did you eat? You ate wind and sunshine. That's the truth.

Even if you ate meat, from where does meat come? A cow produces meat, but it doesn't eat meat. It eats grass, that's all. Where does grass come from? Grass comes from wind and sunshine. That's all. A

minute part of it is supplied by the soil. And there you have it. So you are nothing but wind and sunshine. It's a fact. Only with water added. Wind and sunshine and a lot of water.

And so when you're eating food, it means you're taking a miracle of wind and sunshine — you couldn't make food out of wind and sunshine; nobody in the world could do it, only Hakadosh Baruch Hu — and now you're taking it inside of yourself and it's going to give you energy. The energy to think. The energy to talk. It's the wind and sunshine that's talking. The wind and sunshine give you the power to hear.

All the motors that work in your body, even the pumping of your heart, are energized by the energy that the sun poured into the carbon dioxide that you ate. And when you eat it releases that energy. That's why you're a living being and that miracle is Hakadosh Baruch Hu's achievement.

So you're eating *l'shem Shamayim*. You're eating to recognize Hashem's miracles in this world.

One Meal a Day

Now, I'm not saying that's the *only* way you should eat *l'shem Shamayim*. If it's too difficult for you, so be *yotzei* and say just these words, "I'm eating *l'shem Shamayim*!" And you have fulfilled number six in the steps to greatness.

Not all the meals; that's too much to expect of you. Just once. Choose either breakfast or lunch or supper, and before you start, say, "I am eating *l'shem Shamayim*," and have in mind that's number six on your program.

Step #7: Tzelem Elokim

Reflection of Godliness

Number seven in the program of greatness: The Torah at the beginning tells us a very important principle, and if we would realize its importance we'd see that it's a foundation of *kol haTorah kulah*: **וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ** – Hashem created man in His image; in the image of Hashem He created him (Bereishis 1:27).

It's a tremendous principle, a tremendous fact! Man is created with a *tzelem Elokim*, in the image of Hashem. *Tzelem* from the word *tzel*; it's a reflection of Hashem. Every human face is a reflection of Elokim.

Even Me?!

Now that's very difficult for us to comprehend. Do you mean to say my ordinary face? There are millions of faces. My ordinary little face, a face of dust, a face that is just chemicals, this face reflects the image of Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

“Yes!” shouts the Torah! No doubt about it *at all*! Because your face is like a screen and your *neshamah* is a projector — the *neshamah* projects on your face the glory of the human soul. And the human soul has in it the greatness of Hashem! וַיְנַפֵּחַ בְּאַפָּיו – Hashem breathed into a man (Bereishis 2:7). When someone breathes, he breathes from himself (Tanya 1:2), and so from Hakadosh Baruch Hu there's greatness in the human soul; and that greatness is projected on a living face.

The Spiritual Face

That's why there's no object in the world as interesting to us as a human face. A live human face is the most vibrant and expressive thing in the whole world. You can see the nobility, the greatness, the grandeur of the spirit; and that spirit, you have to know, does not come from the food that the mother ate or that the child ate as it developed a bigger body. No; from eating bread and butter and other things, you don't develop spirit. So the spirit came only from one Source, from the Source of all the spirits. And therefore, the image that's on a human face is actually a Divine image.

The fact that we don't recognize it is because we have meat on our eyes. Instead of eyes, we have the eyes of animals, of cows. And therefore we have to train ourselves to look at a human being and see the beauty of his visage, the nobility of his face, the greatness of the expression.

Frum Faces are Best

And so, that's going to be our step number seven to greatness: Once a day, pick a face — not a gentile face. If you're a man, pick a man's face; don't look at a woman's face. Pick a man's face. If you can find a very *frum* Jew, pick his face and look into his face and think, “I am seeing the *tzelem Elokim*.”

Women: choose a woman's face. There are very *frum* women — in your encounters during the day, you'll meet at least one *frum* woman. Look at her face. You don't have to stand and look for an hour. Just look for a few seconds and think, “That's *tzelem Elokim*,” and know that it's as true as anything else. It's *Toras emes*. There shouldn't be the slightest doubt in your mind. If anything is true, that's one of the most true statements that you could ever make; only you have to get accustomed to the idea. You have to train yourself.

Hashem's Perspective

It's a good idea to think about what the Gemara (Sanhedrin 58b) says, a remarkable statement: הַסּוֹטֵר לֹעֵזוֹ שֶׁל חֲבִירוֹ – If “A” slaps “B” in the face because he got angry, בְּאֵילוֹ סוֹטֵר לֹעֵזוֹ שֶׁל שְׁכִינָה – it is as if he slapped the face of the Shechinah of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Now, don't think it's poetry in order to make people behave. It's *Toras emes*. Only we're ruined. We're spoiled by non-Jewish ideas and therefore many people harbor in their minds a wickedness. They see a face, it looks to them like a monkey. Only a monkey has more hair and he's brown; this face is a little pink. But still it's just a face. That's a ruination! It means a mind, a *neshamah*, has been destroyed by thinking that way.

Instead, we have to learn to think like Hakadosh Baruch Hu thinks. When He said that — *b'tzelem Elokim* — that's how He looks at a human face. And so, if Hakadosh Baruch Hu regards your face with such endless respect shouldn't we ourselves do the same? Seeing a face should remind you of the glory of *kavod Shamayim*.

And sometimes, if by accident you look in the mirror, don't lose the opportunity. You could fulfill point number seven on yourself. You're looking in a mirror; you see a *tzelem Elokim*. The Gemara (Shabbos 50b, Vayikra Rabbah 34:3) says you have to wash your face every day because that's the statue of a king. If the king gives you a statue of himself, he expects you to dust it off and make it clean every day; the Gemara says that. So when you're washing your face, if you want, you can fulfill step number seven. Before you walk into the bathroom, say, "I'm going to now fulfill step number seven. I'm going to wash my face. I'm washing the statue of the King, the *tzelem Elokim*." If a mother washes a little baby's face, she can also fulfill this step: "I'm washing the face of *tzelem Elokim*."

You have to work on that. Because just talking about it in general like everybody else does and not doing anything, that's *לאויל שפתיים*. But a *חכם לב*, he takes *mitzvos* and right away he starts. "Right now I'm going to start considering when I see a face, I'm going to consider it's actually a picture of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's Face!"

Now it's terrible to say such a thing. How do we have the audacity?! But what can we do? Hashem said it already. All we have the right to do is repeat His words. And so when I look at your face I see the nobility of the Shechinah on your face. "*Shechinah*!?" you say? Maybe if you're a big *tzaddik*, a *gadol hador*. No! Anybody. We're not talking about a face of *reshaim*. You're a *shomer mitzvos* over there and I'm looking at your face. Your face may be lined with worry, with anxiety. It makes no difference. You have a face that Hakadosh Baruch Hu regards with the greatest reverence, so we surely should revere your face. And therefore once a day make an attempt on that. I guarantee you the results will be tremendous.

A G-dly Smile

Number eight: In *Birkas Kohanim*, we say, *יָאֵר ה'* *פָּנָיו אֵלֵינוּ* – Hashem should cause His face to shine on you (Bamidbar 6:25). Now, the Tomer Devorah, a beautiful little *sefer*, says that we should emulate Hashem's ways. We ask Him to cause His face to shine on us, and He does. When His face was shining on us, He gave us the Torah: *כִּי בְאוֹר פָּנָיו נִתְתָּ לָנוּ ה'* (Sim Shalom). That's how great it is when Hashem's Face shines on us. So the Tomer Devorah says, if that's the case, then let your face shine on your fellow man. It means you should smile to your fellow man. Once a day, smile at your fellow Jew.

Now, I know you smile all the time – at least you'll claim that – but do it one time every day just because of step number eight on the road to greatness.

Here, you see somebody coming, a man. Women should smile to women, men to men. Somebody's coming and you think, "Here is my chance now to be *mekayem* this *mitzvah*." And if he's a sour-faced man, even better, because it's harder to smile at him; it's more of a *mitzvah*. So make up your mind and give him the full pleasure of seeing a countenance smiling upon him.

If you have nobody to practice on, so *b'shaas hadechak* you can practice on your father and mother. Smile on them at least. You can smile at your wife. She might be surprised. She wasn't ready for that. But it counts; it counts for the program.

Now, you have to train yourself to do that. It's difficult. It's false. It's a mask. But you'll get Olam Haba for doing it anyhow.

Kelmer Smiles

I told you this story. The Drobyaner Rav once went to visit the yeshiva in Kelm. In Kelm, they trained their boys with good manners. The Rav came in and he was standing in the vestibule. A yeshiva *bachur* came out in the hall and he was

smiling at the Drobyaner and so the Rav was thinking, “I see he’s an old friend of mine.” But he was ashamed that he couldn’t recall his name. “I see he’s a good friend of mine, but I can’t place him.”

When this young man went away, the Drobyaner Rav was standing there in the corridor thinking, “Who is he? Where did I meet him before?” And then another man walked out of the *beis medrash* and did the same thing. A big smile. The next minute, another *bachur* comes out of the yeshiva and gives him a friendly smile. Then the Rav caught on. “Oh, that’s the system in Kelm! That’s how they greet everybody.”

Slabodka Torah

And so, *פָּנֵינוּ אֵלָיֶךָ*, *Yar ha’* – let your face illuminate, shine, on somebody. There’s nothing like smiling at a person, to give him strength and happiness and health. The Gemara says that, but before I tell you the Gemara, did I ever tell you the story of how Rav Isaac Sher came to Slabodka?

Rav Isaac Sher was once in a yeshiva far away from Slabodka. He never dreamed of coming to Slabodka. He ended up in Slabodka and he became the Slabodka *rosh yeshiva*. How did he happen to come to Slabodka?

He once was present when a person was saying a Slabodka *shmooze*, a *torah* he had heard in the Slabodka Yeshiva. And this man was telling about a certain person who used to come with a can of milk every morning and stand on the street in front of the *beis hamedrash* to give milk to passersby. In those days, people weren’t so fastidious about drinking from the same cup, and he had one cup. And as each person came out, he ladled out some milk from the can, poured it in the cup, and gave each person a cup of milk to drink. They made a *bracha*, drank the cup of milk, made a *bracha achronah*, thanked him, and walked on further.

So this man was a public benefactor; he was helping tens of people, hundreds of people, every morning. The truth is that when this man passes away, a monument should be put up for him because

he has a *chelek* in everybody’s body. You know, a cup of milk in the morning is going to be a very big benefit to a person. Everybody knows milk is nourishing. Milk has a lot of calcium and other good things. The calcium goes into the bones. And the fat of the milk and all the other components – it’s very nutritious – become part of your body. It gives you *koach*. It makes people happy and strong. It makes you live longer. And this man did it every day. All those people who passed by, part of their bodies were contributed by him. And so this man is *זָכוֹר לְטוֹב*, absolutely.

Better Than Milk

“Now,” the Slabodka speaker continued, “as great as that man is, there is another man who did even better than him. Better? How can you do better than that? So the Gemara (Kesubos 111b) says *טוֹב טוֹב הַמִּלְבִּין שֵׁינָיִים לַחֲבִירוֹ יוֹתֵר מִמַּשְׁקָהוּ חֶלֶב* – *showing your white teeth to somebody in a smile is better than giving him milk to drink*.

“A smile that goes into a person is even more effective than a glass of milk. A smile reinforces a person’s whole nerves, his character. Everything becomes different. It’s a different day. And so the man who hands out smiles, the Gemara says, is better than that great benefactor who ladled out milk.”

Now, when Rav Isaac Sher heard that *shmooze*, he decided to come to Slabodka. He traveled to Slabodka to learn and eventually became the *rosh yeshiva*. But it was that *torah* that won him over; to hear a Gemara explained so clearly, to take seven words from the Gemara and bring it to life. That’s what he wanted to hear.

And we have to hear that all our lives: We have to keep in mind how great it is, how helpful it is when we smile at people. And we’re emulating Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He wants us to fulfill *וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדִרְכָיו*, to walk in His ways. We should emulate Him. He is always smiling on us. When the sun is shining, He’s smiling on us. When things are going well, He’s smiling on us. He’s giving us His great love and it’s expressed in the form of *he’aras panim*. And

therefore, the Tomer Devorah says that we should try, in our own small way, to emulate Him.

Smile Once a Day

And therefore, when you smile at your fellow man, even if you do it once a day, and even though you don't mean it, that's already a step in the right direction. You're only doing it because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to do it. You're doing it *l'shem Shamayim* or you're doing it because you want to climb one more step to greatness; that's also *l'shem Shamayim* because "greatness" means you're coming closer to Hashem. And so, once a day, do that. Give somebody a nice broad smile. Whether you say something or not, that's a different story.

Now, don't look back and say, "I smiled already ten times today so therefore why should I do it once more?" No. Those ten times don't count. You have to do it once *l'shem yichud* this purpose of coming closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu by the ten steps of greatness.

Step #9: My Clothing, My Glory

Hashem's Clothing

Number nine in the steps to greatness: *Malbish arumim* – Hashem clothes the naked. וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּישֵׁם – Hashem made for Adam and his wife garments and He clothed them (Bereishis 3:21).

Now the question is raised, why did He have to make garments? It states previously that Adam and his wife sewed up leaves. They made some garments for themselves.

And the answer is Adam and his wife understood on their own that there has to be *tznius*; a certain amount of decency in the world. You can't have a civilized society unless the *ervah* is covered up; that should be out of sight. No matter how much the New York Times will preach the opposite, anyone with half a brain understands that; in a civilized society, there's no such thing. And so Adam and Chava covered up.

Advanced Clothing

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to them, "My children, you're making a big mistake. You don't understand. Clothing has to have a more important purpose than that. I approve of what you did, but there's a much more important purpose. Clothing is to let yourselves know that you are unique in the universe. It's to make you dignified."

Clothes make the man. You become dignified through them. Like Rabi Yochanan said, "מֵאַנִי מְכַבְּדוֹתִי" – my garments give me dignity" (Bava Kamma 91b). Clothing means you're a human being.

Imagine: A man is walking almost naked in the fields and he sees deer running by. He sees sheep. He sees rabbits. And they look almost like he does. They have feet. They have ears. They have eyes. So after a while, he comes to think he's one of them. He's more important maybe; he's better than they are at surviving. He has a better head. But still, he's one of them. And that's the most tragic error in the world. The greatness of mankind becomes lost.

It's lost in all the colleges today. What does the college think? That you're just a better edition of the gorilla. You're a more successful chimpanzee. The chimpanzee didn't make it.

And therefore they behave like chimpanzees in the colleges. Today, the colleges are places of jungles – only I'm afraid it's an insult to the jungle to say the colleges are like jungles. Animals behave better.

Clothing for the Soul

And so Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Adam and his wife, "Clothing is not merely to cover the nakedness. It's to show who you are. You have a *neshamah* in you! You have a greatness! You're a *tzelem Elokim*! You are so unique that there's nothing in the entire universe that compares to your greatness. Even *malachim*, even angels, are beneath you in greatness. You have free will and you are able, if you deserve it, to come to the Next World in such a state of happiness that no *malach* will ever attain. That's how great you are. And to demonstrate the

superiority of mankind, you must be clothed. You must wear full garments.”

Not even *part* should be exposed; your arms shouldn't be naked because they look like a horse's front feet. Don't wear shorts. If you wear shorts, the whole thigh is naked and somebody who looks at you will be reminded of the back thighs of a horse. He might even say, “His thighs are like a horse's.” Be covered up. That's the greatness of mankind.

Early-Morning Philosophy

Now, when we put on garments in the morning, we don't have time to stop and philosophize that long, but for our program we should spend thirty seconds — a half a minute, *minimum* — thinking about our garments, what a gift they are to us from Hashem.

If you want to think along the lines of what you just heard, good. If you want to think, “Where do garments come from?” also good. All the garments come from the soil. Cotton grows from the soil. Wool comes from sheep who ate grass that comes from the soil. Wool doesn't come from sheep who eat wool. If the sheep ate wool, they wouldn't produce anything. They'd die. The sheep take grass and produce wool; and grass comes from the soil. So your garments have grown out of the soil.

Garments come out of the soil?! It's a miracle. It's a special gift. It comes from Hashem. And so you might want to use the thirty seconds thinking about that, how this miracle of clothing reminds us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the One clothing us.

Appreciating Your Shirt

If you want to think in that half minute what a benefit it is to have buttons, excellent. Suppose we didn't have any buttons. In the olden days, what did they do? They took a chestnut or a stone and put it in here and they made a hole over here and they took the hole and pressed it over here and the stone was sticking out in the cloth on the other side. And when you went to sleep, you took the stone and put it on the floor. In the morning it was dark; you had to go on hands and knees to look for the stone in

order to button up your shirt. But now it's right there. It's sewed up tight. And they're even waterproof; when it's laundered the buttons don't melt away. When I was a boy, the buttons used to melt away. They don't melt away anymore today. Do you appreciate buttons? A blessing to have buttons!

And here on the front of your shirt it's doubled up. You know why it's double? Because if it wasn't doubled, the buttonhole would tear more easily; it would be too big after a while. And so it's doubled in front. Also, the buttonhole is reinforced all around with stitching. Wonder of wonders! Could you do that? You couldn't do it yourself. So you have to thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for every detail of your clothing!

Suppose your shoe strings didn't have iron tips on them and they went out of the hole. How would you put them back in? You'd have to spit on the end and twist it and if it's dark you would miss the hole each time. You'd try and try again. But, *baruch Hashem*, there are iron aglets! (*In the early 1900's, before use of plastic became widespread the aglets were made of metal.*) Where does iron come from? Iron is buried in the ground. An accident? It's an accident, the *meshugaim* say.

It's purposeful! Hakadosh Baruch Hu buried iron in the ground for people to use. Animals don't use any iron. Do sheep use iron? Do monkeys use iron? Nobody uses any iron, only we. So Hashem put it there for us. So the shoe string is a great gift.

Two Words

There is a lot to think about. A half of a minute won't do any justice — but *at least* that. As you're getting dressed, say, “I'm going to spend a half of a minute, thirty seconds, contemplating my garments, and I'll say just the words ‘*malbish arumim*’ aloud.” Just these two words. Later I'll make a *bracha*. Right now, “*malbish arumim*” aloud.

So we'll sum up. Point number nine, you're going to say aloud “*malbish arumim*” and think of one of these noble ideals connected with garments. Whether it's the greatness of mankind, or the

kindliness of Hashem, or the miracles of how it comes out of the earth, or all the conveniences we have today — pockets, buttonholes, buttons. Whatever it is, you should get in every day a half a minute of thought, and that will lead you up to greatness.

Step #10: Remember Yerushalayim

Higher Than Happiness

And now we come to number ten: אִם אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ – If I shall forget you, Yerushalayim, תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי – let my right hand forget its cunning..., אִם לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׂמֻחֹתַי – if I shouldn't remember Yerushalayim even in my greatest happiness (Tehillim 137:5-6).

Here is a great happiness. A young woman finally found a good chosson. And he found a nice kallah. And they're standing under the *chuppah*. It's a great happiness. They're getting married.

What do you do? You take a glass and you break it. Everybody shouts *mazel tov*! It's like it's a signal for *mazel tov*. But the glass is not for *mazel tov*. The glass is to remind us of our great tragedy, the destruction of Yerushalayim. It's not *wrong* to say “*mazel tov*” at that time — it's at the end of the whole ceremony — but the glass is a sadness.

The Ancient Vow

Now, how can you bring sadness into such a great *simcha*? Why should we do that? The answer is we made a *neder gadol*. The Jewish nation made a *neder* that we won't forget Yerushalayim even in our greatest happiness. אִם לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עַל רֹאשׁ שְׂמֻחֹתַי – If I won't remember Yerushalayim even in my greatest happiness.

So how can our days go by without thinking of the olden Yerushalayim where prophets, *nevi'im*, walked in the streets and the Shechinah dwelled in the city? The Beis Hamikdash was in the heart of Yerushalayim and everybody felt the presence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Every house in Yerushalayim

was a little Beis Hamikdash. We have no idea of the nobility and *kedushah* in every family in Yerushalayim.

Now, this should be spoken about at length. It's a pity people don't understand that, what was in Yerushalayim. And it's gone. Yerushalayim today is just a name, “Yerushalayim.” Even though Meah Shearim is beautiful, there are nice people there, but it's nothing at all like the Yerushalayim we had in the days of old. Even in Yerushalayim when they make a wedding, they break a glass, because אִם לֹא אֶעֱלֶה אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם; that's the old Yerushalayim that we lost.

Tikkun Chatzos: The Abridged Version

And so for number ten, listen to me. The following thing I'm going to tell you in secret and don't tell it to anybody else because they'll laugh at you. Every day, when nobody is looking, sit down on the floor for just a second and think about the destruction of Yerushalayim. Get up right away before your wife comes in! Every day, before going to sleep, if possible, do that. That's the best time.

Now, many Jews in the days of old used to say *tikkun chatzos*. When I was a boy, I used to say *tikkun chatzos*. Unfortunately, it's forgotten today. It's in the big *siddurim*, *tikkun chatzos*. The Lelover Rebbe said that his mother used to wake him up — little children — late at night and they all sat down on the floor with her and she said *tikkun chatzos*. They were crying — they wanted to go back to sleep — but she didn't let them sleep. She woke them up in the middle of the night to sit on the ground and to mourn for the destruction of Yerushalayim. קוּמִי רוּנִי בַּלַּיְלָה – Arise and sing out at night and weep for the destroyed Yerushalayim (Eicha 2:19).

And Jews did that in every generation. Not everybody, but very many people did. They got up at night, sat on the floor and wept for Yerushalayim. And the *navi* says don't stop weeping for Yerushalayim. תִּדְרֹג עֵינֵי לַיְלָה – Don't stop. וְלֹא תִדְמָה – Day and night weep for Yerushalayim (Yirmiyahu 14:17).

Conclusion: Open the Needle Hole

Help is on the Way

And so these are the ten points. We sat here together and spoke about them, but now you have to review them on your own, memorize them, and begin practicing them.

And I want you to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to be present at each of these ten things you do. As long as you desire to make headway in life, He'll help you succeed. בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂאֵדָם רוֹצֶה לִילָךְ – In the way that a man wants to walk, מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ – he is being led (Makkos 10b). Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “קָרַשׁ אֶת עַצְמוֹ מְעַט – you make yourself just a little bit holy and I'll make you a great deal holy. פִּתְחֵי לִי בְּחוֹדוֹ – Open for Me a doorway in the size of a needle hole – a needle hole is not a big doorway, וְאֲנִי אֶפְתָּח לָכֶם בְּפִתְחוֹ שֶׁל הַיָּכַל – and I will open to you a doorway as wide as the entrance to the Beis Hamikdash. I promise you,” Hashem says, “these steps are going to bring very big results.”

But suppose you don't even open a little needle hole? Then no help will be forthcoming. They are effective only if you do them. If you listen to them and don't do, nothing gets promised to you. And doing means if you'll do them again and again. Then you are assured *min haShamayim* of big results.

Now, I want to add a word of caution. If you start this program, it could be that after thirty days you'll be knocked out. You'll be tired. And so if you need it, take a vacation and stop. Wait six months and then get back into business again for thirty more days. The next time you can wait five months. You're strong enough to take it now. After a while, who knows? You might do it all the time.

And so I give you my best wishes. *Bracha v'hatzlacha!* Do it! *Yikach mitzvos!*

Will you forget about them sometimes? Probably. But if you keep a small notebook and mark it down every day — check it off; did I do this and this and this? — that will help. And when you do forget or you weaken in your resolve, so you start fresh the next day.

So at least once a day we can do it — it could be in the daytime, too, but nobody should see. Quickly sit down on the floor and think, אָם אֲשַׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַיִם – If I forget Yerushalayim, תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי – my right hand should be forgotten. Do it in order to remind yourself of the *churban Beis Hamikdash*, of what we once were in the days of old, of the greatness that we once possessed.

Even though you live in a mansion, you live in a beautiful palace in Boro Park let's say, and maybe you have servants and money and furniture; you have everything your heart desires. No. You're in exile. It's a *rachmanus* on you. You have lost the pride, the crown of your head — that's the ancient Yerushalayim where the Beis Hamikdash was like the jewel in the midst of our nation and the Shechinah dwelled among us. So how is it possible that we should forget that entirely, and days and days go by until Tisha B'Av comes and we sit down and remind ourselves? All year round not?

Mourn for Greatness

And therefore, we'll come back now to what we said at the beginning of this subject. הָכֵם לֵב יִקַּח מִצְוֹת – The wise man seizes the opportunity to do mitzvos. He doesn't keep on postponing. “Oh yes, someday, when I'll be old, I'll be *mekayem tikkun chatzos*.” I'm sure there are *frum* people here who see it in *siddurim*, that old *nusach*, and they hope someday, someday, someday... and it never happens. Their lives go by and they don't fulfill the promise. They do forget Yerushalayim. So once a day — nobody has to see — sit on the floor for a second and mourn for the Yerushalayim of old.

And don't tell this to other people. They'll say, “What crazy things is he telling you in that place?”

So listen to me, my friends. If you want to be somebody, you have to be a little bit crazy. If you're too sane, you want to be a wise guy, you'll be nobody. That's why most people never make a step ahead in life.

Rav Nachman Breslover in one of his *seforim* (Shivchei HaRan 5-6) relates that when he began his career as an *oved Hashem*, he fell down many times. Sometimes, a hundred times a day he fell down; but he wasn't discouraged. He got up and said, "This time I'm going to remain standing." He fell again. Each time he rose again and fought back. And that's the career of all good people. They fall and they fall, but in the end they are going to conquer.

If you do it even once, only one day, you're also somebody. You're unusual. Nobody else does it. And all your life you'll say, "Well, *once* I allowed myself to be persuaded. I acted silly for a little while, but I'm not sorry at all."

But if you forge ahead on all ten fronts, oh, that's the way to greatness. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will see that you're serious and He'll help you succeed. And even though it's only a little wave, a little push ahead, but that wave travels. You know nothing is lost in energy. When you knock on this desk it's not lost. It travels through the earth to China. It doesn't get lost. That's the law of conservation of energy. Only it's so diffused when it comes to China, that you won't notice it anymore. But nothing ever goes lost. No energy goes lost.

And with Hakadosh Baruch Hu it surely won't go lost. And He's going to keep you in mind and He'll carry out His promise to you: "If you open up for Me *כְּפֶתְחוֹ שֶׁל מַחַט* – *even like a needle hole*, I'll open wide for you *כְּפֶתְחוֹ שֶׁל הַיֵּכַל* – *like the entrance of the Beis Hamikdash*." And so as long as we keep trying, more and more, again and again, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will reward us for our efforts. And with His help we'll enter the Beis Hamikdash of *kedushah* and *shleimus*.

Have a Kesivah V'chasimah Tovah

**This week's Let's Get Practical
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Q&A

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שאלות ותשובות לרב אביגדור מילר ז"ל

QUESTION

If I want to accept upon myself to begin learning a *mussar sefer* in order to get ready for Rosh Hashanah, which *sefer* do you recommend?

ANSWER

I would advise, if you really mean business, to learn *Mesillas Yesharim*. Now, you may have a taste for other *seforim*, but *Mesillas Yesharim* you have to know is tried and tested. Generations have succeeded by means of that *sefer*. It has a tremendous effect.

When the Gra saw that *sefer* and he read the first eleven *perakim*, he said that there's not even one single unnecessary word. He said that if the *Mesillas Yesharim*, if Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, were still alive in his days, he would walk on foot to Italy and make him his *rebbe*.

So I would advise you, in case you don't know what to do, to learn *Mesillas Yesharim*. You won't regret it.

TAPE # E-157 (September 17, 1998)

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