

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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PARSHAS NOACH

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE BUSY MAN STUMBLES

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Part I. The Darkness of Busyness

Noach's Tziddkus

In the Torah we are given examples of people who made errors and suffered consequences because of that. And these examples of the Torah are not intended as mere stories; they are related to us so that we should learn from them.

The Medrash Tanchuma (Noach 13) cites an example of this principle from our *parshah*, and that's the case of Noach. Noach, you know, was a big *tzaddik*; even when he was born, they already expected great things of him. זֶה יִנְחַמֵנוּ – *This one is going to console us* (Bereishis 5:29). That's what they said about him. It was hoped that he's going to be the redeemer of the world. The world had gone down since the beginning of creation – things weren't the same – and people were hoping that Noach would introduce a great change. זֶה יִנְחַמֵנוּ מִמַּעַשְׁנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן יָדֵינוּ – *This little boy will comfort us from our work and the pain of our hands* (*ibid.*) And he didn't

disappoint. He *was* great. נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק ... בְּדוֹרוֹתָיו – *He was the righteous man of his generation* (*ibid.* 6:9).

Now all of you learned Rashi and you know that he brings two opinions. One opinion is that he was extremely great; even when matched up to Avraham he was considered a great *tzaddik*. And some say it was only *b'dorosav*, 'in his generation' that he was a righteous man; he was only 'relatively' great. But 'relatively' also means he was extremely great; if somebody is less than Avraham Avinu it doesn't mean he's not a very great man. Let's hope we will be less than Avraham Avinu like Noach was. And so Noach was chosen by Hakadosh Baruch Hu from his generation; he was an especially great man.

The Tzaddik Stumbles

And yet we find that he made a misstep. Noach made a big error, and his error caused a tragedy. And it's a story that we're told because it's intended for us.

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Do you remember what happened to Noach after the *Mabul*? A very embarrassing event. He grew grape vines and then he wanted to sample the results of his labors so he tasted some of the juice of the grapes. And it was very good; so good, so satisfying, that he thought “I’ll taste a little more” and then a little more and finally he fell asleep. And in his sleep he thrashed around and he uncovered himself.

You remember what happened after that? One of his sons saw him uncovered and because he wasn’t respectful to his father this son later incurred the father’s curse. *Ach!* It was a tragedy, the whole story. A shameful event and a misfortune for everyone involved.

Actually, if it was us we wouldn’t have put it in the Torah – we would have respect for the great man that Noach was and leave the whole story out. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu has other ideas; He wants us to learn – that’s what Torah means, *teaching* – and so every year we all go to the shul and read in public that *וַיִּשְׁתֶּי מִן הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אָהֳלָה* – *Noach drank of the wine and he became drunk and he became uncovered in his tent* (ibid. 9:21).

The Source of the Error

Now the question is how could such a thing happen? The world likes to say that ‘mistakes happen’ but it’s not so simple. Accidents only happen by careless people, or careless behavior.

It should have been impossible for a person of such virtue to make such an error unless there was something there, some carelessness that preceded it. And therefore, as Torah learners, as a nation that studies the teachings of our Creator, we have to look back and try to appraise Noach’s way of life – what was there in Noach’s conduct that could have admitted the possibility of such a mistake?

And the Medrash Tanchuma (Noach 13) says that the answer is in the words of the Torah immediately preceding the incident. *וַיִּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה* – *And Noach began to be a man of the earth*, *וַיִּטַע כֶּרֶם* – *and he planted a vineyard* (ibid. 9:20).

What’s the Error?

Now actually that means that he did what was expected of him. Because Noach had been a long time in the *teivah* during the Flood, and during this time he was thinking about his responsibility for the ‘day after’.

He knew that the face of the earth was desolate and he was thinking of ways and means of restarting gardens, agriculture, planting, under mankind’s direction. Because even though wild plants and trees would start regenerating on their own everywhere from floating seeds and airborne spores, those plants that need the care of man wouldn’t.

And so Noach emerged from the *teivah* now with a plan. He would start planting once more all those things that needed the care of humans. There are a lot of plants that don’t perform at their best when they’re wild. Only under the supervision of a human being can the plants give forth their produce in the best possible manner. At least in one corner of the earth from where it could spread everywhere.

That’s included in being a *tzaddik*; to help mankind. A *tzaddik* picks up a banana peel where a person might slip and fall. He picks up toys from the steps because he cares about people. And so Noach was the *צַדִּיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם*, *the righteous man who took it upon himself to begin rebuilding the foundation of the world* (Mishlei 10:25), to restore for mankind what the sinners had caused to be destroyed. And so he’s praised by the Torah for that: *וַיִּחַל נֹחַ* – *And Noach began*

to dedicate himself to replanting the earth ... וַיִּטַע כַּרְמִים – and he planted vines (*ibid.*).

Man of the Soil

Now, all that is true. Absolutely Noach is lauded for that. But the *Medrash Tanchuma* tells us something else, something hidden in plain sight. Because it should have said וַיִּחַל נֹחַ – that Noach got started on a project of replanting the world, וַיִּטַע כַּרְמִים – and he planted vines. But it says there extra words, אִישׁ הָאֲרָמָה – he became a man of the earth; and the *Tanchuma (ibid.)* tells us that a hint of reproach is intended in these words. ‘Man of the soil’ means that he became excessively involved in his work.

Now, you citified people, perhaps you’ve never had the opportunity, but when people begin to garden they actually develop a love for agriculture, for planting. It’s entrancing when you put a seed into the earth and then you see what happens, miracles upon miracles follow and it comes out and it unfolds and then finally you see blossoms and then finally you see a flower or fruit. Many people put their lives not only into their gardens but they also have greenhouses, indoor plants. And they’ll experiment too. It draws a person in.

The Sin of Overwork

And Noach surely was busy with this work. He put his heart into it because it was an ideal to him. He was doing a mitzvah for mankind. He didn’t work the earth merely for *parnassah*; to him it was a great ideal that the earth should once again begin to produce useful things.

And so what happened? The *Tanchuma* says that he overdid it. נִזְקַק לְאֲרָמָה – He became attached to the soil. He was so busy that he had no time to think! To be busy is a good thing, absolutely. And to be busy with good things,

even more so. But to be too busy to think, that’s a tragedy. That’s what the *Tanchuma* is telling us.

And that’s what happened to Noach; all of his talents and all of his heart he put into the project and to a certain extent he overdid it. And that, the *Medrash* says, is the explanation for his downfall. Noach, this great *tzaddik tamim*, got too involved and נִעְשָׂה חֲלִין – he became degraded, debased, because of that. Of course, he had to be planting. It was a very good thing! But he threw himself into his career with enthusiasm, and now he didn’t have any time. Because this was his career in life now, to save the world.

And because he was so busy he had no time to think. To think, “Am I overdoing it? Am I maybe too busy? Am I thinking ahead, thinking about the results of my work? Could it lead to a problem? What tests might come up against me? Am I prepared for them?”

There’s so much for a person to consider while he’s in this world but Noach was simply too busy. And he therefore had no time to consider the possibilities that might arise in life.

Inevitable Consequences

And finally, the *Medrash* says, the inevitable happened. I say ‘inevitable’ because when a person is too busy to think about himself, it’s just impossible otherwise – something will happen, some unwanted consequence. And we find now this noble man in a very ignoble situation; he’s lying drunk and uncovered and his son is peeking in through the open door and giggling at the sight. And now history is forever changed; it caused his son to be cursed and one third of mankind was rejected.

Now we have to listen to this example that our Sages tells us and we have to pay prayerful attention and use this experience of antiquity as a model, a teaching, for our lives. We're learning that one of the biggest dangers we face is the danger of getting too involved, over-involved, in this world. Busyness! That's one of the biggest obstacles that hinders a person's climb to *shleimus*, perfection.

Striving for Perfection

Now, that word 'shleimus' or 'perfection' in English is a word that has to be part of our vocabulary. It's a term that was used most effectively by the Mesillas Yesharim. He speaks about it right away in the beginning of his *sefer* and he equates perfection of one's mind and character with the highest service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And he sets down the principle that one who is more *shaleim*, more perfect, is more acceptable to Hashem and he's more successful therefore in his career in this world.

But it's not so simple. He describes there a ladder, a ladder of perfection with various rungs, that leads up from this earth to *Shomayim*: **סֵלֶם מֵצֵב אֶרְצָה וְרָאשׁוּ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִמָּה**, that's the ladder of *shleimus*. There's a ladder to climb, one rung at a time. And we're going to see tonight that the first rung, the rung of *zehirus*, is the lesson of this story.

Part II. Illuminating Your Mind

The First Rung

Now, *zehirus* we commonly translate as 'being careful'. And in general it's true; *zehirus* means to be on guard. *Hishamru lachem!* Watch out! Because this world is not such a simple world; it requires caution. You must look where you're going. When? All the time. On the street,

in the home, in the shul. You can never lean back and relax and let things slide. You have to do everything with *zehirus*, with care and caution.

But actually it's not exact, that translation. Because technically speaking the word *zehirus* comes from the word *zohar*, illumination. It's similar to **צָהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לְתִבְהָה** – *make a light in the teivah* (Bereishis 6:16). It's the same word; *tzohar*, *zohar*. It means illumination. And so the first rung on the ladder, *zehirus*, really means to illuminate the mind. Because in order to be careful it is essential for the mind to have a clarity of understanding; what am I doing in this world, where am I headed.

Make the U-Turn

So a man says, "What do you mean 'Where am I headed'? I'm an Orthodox observant Jew. I'm headed straight towards Gan Eden."

That's what you think. But ask your local synagogue rabbi – well, him not; he wants to keep you as a member. So ask the rabbi of the other synagogue, the one you don't attend. He'll tell you where you're headed. It could be you're headed off a cliff.

And the only way to turn around and head in the right direction is by means of thinking. It's impossible otherwise. You can't be a *zahir*, you can't illuminate your mind, without time for meditation.

Jewish Meditation

Now I understand that meditation is out of style today. Who meditates today? Maybe a hermit. Or a fakir from India. But, my friends, it makes no difference what you say. What matters is what the Navi says. **שִׁימוּ לְבַבְכֶם עַל דְּרֹכֵיכֶם** – *You must put your mind on your path* (Chagai 1:7). A Jew meditates! If a person is not

going to take out some time to think things over, he'll never get anywhere in life. There is no progress in *zehirus* unless the mind is employed.

Now when we say 'mind' it's not being intended in the way mathematicians use their minds, or doctors or accountants. These people may be very proficient with their minds, nevertheless their minds are not really active. They're only like specialized machines.

Let's say if you buy a tape recorder, it can do one thing. It can record. It cannot beat eggs for you. It cannot make toast for you. They're specialized machines. Same thing, this accountant. He's a specialized thinker. He knows all the loopholes to keep your money out of the hands of the government. He can calculate the things he's been taught to calculate, the various deductions and expenses. But to make an accounting of himself, it could be he knows nothing at all.

Yourself! That's what you have to think about most! And that's what the Mesillas Yesharim (Perek 3) says: צָרִיד לְהִיּוֹת הָאָדָם מְתַבּוֹנֵן – *a man must always be consulting his mind, constantly and at set intervals ...* לְהִתְבּוֹנֵן עַל מַעֲשָׂיו – *to think about himself, his behavior and actions.*

The Main Mafsid

Now, the Mesillas Yesharim lists various *mafsidim* there, various obstacles to climbing this first rung of thinking, of 'illumination'; but the one that he says is most prevalent is *hatipul vevatirdah* – busyness. The most general of all the obstacles is *being too busy*. The plain truth is that most people are too busy to think. In order for a person to understand his way in the world, he must have some leisure; he must have time to think.

Otherwise he is not going to understand anything about the world and about Torah. He won't understand anything about the Afterlife and all the great Torah attitudes. And most important he won't know anything about himself; about his relationship to his fellow man and about his relationship to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, his relationship to the Next World. He'll understand nothing at all because it's something that requires a great deal of thought.

It's a pity that this subject is relegated to a vest pocket activity. I'm talking even about people who are interested in it – those who are not don't even have a vest pocket for it – but even the good people are willing only to give a little time to this once in a while; and that's a fatal error because it needs *much* time!

A Man of This World

And if you become an *ish ha'adamah*, if you get overly involved in this world, you'll never be able to do it. If you're busy with farming, with planting vines – even if it's for a very good purpose – you'll inevitably stumble.

And it doesn't mean only farming. Could be you're not a husbandry man, you're not a farmer. Farming is just one way of accomplishing things, of cutting out a career for yourself in life and making a living. But it makes no difference.

Let's say you're a researcher in chemistry. A researcher who works in a laboratory and he's looking for the secrets of matter that will help mankind and give him *parnasah* too, the same thing. He comes home from the laboratory and he takes along with him all of his thoughts. He's still thinking of the formulae; he's thinking of the possibilities of the discoveries he might make and that fills his mind even when he's

home. When he goes to bed and arises, that man is enslaved to his career.

And a plumber and a factory man and a mother busy with her children, same thing. Even a yeshiva man in the *kollel* he's not immune; everyone can have the same problem. No time to think! It's the scourge of mankind.

Gadgets and Hobbies

But not only a job, a career. It doesn't mean only that people have a lot of work to do. Even if they work only five days a week and six hours a day or less, but after hours they have a lot of other things to do. People are busy all the time with gadgets. You don't see people sitting on the steps anymore or walking in the streets. You don't see that anymore.

So at night you could say it's due to the judges. The liberals with their bail laws make sure that decent people stay off the streets at night. But by day too – Sundays, legal holidays – we don't see people on the streets.

You know once upon a time people sat on steps. When I was a boy, at night the whole block, all the steps on the block, were occupied by people sitting there. It doesn't mean that they were engaged in the big *mitzvos*. They weren't *osek baTorah*, in *zehirus*, but people had time. Today everybody is busy. Busy with what? Go find out. They're speeding with the car, in this direction and that direction.

A Busy Home

Some people are especially foolish and even into their homes they bring things intended to keep them too busy for contemplation, for success.

Here, you have a woman who has a special room that is dedicated for her hobby. She has a Turkish Room; she has all types of Turkish

things in that room. And it's her pride and joy; she takes her guests into that room to show them the Turkish tablecloth, the Turkish cups and the Turkish pictures.

Now, that is a waste of a life. You are wasting your life on zero. One hundred percent zero! The money was thrown out in the garbage! I was once in a man's house, and he took me into his room where he had his coin collection. He was showing me his African coins, and his Chinese coins. I was thinking, "I don't see anything in it. All I see is a waste of money."

But money is the least of the problems. What about the time that is being thrown out? It takes time to have African coins and Turkish cups. Not only money is being thrown out but time and thoughts are being thrown out in the garbage. How can a person decide to waste his life on hobbies, on extraneous things, when he needs time to climb the ladder of perfection? Who has time for collecting stamps? Fishing? You'll spend your Sundays fishing?

A Busy Calculated Life

So if you go out of here tonight and you say, "Rabbi Miller made nothing out of hobbies," it's the truth. And spread the good word. Now I'm not saying that a person can't do things for relaxation. I told you once about the sefer, *Shevet Mussar*. *Shevet Mussar* is a very strict *mussar sefer*; he talks there a lot about *onshim*, punishments. But he tells you that if necessary, you can even go to parks and walk in the gardens. But who says you have to climb mountains and explore by camping in national parks?

So you'll speak to someone who knows you, a *talmid chochom*, and you'll make a judgement, what yes, what no. But the rule remains the rule: the most prevalent of all the causes of

forgetting about your purpose in life is busyness.

The world is full of tendencies and these tendencies come in a man's life and they take his mind off of his main purpose in life. And today especially we have to know that we are being hampered by the most frequent of all obstacles, the obstacle of *hatipul vehatirdah*. We're too busy to think.

Part III. Illuminating Your Life

No Immunity

Now, once a person recognizes this problem – and *nobody* is immune; that's what the story of Noach is telling us – so he must begin to set aside time for himself. If a man wants to avoid the tragedy of stumbling, of shame in the Next World, he has to overcome the obstacle of *hatipul vehatirdah*. There has to be some time in his life for himself.

I always tell you this story. There was a banker, a successful banker, who had many things to do in his off hours. Sunday he was busy all day long, meeting important people. He was important so he met important people. They invited him, he invited them. He was busy all the time, even when he wasn't sitting in his office in the bank.

And one day he decided that this is no way to live and he said, "Saturday night I am separated from the world." He took his telephone off the hook and he told his wife to go out with the children. "Here is money," he told her. "Go out and enjoy yourself with the children." And he remained home. Every Saturday night he spent taking account of himself. A true story.

A Gentile Model

Now this banker, a gentile banker, was cited by a writer as an example of what people could do. He refused Saturday nights to have anything to do with any kind of people except with himself and he became a much better person because of that. And so the Jew *lehavdil* surely must do that.

There's no excuse, "I'm too busy." Sometimes your wife makes demands on you, relatives make demands on you, invitations come in from all sides for every kind of affair. A person has to be discerning; you should question yourself what comes first, to satisfy all the requirements of society or to think about myself and accomplish something in this world? Whatever it is, you have to come to some kind of a compromise, but it must be a compromise that gives you time to think.

Stealing for Yourself

It's like the Chafetz Chaim used to say. The Chafetz Chaim *zichrono levrachah* said there was once a woman who used to sell rolls and she sent out her little boy to sell the rolls. One day the boy came home weeping and his basket was empty and he had no money. So the mother asked him what happened.

So he told his mother that a gang of *shekatzim*, gentile *shekatzim*, came and knocked the basket out of his hand onto the floor and they seized the rolls and ran off.

So the mother gave him a slap.

He said, "Why are you hitting me? It wasn't my fault."

So the mother said, "When you saw the *shekatzim* grabbing the rolls, why didn't you also grab one? At least something you could have grabbed."

Stealing From Your Wife

So the Chafetz Chaim said: people are going to tell Hakadosh Baruch Hu it's not our fault. My wife took away some time from me. My children took away time. My customers. My relatives. I had no time. Everybody was taking my time away.

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu will say, "Why didn't you take some for yourself too?"

And that's the big principle that we're talking about now. Everyone must make time to sit alone, in quiet seclusion, to think about themselves. It's impossible otherwise for a person to hope for success in this world unless he is able to tear himself away at least for a little while in order to take account of himself. It's a vital necessity for everybody.

A Businessman's Attitude

Don't you see the storekeepers, said the Mesillas Yesharim, that they take inventory? From time to time they make an accounting. They have to see what stock was sold, what's left on the shelves. Which items go better, which less, where's the higher profit. You can't stay in business and just hand merchandise across the counter and get money back. Maybe you're losing money.

Same thing all of us. Day after day you'll just go through the same procedure without taking an inventory? "Am I accomplishing? Maybe I'm losing over here or over there. Maybe I could do better in this or that. Maybe less of this and more of that." And therefore, everybody must take account; just as a businessman must, everybody must take account of his own business.

Accounting: The First Ledger

Now, the Mesillas Yesharim says there are two kinds of *cheshbonos*, two kinds of calculations. One calculation, the one we're most familiar with – I'm not saying we do it but at least we're aware of the concept – is when you spend some time thinking about your faults; what sins and blemishes you have in order to become more perfect.

You'd be surprised. If you'll search you'll find plenty of things you didn't realize. Oh yes, plenty of things you overlook, sometimes serious things that you did. I look back and I regret; I made big mistakes. If you'll search you'll find. Certainly you'll find.

Sometimes a man has embarked on a wrong way even in one detail. Could be he's a fine Jew but he has a bad tongue; he belittles people. Maybe he doesn't speak to his wife the way he should. Maybe he doesn't come to *daven* on time like he should. Other things, bigger things. I would say them out loud but I know that I'll be stepping on some people's corns. But everyone on his own must make this accounting with himself at regular intervals.

Accounting: The Second Ledger

But there's a second accounting that you have to search for the Mesillas Yesharim says. He says that you have to make time for thinking about the good things you're doing. **מִה מִן הַטּוֹב נִמְצָא בּוֹ** – *You have to make an accounting to discover your good qualities (3:6).*

Now, that's surprising. Why do you have to study that? What's the purpose? To compliment yourself? To us it seems that it shouldn't enter the *cheshbon* at all. Who wants to see what's good? We'll become conceited. We'll be bloated with pride! We have to see only what's wrong with us. We have to have a low opinion of

ourselves and know what we have to rid ourselves of. But to see our good deeds? That doesn't seem necessary at all.

And he explains why it is necessary. Because a person can have good things but he doesn't know he has them. He never thinks about it and if he doesn't know, sometimes he might throw them away recklessly. So the Mesillas Yesharim says you must study the good things you have **כְּדֵי שֶׁיִתְמַיֵּר בָּהֶם וְיִתְחַזַּק בָּהֶם** – so that you should continue them and hold onto them.

Don't Squander!

There are a lot of good things that we have that we squander. Many people are busy not only not gaining good things, but they're busy losing good things they already have.

It's a great pity that people are constantly throwing away good habits that they have, constantly giving up certain good practices and attitudes that they started. They live life recklessly and don't pay attention to what's slipping out of their hands. It's only if you appreciate what you have that you're able to hold onto it.

You're learning well? Compliment yourself and think of ways and means of holding on to that. Sometimes you need to think of *tachbulos*, stratagems. Where you'll sit in the *beis medrash*, what you'll learn. You're *davening* well? Hold on tight. Think of ways and means to not let go. Maybe a good *sefer* with *peirush hatefillah*. Maybe you'll come to shul a few minutes earlier.

Holding on to Character

Sometimes you have good *middos* – when you were younger you practiced your good *middos*. But now you're older you go into the business world and you think that now you have to get businessman's *middos*, other ways

of behavior. Nothing doing! The *middos* you had when you were young and you were practicing *avodas Hashem*, keep holding on to them tightly.

Sometimes there are good things that were put into you by your parents. A young man and a young woman have to include that in their accounting. How can I hold on to that? You know when parents leave you money or they leave you property, you have to take care of it. You make plans for that. So if your mother and father taught you good *middos*, Jewish *middos*, watch over them. Now you're a big boy or a big girl and the street, the environment, is pressing down on you all the time. The street wants you to have Irish *middos*, Italian *middos*. Nothing doing! You have to think about your good ways, your good attitudes and character traits, and think of ways how to hold on to them.

Maybe you're a bashful boy. You don't talk to girls. Bashfulness! An excellent *middah*. Maybe your mother taught you to speak nicely. One time she put soap in your mouth when you said something you shouldn't and you learned to have a clean mouth. Hold on to that very tightly! Include that in your accounting all the time. Think about ways and means of encouraging your good attitudes, of sticking to them.

The Great Accounting Schedule

And so it's not enough to have a *cheshbon* to understand what you have to fix, the sins and blemishes you need to fix. You must also have a *cheshbon* to know what you have in order to hold onto it and not to yield, to be stubborn and to persist in it. And to succeed in that great *avodah* – taking time to think about yourself and uproot the bad and strengthen the good – every person has to be aware of that obstacle of *hatipul vevatirdah*, the busyness of life, that

holds us back from our upwards climb towards *shleimus*.

And so, to conclude, we'll repeat the words of our great teacher, the Mesillas Yesharim (3:12): **וְהִנְנִי רוֹאֵה צָרָךְ לְאָדָם** – *I think that there is a necessity for man*, **וְיִשְׁקֹל דְרָבְרוֹ יוֹם** – *to be careful and weigh his ways every day*, **כְּסוֹחֲרִים הַגְּדוֹלִים אֲשֶׁר יַפְלִסוּ תָמִיד כָּל עֵסְקֵיהֶם** – *like the successful merchants who make an exact accounting every day*, **לִמְעַן לֹא יִתְקַלְקְלוּ** – *in order that nothing should go wrong*; it means that the bad things he'll get rid of and the good things he'll strengthen, **וְיִקְבַּע עֵתִים וְשָׁעוֹת לְזֶה שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה**, **מְשַׁקְלוֹ עֲרָאִי** – *and he should set for himself times and hours for this accounting so that it should not be haphazard*, **אֲלֵא בְקִבְיֵעוֹת גְּדוֹל בִּי רַב הַתּוֹלָה**, **הוּא** – *but rather with great consistency because there is tremendous profit in this way of living*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Illuminating the Mind

Noach was a unique individual, extremely great, yet his busy-ness – with good things – caused him to fall. It is imperative on us to set aside time for solitude and meditation – a time when we can make a reckoning with ourselves. This week I will *bli neder* dedicate at least two minutes daily to this exercise. For at least a minute I will review the negative aspects of my character and behavior, and for at least a minute I will seek out my strengths and think about how to build on these positive behaviors and attitudes.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

- 9 – Illuminating the Mind | 272 – Kayin, Noach and Uziyahu
- 323 – Utilizing the Righteous | 464 – Circumspection and Alacrity
- 597 – Avoiding Pitfalls

Q&A WITH RAW AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L



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QUESTION

Should Jews get involved in politics?

ANSWER

It depends what you mean 'involved in politics'. Jews have to be involved only in *avodas Hashem*. In politics *per se*, we have no interest.

However, when we see an issue that involves morality, we should always vote and it's a mitzvah to vote. You have to know Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects Jews to participate in improving the moral environment. If your vote can help out, it's your job to vote for morality. Whom to vote for, that's something that depends on the circumstances but in general voting is not an act of secular activity. It's not *chullin*; voting is *kodesh*.

The Gemara tells a story. A *chacham* of the Gemara was walking in a certain marketplace and he encountered Eliyahu Hanavi. He said to Eliyahu Hanavi, "Is there anybody in this marketplace who is a *ben Olam Haba*?"

Eliyahu said "Yes".

"Show him to me" the *chacham* said.

Eliyahu led him to a clown that was dancing in the corner of the market. He said "This clown is a *ben Olam Haba*."

So the *chacham* approached the clown and said, "Tell me what good things you do."

So the man said, "Well, I'm a clown by profession. When I hear of somebody who is discouraged, who is in a depression, I visit him and I clown before him to make him laugh and cheer him up."

That's what Eliyahu Hanavi said caused that man to be a *ben Olam Haba*.

Now where does it say that clowning is one of the ways of serving Hashem?

The answer is when it's necessary to serve Hashem you do it in any way that's necessary. And so if you have to be a clown and go to polls and vote, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give you reward for that. Don't say "I'm only *oved Hashem* by putting on *tefillin*, by *davening*, by doing the *mitzvos* everybody else does." Sometimes *avodas Hashem* requires us to do queer things too.

And therefore if you can help out in the great battle against immorality and against any form of wickedness, by putting your vote in the right place then you surely are *oved Hashem* by doing it.

TAPE # 760 (November 1989)