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SEFER DEVARIM - THE MEVORACH FAMILY EDITION

FOR THE HATZLACHA, BRACHA, HAPPINESS, HEALTH,
ZIVUGIM AND SUCCESS OF OUR FAMILY AND ALL OF KLAL YISRAEL

TORAS AVIGDOR

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

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פרשת עקב

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

One Hundred Blessings

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Part I. Brachos for Gratitude

What Does He Want?

“What does Hashem want from me?” That’s a question that everyone should ask themselves one time or another – and probably very frequently – because the answer to that question is everything. If we want to accomplish things in this world, it’s a question that should concern us all the time.

In this week’s *parsha* Moshe Rabeinu is speaking to the Am Yisroel and he says to them as follows: וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה'שֶׁמֶלְאִלְקִיד שְׂאִיל מֵעַמְּךָ – “And now Yisroel; what is Hashem asking from you?”

Oohh wah! Jackpot! That’s our question! And we can hear an answer now from Moshe our Teacher who is speaking the Word of Hashem: “You know what He wants from you? לִירָאָה אֶת ה'שֶׁמֶלְאִלְקִיד, בִּי אָם – only, to fear Hashem your G-d, לֵלְכֶת בְּכָל הָרָכִיו, – and to walk in all of His ways, וּלְאַהֲבָה

וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת הַשֵּׁם מֵאִלְקֵיךָ בְּכָל לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ – and to love Him, Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul, לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת מִצְוֹת הַשֵּׁם וְאֶת חֻקֵּי
אֱתוֹ – and to keep all the mitzvos of Hashem and to keep all of His laws (Eikev 10:12-13).

Now, there's a lot in that *possuk* – He's asking a whole lot of things from you – it seems like He's asking for everything! It's a load of work; a program for a lifetime.

Difficult Path of Heroism

And so, if you want to get started, it seems you have to gird up your loins and start learning Shas. Learning the whole Talmud will certainly bring you closer to all of the ideals enumerated in that *possuk* – only that it'll take some heavy lifting to achieve that.

And Shas is not enough. You'll have to learn Mesillas Yesharim and Sha'arei Teshuva and the Chovos Halevavos – other *seforim* as well – and you'll have to learn them cover to cover and do it many times! It'll take some heavy lifting to achieve such a comprehensive program; nobody said greatness come easy! It entails many difficulties and a great deal of self denial.

Now I'm not saying that learning Shas and *mussar* is the only way – it could be there are other ways as well, but whatever it is there's no question that any path you take will require heroism and heavy labor. To achieve all those qualities of perfection is not going to be easy. You have to prepare yourself for a long career of hard work.

Seeking the Easy Path

And so when we study that *possuk* – even superficially – we should be quite surprised by how Moshe Rabeinu introduces us to all of these great ideals: **מָה... כִּי אִם** – “What is it that He's asking of you already? Only this...”. *Ki im* means ‘only this and that's all’. Only this?! That's hard to understand because we see that what Hashem wants of you is *everything*.

But if that's what Hashem is saying – that's the *pshuto shel mikra* after all – so we'll have to admit that there must be some simpler way of accomplishing these great ideals.

There must be an easier path for us to climb this mountain of greatness because if it was difficult, if from every angle there was no easy access to the top, it wouldn't make sense for the Torah to use such words – “What is He asking from you already?”

Blessings Are the Key

In Mesichta Menachos (43b), Rabbi Meir quotes our *possuk*, וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה'שֵׁם לְאֱלֹקֶיךָ שׂוֹאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ – What does Hashem Elokecha require of you? and he says as follows: Don't read the word “מָה” – What does He wants of you,” but מֵאָה – “He wants *meiah*; He wants a hundred.” Instead of *mem hei*, we stick an *alef* in between and now it reads *meiah*, a hundred.

A hundred what? So Rabbi Meir goes on and says, חֵיב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ מֵאָה בְּכָל יוֹם בְּרִכּוֹת – Everyone is obligated to make one hundred *brachos* every day. Rabbi Meir used the sharp and witty style of the Sages and he put a play on words, אֵל תִּקְרִי מָה אֵלָּא מֵאָה – You want to you know the way, that easy way to come close to Hashem? Instead of saying מָה, which means easy, say מֵאָה – one hundred *brachos*.

Now, it's important to realize that all the *drashos* of Chazal are inherent in the plain meaning. It's not merely a memory aid; it's actually included in the *pshat* of the *possuk*. And so we must understand that this verse מָה ה'שֵׁם לְאֱלֹקֶיךָ שׂוֹאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ, includes the duty of saying one hundred *brachos*. But not only the duty; it's the key!

You want to fulfill what Hashem wants from you? You want to come to *yiras Hashem*? You want to love Hashem and walk in His ways, and all of those great subjects in the *possuk*? So our Sages are telling us that the easy way, the way of *mah*, is by means of *meiah*. חֵיב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ מֵאָה בְּרִכּוֹת בְּכָל יוֹם – A hundred times a day you have to thank Hashem, that's the *easy* way to come to all of those great perfections enumerated in the *possuk*.

Discard the Catalog

So you'll say I'm exaggerating – *meiah brachos* is the key to perfection?! Making *brachos*? That's A,B,C's – it's kindergarten talk! We're talking now about big subjects, great pinnacles of perfection, and you're saying *brachos*?!

But that's what Rabbi Meir is telling us here; the *hakdamah*, the preface to *yirah* and *ahavah* and all the good things in that *possuk*, is to make a hundred *brachos* every day.

Now don't go and tell me a catalog of the *brachos*. Some think it's a matter of counting; here's how they work it. There's 19 *brachos* in the *shemoneh esrei* you say three times a day so that's 57 *brachos* and you hear *chazaras hashatz* twice a day, it's 38 more. And before you even said the *shemoneh esrei* of Shacharis there's 30 *brachos* already (Mishnah Berurah 46:14). And now you exceeded the limit and all that time you didn't even thank Hashem once.

No. Forget about technicalities. Of course if a man makes a hundred *brachos* a day, no matter how he makes them, we accept him. There are people who don't make any *brachos* and so we're happy with this man who is fulfilling the technicalities. But is that man fulfilling his destiny in life which is to fear and love Hashem? *Meiah brachos* means a hundred heartfelt expressions of thanks.

Rediscovering Brachos

Now, if you're going to hark back to your concept of what a *bracha* is, then the whole talk will be in vain. A *brachah* is not just *Baruch Atah Hashem*, you mumble some words and finished. Even if you're not mumbling – let's say you're saying the words slowly with *peirush hamilos*, even that is not the *brachah* we're talking about here.

In order to get the benefit of this idea, you must act like you never heard of the term *brachos* before. You just became *geirim* now, and for the first time in your lives you're hearing there's such a thing as a *brachah*.

Why do we say *brachos*? I'll tell you a secret now, something I heard from my *rebbe* in Slabodka. He was telling us what the Kuzari (3:13-17) says, a remarkable statement explaining one of the reasons for our *brachos*: וְיוֹסִיף לוֹ עֲרֻבוֹת עַל עֲרֻבוֹת, שְׂיִכְרֹד תָּמִיד – *It adds pleasure on pleasure when one says blessings*. You hear that? Eating an apple is a pleasure, certainly. But what type of pleasure is it if you don't concentrate on enjoying it? Sometimes you'll just gobble it down and you only remember you were eating an apple when you get to the core and you need to find a trash can. So the Kuzari says that one of the reasons for our *brachos* is to enhance our pleasure. Before you eat the apple, you stop and you feel gratitude for it. Ah! Now you can dig in and enjoy it!

But my *rebbe zichrono livracha*, when he taught us that, he argued on the Kuzari. He said it's not "one of the reasons" for making *brachos* – he said it's *the* reason. It's the most important one. Because that's how you'll become a person who lives a life of gratitude to Hashem – you'll walk around in your home, on the street, everywhere, feeling grateful to Hashem for everything He's giving you.

Ungrateful Boys and Girls

Grateful?! That's a secret to many people. Last week I was walking on Kings Highway with a young man, a yeshiva man, and he asked me: "Why should I be grateful to Hashem?" I took a look at him. He wasn't wearing crutches. He didn't have braces on his feet. He didn't have a brace to hold his neck up. He seemed to have a full set of teeth – at least

they didn't look like false teeth. He looked to be quite well-nourished as well, and he didn't seem to have slept the night on a park bench either. And he was clothed – it wasn't too shabby. And this yeshiva man asked me, "For what should I be grateful to Hakodosh Boruch Hu?" He was serious – he was asking with sincerity.

It's the same as a little girl, a girl of sixteen who refuses to wash the dishes. "What am I getting out of you?" she says to her parents. The nice ones don't say it, but they think it. She refuses to even pick up her own stockings in the morning when she runs off. She never brings the garbage out; she doesn't do a thing in the house. She only has one complaint against her parents – "What are you doing for me?"

That means, besides giving me free lodging – no rent is charged for the bed she sleeps in – and besides giving me three meals a day and clothing, what else are you doing for me? Besides for paying her doctor bills, besides paying for dental care, besides for paying her Beis Yaakov tuition. When she washes her face, when she puts on the light in her room, she's using her father's hard earned money. And besides all that, later when she decides to do a very big *mitzvah* and choose a *kollel* man, so she'll confer upon her poor father the privilege of supporting him and her for the next five years. And she thinks she's doing a big *mitzvah* – "I took a *kollel* man!" On whose shoulders? On her old father's shoulders. It's a great ideal and a tremendous *mitzvah*! But it's her father's doing. And still, she's thinking, "What am I getting from you?"

Gaining Gratitude

So you'll shake your head, *tsk, tsk*, when you hear about this inconsiderate girl, but actually she's just a *mashal* for all of us. Most people in this world – I'm talking even about the good ones – they think Hakodosh Boruch Hu is not giving them anything. "What am I getting from You?" they're thinking. Now, they won't tell you that; some self-esteem they have, but you can be sure that's exactly what they're thinking: "What is Hashem doing for me?" And I'm afraid that most of us here tonight, even though we're polite enough not to say that, but in our heart, that's what we're thinking.

And that's what a hundred *brachos* a day are for. A hundred *brachos* means that one hundred times every day you have to make yourself aware of the gifts you're enjoying all the time. Because what is a *bracha*? It's an expression of gratitude. Otherwise it's not a *bracha*, it's just words. Of course, you fulfill your obligation *al pi halacha*; you won't make a second one. But that's not what the Torah meant.

And if that's the case then we have a lot to talk about because our job now is to discover all of these gifts that Hashem is giving us. Don't think you can just get up now and go home; don't think you know all about it. It's only the beginning of the talk and it needs an explanation. So hang around yet because there's a great treasure we have to uncover.

Part II. Daily Gratitude

Join The Club

Now, I have to warn you – it'll be fun practicing up seeing the kindness of Hashem in our lives but it's going to take work; good things don't come *that* easy. But we'll do it together. We'll have a club; a walking club and we'll walk through life together.

Imagine we have an appointment, all of us here, to meet tomorrow morning on the corner of Avenue R and Ocean Parkway. Six o'clock in the morning – that's the best time of the day – we'll begin our walk. And we'll walk together on the avenue and we'll study the happiness of life.

Now, before we meet up you're going to have to wake up and get out of bed because it won't be much of a walk if you don't wake up. You know that some people didn't wake up this morning; not everybody is so lucky. And so as soon as you open your eyes, you should remember that and give thanks to Hakodosh Boruch Hu that He allowed you to get up in the morning. "*Modeh ani lifanecha*, I thank You Hashem for waking me up this morning." It's actually fun to get up in the morning – only that nobody thinks about it! It's something you should practice enjoying.

Appreciate Life

Do you ever go to a *shiva* house and you have nothing to talk about? You come in – **וְהַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם** and you walk out. It's something, it's still a *mitzvah*, but there's something more you can accomplish even on the way out. What's the first thing to think when you walk out? "*Baruch Hashem*, I'm alive!" You hear the *chiddush*? When you're *menachem avel*, the first thing to think about when you walk out, as you're going down the steps to the street – "*Baruch Hashem* I'm alive." Even better, say it.

Now, if you're working on this *meiah brachos* program for greatness so you don't wait for the *shiva* house *rachmana litzlan*. That's how you wake up every morning! "*Baruch Hashem*, I'm alive!" You just discovered the happy news that you woke up again! You have to be grateful for that.

Appreciate Functions

So you're alive now and you go to the bathroom. Ah, the pleasure of urinating. Don't say "it's just nature". A lot of people don't have such natures; they have very much difficulty. But for you it goes smoothly and you should enjoy the moment. You can take my word for it, if you put your mind to it it's a tremendous happiness. The Gemara (Berachos 57b) says that going to the bathroom is a taste of *Olam Haba*; it's such a pleasure! Don't be afraid to enjoy; don't be ashamed to enjoy what Hashem is giving you – that's the purpose of all of these functions.

I know a very wealthy man who cannot urinate. He has no kidneys anymore. If he could walk into a bathroom and perform like any ordinary person he'd be delirious with happiness. He told me he remembers the good old days when he could urinate normally. Oh, what a happiness it was when he walked into the bathroom! If he would come up here and teach us how to say *Asher Yatzar* that would be a lesson. You come out and "*muh, muh, muh, muh.*" That's how you say thank you?! If you're happy, you don't just say *Asher Yatzar* – you sing it.

Of course, if you didn't study it, if you don't think about it there's nothing to sing about and mumbling a *bracha* is better than nothing. You're at least a *frum* Jew if you mumble the *bracha*, but it's a pity. You're losing the great opportunity of achieving all the perfection that *meiah brachos* can bring to a person.

Appreciate Mobility

Now, I skipped a lot of steps here. Because you didn't urinate in your bed; most of you didn't wet the bed in the morning. You *walked* to the toilet. Ahh! Walking is a *ta'anug*. If you'll think for a moment that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is giving you the blessing that you're able to move your feet; you can move your thighs – they swing effortlessly in the socket. You can move your knees. They move so perfectly in their sockets. You can move your ankles in their socket. And your toes too you can move – each one in its own socket. And all these sockets are functioning at one time perfectly! Not to mention the coordination of the muscles. Every muscle that's extended has another muscle that's pulling in the opposite direction. You should know, you're a trapeze artist when you walk. You balance yourself and move with perfect ease and facility.

So as you walk, you should be enjoying those gifts. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'שֵׁם הַמְּכִינֵן מַצְעָרֵי נֶגֶר. Thank You Hashem for this pleasure of being able to walk normally. There are a lot of people who can't. There are some people who

cannot function because of their toes. Everything else is perfect – but if their toes are fused and they won't move in the socket properly, then they have misery and very great suffering. If the ankle is fused, it won't move. Even if the knee is a tiny little bit inactivated it can be excruciating pain to move it.

Appreciate Vistas

So suppose you were successfully and gracefully able to walk out of your home and now we meet up on Ocean Parkway for our walking club. We are already delirious with happiness but now we are going to discover some new pleasures. The sun is coming up now and we see a beautiful blue sky. Don't miss that opportunity!

“Why is the sky blue?” Isn't that a *klutz kasha*? Why is the sky such a beautiful sapphire blue? So you have *chachomim* who come along and they say – they read this in a science book once – that as the sunlight reaches the earth's atmosphere it's scattered in different directions because of the gasses and particles in the air; and for a certain reason the blue light scatters more than the other colors.

Very good, but that's not the reason *why* it's blue. It's describing *how* Hashem makes it blue but it's not the reason. I'll tell you a secret – it's good you came here tonight. Hashem made the sky blue so that you'd enjoy it. The color blue is soft and sweet on the eyes (Chovos Halevavos, Bechina 5), and you're expected to enjoy that. Isn't that a good thing to practice?

See if you can do it tomorrow morning. Go out onto the street tomorrow, look up at the blue sky and say, “The sky is a beautiful blue and Hakodosh Boruch Hu made it that way because He wants me to enjoy it. Me! That's the purpose and I'm not going to let it go to waste.”

Appreciate It

Now don't be a spoilsport and say, “Well, there are a lot of other people in this world besides me. Am I going to say He made the sky blue because of me?!” The answer is, yes. That's what the Gemara says (Berachos 58a): אֹרֶחַ טוֹב מָה הוּא אומֵר – what does a good guest say? A good guest, when he walks into a house and sees a table that's spread with all good things, what does a good guest say? He says like this: כָּל מַה שֶּׁטָּרַח בְּעַל כָּל מַה שֶּׁטָּרַח אֵלָּא בְּעִבְלִי הִבִּיתָ לֹא טָרַח אֵלָּא בְּעִבְלִי – whatever the host labored to do, he did only for me.

So as the good guest walks in and he sees cucumbers, he sees egg salad, he sees chopped liver, he sees whiskey, he sees cake; about every item he sees, he says, "The host put it there for me."

Now, it doesn't mean he should eat it all up. That's not the intent of that *ma'amar*. What it's telling you is that as you look at it, you're expected to squeeze all of the enjoyment you can from what you see – and feel gratitude. You have to think, "The host put it there for me to enjoy." That's how you walk through this world. That's the right attitude. "Hakodosh Baruch Hu is painting a blue sky for *me* to enjoy." Once you get that attitude, then you're looking at the universe with the true perspective.

Appreciate Rain

Now suppose, let's say our club walks out and this time the sky is not blue – instead it's overcast with gray clouds. Oooh! That's a glorious opportunity! הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים – *He who covers the skies with clouds*. That's a different opportunity than the blue sky from yesterday. הַמְבִּיךְ לָאָרֶץ מָטָר – *He's preparing rain for the earth* (Tehillim 147:8). What does that mean? Who cares what He prepares? The fact that He prepares rain is important?!

Yes! הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים – *When He covers the skies with clouds*, הַמְבִּיךְ לָאָרֶץ מָטָר – *He's preparing rain for the world; for us*. Gray skies are not only gray; cloudy skies means yellow oranges, pink peaches with rosy cheeks, red apples, purple grapes – they all come from rain. All good things come from rain. Dovid Hamelech looked up at the clouds and felt gratitude and he said, "Don't make any mistake about it. הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים – *He's covering the skies with clouds*, and I thank Him for that!"

And therefore, whether the sky is blue or gray, it's an opportunity for happiness. Now, there's no *bracha* that you make on the sky, but gratitude you have to feel! You say, "Thank You Hashem for making me happy by means of Your beautiful sky." We have to study the sky and say those words until it finally creates an impression that causes us joy. And if you'll work on this again and again, and finally a sapphire blue sky actually makes you happy, then you know that you're getting there.

Appreciate Flowers

Once you practice up on this attitude, you begin to enjoy everything. You open our eyes and all around you see glorious things, beautiful things. There are beautiful gardens on Ocean Parkway. Some of our neighbors hire gardeners and it costs them thousands of dollars a year merely to tend their gardens.

So as you pass by, you might think, “Well, he does it for himself, not for me.” No, that’s what a bad guest says: **אוֹרַח רָע מְהָ הוּא אֹמֵר** – A bad guest says, “Whatever he did, he did for himself. He didn’t do it for me.” That’s a twisted way of thinking,

You know, I enjoy the gardens more than the householder who pays a thousand dollars to the gardener. I look at the flowers and I enjoy the beautiful colors to no end. In the springtime I see them just coming out and I watch them growing every day. Beautiful red and yellow and purple and orange flowers are blooming all over. I stop for a minute to study them. It’s a happiness!

You can keep your thousand dollars in your pocket and enjoy other people’s gardens. The whole Ocean Parkway, all the way down to Boro Park is all gardens, all happiness. Look at them, study them; it won’t cost you a penny. He’s breaking his back pulling up weeds and we pass by and we enjoy it to no end. The grass is beautiful; the colorful flowers are a pleasure to look at. Ah, ah, ah; how nice it is! Put all these things in your head and in your heart and become happy by looking at them.

The Fun Road to Perfection

And therefore, when we walk out into the world and we begin to see the things of the world, we must understand they are for us. They’re all for us. The fact that it’s for someone else too, that doesn’t detract. It’s for you. And by means of these noble thoughts you’re training yourself to enjoy yourself in this world the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu intended.

That’s the royal road to greatness! Isn’t that a fun road to perfection? Because while you’re working on developing gratitude and attaining perfection, you’re becoming happier and happier. You’re becoming an *ashir*, a rich man, without spending a penny. **אֵיזְהוּ עָשִׁיר**? *Who is rich?* It’s up here (*the Rav zatzal pointed at his head*) that you find happiness. Your wealth is in your mind. And your money remains in your pocket.

Part III. Filled with Gratitude

Appreciate Seeing

Now, once you get the hang of it, you’ll see that it’s not so hard to do. From your own mind you’ll be able to add onto the happiness of *meiah brachos*. Because you’ll think, “How do I see the sky and the gardens anyhow?” You can’t accomplish that feat without eyes. “Ribono Shel Olam, what would I do without my eyes?!” Ah, eyes! Ay yah yay, eyes! Eyes

are a happiness that most of the world is not enjoying. They're using it, yes, but enjoying it? *Ah nechtigeh tug.*

And therefore, we have to practice up enjoying our eyes. Can we even describe the happiness of seeing? It's impossible to describe that pleasure. You see life, you see movement, you see color, you see your family, you see the world – what a happiness it is!

So as we're walking in our walking club tomorrow morning down Ocean Parkway, let's not forget – at least one full block, from corner to corner – you're looking and thinking, “Ahh! I'm using these two cameras in my head and I'm enjoying it to no end.”

Healing the Blind

It takes a long time for these things to penetrate our thick skulls but if you want to know that it's so, all you have to do is wait until you encounter a man with a white stick tapping his way. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap. Take a good look at him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu saw that you're slow in understanding so He sent someone to teach you a lesson. This poor fellow is waiting at the street corner and someone has to take him by his arm and bring him across. *Ay yah yay*, what a pity. What a tragedy!

Think – what would he say if he suddenly could get a pair of eyes like yours? How would he make a *bracha*? You think he'd mumble בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ פִּקְחָה עֵינָיו...? That's how they say it in *shul* in the morning – *yeshiva* boys also; the best of them. The best of them rattle it off and they count it towards the hundred *brachos*! Technically, maybe it counts; maybe it's a *bracha* and you can count it, but that's not how to enjoy a gift.

A man who appreciates his eyes, he says thank you like a man drinking the most precious champagne, sipping every word. *Boruch* – ah, ah, ah! *Atah! Hashem!* Every word is a diamond! The man tapping his way on the street would shell out a hundred thousand dollars to the surgeon to regain his eyesight. He'd be eternally grateful to him. He'd call him up every year on the *yartzeit* of his operation.

And Hakodosh Boruch Hu did it for you for nothing. He's not sending you bills; He doesn't ask anything from you except that you should enjoy your eyes. Not just to make a *bracha* – that's not what He's asking. He wants that you should enjoy them – you should be so happy with your eyes that you *feel* like making a *bracha*! That's a big job already!

Appreciate Teeth

Now, our walking club is still walking down the street; don't forget that. We still have a lot of *brachos* to make, a lot of happiness to enjoy. So let's say you'd have coins in your pocket, so you could cause the pocket to shake as you walk, and when you hear the change in your pocket, it's reassuring; it's a happiness. Let's say you have a pocket full of quarters and you shake your pocket and the change is jingling in your pocket – it feels good. It sounds good.

But suppose you have nothing in your pocket; you have no money to jingle. So click your teeth instead. Click click. Teeth are better than money! In the olden days – not so long ago – when somebody grew old and he lost his teeth, he was finished with life. If he had a nice granddaughter, she used to take an apple with a knife and scrape off some mush and give it to the old *zeideh*. He couldn't eat, he couldn't chew, but a little mush he could slurp. But you young fellows, you're rich! Most of you have a mouth full of teeth! *Ay yah yay*, teeth! What a happiness!

If you're eating with your own teeth then you're a lucky fellow – you already have everything. Even false teeth cost money. You have false teeth? Thank Him! So whether you have false teeth or your own teeth, you have to study your teeth. You have to be rich in the knowledge of what you have growing from your gums. A mouth full of teeth is a happiness!

Appreciate Lights

Now, let's imagine the day is almost over and the sun is going down. All good things have to come to an end and our walking club has to break up for the night. We have to go home; our wives and children are waiting for us and so our laboratory work of enjoying the gifts of Hashem must end now. Tomorrow morning we can meet again.

Oh no! It's not over yet. When you walk into the hallway in your home and put on the switch, you're suddenly bathed in light. Do you thank Him for electric lights? Electric light is a very good thing. I remember when I was a little boy, we didn't have electric lights – only gas lights, no electric lights! I remember that! The house didn't have electricity. And then electricity came – it's *mamish* like sunshine in the middle of the night.

Do you ever thank Hashem for the electric lights? How can you live without thanking Him? The answer is, every week you thank Him. Every Motzoei Shabbos you say, **בֹּרָא מְאֹדֵר הָאֵשׁ** – you thank Hashem for artificial

light. People don't know what that *bracha* is all about. They think it's just a ceremony. No, **בּוֹרָא מְאֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ** means you're thanking Hashem for artificial light. If you spend a little time thinking about how much you benefit from artificial light, you'll love Hashem for that. "I'm thanking you Hashem for all forms of artificial light; fire, incandescent, fluorescent, everything."

Appreciate Your Home

But that's only the light switch. You know how much happiness a home is?! A wife, children, four walls, a roof, plumbing, radiators, stairs and banisters and hot water and light bulbs and closets and windows – the pleasures are endless! Hashem gives us all good things in the home.

But it's getting late and now it's time to put on pajamas and climb into bed. Pajamas! We could talk about the happiness of clothing and pajamas all night. The buttons and the stitching around the buttons; it's an endless happiness.

But it's too late for that now. And so the last detail of our happiness voyage for today will have to be sleep. You have to be grateful and thank Hashem for sleep. Every night you say it: **הַמַּפִּיל חֶבְלֵי שְׁנָה עַל עֵינַי** – *You give me the ability to fall asleep!*

Appreciate Sleep

When you fall asleep, it's a miracle. And that miracle is a gift. You know some people can't sleep anymore *chalilah*. An old man told me, "*Ich hub farloren dem shluff* – I lost my sleep." He meant he lost his ability to sleep. It's a pity on him. To lose such a precious gift like the sweetness of falling asleep, that's a tragedy. Sleep is more important than food.

But you still have it! So you put your head down on the pillow – most of you have pillows; you're not sleeping on the ground – you have a bed, don't you? So as you fall away into dreamland you're still thanking Hashem. That's the last thought you have as you drift off into your sweet sleep. "Thank You, Hashem for giving me a pillow and a mattress and for giving me the gift of sleep. I love You Hashem." And in a few hours we'll be getting up again to say *modeh ani* again and to start loving Hashem all over again.

Be Sincere

Now, I understand that what we're saying here tonight, if it was said to an ordinary congregation of *bnei Torah* – so they would think it's a waste of time. "I didn't come here to hear such things – it's too simple." To

many people, they think it's just talk. Well, if that's what they want, that's what it's going to remain.

But I'm talking now to people who deserve credit because they came here for a purpose; people who are *mevakshei Hashem*; they are seeking Hashem. And to such idealists we can propose this plan of using the world to enjoy the *chessed Hashem* and to be constantly thanking Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

That's the way for a Jew to live! Of course, at first it's only artificial but little by little it grows on you. You can't do it all the time? So at least a hundred times a day you should do it. The more you do it the more successful you are, but a hundred times that's the bare minimum. And that means a hundred times a day you have to stop and enjoy the world – and you enjoy it so much that you feel a sincere gratitude to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

And not only will you be enjoying the world, but the most important thing is *you'll be enjoying Hashem's world*. That's very important! It's always Boruch Atah Hashem – You Hashem are giving me this and this and that and that. My underwear is a gift from You. My fingers are from You. And my heart and my ears and the sidewalk and my shirt.

Growth by Gratitude

And that's going to be the solution to the great problem of how can we gain all these things that Hashem is demanding of us: *to fear Hashem, and to walk in all of His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul* and so on. Because it's a problem, a real problem: How do we come to all those forms of perfection? We're ordinary people living in an ordinary world. How can we achieve all of these great levels of *avodas Hashem*?

The answer is that *avodas Hashem* starts when a man understands what Hakodosh Boruch Hu did for him, when he studies all the benefits that are being showered on him. Not only today! A man can say – even a seventy year old man – “How fortunate I am that I was born! How many miscarriages take place in the world and I made it! I'm not a cripple! I'm not blind! I have so many limbs and so many organs, and every one is functioning and each one is a miracle of plan and purpose.”

And after a while he begins to ask a big question, a very big question. מָה אֶשִׁיב לַשֵּׁם כָּל תְּגֻמּוֹלוֹהִי עָלַי – “What can I do to pay back to Hashem for all that He's doing to me?”

And that's what Rabbi Meir comes to teach us – that the key is hidden in the *possuk* itself. **אֵל תִּקְרִי מָה אֵלָּא מַצָּה** – What does Hashem want of you? A hundred *brachos*. And from those hundred *brachos*, you'll attain “all of the components of the complete service that is pleasing to Hashem” (*Mesillas Yesharim*, *Hakdamah*). Rabbi Meir tells us that by means of this easy way – or *relatively* easy way – of appreciating all of the good things that we are enjoying, that's the key to success.

And you're going to see that this is not only the road to come close to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, but this road will also be the royal road to fulfillment and happiness in life. After a while you become happy with so many things that you actually are a happy man. You'll actually appreciate the gifts. And the happiness will last all your life – and not only all your life, but it will last you into *Olam Haba*. If we'll enjoy this world one hundred times a day, and if we express our gratitude to Hashem each time, that's the road not only to happiness in this world, but to the perfection in *avodas Hashem* that brings you eternal happiness in the World to Come.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Growing in Gratitude

Even the “bare minimum” of a saying hundred genuine *brachos* every day seems almost out of reach when we're starting out. This week, ten times every day, I will *bli neder* say thank You to Hashem for something that He is giving me – every day, ten separate gifts, ten separate expressions of gratitude.

Once I get the hang of it, I'll add on to the total. Next week I'll do it fifteen times a day. The following week, twenty. I'll keep adding until I'm in the habit of thanking Hashem all the time!

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Should a yeshiva man seek a marriage that gives him enough money to ensure his future in a kollel?



And the answer is yes – that's the answer. Unless he doesn't want to continue in a kollel.

And you must know that even though learning Torah for years after marriage is in itself a great blessing, it's a blessing not only for him – it's a blessing for his wife too. She's a *kollel* wife, a different kind of wife, and the children are *kollel* children, a different kind of children. Everything is different – it's a different life afterward. Even though later he leaves the *kollel*, it's already a different family forever and ever.

However, despite the fact that this is a valuable way of settling one's affairs, he should not make the error of selling himself to the wrong party just because of learning in a *kollel*. It's important to know that a wife is in itself a *shleimus*. How lucky is the man who can get a woman of valor, an *eishes chayil*. Many times a poor girl, without any money at all, but her ambition and her zeal, and her idealism can push him to greatness in Torah. And besides greatness of Torah in *kollel*, there's greatness all the days of his life. The right kind of a wife can encourage a man to learn all day Sunday and all day Shabbos and every evening – there are plenty of people who are forging ahead to greatness even without being in the *kollel* just because they married the right woman.

And don't forget, children are very important too; and if the woman is not the type who wants to raise a family then you're frustrated. עמלינו אלו הבנים – Our toil, our achievements, are our children. And therefore, a woman who is willing to have a big family and she has the spirit to bring them up *b'derech haTorah*, that itself is a big wealth. So therefore the best thing is to marry a woman of that kind; if she happens to be very wealthy too, that's the best *shidduch*. But you must use your judgment not to sacrifice the virtues merely for the sake of the ability to learn in *kollel*.

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