

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

BE SELFISH

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Part I. Self Improvement

Mysterious Fixes

There is a concept spoken about in the *seforim* called *tikkun* – ‘improvement’ or ‘rectifying’ – which is fundamental to the life of every Jew and therefore deserves our attention. Now, in the language of *kabbalah*, of the esoteric, *tikkun* refers to the improvement of the world – not only this world that is apparent to our eyes, but also other worlds that the *kabbalah* speaks about. It’s a mysterious and valuable study called *tikkun olam*, the various ways and methods of rectifying the physical and spiritual worlds.

Maybe someday we’ll talk a little, *al pi* the Nefesh HaChayim, of the big *tikkunim*, rectifications that are beyond our view, that are accomplished in the spiritual worlds by capable men. But for now, it’s beyond our ken; we don’t have the means of appreciating it enough.

Unmysterious Fixes

But there is another branch of *tikkun* which is even more fundamental and it’s not as mysterious – wherever you look in the Torah, you find this

concept reiterated – and that’s the great function – not of *tikkun olam* but of *tikkun atzmi*, the perfection of one’s self. And that’s the subject I wanted to speak about tonight.

Now *tikkun atzmi* is also not a simple concept because there are various areas of this *avodah* and each one is a subject of its own; each one deserves its own lecture – or lectures. However, for our purposes right now there’s one form of *tikkun* of one’s self that we’re going to deal with and that is *tikkun* of one’s character. And even though it’s not so mysterious if we have time at the end, we’ll see that this *tikkun* is also connected to the *kabbalah*; it’s also part of the esoteric studies.

Loading and Unloading

We begin with a mitzvah in this week’s *sedrah*. Everybody who studied a little bit of Chumash knows that when it comes to helping your fellow Jew with his packages, there are two distinct mitzvos in the Torah: *prikah* and *te’inah* – unloading and loading.

Prikah means, let’s say, that your fellowman is trying to unload a heavy bail of hay from his donkey that is רִבֵץ תַּחַת מְשָאוֹ – *weakening under its load*, so it’s a mitzvah to help him. וְהוֹרַלְתָּ מֵעֹזֵב לוֹ – *You should*

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not allow yourself to pass by and leave him to deal with it on his own, עֲזֹב תֵּעָזֵב עִמּוֹ – instead, you should forgo your plans and hurry to help him (Shemos 23:5).

By the way, not only to unload donkeys; to unload your fellowman, that's also a mitzvah. If you find your fellowman is loaded down with a heavy bag of groceries and you see he's having difficulty, you shouldn't ignore him. You should stop and offer your services at least part of the way or you offer to hold it while he adjusts himself for a moment until he's ready to continue. Sometimes you see he's struggling with the shopping cart; it's hard for him to negotiate the sidewalk. So if you can lend a hand to raise the shopping wagon, to unload his weight, it's a mitzvah to help him. It's like the mitzvah of *prikah*; if it's a mitzvah to unload his donkey so to unload him, that surely is a mitzvah.

Now, there's a second mitzvah called *te'inah*, to help somebody load a burden. You see a fellow Jew trying to lift a heavy bag onto his donkey – even if he's down the block and you're going the other way – you have to run over and help him lift. Of course nobody is *mechuyav* to risk a hernia, but suppose that's no problem, so it's a mitzvah to help. הִקֵּם תִּקְיֵם עִמּוֹ – You have to assist him in loading his donkey (Devarim 22:4).

Weighing Mitzvos

Now, the Gemara (Bava Metzia 32b) gives us a scenario, a case where these two mitzvos bump into each other and one of them has to yield. Suppose you're walking down 13th Avenue in Boro Park – 13th Avenue is my words, my embellishment of the Gemara – and you see a neighbor who's attempting to put a load on his donkey. But it's a heavy thing, a washing machine let's say, and he's having trouble. So it's a *mitzvah min hatorah* to help him load.

Only that as you're hurrying towards him to help him load up his donkey, down the road you

see there's another man who's trying to unload his donkey; a different neighbor and he also has a heavy load. He has his own washing machine and he's trying to unload it but he just can't do it on his own.

So you have a problem now; whom should you help first? Which mitzvah is bigger, loading or unloading?

Helping The Donkey

And the *psak* of the Gemara is that it's more of a mitzvah to unload than to load. Why? Because when you help the one who's loading, so you're helping him alone. He wants your help, yes, but his donkey is quite satisfied if you don't help. But when it comes to unloading however, you're helping not only the one unloading, but you're helping his donkey too. The donkey is not happy struggling under that heavy load – it's צָעַר בְּעֲלֵי חַיִּים – and so you're making the donkey happy too when you unload. And therefore if there's a question which of the two mitzvos you should do if you could only do one, so you do the mitzvah of *prikah*, of taking off the load, rather than the mitzvah of *te'inah*, putting on the load.

But now the Gemara goes on; the same story but now with a twist. Suppose the man who is trying to load his donkey, the one whom you're not helping first, happens to be unfriendly towards you. He's your *sonei*. He blocks your driveway. He steps on your lawn. And so you don't like him too much. You're a human being after all; he's on your nerves. And on the other hand, the man who's trying to unload his donkey, the one whom you're supposed to help first, he's a friend.

Now if it was up to us we would think; what's even the question? Help your friend unload! After all, we established already that unloading goes first because you're accomplishing two things; you're helping your fellow Jew and you're helping the donkey too. And so if this fellow Jew happens to be your friend too, even better.

Enemies First

That's what we would say but it's not what the Torah says. The Gemara says, **מִצְוָה בְּשׂוֹנֵי אֵי** – *it's a mitzvah to help your sonei load the donkey*. That's why the *posuk* goes out of its way to say **כִּי תִרְאֶה בְּחִמּוֹר שׂוֹנֵי אֵי** – *If you see a donkey of your enemy on the road under a heavy load, you have to help take off the load*. Why mention 'your enemy'? So we see right away that the Torah is saying, if he's your friend, then no question you have to go help a friend unload his donkey. But an enemy, that's even more important.

Now, the question is why this anomaly? What happened to the rule that unloading goes first, that we're concerned about the donkey's pain? And the Gemara tells us an important idea; this is the idea we're going to talk about tonight. It's true that **צַעַר בְּעֲלֵי חַיִּים** is important but there's something more important: **לְכַף אֶת יִצְרוֹ עָרִיף** – *To force your evil inclination is a bigger achievement* (Bava Metzia 32b). To break the wickedness in the heart, to go against your inclination, that's a bigger achievement than to take the load off the poor suffering beast.

So even though your enemy's donkey will suffer under the load of the big washing machine that you're going to put on its back, and meanwhile your friend's poor donkey over there is waiting to be unloaded, forget about your friend and go instead to help your enemy load the donkey. It's a mitzvah for you to help your enemy load because you're doing a much more important unloading – you're unloading yourself of your hostility that you feel towards your enemy. By going and helping your enemy you're bending your will; you're making a change in your character and that's more important.

Who's An Enemy?

Now, one thing we have to make clear. It doesn't mean an enemy who's an enemy of the Torah. No; an enemy of the Torah is an enemy of Hashem and him you shouldn't bother with.

An enemy means someone who gets on your nerves. Maybe he sins too but he's a *frum* Jew. An enemy means he's your competitor. He has a grocery store like you have a grocery store; he's a *frum* Jew but he opened a grocery store on the same street where you had your store for years. And you see now that his truck breaks down so you're thinking, "Why should I help him? He uses his truck to deliver goods to his customers. I want his customers."

That's why you *should* help him. Because if you help him, you know what you're doing? **לְכַף אֶת יִצְרוֹ עָרִיף** – *You're bending your yetzer hara, that's better than anything else*. So if it was your friend and he has a shoe store, not a grocery store like you, and you run to help him, very good. Very good! It's a big mitzvah too. But if it's your competitor, that's *adif*; that's the real success because you're changing yourself!

Wasting Your Time

So imagine now that you heard this talk tonight and you're interested in this idea of *lakuf es yitzro*: "If I can force myself to be especially nice to people maybe I'll actually fulfill this ideal of *tikkun hamiddos* that Rav Miller was talking about." So you walk out on Kings Highway, let's say, and you see a *rosh yeshiva* taking a little walk after the *seder*. So you think, "Here's my chance," and you come over to him and you want to say some kind words. It's not your nature to say kind words to people, but you want to force yourself to be nice to him.

What does he do? He says kind words to you. You try to encourage him, but right away he's encouraging you. It's a no-go. It's a waste of time with him. It's a mitzvah, of course, to be nice to *tzaddikim*, but you're not accomplishing anything. You're not changing yourself. You'll get *sechar* for encouraging *tzaddikim*, absolutely, but you're not changing yourself.

So suppose now you're walking on the street after that encounter and you feel frustrated – "Ach!

It was a bust with the *rosh yeshiva*” – but all of a sudden there comes somebody who is a follower of a different *chassidische rebbe* than yours. And he’s not friendly towards you at all; he always ignores you as you pass by. And you’re not so interested in him; he’s too much of a grouch for your taste.

Striking Gold

Ah! Now you struck a gusher! You met a mean fellow! So you walk over and you say *shalom aleichem* to him. You’re not interested? You’d rather ignore him? That’s exactly why you should bend your will and do it. Say good morning. Smile at him. Whatever you can do, you do. That’s the success of life! A difficult person, that’s your opportunity!

You know there are people like that; we call them in Yiddish *shvere passenjirin*, difficult passengers. The old-time wagon driver, the *ba’al agalah* who used to take passengers on his wagon for a trip from one town to another, so some of his passengers always complained, they always made impractical demands on him. So he had a list of the difficult passengers, the *shvere passenjirin*, the ones to be especially prepared for. And those are the ones we have to be prepared for because it’s the *shvere passenjirin*, those are the ones who will make you successful in the program of *tikkun atzmo*.

Part II. Self Perfection

A Reliable Source

Now, how important is the subject of *tikkun atzmo*? So we’ll see what the Vilna Gaon says in one place. Me, you could argue with. Rabbi Miller, who says he’s reliable? But the Gra? The Gra you can trust.

In one place the Vilna Gaon says like this: עקר הוא היות האדם – *The main purpose of a man’s life is, to strengthen himself always to break his qualities of character, to go against all the tendencies and instincts of character.*

That’s the main purpose of our lives, to break the *middos*. וְאִם לֹא לָמָּה לֹא חַיִּים – *And if he’s not going to bother with that, why does he need life?*

And it’s based on a *possuk* in Mishlei. לָמָּה זֶה מְחַיֵּר אֶת יַד בְּסִיל לְקִנּוֹת חֲכָמָה וְלֵב אֶת – *Why is there money in the hand of a fool with which he can buy wisdom, but he has no mind and so he doesn’t know what he’s doing (17:16).*

Here’s a fool walking in the street with money in his hand.

So we say to him, “Mr. Fool, that’s a lot of money you have. What’s it for?”

“Oh, this money? It’s to buy something.”

“What are you supposed to be buying?”

He doesn’t know. He was sent on an errand but he forgot what he’s supposed to buy. And so he just walks around the grocery putting random things into his basket. “Maybe I’m here for this or maybe for that.”

The Currency of Life

Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent us into this world with money. What money? Life! Whether you’re old and only have a few more years or you’re young and you have many years, every day is money! Every minute is money!

But the question is do you know what you’re supposed to be doing with the money of life. When you ask the young fool or the old fool what’s the purpose of life, he says he wants to go to Florida. Other things too. “I have to make a living. I have to eat. I have to watch a ballgame. I have to sleep.” A lot of things he’s buying with his time.

So along comes Mishlei and he says, you know what life is for? לְקִנּוֹת חֲכָמָה – *The purpose of that money is to acquire the wisdom of proper living; in Mishlei the word chochmah means proper living, perfection of character.*

Of course, it means Torah and *mitzvos* too; Torah and *mitzvos* are absolutely included. But you have to know that many people who are loyal to

the Torah and are willing to fulfill everything are not aware of the urgency of the concept of *shviras hamiddos*. A person's purpose in life is to mold his character.

And how does he mold his character? By going against the passions and instincts that motivate him; by bending your *yetzer hara* into a pretzel for the purpose of *tikkun*! לְהִתְחַזֵּק תְּמִיד בְּשִׁבְרֵת הַמַּדּוּת: That's the purpose of your life – to change yourself for the better!

Good Selfishness

You know, if we are going to give a name to this lecture we would call it 'Be Selfish'. Now, that's an interesting name because it seems we're talking here about the opposite of selfishness; about giving to others, about bending to the will of others. But actually it's the most appropriate name because we're learning now that we are here in this world to make use of difficult people for our own selfish gain. A wise person uses all the opportunities to be לִכְפֹּף אֶת יְצֵרוֹ because he understands that *tikkun atzmo*, the perfection of his own *neshamah*, that's what he's living for. That's why you came to this world with a *neshamah*, so that you should mold and transform yourself into something better.

And that's how we should view the opportunities of 'difficult' people – as the opportunity to be *lakuf es yitzro*. And so when such opportunities come – the difficult passengers – we should be selfish. We should think, "I'm not going to waste my character by sinking to this man's level! On the contrary! I'm going to utilize him to make something out of myself! I'm going to use the money of life to gain profit from him! I'll deal with him with kindness and gentleness and a smile no matter what."

Shuls and Shoes

Let's say there's somebody in the synagogue against whom you bear a grudge. It could be a justified grudge. Let's say the *gabbai* has decided to ostracize you. You never get an *aliyah*! Or he finally

gives you one, and you feel it's an outright insult to you! He's needling you.

And so for some time when the time comes to say, "Good Shabbos," you made it your business to avoid him. But now that you're learning this great principle, so make up your mind, you're not the going to wait until he does *teshuva*; עָזַב תְּעֹזֵב – *forsake what you have in your heart*, עִמּוֹ – *and be with him* (Shemos 23:5). And so you go over and say "Good Shabbos," anyhow.

I knew a man once who trained himself like this. He had a competitor, a *frum* Jew, and he was losing business to this competitor. And he was angry at him. It's not an easy test to have a competitor who sells better shoes than you and has more customers than you. Especially if your store was on the block first. I don't envy that man's test.

The Successful Shoe Store

But this man turned that test into gold. He passes by him on Shabbos on the street, and he gives him a nice, big "Good Shabbos!" It's not easy; it hurts you when you see a competitor. But this man understands what life is for so he makes it a success. He sees his 'enemy' coming down the block and he's thinking that Hashem loves that man. He's a *frum* Jew; absolutely Hashem loves him.

And so he says, "I wish that man should become wealthier and wealthier. Of course, I also should become wealthier and wealthier. I wish him he should live long. He should enjoy the *cholent* today. He should sleep *oneg Shabbos*. I wish him all good things."

"Oh", Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, לִכְפֹּף אֶת יְצֵרוֹ עֲדִיף, – "You're forcing your *yetzer hara* to bend over; that's the best thing of all." After all, what's the success of life! Selling shoes? Customers? It's important but it's not life. Life is for perfection of character.

An Abusive Husband

And now we're going to see a few examples that are maybe more on our level. Here is a woman who comes to me and she has a difficult husband. He comes home from work, he's excited and nervous. And when she makes the slightest remark, he falls upon her with abusive words.

Now this doesn't mean that we're going to justify him. There's no question something should be done in order to teach him, but it's not easy to train a person, especially if he doesn't come and ask for it. And so he's difficult, always starting a quarrel.

But what will she gain by participating in the quarrel? Nothing at all. She'll only pour oil on the fire. And so if she's a wise woman she decides to forget about it. "I'll forget what he said against me, like it never happened." That's a wise woman.

A Successful Wife

But if she's a *very* wise woman then she'll do more. Because forgetting, that's excellent, but it's a lost opportunity, a wasted opportunity. I'll tell you what success is. Here is a woman – her husband insults her. They fought. He's her 'enemy' now. And she's upset at him, she's hurt. What does she do? She cooks a tidbit, a piece of cake or something and puts it on a plate and offers it to him. A tidbit to appease her husband.

Now, he might turn it down. He's a fool for doing so but he might turn it down. So she thinks it was a waste – he's the same bull as he was before. But she has to know she has done something tremendous. Did she change him? Probably not. But she did better than that. She changed herself! She has forced herself to do a nice deed of friendship to her husband despite the fact that he was mean to her, and that means she changed herself.

A Successful Husband

Now, it might happen the other way too. You come home from work and your wife falls upon

you. "All day long," she says, "I have to stay here with the children and now you come home at night. It's your job to take over." And she says it with such passion.

Now she doesn't know that you had cantankerous customers today, that you were suffering from your employer or from the other employees. So you're thinking, "What kind of dissatisfaction could she voice against me? I'm working hard to make a living!"

But you remember this lesson of being selfish and so you gather your strength – you bend your *yetzer hara* and you answer sympathetically, "You're right, my dear, you're right. What do you want me to do? You want me to wash the dishes tonight? I'll watch the children."

She doesn't want you to wash the dishes. She won't let you. She won't let you watch the children either. But in the meantime, as soon as you answer these words, you have gained a very great merit.

Succeeding With Cousin Jake

Or let's say you're going to a wedding and you know you're going to meet there your second cousin, Jake. Now, Jake is a *frum* Jew but he's not a *talmid chocham*. He's not wealthy either. He has no especial reason that he should be arrogant. But he is. There are people like that, you know. Conceited, but for nothing.

And when he meets you, he looks down on you. Although you are far superior to him – maybe you learned, maybe you have secular education, maybe you even have *smichah*; and he has nothing – but he's so full of empty *ga'avah* that he despises you.

So imagine now that you're going to meet him at the wedding. Now, there's a principle of course to not look for tests. An *oved Hashem* follows the method of *lehaktin hanisayon*, of minimizing the challenges, but sometimes it can't be avoided. In life you must meet people and sometimes, maybe even often, the people may be of the kind that are difficult to deal with.

So you have to walk over to him. You have to greet him; you have to say hello to him. And even though you know that he'll barely notice you – you're nothing to him – but you resolve to greet him with a smile, to be especially nice to him no matter what.

Holy Selfishness

"I am selfish," you think, "and that's why I'm not going to cheapen myself because of you. Just because you are mean and impolite, I'm going to become mean and impolite? Oh no. I'm not going to give up my purpose in life just because of you. Just the opposite! I'm going to rise up to greater heights because of you."

And people who live selfishly for the purpose of increasing their perfection by casting their *neshama* in the mold of **לְכַף אֶת יצָרוֹ**, they're the ones whom Hakadosh Baruch Hu considers the fulfillment of the purpose of the world. Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks down and says, "You are fulfilling your purpose in life. Because **לְכַף אֶת יצָרוֹ** – *to force one's own inclination*, **עֲרִיף** – *it's the very best thing in this world*.

Part III. Self Transformation

A Strange Blessing

The Gemara (Moed Katan 9b) tells a story. There were two sages, *tzaddikim*, who once came to a certain town and so a father who lived in that place he said to his son, "Go to these *talmidei chachomim* that are visiting and get from them a blessing."

So the son went to where the sages were staying and they blessed him as follows: **יְהִי רָעוּא דְלִבְלָבְל פְּתוּרָא** – *It should be the will of Hashem that your table should be always in confusion.*" That's what they said to him.

Now, when the son came home the father wanted to hear what happened. "Nu? What did they say? What was the blessing they gave you?"

"Blessing?" the son said. "They cursed me. They said that my table should be confused, turned upside down."

A Father's Interpretation

So the father told his son, "No, no. You're not understanding them. They gave you a very big blessing. They mean you should have a big family, lots of sons and daughters, climbing over the table and under the table."

You know when you have two children or one child or no child, it's nice and quiet. You don't have to worry too much; your table stays clean and upright. When you have a big family, however, boys and girls, you understand that it's an entirely different story.

Boys especially; if you ever brought up a boy, you know that he's a *mazik*, a *sheid*. No matter what the feminists tell you – they try to persuade you that girls are the same as boys – but it's not so. Boys are uniquely troublemakers. But girls are not easy to raise either. Girls are a different type of trouble but they're also a handful. And so whatever it is, a houseful of children, boys and girls, absolutely means a table that's overturned.

I say 'table' – it's a life that's overturned. Because they're fighting and making noise and breaking dishes. It's not easy. They don't listen, they complain, they get sick, they don't appreciate what you do for them.

And that's what this father told his son: "When they said you should merit a confused table, they were saying the truth. It was a way of saying you should have a big family. It was a blessing."

The Blessed Riddle

But the question is, why did those sages say it in that way? The boy was asking for a blessing, not a riddle. They could have said **וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֹפָר הָאָרֶץ** – *Your seed should be abundant like the dust of the earth.*" That's a better way of saying it, of blessing him with a lot of children. They could have said,

“You should have a happy house, filled with children.” That’s what I would have, anyhow.

The answer is, the blessing of children is not what we think it is. Of course it’s a big blessing if you have children in the home. There’s a lot of happiness in a home filled with children, a lot of *nachas* in a crowded home. And even if there’s trouble here and there but one day you’ll walk them down to the *chuppah* and there’ll be grandchildren too. Absolutely it’s a happiness and it’s a big *zechus* too.

But there’s a bigger happiness, a bigger merit. And that’s the difficulties, the *tzaar gidul bonim*, the tables they turn upside down. The fact that your children were turning the house upside down, that was the biggest benefit you’ll have from them.

The Runaway Mom

I’ll explain that. You know, sometimes a mother thinks, “If only I could just drop it all and run away. Look at my cousin, a career woman. She has no children. She comes home at night to her empty apartment in Manhattan and she lies down on her couch. She eats her cake and her soda, whatever it is, and she listens to the weather, looks at TV and she plans her program for the next day. And she goes to sleep on time. If she wants, she goes to sleep whenever she likes. And look at me – I have to get up in the middle of the night.”

After all, you’re trying to raise a Jewish generation. It means one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, children and they are various ages. You know what that means? You know what type of life it is? It’s a life of *lakuf es yitzro*. A mother and father are always bending their will to give to their children. It needs *kvishas haratzon*. You have to restrain your own desires to take care of children. You have to sacrifice so much of your own convenience for a child.

You have to diaper this child and humor another child. You have to tolerate your child’s tantrums and you have to go along with their quirks and play

with them. You have to do all kinds of things for them. And no matter how much trouble they make, how difficult they may be – sometimes they’re insolent and disrespectful – but a parent continues to give and give.

Now it doesn't mean raising children is all suffering. There's no question there are compensations in raising children. A mother is constantly happy with her children. Every minute she just loves to look at her children. The mere fact that she hears their voices is music in her ears. And nevertheless, sometimes it's too much music. Sometimes there's music in the middle of the night too and the parents can't sleep.

Unselfish Selfishness

But they do it anyhow. So while the other men and women in midtown New York or from suburban places are traveling all over the world spending money – they don’t have any children so they’re traveling around for their own good times, for selfish purposes – meanwhile this *frum* young woman or *frum* young man is giving their life away for somebody else. That’s *kevishas haratzon*. That’s self control. And they’re becoming more and more perfect!

And you want to know who the selfish one really is? The *frum* mother and father, they’re the selfish ones because they’re making themselves better and better. Every day, every minute, it’s a bending of their will and a perfection of character. They become transformed and that’s the most selfish thing because that’s what will be forever. The *neshamah* they mold, that’s their property that will be forever.

When Children Change Parents

Don’t you see sometimes that girls who were negligent, girls who were lazy and selfish, when they became mothers they became transformed. Boys who were troublemakers and all they considered was their own pleasure, if you see them many years later, after years of raising children,

they're transformed. They become industrious. They become compassionate. All of the bending of the will, day in day out, is a means of self transformation, a means of perfection of character.

And that means it's the most selfish thing to have a house with a lot of children – it's the good selfishness. That's why the *seforim* say that when a person goes through *tzaar gidul bonim*, אֵינוּ רוֹאֶה פְּנֵי גֵהֵנוֹם – he doesn't even see *Gehenom* in passing. Everybody will have to take a little vacation in *Gehenom* before he goes to the Next World because we have some flaws in our character and before we can go to the place for our great reward we have to stop in for a little while so they can brush us off and take off some specks from our character before we can go in to Gan Eden. But if you had *tzaar gidul bonim*, you won't even look at *Gehenom* from a distance. אֵינוּ רוֹאֶה פְּנֵי גֵהֵנוֹם! You know why? Because you had it already!

You had it in the most effective way in this world when you're able to change yourself by yourself. If you change in *Gehenom*, it's not because you changed, but it's a *chessed*, a kindness of Hashem that changes you. It's nothing like what you performed by your own free will in this life. And it's one of the chief accomplishments of being in this world – *tikkun atzmo*; you're perfecting yourself!

The Simple and the Mystical

And so we come back now to the beginning of our talk, about the greatness of *tikkun atzmo*, and I'll tell you what was mentioned in the beginning. We said that this perfection of *tikkun atzmo* is also included in the mystical concept of *tikkun* that is found in the *kabbalah seforim*; that when you train yourself in this program of *lakuf es yitzro* it's a fulfillment of a mystical concept too.

The Tomer Devorah tells us that. Because in his preface he's talking about serving Hashem by emulating His ways and he says like this: "It is proper for a man to resemble his Creator and then

he'll be included in that great secret of the *Tzurah Elyonah*, the Upper Image, *Tzelem u'Demus*, in His likeness and His appearance." It's a mystical concept that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has a certain Image, and when you practice emulating Hashem's ways there's some mystical connection between you and the Shechinah.

And what's the first example he brings? What's the first *middah* of Hashem that a person should imitate in order to enter into that secret of His Image? It's what we've been discussing here. The first example, the Tomer Devorah says is *מי קל כְּמוֹךָ* – *Who is there a powerful G-d that is like You?* That's what the *navi* Michah said about Hashem: "Who is a *Keil* like You?"

A Different Type of Power

Now, *Keil* means the One Who is Powerful but the *Navi* here is saying that this Power has two aspects. Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu has Power to do anything He wants. He could cause a sinner to die on the spot if He willed it. That's *Keil*, that He has the Power to do it. And still, there is a second aspect of that Power: He is a *Keil* Who utilizes all of His Power to bestow on the sinner all the abilities, all the faculties and energy necessary to continue his existence *even though he's sinning*.

In that same moment that a person is committing an indignity against Hashem by disobeying Him, he is being supported by Him. The sinner's body is functioning only because Hashem is maintaining its function with the millions of miracles that take place within the human body.

That's the great *middah* of *Keil*: Hashem tolerates the impertinence of man toward Him with such a tremendous toleration *מִה שֶׁלֹא יִכְלִיחוּ הָרַעְיוֹן* – *that the mind cannot comprehend*. Because there's nothing that is concealed from the eyes of Hashem. He sees everything. And yet, Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't cut off from him His help. Even when a man is raising his arm to commit a sin, when he's behaving as an enemy of Hakadosh

Baruch Hu, He supplies to him the energy and the dexterity to move his arm.

The Perfection of Creation

And that, the Tomer Devorah says, is the first *middah* that a man should attempt to follow. Because that *middah*, the *middah* of patience with others and being willing to ‘bend your will’ to such a degree that you won’t take away favors from anyone, even the one who is being insolent against you, that’s one of the great accomplishments of man in this world.

It’s the achievement that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants most from you: that you should fulfill the principle of *לְכוּף אֶת עַצְמוֹ*, of bending yourself in your dealings with others and fulfilling the purpose of life. You’re changing yourself into a more perfect creation, so perfect that you’re included in the *Tzurah Elyonah*, the Upper Image of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let’s Get Practical

One Bend a Day

Once a day this week, I will *bli neder* look for an opportunity to be especially kind and especially helpful to a difficult person, an ‘enemy’ of mine, with the intention of *lakuf es yitzro*, gradually bending my will and perfecting my character. And I will have in mind that I’m doing it *l’sheim Shamayim*: “I’m doing this because Hakadosh Baruch Hu put me in this world primarily for this function of *shviras hamiddos!*”

This week’s booklet is based on tapes:

49 – Pursuing Real Money | **389** – Perfection in Marriage:
Emulating Hashem | **649** – Be Selfish | **874** – A Nation of Self
Control | **E-173** – A Life of Self Control

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QUESTION

On Shabbos Mevorchim we ask Hashem for a חיים של עשר וְכבוד, a life of wealth and glory. But didn’t we learn that glory is something that is inappropriate to run after in this world?

ANSWER

Good question. Why do we ask for חיים של עשר וְכבוד, a life of glory?

The answer is this: We are not *looking* for glory; but we hope Hashem will help us behave in such a way that we *deserve* glory. If people will honor us because of our good character, we don’t mind. But it’s not the glory we want – we want to succeed in a life of behaving in such a way that we deserve *kovod*. Yes, I would like people to say, “Miller – he’s a nice fellow!” I would like that, yes. Because that means that most likely I did something that would please people. So you should do things in such a way that people should approve of you – but you’re not looking for *kovod*.

And so, in that *tefillah* we ask Hashem, “Please, give us a life of *kovod*; please help us this month so that we should behave in a dignified manner; decently and *Torah’dik*, and then we deserve to get *kovod* from people.”

Ah! If we succeed in doing that this upcoming month, then we’ll be very happy because that means that we’re living successfully.

And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu should give everybody here *kovod* in this world. He should give you long years of happiness. Everybody should be wealthy and healthy and have *nachas* from children and live long years. *Brachah v’hatzlachah l’orech yamim tovim*.

August 2000