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AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

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OUR ETERNAL PEOPLE

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מנחם משה בן נפתלי הירצקא

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OUR ETERNAL PEOPLE

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Part I. Joining the Generations

One Nation Under G-d

In the Torah we find again and again that we are called Hashem's one nation. וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם - "I took you to Me as a nation" (Shemos 6:7). וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי לְעָם - "You shall be to Me a nation" (Vayikra 26:12). כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ - "For you are a holy nation to Hashem your God" (Devarim 7:6). Throughout all the *kisvei hakodesh*, it's repeated and reiterated that we are the *goy echad* (Shmuel II, 7:23).

And it means all of us; not only the ones sitting here. It means the Jews in Los Angeles. It means the Jews in the Five Towns. It means the Jews in Meah Shearim and in London. Wherever there are Jews, we're all one nation. Like our old "friend" Haman testified about us; although

we're **מְפֹזָר וּמְפֹרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים** – *scattered and dispersed among the nations*, we remain **עַם אֶחָד**. The *Teimanim* with their robes and their turbans, and the *chassidim* with their *shtreimelech* and silk *beketches*, whatever it is, we are one nation.

Many Nations Under G-d

And if that's the case, we're surprised to find some instances in the Torah where it's speaking about the Am Yisroel but the word "nation" is found in plural. In the beginning of our *sedrah* for instance; it's warning a *kohen* against coming in contact with a *meis* and it says as follows: **לֹא יִטְמָא לְאָדָם יָמוּת** – *He shouldn't contaminate himself to a dead person among his peoples* (Vayikra 21:1). Not *amo*, his people; it says *amov*, his peoples. That's interesting.

Later in the *parsha* too; it discusses someone who eats on Yom Kippur and it says that he's *chayav kareis*, that he'll be cut off from the nation. But if you know even a little bit of *dikduk*, you'll notice that it says it in plural: **וְנִכְרְתָהּ מֵעַמֶּיהָ** – *The nefesh will be cut off from her peoples* (*ibid.* 23:29). Again, in plural. And if you pay attention you'll see that it's a common thing in the Torah. Instead of talking about the nation in singular, the Torah many times talks in plural; peoples, nations.

A Nation of Generations

And the answer is that when we talk about the Am Yisroel we are not just one generation. Our people starts way back from Avraham Avinu and goes down to *techiyas hameisim*. The generation of Avraham Avinu, that's one people. The generation that came after the Avos, that's another, and the generation that came after them, another. Each generation is a separate people.

And they're not the same. You can't compare the people in Mitzrayim with the *Dor Hamidbar*. Even though they had very great accomplishments in Mitzrayim for which they deserved to be redeemed, but the *Dor Hamidbar* was something different. A nation that built the Mishkan, that looked at Moshe Rabbeinu every day, that ate *mann* and saw the *Ananei Hakavod* whenever they looked up, that's an entirely different kind of a people than the ones who lived and died in Mitzrayim.

The *dor* of Yehoshua, that was another generation. The people that lived in the days of the Shoftim, when they settled in the **אֶרֶץ יְבֵת** and brought *bikkurim* and gave *terumos u'maasros* for the

first time, that was something new; a different people. Another nation was in the times of Dovid Hamelech when Dovid taught them to sing *shiros v'sishbachos* and they sang his songs together, songs of praise to Hashem. And then Shlomo Hamelech, it's another nation. And on and on; every generation is a different people and therefore the Am Yisroel are called "peoples," plural.

And so when the *kohen* is thinking about going into the cemetery – he might want to visit the grave of his father or grandfather, or a *tzaddik* from a long time ago – he's reminded about all the generations of our nation: "Don't make yourself *tamei* to your peoples, your past generations." Or when someone *chas v'shalom* commits a sin, a severe sin, he must know that he's cutting himself off not only from his neighbors, from his friends in shul, and from all the Jews who are living right now – he's cut off from his *peoples* too, from all the historic generations.

Identifying With Your Peoples

It's a very important point you're hearing now because usually when we talk about the Am Hashem, if you're a higher quality Jew you don't think only of your own community. If you're a Satmerer, you think also about the Lakewooders and the Flatbushers. They're not the same as you but they're also part of the nation. A Chaim Berliner, he's thinking also about Torah Vodaas and the Mir, and the Lubavitcher is thinking about the people in Meah Shearim. And they're all thinking about each other because together we're all one people. Very nice.

That's very good, but it's not enough! What the *pessukim* are telling us here is that being connected to your people means also to your peoples, in plural. The Am Yisroel is more than our present generation; it includes those of our past too. So once a person establishes in his mind an attitude of identifying with the Klal Yisroel that are now in existence in the world, he must go on and begin identifying with the Klal Yisroel of history. All the generations before us; our grandfathers and grandmothers, and their grandparents, and all the generations before them. We want to be joined not only to our people of today but to the peoples of all the generations in the past as well.

You're not just living with *your* generation of the Jewish nation. No! We belong to Avraham Avinu's generation too; that's also our nation. And all the great generations who followed. Moshe Rabbeinu's people,

Yehoshua's people. Devorah Haneviah, Eili Hakohen, Shmuel Hanavi, Shaul Hamelech, Dovid Melech Yisroel, Gad Hachozeh, Nosson Hanavi, all of them. All of them! We belong to them, together with them.

Know Your History

And that's why it's important to know about them. You cannot so easily identify with something you don't know; but when you learn about somebody in the past, you can begin to think, "That's my flesh and blood. We're together." And so you have to find out about your people.

A person has to get into the habit of learning Chumash and Nach properly. You're not reading about some distant people, a story in a book. The lives of the generations that lived in our past — the Avos and the Shevatim and so on — should become saturated into our blood. In the olden days, every Jewish child was saturated with Chumash; he learned Chumash all day long until he began Mishnayos and Gemara, and therefore, the admiration for the Torah generations was in his bones. He lived with the *Dor Hamidbar*. That's called being together with the Jewish nation; to be proud of your past, and to know your past.

There are so many people, *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*, who have no connection at all with our past. How can that be? What about the Tana'im and Amora'im? The generation of Hillel Hazaken! Rabi Yochanan ben Zakai! Rabi Eliezer ben Hurkenis! Rabi Akiva! Rabi Meir! Rabbi! Each one was another generation. And the people who lived then are our people too! The best thing is to go back to the Gemara itself if you're able to do it and read what the great men of ancient times said about our nation. We had generations that lived in the great days of Pumbedisa; the great yeshivas in Neharda'a and Sura.

Know the Middle Ages

You have to identify with the people who lived in the time of Rashi and the Ba'alei Tosfos. The generations of Jews who lived in North Africa and elsewhere. The Jews of the Middle Ages who gave up their lives for Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When the Crusaders came and they slaughtered the *kehillos hakodesh* עַל קְרוּשׁ הַשָּׁם שְׁמֵקְרוּ נִפְשָׁם. The *Kedoshei Ashpira*, the town of Speyer in Germany, are our people. In Vermeisa, the town of Worms, and in Magentzia, Mainz, it was a generation that we want to be connected to. That's why we say *Av Harachamim* every Shabbos. It's a pity most people don't think what they're saying. הַנְּאֻהָבִים וְהַנְּעִימִים בְּרַחֲמֵיהֶם – *They're a special generation beloved by Hashem; beloved in their*

lifetime, וּבְמִוְתָם לֹא נִפְרְדוּ – and they're beloved after they passed away. Because they're still His people. And they're our people too!

We cannot ignore the generation of the Maharsha or the Rama, the generation of the Shach, or the generation of the Magen Avraham. We have to think about the Jews in Europe two hundred years ago when almost everybody kept everything, when every Jewish town was a *mikdash me'at*. Thursday nights, it was packed. Peddlers returned from the villages where they trudged all week selling their wares; they came back for Shabbos, and Thursday night they sat and learned all night *mishmor*.

Even a hundred years ago; I had a *chavrusa* in Slabodka who was from Biržai. Aharon Birz'er, *zichrono livracha*. He told me that his grandfather used to tell him that in Biržai on Thursday, you couldn't get a seat in the *beis hamedrash*. It was packed with peddlers who were sitting and learning all night to make up for the time they lost. Oh yes, the people of Biržai, of the Magen Avraham, of the Shach, those are our people too. That's what it means "peoples"; to identify with all the generations that passed away.

Authentic History

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks at us, not only does He see those who are alive today who walk around and fulfill His Torah; His view is expansive. He looks equally at all the generations in the past. They are all members of His people! And so when you talk about Am Yisroel right now, you can say "nation," yes. But that's not the whole story; the nation in general also means all the generations in plural. It's one long chain of different links, different "nations." They lived in various places and each had their own unique tests and achievements, and together they make up the eternal Am Yisroel. That's why our ambition must be to identify with our history. Because it's not "history" – it's our nation.

A man who puts his interest in the history of the *umos ha'olam*, in the history of the nations, it's entirely a waste. Of course, if you're a history teacher, that's your *parnassah*, you can't help yourself. But to put your heart into it? "My heart is in the great poets of English literature. Merry Old England! Shakespeare's time! Dickens! Ah, ah, ah!" No; it's an empty dream, it's *sheker v'kazav*! You think about them, you're thinking about insects that once lived. They're gone forever! They're off the map!

American history? It's just a spiral of errors. George Washington? Abraham Lincoln? I'm a patriot for America, but that's not our history. Of course, we should be loyal to our country, we have to support all the good things, but we must know that there's nothing there. Our history, our historic people, is it!

Of course, it means *from* Jews, the *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*. Ben Gurion? Forget about him; he's not our people. עוֹשֵׂה עֲמָדָה means מעֲשֵׂה עֲמָדָה, those who do the deeds of your people. Herzl? He goes into the dustbin of history. I don't care what someone will tell you outside; our history, the generations we are one with, don't include Jabotinsky. An *oichel treifos*, a *mechaleil Shabbos*, a *rasha gamur*, a man who didn't keep anything. He's not part of our history. All the "heroes" who were not loyal to the Torah don't exist for us. But those who believed in Hashem and who kept the Torah Hashem — including all the *gerei tzedek* of our past who were loyal to Hashem and the Torah — they are your people. All the generations of the Am Yisroel are one long chain with many links.

Part II. Joining Forever

Existing Forever

Now, it's a good idea to understand how important this way of thinking really is, so we're going to take a little time now to study this subject; we'll understand how being together with all of our past, all the way back to our Avos, is *sine qua non* — absolutely necessary — for a Jew.

We said in the beginning that when a man commits a serious sin like eating on Yom Kippur, it says וְנִכְרְתָהּ מֵעַמִּיהָ. Again and again, we find that *lashon* of being cut off from all the generations. Eating *chametz* on Pesach is *kareis*. He'll be נִכְרַת מֵעַמִּיו for that sin. Many other sins like that. If a man will make *shemen hamishcha* according to a certain formula that the Torah prescribes, it's *ossur* to do it; וְנִכְרַת מֵעַמִּיו – he'll be cut off from his *peoples*; plural. It means he won't be a member anymore of that eternal nation that started from the beginning and will last till the end of time. He'll be cut from that continuity.

That's a tremendous threat because the people who once lived are just as real as we are. Our grandfathers and our great-grandfathers are

just as alive as we are right now — even more than us. And so to be cut off *chalilah* from your people who are living now in this world, to die young or even not so young, is not such a happy thing either but at least he hopes that **וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֵל עַמֶּיךָ**, *he'll be gathered together with all of his peoples* (Bamidbar 27:13). But to know that he'll be cut off from them too? Oooh, that's the biggest tragedy. Not only is he cut off from the people here, but he'll be cut off from the historic nation of Hashem that exists forever.

The Purpose of Life

Now, if we're going to appreciate that warning, we first have to make something very clear to ourselves: Success in this world means one thing — we want to earn the reward of Olam Haba. Otherwise, it's a waste of living. We're in this world only for that purpose; it's a *prozdor*, a preparation for the World to Come.

And therefore all you “enlightened” Jews who don't believe in Olam Haba — there are some Jews like that, some Modern Orthodox who don't really believe. I once heard the president of the National Mizrahi of America speaking. I had to be there for a certain reason and he was saying that Olam Haba means the future of the Jewish nation in Israel; that's the world to come. He said it in public! It was in Massachusetts. It wasn't New York City so he thought he'd get away with it but now his words are being echoed right here in Brooklyn. And so we tell him that if you don't believe in Olam Haba *literally*, you won't have it.

National Membership

But it's not only believing it. There's something about Olam Haba that you need to know. You must understand the World to Come is not promised to any individual on his or her own merit. It's a national reward. **כֹּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא** — It's only because you're a member of Yisroel that you're *zocheh* to Olam Haba.

That's something very many people aren't aware of. We think that we get Olam Haba because of ourselves; according to what we achieve in this world, we merit the Next World. It's not true however. Yes, how *much* you'll get, what your station will be there, that's up to you, but your ticket to get into Olam Haba in the first place has nothing to do with you.

Avraham's Reward

It's a *zechus* that Hashem gave to Avraham Avinu. אָנְכִי מִגֵּן לְךָ – “I am your shield,” Hashem told Avraham (Bereishis 15:1); it means that I'm going to stand by you and your children. But not only in this world; שְׂכָרְךָ הִרְבֵּה מְאֹד – *your reward is very great (ibid.)*. Not *harbeh*. *Harbeh me'od!* And when Hashem says *me'od* it means *mee'ooood*; it means something endless. What kind of reward is so great? Only one reward – Olam Haba. And so Hashem promised Avraham that He'll stand by Avraham and his descendants forever; He'll give them the World to Come too.

Only Avraham and his descendants are promised that; it's a special gift. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “My children, My nation, because I love your forefathers, that's why I love you. And it's only because of them that you get the Next World.” The Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* says that (3:43). Among some of the fundamental statements he makes there, principles that include everything, he says that all the benefits that Hashem ever did to our nation and ever will do to our nation are because of our fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Until the end of time, whatever will happen to us will be a reward for the merit of the Avos. And not only in this world but כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, this that all Yisroel are promised a share in the World to Come – that is unless they'll throw away the ticket – is because of them. Even the righteous who earn the happiness of Olam Haba should know that it's a merit of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov that bestows this on them.

Paid Off in This World

That comes as a surprise to many people. Doesn't a Jew get Olam Haba because of his merits that he himself earned? And the answer is all the *mitzvos* that we will ever do are not enough to pay for our board and lodging in this world. Not only board and lodging; we are equipped with the most expensive Rolls Royce in which we travel around. The body is such a perfect vehicle for our soul. It's fashioned with such bottomless wisdom and kindness, with millions upon millions of provisions of self-regulation. It's almost foolproof. The fact that so many fools continue to live itself demonstrates the wonders of the body.

Now to pay rent just for this vehicle would require that we would be doing *mitzvos* all the days of our lives. So get busy serving Hashem; you're already over your head in debt!

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So what about Olam Haba? Olam Haba is a gift. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “My children, because I love your forefathers that’s why I’m giving you the ticket to get in.”

Happiness of Life

That’s why a *goy* won’t get it. Don’t be deceived. If a *goy* lives in this world and he ate meals and he wore clothing and he had a place to sleep, it’s a very great happiness. Don’t think Hashem owes him anything. You lived in this world? That’s enough giving.

The fact that the Italian bricklayer goes home at night, and he has a wife and a house and supper to eat, that’s more than enough. It’s enough that Hashem gives him life in this world. He wants the other world too? Why should he get it? It’s a gift! After living happily in this world – so many years you ate and you slept and you had clothing and you had everything else – you want Olam Haba too?

The Am Yisroel is a different story. Look, Hashem promised us already; he gave it to us because of Avraham Avinu. And therefore, Olam Haba for the Yisroel, for the *zera Avraham*, is a special gift. And it comes only because of the *amov*, the generations; that’s our connection to the Avos. **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל – וְשָׂרָא** – *And so if you identify with the historic Yisroel, וְשָׂרָא – וְשָׂרָא* – *then you have a special claim.*

Authentic Conversion

That’s why even a *ger* can get it. When a *ger* is one with the *zera Avraham*, with all of our history, so he belongs to us and he’ll share in our destiny. But when a person becomes a *ger* and he doesn’t identify with the historic Am Yisroel, he has demonstrated that he is a failure as a *ger*. If a *ger* maintains his loyalty to his previous countrymen, if he thinks that their history is his, then he is not a real *ger*; it’s a very superficial and weak form of *geirus*.

I’ll tell you a story; there was a *ger* who once heard a certain *talmid chacham* criticize the gentiles from whom this *ger* had come. And this *ger* was enraged. He even said, “I might take revenge on that rabbi.”

When I heard that story, I said, “Forget about it; he’s not a *ger*.” A *ger* no longer has any interest in his past! He is one with the Am Yisroel and the *goyim* are no longer *anything* to him. If he maintains loyalty to his nationality – he says, “No, by religion I’m a Jew, but I am loyal to my nation from which I came” – then goodbye! He’s not a *ger*.

When it comes to Pesach, he has to celebrate Yetzias Mitzrayim as if he had come out of Mitzrayim. He has to rejoice and say אֶזְיֵי־מִצְרָיִם because the Egyptians were drowned in the sea. Even if he's a *ger* from Mitzrayim, from the Eirev Rav, and it's his brother who is drowning, he rejoices with us. And on Purim he has to dance at the destruction of Haman.

Imagine, מִבְּנֵי בְרָק שֶׁל הָמוֹן לְמִדּוֹ תוֹרָה בְּבֵי בְרָק – *There were descendants of Haman who were in Bnei Brak, learning in the yeshiva (Gittin 57b). They were geirim. So when it came Purim and everyone was talking about how Haman's sons were hanging, were Haman's great-grandchildren thinking, "Oh, but they were my zeides"? Would they sit there sadly? No, they wouldn't do that. In Bnei Brak they got drunk, too. They rejoiced. Because they're not their relatives at all. That's how a ger should think; he's finished with his past. The nations, the generations of Jewish history, that's who he identifies with.*

Dying Jewish

And that's the *avodah* for all of us. How to do it, we'll soon see, but we have to be joined to the Klal Yisroel forever and therefore whatever promises are made for the *klal* will apply to us too. It means *nitzchiyus* of the World to Come. We should always keep in mind that by showing that we belong to the Am Yisroel and participating with them, we're gaining a ticket to Olam Haba, *k'pshuto*. That's our *zechus* because we belong to that great nation. In order that we should deserve the Olam Haba together with them as a national reward, we have to identify with them and be together with them in our minds.

That's why the Am Yisroel makes a big deal about where they're buried. Who cares where your bones are going to lie? You're dead anyhow. The answer is it's so important because if you buy a plot only with *frum* Jews, that shows your heart is right now identified with the historic nation, the generations of Jews who are living now in Olam Haba. We want that even our bones in the cemetery should be together with all the generations of the Am Yisroel.

Now, don't be sad when you hear this. Sooner or later it will happen to everybody and it's a good idea, a very wise thing, to make provisions beforehand. Where will you be put? We want to be buried among the *frumme* because we understand that it represents *amov*; it means we're going back to our peoples. That's why Bilaam was burning with jealousy.

You remember when he looked at the Am Yisroel, he said תָּמוּת נְפֹשֵׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל – “Oh, if only I could die the death of these righteous people, וְתִהְיֶה אֲחֵרִיתִי כְּמֹהוּ – and my end could be like theirs” (Bamidbar 23:10). What did he want? Just to be buried together with Jews in the same cemetery? It’s because he wanted וְתִהְיֶה אֲחֵרִיתִי כְּמֹהוּ, what comes after the cemetery. “If only I could be *zocheh* to a Jewish cemetery and go to Olam Haba like them.”

Part III. Joining in Practice

Living Jewish

Now, there’s much more than signing up for burial in an Orthodox cemetery. It’s an important demonstration that your heart is with all of the generations of the historic Am Yisroel, but it’s not enough. It’s not enough to *die* Jewish – you have to *live* that way too. Because when Hakadosh Baruch Hu says that identifying with the historic Am Yisroel makes you eligible for all the greatness and promises guaranteed to the nation, we have to realize that בְּרָדְךָ שְׂאֲדָם רוֹצֶה לִּילְךָ בְּהַ מוֹלִיכִיךָ אוֹתוֹ, the more you want and do, the more you’ll succeed in this result.

Now, I won’t be able to go into all the details because there are very many ways in which people can carry this out practically, but in general we have to walk in the ways of the previous generations. And not only *minhagim*; of course if they started certain practices then to us these *minhagim* are *kodesh kedashim*, the utmost holiness, but it’s more than that. It’s our entire way of living.

It’s *kedai* to think about that once in a while. Did you ever try that? Take two minutes alone and think, “How much does my way of life approximate the way of life of our forefathers a hundred years ago?”

Emulating Grandparents

Is a man in the home like his great-grandfather? Is his ambition to be successful in *Torah u’mitzvos* and to build a *frum* home modeled after the previous generations? Is a woman in the home like her great-grandmother? Is her great ambition to be a homemaker and to bring up a large family in the ways of Hashem? Is she loyal to her household duties, or does she think of a profession? If she does, then she’s not imitating Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah and none of those who follow

them. It's the mode of life of a Jew that identifies with whom he's really interested.

Of course, there are many other things to imitate. Are you practicing hospitality, *gemilus chassadim*, like Avraham Avinu? If a *meshulach* comes along from Eretz Yisroel do I send him away quickly with some money or do I offer him hospitality too? He may not eat your meat or drink your milk, but if you give him a *glatt* kosher apple, he'll enjoy it. Of course he'll enjoy the money more, but in addition to that, an apple is good too.

Eternal Standards

Tznius. Are your daughters trained in *tznius*? Do they wear dresses that cover up as much as possible? That's the way of the Jewish nation. You'll forgive me for telling you this, but a woman who wears pants does not belong to the historic Klal Yisroel. She may be the most *frum* woman, but she is not identified with the Jewish nation. The historical Jewish nation doesn't do such things. A Modern Orthodox rabbi said it's okay? So you'll be with him in the Next World.

The Jewish people are interested in demonstrating the *kedusha* of their nation. Our nation is a holy nation and one of the elements of *kedusha* is decency. Women who wear pants or display themselves in other ways are not identifying with the right side of history. The historic Am Yisroel, your peoples, do not approve of women dressing like men. I won't go into the *halacha*, but it's certainly disapproved. There are minimum standards required by the *halachah*, by our nation's history – to cover up from the shoulders down to the elbow, the knees, the neckline – that must be followed under all circumstances.

And so you're connected now to all of our mothers and grandmothers. You're connected to Rosa. You know the story of a famous woman, Rosa? They captured her and wanted to tie her to the tail of wild horses through the streets. That's how they wanted to torture a woman to death. She asked for some pins and pinned her dresses to her feet so while she's being dragged through the streets, she shouldn't be uncovered.

Now, in those countries where it's customary to cover more, then it's required to cover more. But there are eternal standards of our nation, of our grandparents and great-grandparents and further back,

that don't fluctuate according to the styles of the countries. And it's very important to live according to those standards.

Movies, YouTube and Kareis

No matter what you're going to say, you must realize that the person who does things that the Jewish nation does not approve of in its historic appraisal is separating himself. Say a Jew goes to the movies. So he already demonstrates that he has no connection to our past. It's not an exaggeration because all the generations of the past would despise him for that. That's the plain truth. His ancestors would say, "You don't belong to us. You're not *mishelanu*."

Not only Moshe Rabbeinu would say that; even a maidservant, a *shifcha*, in the days of old would say, "He's not from us!" Josephus said, "Even our slaves understand that the entire purpose of a man in this world is to do virtuous acts in the eyes of Hashem." That's what Josephus says! A politician!

And so a person who goes to movies is actually *despised* by all the generations. They're looking down upon him and they're saying, "You don't belong to us." If he turns on the TV, they say, "What are you doing? You're not our child. You're a stranger to us. You're giving over your mind to enemies of the truth – to evolutionists, to *leitzim*, to immoral people, to gays, to liars – and therefore, how can you be a member of our Klal Yisroel?"

Simchos and Amusements

Now, women wearing pants, television and movies – *that* maybe you understand already. You like to hear things that you already accept. It feels good. You can pat yourself on the back and go on. But I'll tell you something more. Even the *simchos*, we have to strive to make them the way our forefathers did. I was once at a *bar mitzvah* and the boys were acting *meshuge* and everybody was watching them. People had danced a little bit and when they stopped, the little boys took over. They picked up the little *bar mitzvah* boy on a chair like he was a *chosson* and danced with him wildly. I was thinking, "That's a *bar mitzvah*?" A *bar mitzvah* means to think about Hakadosh Baruch Hu who gave us *mitzvos* and thank Him for the *mitzvos*. That's what it's for. Just to be *vild*, that's not the ways of our peoples. We have to emulate our forefathers – walk in the ways of our parents.

Now I don't want to start enumerating many things because you'll say I'm a killjoy. But in general, in our mode of life, we have to identify with our forefathers. Our grandmothers and grandfathers had meals. They enjoyed life. They wore clothing. They dressed decently. They raised their children properly. They lived *gashmius'dige* lives of happiness. They weren't less happy than anybody today, but they emulated their forefathers in all the ways that they could learn from the Torah, *nevi'im* and *kesuvim* and the Torah *sheba'al peh*. And if we return to that, a great deal of simplicity will result, a great deal of frivolity will be eliminated, a lot of money wasting will be eliminated, and a lot of living like our nation always lived will be achieved.

Identify by Names

I'm going to take one more subject and then we'll stop. Another easy way to identify is to utilize the holy names of our nation. Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov; that's excellent. Moshe, Aharon, Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel, Leah. And even the names Chaya, Shaina, Baila — all these names were not given in this generation for the first time. They were handed down from ancestors a hundred, two hundred, three hundred years ago who were such holy personages that they are beyond our ability to appreciate. Like Reb Yeruchum *zichrono livracha* said, "We do not understand the greatness of our grandmothers or our great-grandmothers. They are beyond our comprehension." And these great personalities are the ones we are connecting to when we say, "Fraidel" or "Bracha."

And so if you want to identify with them, you can start right now. If you have a name that's not Jewish, stop using that name. There are people who have been listening to my tapes for years and they changed their names. They communicated with me by correspondence. At first he was Jerry. Later he becomes Joseph; and then Yosef. They learned the importance of identifying.

Or Craig. Is that a name for a Jew? Why do you need a Scotch Irish name that commemorates some ruffian? You know who the first Craig was? He was a bandit in the Scotch highlands. A Jew who calls himself Craig instead of calling himself Reuven is identifying with criminals, with a bandit murderer. Any name that doesn't have a Jewish connotation means that you're giving up the opportunity to identify as a Jew, to be connected to our history.

Choosing a Camp

Look in the Chumash for names! Does it say *vayidabeir Hashem el Jeffrey* or *el Patrick*? No; it says Moshe and Aharon. They're the ones. Where were Jeffrey and Patrick at that time? I don't want to say. They weren't even in a saloon at that time. There were no saloons over there yet. They were running around in the woods foraging for berries.

And don't tell me any *bubbe ma'asehs*, fairy tales, that you just give a name because it sounds nice. Why does "Stewart" sound any nicer than "Shimon"? Stewart commemorates the screams of a woman in pain coming out of the cottage where the Stewarts are busy with their fists on their wives. Shimon, on the other hand, commemorates those people who live in Torah, whose hearts love Hashem. And therefore make sure your heart is in the camp of the Shimons. Shimon has all the glamour! Eliezer. Yehudah. Reuven. Sarah. Leah. Rivkah. These names should be the most beautiful names to you.

Identify in Many Ways

Now, I don't want to talk much more about it because I don't want to be burdensome and tell people things they have to do, but in general the lesson should be learned and reviewed constantly. "Identify with My people, all the Jewish generations," Hashem says.

Actually, it's not burdensome at all. Our forefathers lived happy and successful lives. They were happy in the ways of their fathers and mothers, their grandfathers and grandmothers.

Even our amusements identify who we are. There's nothing wrong with going bowling; bowling is exercising. But going to bowl among gentiles, what kind of business is that for Jews? Our forefathers didn't think about gentile amusements because Shabbos was their amusement. Purim was a day of amusement. Even Chanukah had a certain amount of joy; although Chanukah is only *lehodos ul'halel*, not for *seudos*, still, they enjoyed Chanukah. *Chamisha asar b'shvat*, they enjoyed. They made *brachos* on the *peiros* together and they thanked Hashem for the *peiros*.

The Jewish nation lived happy occasions all the time. Simchas Torah was a great day – Simchas Torah! And Shavuos was a very great day! The whole calendar, their whole life, was studded with joyous occasions. The fact that nobody thought of Thanksgiving, that nothing of the gentile world penetrated into the Jewish heart, only made them

more happy. They were living authentically according to the way our peoples always lived.

And so there are many, many things and you'll have to supply the details yourselves, but the principle is to live in a way that the Am Yisroel has always lived. Not only when it comes to Torah and *mitzvos*, but even in the *gashmiyus* of our lives, we must identify with and emulate all the generations that came before us. "See that you're one with My historic peoples as much as possible," Hashem says. And if you live that way, with your emotions and your actions, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give you the promises that He promised His eternal people.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Identifying with the Eternal People

In this week's parsha, the *kohen* is instructed not to become contaminated to a dead person among his "peoples," in the plural. This surprising term is found time and again throughout the Torah, *nevi'im* and *kesuvim*, and serves as a reminder that the Klal Yisroel is not only made up of those who are alive today serving Hashem, but includes the Jews of all generations who were loyal to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His Torah.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once a day I will take ten seconds during the *bracha* of Avos in Shemoneh Esrei to think about Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov – that I come from them, that I am part of their nation, and that I'm standing now before Hashem together with all the generations of Klal Yisroel. At the same time, I will consider different ways I can identify more with my Eternal nation. I will endeavor to demonstrate my allegiance to the ways of my ancestors and help maintain my awareness that all of the benefits I receive in this world and the Next are in the merit of the Avos.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

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Shabbos Inspired

לע"נ שרה נטשה בת דבורה שהין דינה ברכה בת שרה נטשה דבורה מזל בת שרה נטשה

Joy, Not Self-Sacrifice

On Shabbos, a Jew must detach himself from everything going on around him and live with Hashem alone, like a *Chasan* and *Kallah* together in the *yichud* room. This is not a matter of *mesirus nefesh*, of dedicatedly fulfilling Hashem's command without actually enjoying it. Rather, the goal is to live with Hashem in a spirit of gladness and enjoyment - to bring back the *hadar* of *Yiddishkeit*.

To understand this point, let us compare self-sacrifice with joy. One of the three kinds of people over whom Hashem cries is, "He who cannot engage in Torah learning but engages in it" (*Chagiga* 5b). Why does Hashem cry over such a person? Simply speaking, it means as follows: This person cannot learn Torah, because he's so busy. But with *mesirus nefesh*, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, he puts aside what's important to him and learns Torah nonetheless. And Hashem cries over him because - why does he need *mesirus nefesh*? Why in the first place did he get so involved with other things that he needs *mesirus nefesh* in order to learn Torah? On the contrary, Torah should have been his main interest!

This may be compared to a father who says to his son, "Please bring me a glass of water." The son sighs and says, "Daddy, I will have *mesirus nefesh* for you." He then rises heavily from his chair and goes to the kitchen to bring his father water. His father calls out, "It's okay; forget the *mesirus nefesh* - I don't need any favors. But why is it so hard for you?"

Hashem says to the person who's too "busy" to learn Torah, "How did you get into such a state? Why do you consider learning Torah such a personal sacrifice?" Let's say a man leaves the *beis midrash* at 11 P.M. and goes home. Before reciting *Kerias Shema she'al ha-mitah*, he opens a book again and doesn't notice the passing of time until suddenly he looks at his watch and discovers that it's already 3 A.M.! He sounds like a great *masmid*. How does he do it? Let's see what book he picked up: It wasn't a *Gemara*, a *Chumash*, or a *Mishnah Berurah* either. It was an action-packed novel.

Now we're not so impressed. It's no great feat to read a novel into the wee hours of the night. Why? Because it's enjoyable. But what about the Torah? Don't we enjoy Torah learning? This is what Hashem is saying to the person who's too "busy" to learn Torah: Why is it that you can't learn Torah, but you can read a novel without even noticing the time going by?

This is the meaning of "Hadar died." That beauty was, but is no more. Once upon a time, Torah and *Yiddishkeit* were something enjoyable and sweet for Jews. Nowadays we do everything with *mesirus nefesh*. We're a generation that shows great self-sacrifice for Torah learning and mitzvos. Where is the sweetness and enjoyment of *Yiddishkeit* that existed throughout the generations? When a Jew davened Ma'ariv every evening and said, "Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu - for these are our lives and the length of our days," he felt the Torah was his life. Just as every person loves life, so he loved the Torah.

Let us bring back this *hadar*. When *Shabbos Kodesh* arrives, let us feel true Jewish *simchah* when we pick up a *sefer*. Let us learn Torah with desire and enjoyment. The same applies when we go to shul and have the wonderful opportunity to daven to Hashem. Let us restore the beauty of *Yiddishkeit*. On Shabbos we don't talk about *mesirus nefesh*. On the contrary, we derive immense pleasure from being Jews and having a real, live relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu!

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be a zechut for you and your families!

Adapted by R' Y. Levy from *Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh*, Rav Shimshon Pincus, Feldheim

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QUESTION

Can a person do full *teshuvah* for even what the *seforim* say is one of the most wicked deeds?

ANSWER

And the answer is it's possible to do full *teshuvah* for everything. But first of all, you have to realize that the longer you wait, the more difficult it's going to be. Because repeating any sin, even a small sin, if it's repeated frequently, it becomes as severe as murder.

You know, when they built the George Washington Bridge, I was an observer. I watched them, and I saw they didn't build it by taking big iron beams or steel beams. No. It was spun by thin steel wires that were on a spindle. They ran it back and forth across the river on a girder, and the spindle spun the wire so many times until it became a very big round pole. But the pole consisted of many wires. And so a little wire that by itself couldn't withstand much pressure was now doubled and tripled until it became strong enough to hold up that huge bridge for many decades.

The Shaarei Teshuvah says that even the smallest sin, if it's repeated constantly, becomes as severe as *chayvei misas beis din*, as capital crimes. It's like a thin wire that is doubled and tripled and more, and it becomes very strong. And therefore, it's important to make a stop to it as soon as possible.

However, it's never too late; even on a man's deathbed, if he repents sincerely, it's always accepted. You have to know, however, that it's not easy to repent sincerely when you have been committed to a certain wicked practice all your life. You know why? Because you don't feel how wicked it is. And even though a person will say with his mouth, "I'm sorry. I repent," it's only from the lips outward. To come to true repentance is very difficult because you have to feel that you did a wicked thing; you have to understand what a great harm you did to yourself by this crime. And if you did it so many times, it seems to you it's a daily form of behavior, and it's not easy to feel that regret.

And therefore, nobody should think that it's going to be easy to change his ways just before he dies. So the time to repent is right now. February 1984

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