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PARSHAS BEHAR

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION

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Part I. Your Precious Mind

Welcome Home!

At the end of the *sedrah*, we read about two Israelites who because of their poverty are forced to sell themselves into slavery – one who sells himself to a Jew and the second who sells himself to a gentile. And now, when the Yovel comes, the *pessukim* describe how they are both going to finally go free again.

And yet we note a significant difference between the two. By the first, the one that was enslaved to a Jew, it says, וְיֵצֵא מֵעִמְךָ הוּא וּבָנָיו עִמּוֹ – *He shall go out from you, he and his children with him*, וְיָשָׁב אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ – *and he shall return to his family...* (Vayikra 25:41).

But the Israelite who goes free from a gentile, it's missing those last words: The Torah says וְיֵצֵא בְּשָׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל – *And he goes out in the Yovel year*, הוּא

וּבְנָיו עִמּוֹ – *he and his children with him (ibid. 54)*. Full stop. It doesn't say anything about him going back to his family, to his brothers and cousins and uncles.

Now we know that actually he *does* go back to his family. Nothing is stopping him from returning to his ancestral village, to his life the way he lived before he sold himself. He's a free man now.

Family Friction

But the Torah here is teaching us something very important. He has the full right to return to his family, of course. But his family, *they* have to beware! Because of his years of sojourning with gentiles to whom he had voluntarily sold himself, Hashem urges his family, his acquaintances, to beware of seeking his company.

Certainly he should be redeemed and should become free to return to all of his ancestral privileges. But Hashem warns us here: This man's ideals and attitudes were influenced by his gentile master, and he should not be permitted now to affect the family.

It's a very important lesson the Torah is teaching us here, about how careful the Jew must be to avoid gentile influence. Even a *frum* Jew, because he lived among the gentiles you have to beware of his influence. You have to beware of what he might do to you, what damage he might cause you or your family.

Now, such a thing seems too extreme to us. After all, this man didn't sell himself for no reason. He was impoverished. He needed to feed himself, to feed his family, that's all. And he's a relative and a fellow Jew. And he's Orthodox too. It's not talking about someone who doesn't believe in Hashem, who doesn't believe in Torah min haShomayim. There was no such thing in those days. Every Jew was *frum*. Some more, some less, but every Jew was a *maamin*. And so how could it be that the Torah gives such a *psak* – to beware of this person who has acquired some of the gentile influences by living among them?

Value of the Mind

But the truth is that we don't understand it only because we don't know what it means to have a good mind – how valuable the mind is, how sensitive it is, and most importantly the results of having a good mind.

So we'll listen to someone who *did* know. In Mishlei (4:23) Shlomo Hamelech gives us a good piece of advice: מְבַלְ מִשְׁמֶר נֶצֶר לִבְךָ – *More than anything that you guard, you should watch your heart*, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים – *because from it come all the results of life*.

Now, Shlomo uses the word *lev* in that *possuk* but we already said here many times, we proved so, that in the entire *Tanach* wherever the word *lev* is mentioned, it refers to the mind, to the thoughts and the attitudes. It's not emotions alone like we think today when we say 'heart'. 'Heart' in *Tanach* means understanding, intelligence, mind. And therefore Shlomo is saying as follows: **מְבַל מְשָׁמֵר** – *More than anything you guard*, **נְצֹר לְבָבְךָ** – *guard your mind*.

Guarding Everything

Now, we understand that the Torah requires us to guard very many things. *Al pi Torah*, you must guard your safety, your life. You have to lock all your doors all the time. There are crazy people, people who belong in prison or in the electric chair, walking the streets day and night. So guard your life! See to it that your doors should have good locks on them. Windows too; windows should be secured all the time. Especially when children are around. Don't be careless about windows that are open when children are playing.

But not only your life in general you have to guard; in details too. You have to guard your teeth. A person has to see to it that all his teeth remain with him as long as possible. You have to brush your teeth every night before going to bed. Otherwise, they'll rot and fall out. You have to guard everything that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives you in the body. It's a *chiyuv*.

Outside the body too. You have to guard your property, your possessions. It's a Torah obligation. You cannot waste or let your property go to ruin. Nothing comes into your possession by accident. Everything we possess is given to us as a charge, a trust by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He elected you to be His treasurer.

And so a *frum* Jew is a careful Jew. There's no such thing as a careless Jew. There are just too many things he has to guard, so many areas of life where he has to be on guard, so many valuable things that he must stand guard over.

Guarding the Important Thing

But all of those things pale in significance when compared to the most important thing we have to guard. **מְבַל מְשָׁמֵר** – *More than anything that you guard*, **נְצֹר לְבָבְךָ** – *guard your mind*. Shlomo is telling us here that more than you guard your money, and more than you guard your health, you have to guard your mind. Your mind is more precious than anything else.

And he goes and explains: **כִּי מִמְּנוֹ תוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים** – *Because from your mind, from the kind of mind you have, is going to come all the results of life*. But not only life in this world. 'Chaim' means life in this world and in the Next World; the kind of mind you have, that's the kind of life you're going to have forever.

All your eternal happiness forever and ever in the World to Come depends on the kind of mind you acquire in this world.

Three Precious Pounds

We are in this world primarily to gain a mind; to take our three pounds of brains and make it a Torah brain. And therefore *mikol mishmar*, more than you guard your money, more than you guard your life and your children's lives, *netzor libecha*, guard your mind. Because as important as everything else might be, there's nothing more precious in the world than what's in between your two ears.

Suppose you were carrying up here in your head not three pounds of brains but you were carrying three pounds of diamonds. And let's say anybody who would catch you on a dark street could *chas veshalom* split open your head and get rich – so you wouldn't walk alone even in the daytime. You'd have to walk with armed guards.

And therefore you have to know we need armed guards now too. You see when they're delivering money at a bank, two guards jump out. One is carrying a bag of money. The other one is pulling out a gun and watching. That's a lesson for us. Next time, you should stop and watch that. It's a *marshal* for you. At your ears you have to put an armed policeman. Every ear has to have a policeman to watch. And in front of your eyes. And you have to guard it more than those guards who protect the delivery of money because there's nothing more precious in the world than your mind.

You're Extremely Sensitive

Now, there's a second reason why we must guard our minds more than anything else. And that's because besides for the mind being the most *valuable* thing you'll ever have, it's also the most *sensitive*. That's a very important point you're hearing now – there is nothing in the whole universe as *sensitive* as a man's mind. Your mind is subject to influence from outside more than the most sensitive mechanism.

I'll explain that. Let's say you are full of Torah. You're loaded with Torah up to your nose. And in addition to Torah, you're *l'havdil* loaded with all secular knowledge. You know everything. You can answer every *apikores*. You read all their books. You know what to say. And so you're full of knowledge up to the gunwales. Your mind is some kind of mind! It's very impressive!

The Effect of Empty Words

And now you're walking down the street and coming towards you is a ragged, down-and-out tramp. The fellow, you're certain, can barely read. Write? It's a very big question. He probably doesn't have a nickel in his pocket

and you're sure he has the kind of pockets that couldn't keep a nickel anyhow. From head to toe he's a failure. And this flop of a person, as he passes you by, he calls you a 'Dirty Jew.'

Now you just came out of the bath while this fellow has forgotten the day when he was last in a bath. He smells like a horse's stable on a bad day. And so you know by logic that this remark has no place. It's nothing at all. And yet it's discouraging.

Don't say it's not so. There's no man who doesn't feel a little bit discouraged. It doesn't mean that you're going to change your Judaism. But a word, even from the lowest person, directed even to the most intelligent and most successful, finds a mark.

And that's because the mind of a human being is the most sensitive of all instruments. If something goes in, it makes an effect. And not a passing effect. It'll rankle in your mind. This most precious of all possessions, the possession that is your life in both worlds, is also the most sensitive, the most vulnerable, thing in the world.

Part II. Guard Your Mind

The Open Bank

Now, your property, your health, your life, you can follow basic rules that will protect you. If you take the prudent steps required and you're not careless, you'll be safe. Generally, that's enough.

But your mind is an entirely different story; you cannot protect your mind unless you take the most extreme steps, because from all sides you are being bombarded. People, pictures, words, conversations, advertisements. It's a never-ending barrage of influences entering into your mind. And it has an effect. Absolutely. It's impossible otherwise. And that's why the wisest of all men said, **מְכַל מְשֻׁמֵר נֹצֵר לְבָבָה** – more than anything you guard, watch your mind.

People today are doing the opposite. They're busy guarding everything except the one most important possession. Their minds are wide open. Imagine a bank at night, the bank doors are wide open, even the vaults inside are wide open. The president of the bank goes home to sleep; everybody's asleep, there are no guards, everything is open. What would you say to such a bank?

Well, we are worse than that because our bank is wide open. Our ears are open all the time and the eyes are wide open all the time, and anything that wants, can come in.

Wandering Eyes and Open Ears

Here's a man, when he walks in the streets, he stares. This *shoiteh*, he looks everywhere. You're not watching your eyes? There's nothing to look out for?! Don't you realize what's being poured into your head?

He reads whatever he wants. It's a sickness, to read what imbeciles write. Juveniles, crooks, *amei haaretz*, perverts, write books and articles, and people read their words. Oh, the written word!

When your ears are left unguarded so you listen and you hear everything. People sit and listen to a radio; some listen to other things. They sit together with fools and listen.

Let's say Cousin Jack comes with his family and you sit for two hours and listen as he fills your ears with *narishkeit*. Where are the bars?! Where are the walls? Where are the fences? Where are the security guards? All these things that are coming into your mind. Do you know what danger that is? There's nothing as precious as your mind but nobody's on guard!

The Technological Window

And some people invite criminals into their home. They have a special window; you turn a little knob and a big light comes on and criminals climb in through the window. And sometimes for two hours the criminals are there and they're stealing your mind — they're taking your most valuable possessions.

If you would let them climb into that window and take all your jewelry, it's a much smaller misfortune. Suppose he climbed out of the screen and took away, let's say, your wife's diamond ring and your golden watch and maybe \$1,000 cash you keep hidden away somewhere. It would be a terrible thing for you. You'd call the police. Oy oy oy! My gold watch! My savings! And here you've lost your mind; you've been robbed, you're impoverished, you're a pauper.

So he says, "Oh no, they didn't take away my mind, no. No one can take my mind. I'm not such a fool. I can see all these things and my mind remains the same."

It's the biggest deception! It's the biggest *sheker!* Your mind is gone already. You let the most dangerous thing into your head and it's wreaking havoc, destruction. The foreign influences that creep into your head are more dangerous than the most wild animal.

A Crazy Bear is Safer...

Listen to the picture Shlomo Hamelech draws for us. In Mishlei (17:12) he says as follows: פָּגוּשׁ רֵב שְׂבוּל בְּאִישׁ וְאֵל כְּסִיל בְּאִוְלָתוֹ – *It's better to meet an enraged bear, a bear that lost her cubs, rather than to meet a fool with his foolishness.*

Let's study those words. You're walking in the street, and down the block you see an enraged bear coming at you. How do you know it's enraged? You see it's growling, 'Arghaahhhh!' – it's chuffing too – and the saliva is drooling from its mouth.

Why is it enraged? It's a she-bear, and somebody took away her cubs; that's what it means שְׂבוּל. It's a she-bear looking for her cubs that were taken away by hunters, let's say.

Now, a she-bear from whom you took the cubs away, she is ready to tear the world apart. She's wild. She's crazed. And now she's coming down the street and here you are, your luck, you're walking down the same street.

Are you going to walk quietly and calmly toward her and hope that she doesn't bother you? If you're a *meshugeneh*, maybe. But if you have a little *seichel* what are you going to do? You'll hop on top of a car that's passing by. If there are no cars you'll climb a telephone pole. You'll run as fast as you can in the other direction. Whatever it is, you'll risk your life to get away from there.

... Than a Fool

Now Shlomo Hamelech says, suppose it's not a crazed bear. Instead it's a כְּסִיל בְּאִוְלָתוֹ, a fool with his foolishness. It's the man down the block who always stops and talks to you. He talks *loshon hara*. He makes *leitzanus* on *rabbonim* and *talmidei chachamim*. But even if it's not that – let's say he would never do such a thing; but he's a fool so he pours his *shtussim* into your head.

That man is more dangerous than the mother bear. If you see that man coming towards you and you don't skedaddle, so he's going to collar you; then you have to know you're in for it more than if the bear had grabbed you. That's what Shlomo is saying. פָּגוּשׁ רֵב שְׂבוּל בְּאִישׁ – *Better to meet an angry she-bear, וְאֵל כְּסִיל בְּאִוְלָתוֹ* – *rather than a fool with his foolishness.*

A Fool Created

Because when he talks to you, he's not talking into your ears – he's talking into your head. And he makes you into a fool. You can't help it. No matter how much of a Torah mind you have or think you have, no matter how much Torah and great ideals you have already acquired or think you've acquired, he will damage your mind beyond repair.

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So you think, “How could it be? In a second he’ll say something that will ruin me?”

Yes! That’s what a mind is. The mind is so precious, so sensitive, that when the *kesil* is going to say something to you then you should know it’s going to harm you. He talks to you and you become a fool along with him. You will never be able to get out of your head what he put into it. It enters your mind *and you remember it forever and ever*.

Forever Ruined

You hear that? Forever! And I’m saying that on the *smach* of an authority, a great authority. Everybody knows that Rav Yehudah Halevi, the Kuzari, is a very careful writer. He doesn’t say any *meshalim* or any *guzmaos*. Every word is measured. In fact, he says too few words; in a few words he puts a great deal of thought.

And here’s what he tells us. He says the things that you heard in your youth – he’s talking there about songs, about romantic songs that you heard in your youth – *לֹא תִתְקַבֵּן עֲלֵיהֶם הַתְּשׁוּבָה* – *It’s not possible to do teshuvah, to repent for it*. It means that even though you’ll repent, even though you’ll fast, and even though you’ll shed tears, you’ll never be able to take it out of your mind.

Now it doesn’t mean you’ll think about it all the time. It doesn’t mean it will be in your conscious mind. It might go down into the subconscious. But it will remain forever. As long as you live, it will be there.

Forgiven But Not Healed

Now that doesn’t mean you can’t repent for the sin. If you did something wrong, you listened to something wrong – let’s say *chas veshalom* you went into a movie. Nobody should ever dream of such a thing, especially nowadays. If you walk into a movie nowadays then you have a very small chance of ever coming to the Next World, no question about it. And by the way, spread the good word. All the Jews, men and women, boys and girls, should go away from movies as if from a house of leprosy, a house of plague. Don’t even walk close to the entrance; like the halacha of *אָמוֹת עַל פֶּתַח בֵּית זוֹנָה* (Avodah Zarah 17a). Walk away from it. *הִרְחַק מֵעֲלֵיהָ דְרָבְרִיךְ* – See to it that your path is not close to the movies. It’s such a *makom tamei*.

But suppose a person did go into the movies. Then he has to know he’ll never get it out of his head again. Now for the sin, he can do *teshuvah*. He can repent. How much does he have to do to repent? He should go to some rabbi who will teach him how to repent. It’s very important.

But he has to know that whatever repentance he does it's still not going to remove the thing from his mind. It's like a man who in his anger once cut off his hand. He was angry so he chopped off his hand. And now he can't put on *tefillin* anymore. So he repents. He regrets and he cries and begs for forgiveness. Very good. But he can repent from now until the end of his life and the repentance will only remove the sin; but the *tefillin* he won't be able to put on because the hand won't grow back again. And the mind is not different. Once it's corrupted it will never regain its complete purity.

Now that doesn't mean you should give up. No. You should keep on adding good thoughts, adding Torah, keep on thinking *emunah* and wonderful ideas of nobility of mind to cover it up; bury it deeper and deeper. But it's there, however. It's not out. And that's why we have to guard the mind more than anything else.

Part III. Guard Your Home

Your Precious Home

And so we come back now to this man in our *parshah*, this relative, a brother or cousin, whose mind was subjected to gentile influences. Of course it was. He lived among them; he lived in a gentile home and had a gentile master.

And now he wants to come back home; to return to his homestead and to his family. And so the Torah warns us to be very careful; beware, because your mind is too precious, too sensitive, to allow such a thing.

And it's not only *your* mind. He should 'return to his family' means to return to a Jewish home. A Jewish home! That's not something to sneeze at. If the mind is precious, then a Jewish home is much more precious because it has many minds, many Jewish minds.

It's the minds of your husband and your wife. It's the minds of your children, little children, older children, children that will one day be building their own homes. That's something that requires a *shemirah me'uleh*, an especially high level of guarding.

It's Not "Bubbeh Maasehs"

Now when we hear that it means very little to us. It's like water off a duck's back. And that's because we've lost touch with the ancient Jewish home.

I say 'ancient'. We've lost touch with the holiness of the Jewish home of even just a hundred and sixty years ago. Why do I say a hundred and sixty

years ago? Because a hundred and sixty years ago the great majority of the Jewish homes answered this description.

The *mashgiach* of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Poland, Rav Yerucham once said – he said this about eighty years ago – he said “*Mir kenen nisht farshtein unzer elter bubbas* – We can’t even understand the greatness, the holiness, of our great-grandmothers.” You hear that? Not the *tzaddikim*. Not the great-grandfathers. *Our great-grandmothers!* ‘Beyond our comprehension,’ he said.

Now Rav Yerucham wasn’t a *baal guzma*. He didn’t exaggerate and we have to take these words very seriously. And he said that because our ancestors, our great-*bubbehs* and great-*zeidehs*, had Torah minds, and they lived with an outlook on life that was a Torah outlook; they built holy homes.

Building Holiness

Now, how exactly they built their holy houses, how they built Torah minds, that’s another subject altogether. Creating a mind means learning all the attitudes that give you a new set of values, a Torah ideology. I can’t tell you on one foot, but if you’re interested I’ll be happy to help you. It’s a very important subject that can’t be spoken about enough. But before that, the first element, the foundation, is standing guard over your mind. Because there’s no use if your home, is open to everything.

And so, first of all, a person has to always remind himself that **מְכַל מְשָׁמֵר נִצֵּר לְכָף**. You must cut loose from all sources of influence from the gentile world. Otherwise, what is it worth? It’s like a man who took hold of a bush of thorns. He’s holding onto the thornbush and he’s crying out, “Ouch! Ouch! Bring the peroxide! Bring the Vaseline!”

So we say to him: “What are you crying about medicine?! First let go! Let go of the thorns!” If you are constantly putting thorns in your mind, forget about it.

The Rasha with Peyos

So here’s a man, a *frum* man. He has *peyos* down to here, but he sits and reads, let’s say, newspapers. The ads alone tell you the story. Immorality is glorified. The whole newspaper reeks with vandalism. So the newspapers are a constant source of replenishment of all of the false ideas that he claims to want to root out. He’s still grabbing onto the thorns!

Or the radio. He listens to *chachomim b’eineihem*, dumbbells, giving their opinion about everything that doesn’t mean anything to his life. And it’s being dinned into his head. So who cares if you’re a Gemara *melamed*? Let’s say you’re a Gemara teacher in the yeshiva and you wear a nice long beard. Let’s say it would be such a case. There are some cases like that. You have to know

inside you're a *rasha gamur*. Even though outside you go to the *mikveh* and you seem to be a *tzaddik*, inside you are rotten through and through.

And inside, that's what counts. **וְתַנְהַבְנִי לְבָבְךָ לִי** – 'My son, give Me your mind,' Hashem says! (Mishlei 23:26) That's what I want. **וְרַחֲמֶנָּא לְבָא לְבָעִי**! Of all the things, your mind is what's most precious to Me! **וְכָבֵל לְכָבֶדְךָ**! *With all your mind!* If your mind is making excursions always into the camp of the enemy then even if your body is among the *frummeh*, you're absent. You're over there, not here. And in the Next World you'll go there too.

The Magazine Mess

You have to cut loose from magazines. Those girls, those women, have to know that as long as they continue to read the magazines, there's no use talking! They can outwardly be *tzidkanyos*; they can put on a cloth over their hair and they can daven long Shemoneh Esreis, but inwardly they're still receiving a supply from the sewer main that's pouring sewage from the street into their minds!

They're studying always the 'great' gentile ideals of extravagant living, of pursuing all kinds of pleasures and *taavos*, of shopping and entertainment and of the opposite of Torah living. If you're reading gentile books, novels, romance, so the *hashchasah*, the corruption, enters your mind by way of your eyes.

The Grand Finale

Now before we finish, two more details and then we drop the subject. I know I'm stepping on toes so we'll drop it soon. We'll come back to it one day but for now just two more points.

Number one, the television. There are very many stupid Jews who invite a *goy* into their homes every night. *Lo savi TV el beisecha*. There's a *toevah* in his house on the table. There are not enough words to speak about this great evil that has inundated the homes. And any Jew who means business with *yiddishkeit*, must know, there's no two ways about it. You must get rid of that infernal machine. It's impossible to have a sanctuary, a Mishkan, a Beis Hamikdash with a television in it. There are no two ways about it. Either you have a Mikdash or you have a television. It cannot be both.

You can dodge the subject, but you have to know that that's the plain truth – you're in direct contact with all that's wicked in the world. Even smart *goyim* are saying today that that machine is corrupting the youth. And it's corrupting the minds of the adults too. I'm not saying this as an extremist. I'm saying this after years and years of observation.

Don't tell me it's wholesome. Don't tell me it's meaningless, it's only a little mouse that's talking, a cartoon. It's much worse. And even if the *goyim* don't say any filthy words or filthy ideas, it's so so empty, so false, so twisted, so corrupt, so far away from what our ideals are, that it's a ruination. The family sits around the table and they're all being slaughtered together.

Delicate Family Affairs

Now, the last point before we drop the subject. And that is, don't bring in irreligious relatives. Don't bring in relatives who are not observant to your home! That's what the Torah tells us about the fellow Jew whose mind was sullied by gentile ideas. וְיֵצֵא בְּשָׂנֵת הַיּוֹבֵל – He should go free and come back to the Jewish people, of course. But it doesn't say anything about וְיָשֶׁב אֶל מִשְׁפְּחוֹתָו! Because to allow him into the home is a different story.

Now, it's not an easy subject because many good people have siblings or parents that are not so good. It's delicate. I understand that. So you'll have to use subterfuge.

You can maintain a certain cordiality by telephone. You call them up frequently. You send them gifts. Always try to keep them happy by sending them small presents constantly; they should know you care about them. Maybe you, yourself, will visit them in order to prevent them from making frequent visits to your home.

Keep Them at Hands Length

But to invite them? That should be out of the question. As much as possible keep them out of your house because there's no question that irreligious people will bring in their mannerisms. They'll bring in their suggestions and attitudes.

A man in the shul told me once that his father-in-law comes to visit and he brings with him a portable television – they have such a thing; in the Sears-Roebuck catalog they sell portable televisions – so he shouldn't miss the Yankee game. He brings his television into your Mikdash!

And if he doesn't bring it, so he brings with him all the ideas that he acquired from the television and radio and newspapers he has at home. His mannerisms and attitudes and ideas are going to be impressed upon your children's minds.

And it's very difficult to have a Mikdash, a Mikdash of minds, if it's going to be frequented by people of low caliber. And that's the great lesson of our *parshah*. If even our own brother we have to be wary of because he sold himself to live among the gentiles, you understand already what it means about people who sold their *minds* out to the gentiles.

A Door, A Wall

The door of a Jewish home is not a swinging door, a revolving door, with ideas and attitudes coming in willy-nilly. That's one of the things that the *mezuzah* tells us. When a *mezuzah* is put on the front door of a Jewish home, it proclaims, 'Beyond here is an especial kind of place. It's a place of holy minds that have to be protected.'

Isn't it a remarkable thing that people can live their lives without realizing that this is one of the things the *mezuzah* is saying? Some people kiss the *mezuzah*, but it's not enough. As you pass in and out the purpose is to remind you of what's inside the *mezuzah*: That this is a *בֵּית* where Hashem is *Echad*. He's the only One we're interested in. *וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם וְלֹא בְּבָרִים אֲחֵרִים* – *We speak in Torah attitudes and nothing else*. No gentile attitudes allowed! This is a *בֵּית* where we love Hashem *בְּכָל לִבְךָ*. *All of your mind*, not some; not that you have a Jewish mind with some of a gentile mind too.

I'm giving you homework now. When you go home tonight practice that. Stop at the *mezuzah* for ten seconds and remind yourself about the things we spoke about here. And even though we're still far away from that ideal of watching our minds perfectly, but at least we think about it and strive to come closer to that ideal. And little by little, it becomes more and more sincere. Little by little you become a person who understands that *מִכָּל מְשֻׁמֵר נִצָּר לְבָבְךָ כִּי מִמְּנוֹ תוֹצְאוֹת חַיִּים*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Guarding Your Mind and Home

Of all things we must guard, we must guard *our minds* from foreign influences. It is also important to guard our homes, where the minds of our family reside. The *mezuzah* stands guard outside the door of our homes and reminds us as we enter that we are meant to serve Hashem "*b'chol l'vovcha*" – with all our thoughts, ideals and attitudes. This week, I will *bli neder* stop at least once per day near the *mezuzah* and consider these lessons.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

13 - Most Precious Possession | **133** - The Jewish Home

225 - Your Mind is Your Wealth | **470** - Shemoneh Esrei 10 | **574** - Splendid Home

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QUESTION

What is the lesson of Lag Ba'Omer?

ANSWER

The lesson of Lag Ba'Omer, first of all, is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is a *Rachum v'Chanun* and He gives us a break from the difficulties of *sefirah*. That's number one. Isn't it a good idea to think about that? A break; very good!

Now, the *minhagim* of *sefirah* are very good too of course. You're denying yourself certain things. We're like *nezirim* in a certain sense; like a *nazir*, we don't cut our hair. But Hashem says, "When it comes one day, Lag Ba'Omer, I'm giving you a respite; I'm giving you a rest, a vacation from *sefirah*."

You think it's a wrong idea to think about that?! No, it's a very good idea! No question about it! It was no accident. Lag Ba'Omer is like an island – and for some people it's already the end of the road of *sefirah*.

However, if you want to talk more about the lessons of Lag Ba'omer then we have to talk about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the tremendous miracle that happened to him. He was a man who because he spoke the truth and criticized the Romans, so he had to go into hiding because the Romans wanted to kill him.

Now, when he went into hiding it should have been a ruination for his *ruchniyus*. He went with his son – the poor boy couldn't go to yeshiva. He was in the cave with his father for thirteen years! You think that's something that's not difficult? It's a ruination!

But what happened there? In that cave they reached the highest pinnacle of greatness. In that cave, all by themselves without the *beis hamedrash* – they were in hiding; they had no *rebbeim*, no *chavrusas*. And learning without *chaveirim* is a problem. **תָּרַב אֶל הַבְּרִים וְנָאָלוּ** – *People who learn without any chavrusahs become foolish; they don't grasp the sevarahs of the Torah.* And yet, these two became great.

And all of this is a result of a *gezeirah* of the Romans. It was a terrible decree; to have to go into hiding is certainly a misfortune we would say. But it turned out to be the greatest stroke of good luck that could have happened to them. It made them into the greatest that they could be.

And we learn from this that sometimes what people think is a misfortune, what they think is something to be sorry about, is really a *chessed*, an opportunity. We have to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has planned a man's life that the things that seem to be misfortunes are actually for his benefit. And it's the misfortunes that can make him the very best that he can be. That's one of the lessons of Lag Ba'omer. TAPE # 960 (May 1994)

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