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Part I. Loyalty to a Master

From Loyalty to Freedom

In Medrash Shir HaShirim (1:1), we are given an insight, an unexpected insight, into one of the important factors that led eventually to Yosef's rise to power in Mitzrayim. And the surprising statement of our Chachomim is as follows: **רַבִּי פִּינְחָס אוֹמֵר בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל** **כָּל שֶׁהוּא** **בְּרַ אָבָא** – *Rabi Pinchas said in the name of Rabi Shmuel bar Aba, הוּא יוֹצֵא* **מְשִׁימֵשׁ אֶת רֹבוֹ כְּרָאוּי** **לְחֵירוֹת** – *“Anyone who serves his master properly, he goes out to freedom.”*

Which means, if you are loyal to your employer, then someday you're going to become independent; you'll be rewarded with more

opportunities to accomplish. And מִנֵּין אָנוּ לְמִדִּין – From where do we learn that? מִיוֹסֵף – From the story of Yosef Hatzaddik.

What's the story of Yosef? וַיְהִי בַּהַיּוֹם הַהוּא – There was a certain day, וַיָּבֹא הַבְּתִיחָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָתּוֹ – when Yosef came to his master's home to work, וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבֵית (Bereishis 39:11); everybody, even all the servants, had taken the day off. Now, that's a strange circumstance because Potiphar's home was a big house that was always full of people. It was a busy place, always humming with servants at work. So what happened today that nobody else was around?

The Egyptian Festival

And so our Sages tell us that בַּהַיּוֹם הַהוּא, this certain day was a special festival day. Once a year there was a very big celebration in the land of Egypt. It was called יוֹם טִיאָטְרוֹן שֶׁל גִּילּוֹס – the day when the theater of the Nile was being presented. It was a certain holiday when the nation assembled to give honor to the Nile River because that was the source of all their sustenance.

The Nile rises every year in the summertime, flowing over the banks of the river and spreading out over the surrounding land. Way up in the highlands of Ethiopia, the rainfall increases and the rushing waters fall into tremendous gorges, creating a powerful rush of water that overflows the Nile a thousand miles away. And then, when it subsides, it leaves over a rich, fertile loam that makes that wide strip of land alongside the Nile an agricultural cornucopia for Egypt.

Not only Egypt, in ancient times it also sustained many of the surrounding countries because Egypt exported its Nile-grown grain to the surrounding countries too. And so the Nile, not only fed Egypt but it made it wealthy too—it was the breadbasket of the entire region and the engine of prosperity for Egypt. And therefore, in honor of the Nile which rose and performed its functions dutifully every year, the people gathered to celebrate. It was a happy celebration that everybody participated in.

True Loyalty

But Yosef, not. Why? Because he was loyal to his tasks. There was always a lot of work to catch up on and so he refused to go. הָלָכוּ בּוֹלָם

לְרֹאוֹת – Everyone went to see the festivities; everyone else was happy to have an excuse to leave work.

וְהוּא נִכְנָס לְמַלְאכְתּוֹ לְחֹשֶׁב הַשְּׂבונוֹת רַבּוֹ – But Yosef, his heart told him that it was more proper to stay at work.; “I have a master, and I have to be as loyal as I can to him.” And so וַיָּבֹא הַבֵּיתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ – Yosef stayed home to do his work (ibid.).

Now, that’s quite an example of loyalty to a job. We’d all like to have an employee with a *middah* like that. An employee who feels that it’s his duty to be an *oived Hashem* by being loyal and honest to his place of work, absolutely it’s praiseworthy! But what the Chachomim tell us is that not only was it a commendable *middah*, but they apply to Yosef the *possuk* in Mishlei (22:29): חָזִיתָ אִישׁ מְהִיר בְּמַלְאכְתּוֹ – Have you seen a man who is diligent in his labor? לְפָנֵי מְלָכִים יִתְיַצֵּב – He will stand before kings. It’s such an important *middah* that it’s the reason why eventually Yosef was released from servitude to become the *mishneh lamelech* under Pharaoh.

Crocodile Alcatraz

You’ll tell me that there was a lot of time in between this day and the day Yosef finally arrived in Pharaoh’s palace? After all, he was thrown into prison first. Well, Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s ways are not that simple—there always are some more elements in the story. And the only route to the palace was through the prison because it was there that there were people who would introduce him to Pharaoh, and therefore that was part of the plan to free him and bring him to power.

Why not? I myself would gladly go to Alcatraz for ten years if I could come out as *mishneh lamelech*. I don’t know how many years I have left, but if I was a young man I’d go to Alcatraz for ten years if I could come out and become president of the United States. I would try it.

And so Yosef’s years in prison were also part of the plan. But even though there was still a long road from the house of Potiphar to the palace of Pharaoh, the Chachomim want us to know that when eventually Yosef was appointed second in command to Pharaoh, it was because of the loyalty that Yosef had shown his boss, Potiphar, that it happened. That, they say, was what made Yosef worthy of freedom and glory.

And that's a puzzle to us. Because what's so important about loyalty to a job that Hashem takes special notice of that? What's so exciting about a conscientious worker that he should find such especial favor in the eyes of Hashem?

The Gra's Chiddush

Now, in order to understand the answer to this puzzle we have to first study a statement from the Gra, HaGaon Rabbeinu Eliyahu m'Vilna, in the *sefer Even Shleimah*. It's the very first statement in that *sefer* and it goes as follows: כָּל עֲבוֹדַת ה' תְּלוּי בְּתִיקוֹן הַמִּידוֹת – *The entire service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu depends on improving the character,* שֶׁהֵם כְּמוֹ לְבוֹשׁ לְהַמְצוּת וּכְלָלִי הַתּוֹרָה – *because the qualities of character are like a garment for the mitzvos and for all the general principles of the Torah.*

Now that's a statement that sounds quite important – “all of *avodas Hashem* depends on *middos*” – but not because of how we generally think, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants a nation of people with excellent character *bein adam lachaveiro*. That's true, too but it's not what the Gra is saying here. He says that we have to acquire good character “*because the qualities of character are like a garment for the mitzvos and for all the general principles of the Torah.*”

It means that our entire relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, all of the *mitzvos* that we perform as Jews, all of the Torah we learn, and all of the principles that we attempt to live by, whether we like it or not, are clothed in the traits of character that we have already acquired.

One Set of Middos

Now, that statement is quite a *chiddush* because we're accustomed to thinking of *middos* as belonging to the realm of *bein adam lachaveiro*. But we're learning now that you cannot separate between these two realms. The area of *middos*, of character, and the area of *avodas Hashem* are not two separate things; because a person has only one set of *middos*, and therefore the same relationship you have with people, towards people, will be your relationship with Hashem.

The basic personality of a man depends on the traits of character that he possesses; that's who you are, whether you're dealing with a

person or you're dealing with Hashem. And therefore if a person is healthy in his *middos* – healthy in his *anivus*, in his *menuchas hanefesh*, his *zerizus*, his *savlonus*, his *achrayus* and loyalty – so he'll also be healthy in his relationship with Hashem. But if he is ill in his *middos*, then whatever he talks, whatever he does, he's going to talk and do with the wrong crooked *middos*—even to Hashem. And whatever he may claim, however much he'll deny it, it doesn't matter.

Empty Gratitude

Let's give an example, a common example maybe. Here's a boy who comes home from the yeshivah, and his mother made supper for him. So as he gets up from the supper, does he say thank you to his mother? After all, it took her some time to prepare that supper. Did it enter his mind that he should say thank you to his mother? No. It doesn't even cross his mind.

But he's a *frum* boy so he says, “ברוך אתה ה'... המוציא לָחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.” He makes a big *bracha* to Hashem. You have to know it's empty! He's thanking Hashem without any heart of gratitude at all! Only he's a *frum* boy, so he's doing Him a favor; he's making a *bracha*. But he doesn't have any gratitude to Hashem! And it must be so, because his mother's right there and she worked two hours over the gas range, she was *makriv* herself as an *olah temimah* on the fire of the gas range for him, and he doesn't say a big *bracha* to his mother? So how can it be that he's saying a big thank you to Hashem? To someone who is right in front of you, you have no gratitude but to an invisible Hashem you're overflowing with gratitude? It's not sincere at all.

Recognizing the Cook

Oh yes, you'll say, “When it comes to the Creator, how can I ignore the fact that He creates food? Certainly when I ate that apple, I recognized the hand of the Creator! Of course, I'm grateful to Hashem for the apple He gave me.” No, don't deceive yourself. If you don't feel humbled in front of your mother who was cooking in the hot kitchen, then you're not humbled before Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

That's what Chazal say כָּל הַכּוֹפֵר בְּטוֹבָתוֹ שֶׁל חֲבִירוֹ – if a person is *ungrateful to his fellow man*, suppose he's not grateful for a favor that people do to him, לְבִסּוּף כּוֹפֵר בְּטוֹבָתוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם – he'll be *ungrateful to*

Hashem too. Why is that? Because it's impossible to departmentalize that and say, "To people I'm not grateful, but to Hashem I'm grateful."

And so it's only the boy who practiced up on *hakaras hatov*, on saying thank you to his mother—"Ma! It's a great supper! *Baruch Hashem*, my mother is a good cook"—once you're able to be grateful to your mother and to your wife, then when you'll say, בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הֵינָן אֶת הַכֹּל, so we can suspect that you mean it. But if you didn't thank your mother or your wife or the cook in the yeshivah, and now you say *birkas hamazon*, you have to know it's nothing but an externality, a formality. You had no intentions of thanks. You're denying your fellowman's benefits, so it's impossible that you're appreciating Hashem's benefits.

One Big Compartment

And that's how it is with all of our character traits; the acid test of your relationship with Hashem is your *middos* with people. Otherwise, you're full of baloney. You can't be good with Hashem if when it comes down to brass tacks, you're not good with people around you.

Don't deceive yourself and say, "Although maybe I am not such a fine person in my dealings with others, at least my relationship with Hashem is in good order." It's impossible. That's what the Gra is telling us in his opening statement in the *Even Sheleimah*; it's *sheker v'kazav* because the way you are with people is the way you are with Hashem. It's impossible for a person to departmentalize his character.

Part II. Loyalty to Hashem

Mussar for Middos

Now, everyone will tell you "*middos, middos, middos*"—everyone knows that's the most important thing. And it is! That's why the Gemara is full of that subject. It's full of admonitions against anger. The Gemara is full of admonitions against stinginess, full of admonitions against envy, against arrogance. That's why it's important to learn these Gemaras. You know, I don't agree with what they do in some places, they skip these Gemaras. They shouldn't, it's important!

Also to learn Mishlei, to learn the *Menoras Hamaor*, other *mussar seforim*. Certainly you have to learn them too. Everyone understands

that. And so the importance of *middos*, that's not the *chiddush* here. Absolutely. How can you deal with people if your *middos* are crooked?

But we're learning now that there's a bigger problem! How can you deal with Hashem if your *middos* are crooked?! Our entire relationship with Hashem is based on our character traits. That's the bigger problem!

Dead Cows and Middos

Now, in order to follow this line of thought, we'll listen to the Chovos Halevavos. He tells a story of a *chassid*, a pious man who was walking with his disciple and he saw lying in the street a *neveilah*, a dead cow. Now it was summertime and the carcass had been ripening for some time. It was putrefying in the summer sun and it had a very unpleasant odor.

And so the disciple when he saw the carcass he made a remark about the odor: "בְּמָה מְפֹרֶחֶת נִבִּילָה זוֹ" – how foul this *neveilah* smells."

But his master, the *chassid*, rebuked him. "Why don't you say, 'How white are the teeth of the *beheimah*'? Why speak badly about the cow?"

Now, we don't understand that criticism because what does it matter if you speak unfriendly words about a dead cow? A dead cow doesn't have feelings.

The answer is that you have feelings! It's not the cow we're worried about—it's you. And if you'll get into the habit of looking for faults, of criticizing, so that's what you'll become—a criticizer and a fault finder. Once you get in the habit of belittling even inanimate objects, it becomes a habit, and that's what you become. If you like to knock things—even dead cows—you're eventually going to knock people too. That's how it is. It's human nature. You can't separate who you are.

Keep Our Mouths Shut Tight

And so the *frum* Jew doesn't talk *lashon hara* on *goyim*. There's no *lav*; it says **לֹא תִלְךָ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ**. The *lav* is only to say *lashon hara* against a fellow Jew. However, if you have a habit of speaking bad about a *goy* unnecessarily, then you're developing a *middah* of speaking hurtful words. And so once you get into the habit of slandering cows and humans, you're going to commit the sin and slander Jews too.

And the Gemara (Arachin 15b) says even more. It says there that once you become a big mouth, a slanderer, you'll slander Hakadosh Baruch Hu too. שְׂתוּ בְּשִׁמְיִם פִּיָּהֶם – Do you know why a person's tongue is wagging against Heaven? וְלִשְׁוֹנָם תִּהְיֶה בְּאַרְץ – Because their tongues formerly walked around on the earth.

Their tongues used to take big tours. They used to sit, let's say, in their homes at a *melaveh malkah* and they talked about everybody, lambasting this one and that one. תִּהְיֶה בְּאַרְץ! They walked through Boro Park and Queens with their tongues. They even walked in Eretz Yisroel and talked about *gedolim* and Jews in Eretz Yisroel.

And as a result, שְׂתוּ בְּשִׁמְיִם פִּיָּהֶם – they talk against Hakadosh Baruch Hu too eventually! You hear that *chiddush*? If you knock people, you'll come to knock Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It can't be helped because when the tongue gets trained to speak against people, eventually that same tongue will speak against Shamayim too.

Lashon Hara on Hashem

Don't we see, again and again, people who are criticizing Hashem and belittling Him?

You don't believe me? Walk outside in the wintertime, you'll find two old ladies standing and talking. "What nasty weather! All that dirty snow!" Those are wicked words against Hakadosh Baruch Hu!

You know what snow is? Snow turns into water and water turns into fruits. Because all of the moisture of the slowly melting snow goes into the earth. The farmers say that when there's not enough snow, the crops will not grow well next summer because the earth needs moisture and it's the snow of winter that stores up moisture in the ground. Is that something to complain about? But that's how it is, if you're a complainer, you'll complain about everything.

And even if he may not say it—he may be afraid to say it but in his mind, he's full of dissatisfaction with everything that Hashem did for him. He thinks in *lashon hara* against Him: "Why did this happen to me?" he says. "Why didn't I have more success? Why did I lose money in this-and-this transaction?" And he feels that the blame falls on Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He won't say it, but you have to know subconsciously, he is blaming Hashem.

Two's a Crowd

Arrogance too. If someone is a *baal gaavah* towards people so he's arrogant towards Hashem too. You realize that when a person is arrogant, he wants things his way. And other people, they're just crowding in on him, getting in his way. But actually it's a thousand times worse than that, because really he feels that the world is too crowded for him and Hakadosh Baruch Hu together!

"An arrogant person," Hashem says, "he and I cannot live together in one world" (Sotah 5a). It means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is actually making it crowded for him in this universe.

Of course, he would ridicule that if he heard it. "I would try to push Hakadosh Baruch Hu out of the universe? *Chas v'shalom!* Just in my home I'm arrogant, between me and my wife. At work or in the synagogue, that's where I want it my way. But what's that have to do with Hashem?"

No Kings

The answer is he wants to have what's inside the four walls of his house or the synagogue exactly as he wishes because that's all he's capable of right now. He's limiting himself to those four walls because right now he doesn't see it expedient to talk otherwise. But he'd like to push the four walls apart until it takes over the whole block. And the globe too. He wants to push out into the furthestmost orbit of Saturn and Jupiter and if he discovered some way of getting further out, he'd take in all the galaxies too. Because once he's arrogant, that's who he is.

And so, when he talks to Hakadosh Baruch Hu—even when he's *davening* and shaking—it's *also* with the wrong crooked *middos*. "I'm what matters here, not You." No matter what he's going to tell you! He'll deny it but no matter. It's a false denial. He's arrogant to Hashem too.

Ahavas Hashem Starts at Home

It's like the *bochur* who says he loves Hakadosh Baruch Hu. "Oy, I love Hashem," he says.

So we tell him, "Let's first see how much you love your physical creators, your father and mother."

Ohhhh, that's already a bitter test, to love your parents.

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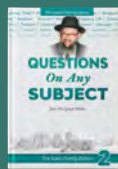
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Now, it says in the Torah you should. The Gemara explains that כָּבֵד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמֶּךָ means to love them. וְאָבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ means to fear and kabeid means to love.

But he doesn't feel that. "Why should I love them? Did I ask them to bring me into the world?" he says.

So the same one will think, "Did I ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu to bring me into the world?" And even though with his mouth he will claim that he loves Hakadosh Baruch Hu, he's a phony. Because if you cannot love the father who is with you in the same house, then forget about your claims of loving Something invisible.

Comparing Apples and Oranges

And that's exactly what it means when it says הוֹקֵשׁ כְּבוֹדָם לְכָבוֹד הַמְּקוֹם – the honor of parents is compared to the honor of Hakadosh Baruch Hu (Sanhedrin 50a). Compared?! How can you compare such a thing? Flesh and blood parents to Hashem?!

The answer is that only when you're capable of giving honor to your flesh and blood progenitors who created you, then you're ready to give honor to the real Creator. And if not, if you're not able to honor your father and mother, then it's not sincere. You're deceiving yourself when you say that you honor Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

That's why the Gemara says that אָבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ מְכַבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאִמֶּךָ – when a man honors his father and mother, הוּא מַעֲלָה, הוא מעלה – Hakadosh Baruch Hu says He considers it, בְּאֵלֵינוּ בִּינֵיהֶם – as if I dwelt between both of them, וְכְבוֹדִי – and the son honored Me (Kiddushin 30b).

Rent-Controlled Geneivah

And so that's the test of somebody who claims he loves Hashem. We think that in order to find favor in the eyes of Hakadosh Baruch Hu we have to be devoted to Him; we have to love Hakadosh Baruch Hu with all our heart and that settles it. No; let's see how he loves his wife or his neighbors, how he loves his employer and his employees. Even his landlord.

Here is a man who has a landlord. Now, this man considers himself a paragon of virtue, but I know that he's trying his best to kill his

landlord. And finally he got his wish. Finally the landlord gets a heart attack and dies.

Now this man tells me an entire story. He and his landlord weren't on speaking terms. Of course it's all his side. The landlord is no good, he's wicked. Now, this landlord could never raise the rent because it was a rent-controlled apartment. The tenant was paying \$38 since 1970! For a big apartment!

And that wasn't enough for him. He was a *malshin* too. He went to the government more than once to complain against this poor landlord. For the \$38 he wasn't getting enough services. And the landlord finally got a broken heart and he died.

Now this man doesn't know that he's a complete failure. He pats himself on the back as he tells me the story of what a good man he is. He recounts his virtues. He *davens* so well, he learns well. He gets along with Hashem very well. But I know he's a failure because with his landlord he's a complete failure. It's impossible that he should get along with Hashem.

Worldwide Success

You have to succeed with your landlord. You have to succeed with your children. You have to succeed with your neighbors. You have to succeed with the *goyim* on your block. If you succeed to the best of your abilities, then you're going to succeed with Hakadosh Baruch Hu too because your relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu depends on your character.

And so *middos* is a fundamental criterion of a person's relationship to Hashem. That's why it's so important to have an ambition to work on ourselves, to get into our minds an ambition to be perfect. Because not only will we be more successful in this world, with people, with our friends, but we'll be more successful with our most important Friend, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Part III. Chanukah Loyalty

Focus on Loyalty

Now, this principle is so big, so all-encompassing, that each *middah* deserves a long discussion for itself, how it plays out in our relationship with Hashem. But for the time being that's all we're going to say about *middos* in general because the *maamar Chazal* we began with tonight is teaching us this principle specifically in the *middah* of loyalty.

The Chachomim, with their sharp eyes, saw that it was Yosef's loyalty to his master — he wasn't his master in Torah by the way; he was a gentile slaveowner — but that's what made Yosef successful with Hashem. It was in Potiphar's house that he climbed the ladder of loyalty to Hashem.

And therefore if a man claims, "I am an *eved Hashem*. I am loyal to Hashem. Oh yes, with *mesiras nefesh*!" but when it comes to his flesh and blood master, he is a crook, then forget about his claim. Even if he has a long laundry list of excuses and he wants to retaliate and stick up for his rights as a member of the proletariat, it won't help a bit.

If when it comes to taking a salary, he takes the full salary, but when it comes to delivering work, he cheats his master and doesn't work loyally, so you have every reason to disbelieve him when he claims to be an *eved ne'eman* to Hashem. Because it's against his nature! He may profess loyalty, but it's only a superficiality. Loyalty has to be something that is applied to everybody, to man and to Hashem. And if he won't apply it to man, it's not true he is loyal to Hashem. Only if you're working on being a *ne'eman* to a *basar v'dam* master, then you have some hope of working your way up the ladder and becoming a *ne'eman* to the real Master, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Loyalty at Home

Not only with a boss. You have to succeed with loyalty to your wife too. *וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ* – A man has to cling to his wife. He has to be loyal to his wife through thick and thin. It's *poshut* that way because he's not being loyal only to her—by being a *dovak b'ishto*, he is actually being a *dovak baHashem*.

Like it states, **וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בָּה' אֶלְקֵינוּ** – You who are *dovak*, loyal, to Hashem through thick and thin, **חַיִּים נוֹלָדִים הַיּוֹם** – that's called living successfully. And who doesn't want that? To live successfully!

But the test is: can you be loyal to your fellow man? Are you loyal to your spouse? Are you loyal to your *rebbe*, to your yeshiva? If not, then it's merely lip service to say that you'll be loyal to Hashem. Because it's easy to say words of loyalty to someone that you don't see, but when you have to be tested with the acid test of being loyal to a *bosor v'dom*, a wife or an employer or a friend, and you can withstand that test, then actually you're ready for the greater *dveikus* of **וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בָּה'**.

The Ladder of Loyalty

And so when we come back to Yosef Hatzaddik, we can understand better now what Chazal are telling us that what Yosef did in the house of Potiphar, the loyalty he evinced by working dutifully for his boss, that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu freed him eventually and made him the *mishneh lamelech*.

Because Yosef wasn't serving Potiphar. He was, but that wasn't it; he was serving Hakadosh Baruch Hu. When Yosef Hatzaddik was doing his utmost for the benefit of his master's property, he was doing it in order to ascend the ladder of greatness; he was working himself over, perfecting his character in order to be a better servant of Hashem.

That's why he didn't grumble and try to get out of it by saying, "I'm here against my will and I'll be disloyal to my master. I was sold into this, and therefore why should I be loyal?"

The Unhappy Teacher

It's like the yeshiva man, let's say, who has to leave the *kollel*. He needs *parnassah* and so he takes a job teaching in the afternoon Hebrew school. But he has excuses—he doesn't want to be there anyhow. He wants to be back in the *kollel*, only that because of the *kesubah*, the *kinyan* he made, so he had to sell himself into slavery. So number one, he comes ten minutes late. They're not paying him enough anyhow—that's his excuse. And now the children are breaking up all the furniture in the meantime.

Now, this man was hired to get paid, not so much for teaching them. He's getting paid to guard the furniture of the Hebrew school.

שָׂכַר שְׂמִימֹר יִלְדִים – He has to guard the children they shouldn't run out in the street and get hurt by cars (Nedarim 37a). That's the main job, שָׂכַר שְׂמִימֹר. If he'll teach them anything, good and well, but the main purpose is that the children shouldn't break the furniture and shouldn't get run over. And he was ten minutes late.

And then in the middle, he goes out and lights a cigarette. Of course he shouldn't do that even on break because there's no smoking in that building. There are signs. But no smoking signs are only for fools, not for wise guys. He doesn't have to be loyal to the rules. And so he stands and smokes a cigarette, talking to another fellow from the next-door class, and in the meantime, the kids are raising the roof in both rooms.

Yosef's Rise to Greatness

No, Yosef was just the opposite. He said, "I'm a slave to Potiphar, and I'm going to be the best possible one I can be." He had more of a reason than the Hebrew school teacher to be lazy, but he knew that all of life is a preparation for serving Hashem. He knew what the Gra said—he was before the Gra but he knew it—that whatever he would be in *bein adam lachaveiro*, that's who he would be *bein adam laMakom*.

And therefore, Yosef's loyalty in the house of Potiphar wasn't just loyalty to Potiphar, to a gentile boss. It was a reflection of his nature, of the traits that he had developed. And it was that perfection of character, the *middah* of loyalty, that Hashem was looking for, and that's why he succeeded; that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu was *matzliach* him.

And that's a lesson the Chachomim want us to take away from this episode, that the loyalty of a person in his daily life, among his fellow human beings, that's what Hashem is looking for. עֵינֵי בְּנֵאֲמָנֵי אֶרֶץ – My eyes are always looking for the loyal ones, לְשֹׁבֵת עִמָּדִי – those are the ones I want sitting by My side (Tehillim 101:6). They're the ones who find favor in His eyes most because it's there that He'll find the fertile soil of loyalty to Hashem.

Mattisyahu Arrives

Now, before we end our gathering for tonight and daven Maariv, I don't want to forget to mention the theme of the day. Tomorrow night

is Chanukah, and I wanted therefore to talk to you about one of the heroes of Chanukah, and that's Mattisyahu.

You know, we don't know anything about Mattisyahu's past. We never heard of him before Chanukah. All of a sudden, he appears on the scene, a hero who is raising the banner of loyalty to Hashem, a *kana'i* who is fighting for *kavod Shamayim*. From where did such a greatness of character burst into our history?

It's a big question because you have to know that there's no such thing as becoming truly great suddenly, overnight. You think that out of thin air, he became a loyal *eved Hashem*, someone willing to put everything on the line for his loyalty? No, that's not how it works.

All the Days of Mattisyahu

The answer is that Mattisyahu, he was an elderly man by that time, and we have to say that he had lived a long life of loyalty. You can be sure if you'd examine Mattisyahu's career, you would see that he was loyal to everything. He had lived a life of *mesiras nefesh* for *tikkun hamiddos* because he understood that he was getting his training to be *ne'eman* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And so he didn't shirk his responsibilities to his wife. He didn't shirk his responsibility to his children. He didn't shirk his responsibilities to his parents and to his employer and to his neighbors and community. And that's why when the time came he didn't shirk his responsibilities to Hashem either. Otherwise, a man who shirks his job to his fellow man will try to get out of doing the job for Hakadosh Baruch Hu too. "Let other people do it. I'm an elderly man. Let other people fight the battle of the Torah."

No! He was an *eved ne'eman*. All of his life, all of *בְּיָמַי מִתְּחִילָתוֹ*, he was fiercely loyal, and that's why he was able to stand up to the greatest test of loyalty that man can face. He had trained himself all his life in being a loyal person, and as a result he was a *ne'eman* no matter what.

The Loyal Chashmonaim

And so, when he saw that the *Yevanim* with their powerful army and wealthy government were undertaking a *gezeiras hashmad* against the nation and everything seemed to be lost—"What's the use of being loyal?" the weaklings said. "We're being slaughtered! It's a lost cause!"—

that's when Mattisyahu and others like him were able to muster their strength, the strength of loyalty, the loyalty muscles they had exercised all their lives. And Mattisyahu told the people, “Chas v'shalom! We're not lost! We're loyal till the end! Even if we have to run and hide in the caves and suffer every kind of discomfort and peril for Hashem.”

Something like that requires strong loyalty. In the caves there were no longer any medicines available. There was no longer any heating when it was cold. You didn't have water when you wanted to drink. You didn't have food. They lived like animals. They lived with diseases. You understand how they felt like flies many times to the elements. Rain, wetness, discomfort. In addition the enemy didn't sit quietly. They pursued them into the caves. They slaughtered them in the caves. And if they caught them, they inflicted the worst tortures on them.

But loyalty is loyalty, and Mattisyahu said, “מִי לֵה' אֵלֵי – Whoever is loyal to Hashem come with me. We'll suffer and maybe even worse, but because of our loyalty we're going to outlast all the nations!”

And that's what happened. A small group of Jews rose up in loyalty to Hashem and that's when Hashem did *nissim* for the Am Yisroel. Because they deserved it! They deserved it because of their perfection of character—it was their perfection of character that resulted in their *mesiras nefesh*.

The Ladder to Eternity

And therefore, when a person knows that by being loyal, that's the first step towards loyalty to Hashem, that should be enough incentive for his whole life. All his life, he goes out of his way to be loyal to his friends and his wife and his children—even to the *rov* of his shul he can be loyal—and he's perfecting his character for the relationship that matters most.

Of course, you have to do more than that—there are other *middos* too, and there's Torah and *mitzvos*. But you have to know that this is already a ladder, a ladder of loyalty.

It's a **סֹלֶם מְדֻבָּר אֶרְצָה**, *a ladder that's standing on the ground among people*, but it's **רִאשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה**, *it takes you all the way up to Hashem*. And it's a ladder that every man and woman, every boy and girl, can start climbing: Be loyal to everyone around you! And once you're

steadfast and loyal to flesh and blood, to your wife and your husband and your neighbors and friends and your boss, then you can climb higher and higher and be *zocheh* to be an *eved ne'eman* to Hashem!

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Let's Get Practical

Everyday Acts of Loyalty

This week we learned that Yosef rose to greatness because he trained himself to be loyal in the small details — to give his boss honest work, to keep his word, and to fulfill his responsibilities even when unnoticed. Since our loyalty to Hashem is built on the loyalty we show to people, this week I will bli neder choose one daily opportunity to practice simple, quiet loyalty — arriving on time, keeping a commitment, or doing a job faithfully — and I will remind myself each time: “This is training to be loyal to Hashem.”

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

194 – The Loyal Ones | **196** – Chanukah III | **197** – Loyal Servants

E-85 – Loyalty: The Light of Emunah

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Friday Unifies Heaven and Earth

The world is divided into two realms: *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*, otherwise known as Heaven and earth. The distance separating Heaven and earth is tremendous. They seem so far apart and so different from one another. But there is a *middah* that unites them.

This *middah*, called *yesod*, causes Heaven to become Heaven and earth combined. And similarly, earth becomes earth and Heaven combined. In other words, *gashmiyus* becomes *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus* together, and so too with *ruchniyus*. For example, when a Jew eats on Shabbos, it's not just a physical act. On Shabbos, the *gashmiyus* is *ruchniyus*, and the *ruchniyus* is *gashmiyus*. Furthermore, *ruchniyus* penetrates Friday, and thereby penetrates the other weekdays as well. Although Friday is mundane and Shabbos is sacred, the Torah gave us the opportunity to unify the weekdays with Shabbos through the *middah* of *yesod*, which unifies *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus* for the entire week.

This *middah* of *yesod*, of unifying Heaven and earth, is the special *middah* of Yosef HaTzaddik. This is the innovation in *avodas Hashem* that Yosef brought into the world: the ability to unify *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*. This is what he accomplished by successfully withstanding his great *nisayon*. He showed that through *gashmiyus*, a person can become a holy tzaddik. This is in fact what happens when a person overcomes the influence of *gashmiyus*, as Yosef did — the *gashmiyus* turns into *ruchniyus* for him. Through passing his *nisayon*, Yosef merited rulership and sanctity, for he unified Heaven and earth.

Friday is what integrates these two worlds. And here lies the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. For a non-Jew, there is a tremendous gap between *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*. They are cut off from one another. When he eats, he is totally physical, and when involved in matters of the spirit, he is totally otherworldly and saintly.

The *middah* of *yesod* expresses a Jew's true character. When a Jew eats, he is spiritual. And when he learns Torah, he connects to the Torah so profoundly that it is not just a spiritual matter for him; he actually enjoys it.

This idea is expressed by a verse written about b'nei Yisrael's leaders at Mount Sinai: "They gazed upon God, and they ate and drank." (Shemos 24:11) Targum Onkelos explains that they were so happy over their *korbanos*, which Hashem had graciously accepted, that they felt as if they had eaten and drunk. For them, sitting in the *beis midrash* was like sitting at a banquet.

For a Jew, Heaven and earth are not cut off from one another. Learning Torah is *geshmak*: It's tasty and enjoyable! Among the foundations of Yiddishkeit are two important factors: A person should truly enjoy his learning and that even when he is involved in *gashmiyus* he shouldn't disconnect from *ruchniyus*.

Friday is preparation for Shabbos. On the one hand it is a mundane day, and on the other hand it is completely sacred. It is a special day of *kedushah* that unifies Heaven and earth. Thus, it is especially important to learn Torah on Friday and not let this precious day slip through our fingers. It is a great loss for us to treat the crucial time of Friday as if it were a "day off" from *avodas Hashem*. By properly appreciating and utilizing Friday, with its unique *middah*, we can unify Heaven and earth!

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QUESTION

What do we tell our children when they see the upcoming December holiday approaching, all the lights and even the Jewish stores are having sales?

ANSWER

The holiday lights are disgusting to us. It's very wrong to admire anything that is in any way connected to *avodah zarah*. *Chas v'shalom* to admire the lights. I don't want to talk in public about what it celebrates. It's one of the most shameful things in history. It's a whole world that is being misled with cathedrals and churches, all kinds of sects, and it's based on nothing. It's a world of *sheker*. And therefore, as you pass through it, you have to say, *אשרי העם שה' אלקיו* – *happy is the nation that Hashem of truth is their G-d.* *Baruch Hashem* that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has rescued us from this flood of ignorance. That's what we say to our children.

Now, the Jewish stores? We tell our children that the Jewish people who have stores are trying to make a living and since the *goyim* are enthusiastic and buying things now, the Jews are utilizing the opportunity. Now is a good time for them to make money. That's all it is and that's the truth. Not only Jewish people. All the gentile stores are also interested only in one thing—the holidays are just a big money making proposition. It's another form of Mother's Day.

And if you think I'm joking, the Witnesses say the same thing. Although I don't approve of them at all, but they say the same thing. They say the whole holiday season is nothing but a money making proposition and there's nothing to it. So even they themselves admit it.

And that's what we tell our children. They want to make money, that's all. And so they're all telling you, "Come into our store and save!" So you tell your children, "Stay out of the store and save!"

December 1981

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