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# PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## THE GIFTS OF TORAH

### CONTENTS:

**Part I.** Thanking for Torah - 3

**Part II.** Thanking for This World - 7

**Part III.** Thanking For the Next World - 13

## Part I. Thanking for Torah

### A Warning Fulfilled

In this week's *sedrah* Hakadosh Baruch Hu warns the Bnei Yisroel about the terrible punishments that will befall them at the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, when the land would go lost from us. And He tells us why it will happen: וְאִם בְּחַקְתִּי תַמְאָסוּ – *And if you will loathe My chukosai, My Torah...*, וְנִגְפַתֶּם לְפָנַי אֵיבִיכֶם – *you will be struck down before your enemies* (Vayikra 26:14-17).

And so to us it seems understandable. 'If you will loathe My Torah' so there are repercussions. After all, Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't bring us to Eretz Yisroel to speak Hebrew and to have a Tzahal; He brought us into the land to be a Torah nation. And if we don't fulfill our part then it makes sense that וְהִשְׁמַתִּי אֶת אֶת הָאָרֶץ ... וְאַתֶּם אֲזַרְהוּ בְּגוֹיִם ... וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם שְׂמָמָה וְעַרְיָכֶם יְהִי

הַרְבֵּה – And I, Hashem, will make the land desolate ... and I will scatter you among the nations ... your land will be desolate and your cities will be a ruin (ibid. 32-33). And so it's understandable what happened. He kept His word, that's all.

But we have to know, we'll see soon, that it's not as simple as people imagine; actually the truth is very very far from our imaginations. And therefore it would be a good idea tonight to spend some time studying the subject of what it was that caused the *Churban*.

### Searching For Answers

We must know that in the days of Yirmiyah Hanavi when he began to foretell the approach of the destruction the people were displeased with him because of his bitter castigations of them, his tirades against them. And they said, “What do you want from us? וְתוֹרַת ה' אֲתַנּוּ – Don't we hold loyalty to the Torah of Hashem?” (8:8)

And they said it because it was so. The people followed no other constitution, no other code of laws except the Torah. They judged only by the laws of the Torah in the way that our traditions explained it should be applied. They learned Torah and kept it – they lived their lives *al pi Torah* – and therefore, “What else could you expect of us?” was the question asked to Yirmiyah HaNavi.

Now could be that had we been consulted, we would have immediately given the answer. This answer, that answer. We like to think we know all about our ancestors' sins. But apparently it was not such a simple question for the people to answer.

### Wise Men and Prophets Too

But not only the people, the *amei haaretz*; מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֲכָם וַיִּבֶן אוֹתוֹ – even the wise men couldn't understand it (ibid.) זָה נִשְׁאַל לְחַכְמִים – They asked of the Chachomim, the Sages, וְלֹא פִרְשׁוּהוּ – and they couldn't explain it either (Nedarim 81a). It doesn't mean they had nothing to say. There's no question they pointed out this fault, this misbehavior, this area in which you can improve yourself. Was there ever a nation where you couldn't find something wrong, unless they're *malachim*? It's certain that the *Chachomim* gave various opinions, but it seemed unsatisfactory to explain such a catastrophe.

So שְׁאַלוּ לְנְבִיאִים – the *Neviim* were asked, וְלֹא פִרְשׁוּהוּ – but they couldn't explain it either. They knew that what Yirmiyah said was going to happen but why it should happen, that they couldn't say. The *Neviim* who criticized,

who rebuked, who sought faults in order to point them out to the people, even they were not able to explain in a matter that was satisfactory.

Until finally Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent a message by one of the prophets as follows: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' – and Hashem said, עַל עֲזוֹבֵם אֶת תּוֹרָתִי – because they forsook My Torah (Yirmiyah 9:12).

Now that seems puzzling. If they didn't keep the Torah couldn't the *Chachomim* see that? If they forsook the Torah why were the *Neviim* not able to explain it? What was the big puzzle, עַל מָה אָבְדָה הָאָרֶץ?

### **Destruction for a Blessing?!**

And so the Gemara explains, *ein hachi nami*, they kept everything. They kept the Torah, absolutely. And they learned Torah too – much more than we learn. So in what way did they forsake the Torah? שְׁלֹא בָּרְכוּ בַתּוֹרָה – *They didn't make a bracha when they were sitting down to learn Torah.* They kept everything only when they sat down to study the Torah, they didn't make a *bracha* beforehand; that's the conclusion of the Gemara.

Now, that's a remarkable explanation, to say that's why they went into *Golus*. It certainly is a sin; when you learn in the morning – before you come to the *beis haknesses* and you want to learn something at home – you have to make a *birchas HaTorah*. According to some it's *d'Oraysa*; it's more important than making a *brachah*, *hamotzi*, on bread before you eat. But does that justify destroying Yerushalayim and slaughtering the inhabitants and sending the people out into exile far away from their homeland for many years with all the attendant tribulations that exile means? It's a remarkable explanation! But the Gemara says that and so we have to understand it.

### **Treasure the Treasure**

And so we come now to our subject. The Ran on the Gemara there quotes with approval the following *peirush* of Rabbeinu Yonah. Rabbeinu Yonah says they made *birchas haTorah*. Of course they did. There's no such thing as not saying *birchas haTorah* before learning Torah. So what does it mean they didn't say the *brachos*? שְׁלֹא הֵייתָה הַתּוֹרָה מִתְּנָה חֲשׂוּבָה לָהֶם – *The Torah wasn't considered to them as an important gift.*

They said the words of the *brachah* like we say מִן הָאָרֶץ לָהֶם when we eat bread. When you make a *brachah* on a piece of bread, do you think about what the bread is? Do you appreciate that bread is life, that bread becomes transformed in miraculous ways into every good thing that we need? Do you appreciate that bread becomes your hair and your eyes and your blood and your brain? A *nechtigeh tug*. It's just a formality; there's a *din*

you have to make a *brachah* so we're loyal enough to say the words. But to actually appreciate the bread?

### The Greatest Gift

But a *brachah* on the Torah without appreciating is much much worse because the gift of the Torah is much much greater than bread. The Torah is everything to us and according to the greatness of a gift that's how much you have to appreciate it. And so absolutely they learned Torah before the *Churban*. More than we do! They made *brachos*! And absolutely they appreciated the Torah. More than we do! But the appreciation didn't rise up to what it should have been, to what such a gift requires. And that, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, is the reason that the land got lost.

You hear that? That's already a valid reason for destroying the land! To our ears it sounds too extreme but the Ran says these words are רָאוּ לְמִי שְׂאֵמְרוּ. He approved of Rabbeinu Yonah's answer. The conclusion of the Gemara – it means the truth of the matter – is that they didn't appreciate the Torah enough.

Hashem says, “At Har Sinai I gave you the biggest gift that ever was given and that will ever be given to mankind. And you're not *meshuga* with happiness, with pride, with joy about it? That's called בְּהִקּוּתֵי תִמְאָסוּ; for such a gift, that's called loathing the Torah. And that's why the land went lost.”

Of course we have to make allowances for human nature. When the Torah was given at Har Sinai, there was tremendous excitement. We loved Hakadosh Baruch Hu for this gift more than if He would have given us ingots of gold and silver and precious jewels. יְקָרָה הִיא מִפְּנִינִים – *The Torah to us is more precious than diamonds*, מְנַפֶּת צוּפִים – *more sweet than honey*. That's how it was in the beginning. They were so much in love with Hashem's Torah: מָה אֶהְבֵּתִי תוֹרָתְךָ – *How I love Your Torah!*

### Life in Both Worlds

But it's a weakness of man that over time the genuine appreciation required of him for a gift diminishes; especially when a person doesn't think about it much so it tapers off until it becomes much much less than it deserves. And when it comes to such a gift like the Torah it's a terrible sin. A Torah Jew means a Jew who for him the Torah is *chashuvah b'einav*. That's the foundation of being a Torah Jew.

The Chovos Halevavos, in his *Shaar Habechinah* where he lists all of the gifts that a person must be grateful for, says that Torah is not just one of the *chasdei Hashem*. It's the one! Of all the myriad kindlinesses that Hashem bestowed upon us, *hagedolah*, the greatest one, is the Torah.

And that means that among the many subjects that a Jew must take time to think about in terms of gratitude and appreciation the most important one is: בְּגִדְלֵי טוֹבוֹת הָאֱלֹקִים עָלֵינוּ – *how great is the benefit of Hashem upon us*, בְּהַעֲרֵתוֹ אֵל מַה שְׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ חַיֵּינוּ בְּשָׁנֵי הָעוֹלָמִים, *by giving us life in this world and in the World to Come*, בְּתוֹרַה נְכִבֶּדֶת – *by means of the glorious Torah* (Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh: 4).

### Inheritance Jigs

Suppose a telegram came tonight when you come home – it's waiting for you on your doorstep, a telegram from a lawyer's office in Manhattan: "We have to inform you that you inherited a million dollars."

You'd just read it like this and put it down? No! You'd do a jig. You'd dance! I would. Maybe you don't care for money but I would absolutely do a jig.

But nobody is going to do a jig if he doesn't appreciate the inheritance. If he thinks a million dollars means a million thumbtacks or a million toothpicks so what's there to jig about?

It means we have to spend time in order to understand what we have. וְמַה יָפָה יְרֻשָּׁתֵנוּ – *How lucky we are and how good is our lot, אֲשֶׁרִינוּ מַה טוֹב הַחֶלְקֵנוּ – and how beautiful is our inheritance!* How fortunate are we that we have a Torah! אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – *You chose us from all the nations.* Those words are an expression of glory, of joy, because we inherited a million dollars, ten million dollars. He gave us His Torah, a gift that has no equal among all the prizes and all the treasures of this world, a gift that gives us life בְּשָׁנֵי עוֹלָמִים, in both worlds.

## Part II. Thanking for This World

### Kind Bookends

Now we'll study this subject a little more because to speak just in generalities is not enough. The Torah won't be precious in our eyes, just because we'll eat *milchigs* on Shavuos. We have to understand how it is actually so; it requires thought and meditation.

And so we'll study a small section of Gemara: רַבִּי שְׁמֵלַי – *Rabbi Shimlai once said a drashah*; תּוֹרַה תְּחִלָּתָהּ גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים – *The Torah begins with the story of kindness that Hashem did.* What does it say there? וַיַּעַשׂ ה' – *Hashem gave clothing to Adam and his wife* (Bereishis 3:21). To give clothing, to be *malbish arumim*, that's certainly

a *gemilus chassadim*. If you can help poor people buy clothing, it's certainly a fine thing to do. And that ideal is near the beginning of the Torah.

וְסוּפָה גְּמִילוֹת חֲסָדִים – And near the end of the Torah also there's an act of kindness: וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ בְּגֵיאַ – Hashem buried Moshe Rabbeinu. To bury someone that passed away is absolutely a *mitzvah*, a great *mitzvah*. Somebody who didn't have money to buy a plot while he was alive, and people get together and buy him a place to be buried, that's a *chessed shel emes*, no question. A very great kindness.

### A Torah of Kindliness

Now, the question is why did Rav Shimlai tell us this? So some say it's to teach us how important the practice of kindness is. The Torah wants to emphasize the necessity of practicing deeds of *chessed* to our fellow man and so it emphasizes it in the beginning and the end. It's not wrong but it's not right either. That's not the *pshat*.

I'll explain what the *pshat* really is. Let's say you walk into a *sefarim* store and you see a new *sefer*. You pick it up. You have no time to read the whole *sefer* so you look at the beginning. It looks interesting; it sounds good. You look at the end. Interesting; sounds good. So you decide that the middle must also be good. And you buy it.

The Torah begins with *gemilus chassadim* and ends with *gemilus chassadim* because the Giver of the Torah wants to demonstrate to us that *the whole Torah is nothing but kindness*. He wants you to buy into that idea: The Torah is *gemilus chassadim* from beginning to end.

### A Gift for This World

That's a fundamental *hashkafah* of a Torah Jew and anyone who overlooks that is missing out on a very important Torah attitude: The Torah was given to us so that we should live more happily in *this world*! מָה יָפָה עוֹלָמְנוּ means in *this world*! מָה נְעִים עוֹלָמְנוּ means in *this world*!

Don't be deceived by crabby people who don't understand the world; people who never stopped to appreciate Torah living, or maybe they don't live properly according to the dictates of the Torah and so they live unhappily. The truth is the *frum* Jew enjoys this world more than anybody else does!

A person who lives with the regimen of the Torah, he's guaranteed to live a happier life, absolutely. Whatever anybody else has, he has too, and much more! הַדְרָכֵי ה' הֵם הַדְרָכֵי נְעִים – *The ways of the Torah are ways of sweetness*, means it's pleasant to keep the Torah in *this world*. In Brooklyn, in Australia,



in Meah Shearim, in London – wherever *frum* Jews are they are the most happy ones.

### **The Happy Family**

Everyone knows that the *frum* families are more prone to living longer and happier than others. You want to prove it? Take a bus and go through Williamsburg. You see Jews standing on the corner and laughing. It's a fact. Jews with beards standing on the corner and laughing.

There's a lot to laugh about. When you live *al pi haTorah* you have a wife who obeys you, not a wife who is a lib woman and is constantly rebelling against you. When you have a family – a Jewish family where you don't have a drunken father and an immoral mother – that's where children obey the parents, those children come home at night, and marry young and there's *nachas* in the family. There's no question that people who live a Torah life, a wholesome and moral life, live happily.

### **The Happy Home**

Jewish children are a happiness! Their children are trained in Torah institutions; the girls are taught *bedarkei Beis Yaakov*, how to live in a Jewish house with *tznius*. Because of the Torah, children learn how to honor their parents and so they're first of all going to make their parents happier and secondly they're going to obey the instruction of parents, which is extremely important for a child. The youth must have some instruction to live successfully; children can't do whatever they wish.

Otherwise, the girl who can put on shorts and go out at night and stay out until two o'clock, we understand she'll get into all kinds of trouble. And therefore when a child has learned to honor their father and mother and obey, there's no question that there's a great deal more of good health and happiness and success in life. All together they're afraid of Hashem and the house is a little *Beis Hamikdash* and they serve *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* all their lives. A Jewish home is a place of joy, no question about it.

### **Broken Homes, Broken Lives**

Outside of the Torah home there are always breakdowns and breakups. People come into conflicts that many times break down their health. There are breakups, sadness, recriminations, broken hearts, slayings, complications, diseases. When people live a settled married life according to the law of the Torah, they'll certainly live more contentedly.

The Torah is always a wall against broken lives, broken families. לא תקרבו לגילות ערוה – *You shouldn't even come close to immorality.* Do you know

how lucky we are that we have that warning! It's a salvation for us! How many divorces and tragedies were passed over!

### **The Tragic Gentile**

Those who don't have the Torah are constantly victims of circumstances that are tragic; besides making them broken people morally, their lives are ruined. It happens all the time among them. He loses his wife, his family. His friends look down at him. He loses his job too.

But *boruch Hashem* the Am Yisroel is protected by the Torah. The Torah is our protection! No question about it! The Torah is a wall against trouble, a guarantee against many misfortunes.

When the Torah tells us *לֹא תֵלֵךְ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ*, that you shouldn't go gossiping among your people, it's saving our lives in this world too. Because most of the troubles of the world today come through people talking words that the Torah forbids. People say things to other people. All kinds of *rechilus*, *mesirus*, hostilities, *machlokes*. You cause harm to people's business and you cause yourself enemies.

### **Chasunahs or Weddings**

The Jew is guarded against that. Only by the Torah Jews, do people get together and celebrate happily, safely. Outside of Torah living, it's always violence, always fighting and recriminations.

Somebody gave me a clipping today about a Puerto Rican wedding. So ambulances were racing back and forth taking people to the hospitals from the wedding. Now, a Puerto Rican wedding, that's something. Usually they don't bother but when they do it ends with violence. They come together, they drink, they begin arguing and the knives come out.

At a Jewish wedding maybe there's some question who gets a *brachah*, some quarrel, but no ambulances are necessary. The Orthodox Jew doesn't carry any guns. Irishmen carry guns. Puerto Ricans, guns. Blacks, guns. Oh yes, they shoot.

Now I'm not blaming them. They didn't stand at Har Sinai like we did. They never received that great gift of the Torah that gives us *Olam Hazehdige* life.

### **The Shabbos Party**

It's fun to keep Shabbos. It's fun to bathe yourself *erev Shabbos*. It's fun to put on *bigdei Shabbos*, to change into clean clothing. It's fun to be together with your family and to eat special meals, good foods. It's fun to sing songs together with your children. It's fun to come together with your

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congregation, your community in your synagogues. It certainly is fun to sleep on Shabbos and to rest your body.

Can you compare a Jew who rests every Shabbos and Yom Tov, which is one sixth of his life, to the gentile? Do you realize what a great benefit that is for the body? You have time to recoup the energy that you lost during the week. A man who lives one sixth of his life in retirement while he's still young, he's surely going to live longer. And so there's no question that Shabbos is a great benefit in Olam Hazeih.

Now, the truth is that we could sit here together and talk for hours only about Olam Hazeih. We could examine the entire gamut of life and see what a difference Torah makes in our lives. In marriage, in health, in getting along with others, in happiness, in *nachas*; in everything!

There's no question that if you'll study the general system of the laws of the Torah, you'll see they're all constructed for the purpose of reinforcing a man's life, reinforcing society, giving him a wholesome lifestyle, making society capable of coexistence, *shalom* and also good health, *parnassah* and having sustenance for our needs.

### **Chiddushei Torah**

I could give tens of examples, hundreds, but it's a lifetime job of thinking. People come here and they want it to be spoonfed, it should be told to them. No, that's the *avodah*, to think, to meditate on it, to come up with your own *chiddushim* about how good the Torah is for this world.

And as much as you'll imagine it's much much more because it's certainly true that when people live by the Torah and fulfill its precepts, immediately they benefit thereby. When you study the gift of the Torah you'll see that it's planned for a man's happiness and health and satisfaction and success in this world. And understanding that, keenly feeling that in our bones, is included in the obligation of the Torah being important in our eyes.

## **Part III. Thanking For the Next World**

### **The Greatest Chessed**

Now, all of that is very important. A Torah Jew should always consider the myriad of ways that the Torah makes him happy and successful in this world. And he should do it until it becomes part of his outlook on life; not superficial words but an attitude that percolates in his mind always.

But now we'll move on and understand another level, a higher level, of the Torah being a Torah of kindness. The entire Torah, from beginning to end, is one big kindness because by means of receiving the Torah, *that's how we became Yisroel!*

To be a Yisroel! That's the greatest *chessed* of all *chassadim* provided by the Torah. More precious than all the happiness and success the Torah gives us in this world, what we have to appreciate most about the Torah, is that because of the Giving of the Torah that's how we became Jews.

### **We've Received a Promise**

You know, before Matan Torah even the *Avos* were called *bonei Noach*. Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, the *shevatim*, their families, they were *gedolei olam*; they were *tzaddikim* and *chassidim*, but they weren't yet the Am Yisroel. It was only when we were given the Torah at Har Sinai that the nation became *geirim*. The Gemara says that. (Krisus 9a): We all became *geirim* at Har Sinai. And once we became Yisroel then all the promises that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made to His chosen nation are ours.

What promises? Many; very many. But the most important one, the one that stands out above and before all others, is that to be a Yisroel means that you're included in the eternity of our nation; you're included in the great promise of **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא**.

You have to know that the *Avos* and all the *kadmonim* before Matan Torah when they got Olam Haba, it wasn't because of Yisroel; they earned it with a very great merit of their own. Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, they earned it. They were very great people who achieved it by means of their greatness. But after Matan Torah even though you're not great, it's yours. A plain Jew, an *am haaretz*, as long as he doesn't rebel against the Torah, he goes along with the *derech haTorah*, he is included in the promise **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא**. Because we stood at Har Sinai he's included in eternity.

### **Theological Questions**

That's why we say in *birchas haTorah* **חַיֵּי עוֹלָם נִטַּע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ** – *We thank You for planting everlasting life among us*. Where does that come into Torah? Isn't it true that every mitzvah means reward in Olam Haba, not only learning Torah?

The answer is it's not talking only about learning Torah; it means the Torah itself. It was at Har Sinai, when the Torah was given, that's when 'everlasting life was given to us'. Every one of us was given a ticket: 'You Chaim and you Berel and you Sarah and you Yenta, and you and you, each

one of you is entitled to Olam Haba. All the great happiness with all the pleasures, unlimited and forever and ever and ever is yours because you received the Torah.'

And Olam Haba, that's the greatest gift the Torah gives us because Olam Haba is the greatest happiness that even Hakadosh Baruch Hu could invent. Now some say it's a *kasha*, how could I say that? "Hashem can't make a greater happiness than Olam Haba?! He can do anything!"

And the answer is He can not make anything greater than Himself. And Olam Haba is **נִהְיֶה מֵעַתָּה לְרֵאשִׁית הַשְּׂכִינָה**, to enjoy looking at the splendor of the *Shechinah*. That's the greatest splendor, the greatest joy, there is.

### **Guard Your Ticket**

Right now generations of *tzaddikim* are sitting and looking at the *Shechinah*, and they're so full of joy. If we had the ability to see it for one minute we would be so excited that we would fall apart. Our nerves would collapse; our blood vessels would burst with excitement. That's why **לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאֱלֹהִים וְחָי** – you can't see Hashem while you're alive. You'll burst. It's a tremendous excitement that you're not capable of withstanding.

Now this may seem like an exaggeration but we're not even beginning to tell the story. It's like a drop out of the ocean. The happiness of Olam Haba that we will enjoy is infinitely unimaginable. *And it's ours only because of Har Sinai!*

Of course, it's a responsibility. If you have a precious ticket, you have to guard it. You have to hold onto it. You can't take your eyes off of it. Never to be *meisiach da'as* from this great privilege that you now possess forever and ever.

And that's the foundation of being a Jew, to believe implicitly in that gift *and to rejoice in it*. The first obligation of a Jew is to be full of joy at all times that he has been included in the Klal Yisroel. That the Torah should be valuable in our eyes means the happiness of knowing that you're included in the Klal Yisroel.

### **The Fortunate People**

Men and women, everyone, boys and girls, everyone should be happy at all times. All the *frum* Jews in Williamsburg, in Boro Park, in Flatbush, in Eretz Yisroel, everywhere, wherever you have *frum* Jews, we tell them **שְׂמְחוּ וְצַדִּיקִים בָּה**.

A Jew who believes in Har Sinai could never be sad. Of course sometimes he's sad because he wants to be a better Jew, that's all right. But never be sad because other people have more money or other people have more

pleasures in the world. It's all nothing because you have with you the greatest gift in the world. You have the Torah and Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "By means of the Torah I am giving you not only this world but you'll be with Me for eternity."

And that only adds to the happiness of a Torah Jew in this world. Because not only does the Torah teach to live successfully and happily in this world, at the same time his eyes are also on the future. He knows that there's another world, an even better world, waiting for him.

That's the ultimate happiness – to live for a purpose in the Next World. Because no matter how successful you're going to be, no matter how much money you're going to acquire and how much fame you're going to get, if it's only this world there is an undercurrent of sadness – the knowledge that it'll end in the grave is the antidote to all forms of happiness. For the hedonist, the one who only thinks about Olam Hazeh, all the joys of life are sapped by the prospect of the end of this world; old age, weakness, sickness and eventually death.

### **The Unfortunate Mayor**

Let's say, here's Mayor Koch. He's sitting in City Hall surrounded by flatterers. He has a lot of power. He has millions of city money at his disposal. He doesn't have to listen to the people. He does whatever he wishes. He marches with the gays and gives them rights.

But someday he'll have a stroke. He'll be in an expensive nursing home, but nobody will come to visit. He had no children. He had no family. When he loses his power, who cares for him? He'll be just an old faggot lying there in a wheelchair, ignored by the world. Reporters won't come to him anymore. Maybe once in a few years, somebody for curiosity's sake, will come to visit him. But it's finished!

But when people live with an ideal of Torah living so it's always happy. He has plenty of fun. Whatever anybody else has, he has too! Don't deceive yourself. The *frum* Jew enjoys this world no less than anybody else does! And much more, like we said before. But in addition, his entire life is flavored with the zest of the knowledge that this is just the beginning of what is yet to come. That's one of the most important ingredients in happiness, to know that there's a life after this one. It doesn't end.

And therefore when people live with the Torah, they know that they are living *chayei oilam*. And that makes a tremendous difference just in the fun of life! And therefore he laughs in this world too. Anybody who knows that he's headed for Olam Haba has a different attitude on Olam Hazeh. And that's enough to make us extremely happy at all times.

## The Wildest Celebration

You know in the *yeshivos* in Europe up till not long ago Shavuos was celebrated as the happiest day of the year, even more than Simchas Torah. It became wild on Shavuos in the *yeshivos*. Because they understood **אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ מְדָה טוֹב הַלֵּקְנוּ** – *how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy that special privilege*. Not only to be from the fortunate ones who sit and learn the Torah but because the Torah means that together with the Klal Yisroel we were chosen for *chayei Olam Haba*, the special privilege of being forever and ever.

Now I know it's very far away from our ideals today; we live in a very *gashmiyusdige* world today and we're far from *emes*. But at least when Shavuos is approaching, when the fragrance of Har Sinai is already in the air, that's the best time to think about that; more than other days. Although every day you make *birchas haTorah* and you should say the words with some idea of what it implies, these days are a special occasion.

And so all of us together, men and women, boys and girls, should utilize the opportunity of *Zman Matan Toraseinu* to review once more the great ideals of the happiness that Shavuos means for us, the gift that Torah bestows upon us in this world and the next!

## Have A Wonderful Shabbos

## Let's Get Practical

### Appreciating the Great Gift

In our *sedrah*, the Torah warns us that if we fail to appreciate the great gift of Torah, we will be punished severely. The Torah is is the greatest gift we could ever receive with tangible reward in this world and the next. This week I will *bli neder* spend more time than usual on *Birchas Hatorah*, reflecting on these lessons.

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**QUESTION**

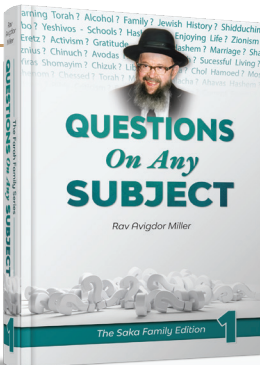
**Why do we read the *tochacha* at such a rapid pace and so quietly? Wouldn't it be more effective if we read it slowly and with more emphasis?**

**ANSWER**

The truth is that today it wouldn't be such a bad idea to read it that way. But in the ancient times when people were more aware of the lessons of the *tochacha* it created a very great anxiety and depression. When people were more aware of the Torah and the lessons intended thereby it was sufficient to read it quietly and everyone was impressed by the lesson anyhow because they understood what the Torah intended. But today, when it's read merely as a formality it wouldn't be a bad idea if the *tochacha* was read aloud and slowly.

Now I'm not going to change any customs, but the benefit of the *tochacha* today is lost. The purpose really is to let us know that nothing happens without a reason. And when misfortune happens it is because the Jewish people are forsaking the Torah and Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't keep quiet. But if you don't listen to the *tochacha*, then you'll never know that lesson.

TAPE # 256 (November 1978)



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