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IN MEMORY OF MRS. CLARA CHOPP A"H AND MENUCHA MARKOWITZ A"H

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE
RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

CHODESH SIVAN



PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA
TRAVELING THROUGH LIFE

Mazal Tov to

Mr. and Mrs. Dovid Lowenthal
upon the marriage of their son, Moishe.

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With warm wishes,
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Toras Avigdor

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

TRAVELING THROUGH LIFE

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Part I. Traveling Through the Wilderness

Traveling Through the Desert

In this week's *sedrah*, Moshe Rabbeinu is speaking to his father-in-law, Chovov ben Reuel HaMidyani, who had come to visit him in the Midbar, and he tells him as follows: נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הַשֵּׁם – We are traveling toward that place that Hashem said about it, אַתָּן אֶתֶּן לָכֶם – “This place I will give to you” (Bamidbar 10:29).

The Bnei Yisroel were traveling through the Midbar heading toward Eretz Yisroel, and Moshe was now offering his father-in-law an opportunity: לָכֶּה אִתָּנוּ – Come with us, וְהַטַּבְנוּ לָךְ – and we shall do good to you, כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר טוֹב, עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל – for Hashem has spoken good for Yisroel (*ibid.*). It means, Hashem has foretold good for Yisroel, and if you join us, you'll be joined to us also

in receiving that good; we'll go into the *eretz tovah u'rechavah* and you'll be there with us.

Traveling Through History

Now, pay attention, because everything in the Torah is not just the story for itself; it's also a model for the future.

Moshe Rabbeinu is speaking to us, and he's saying, "We, the Jewish people, are traveling through the history of the world. Throughout all the generations, נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ, we are journeying. We'll be in the Midbar for forty years, and then we'll be in Eretz Canaan. We'll go to Bavel and to North Africa. We'll go to Europe and Russia. Then we'll go to the Americas too. We're traveling through history until we reach our destination in Olam Haba. And you can join us on this journey if you wish."

Now, don't think it's a *drash* what I'm saying. It's the plain truth that you're hearing now. Because as we travel we say, כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר טוֹב עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל – Hashem spoke good for Yisroel. What's the good? So the Gemara says elsewhere (Kiddushin 39b) that there's no good in this world that's completely good. And when Hashem says "good," he doesn't mean partially good – He means entirely good.

So we're not traveling only to Eretz Yisroel. Eretz Yisroel is not the place where our final happiness is going to be; there's sickness in Eretz Yisroel and there's death in Eretz Yisroel. It's not the place that's *kulo tov* and *kulo aroch*. Eretz Yisroel is only a *mashal* for the great good that Hashem has spoken for us. כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא – Every Jew has a share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a). Our real destination is Olam Haba. That's *why* we're traveling and that's *where* we're traveling to.

On the Back of the Wagon With the Jews

And so Moshe says to this *ger*, to all the potential converts in history, "Come, join us on our journey to Olam Haba if you'd like. That's one of the reasons why we're traveling among you, to give you a chance to join us. If you want, you can hop on our wagon, and what's going to happen to us is going to happen to you. The good that Hashem has spoken to us – that there's a *chelek* for every Yisroel in the World to Come – will be for you too."

And many had the good sense to join us in eternity. Rabi Akiva came from *geirim*! Rus was a *giyoreess*. She had the good sense to join us. Dovid Hamelech came from her. Many great people came from *geirim*. Rabi Meir

came from *geirim*. You look through a roster of the illustrious names, they come from people that had the sense to join us on our travels through history.

That's why we traveled to Poland, so that a certain Count Potocki could hop aboard. He was a famous *ger tzedek* who came from a noble family, and even though it was a time when nobody thought of embracing Judaism, he was an exceptional person and – despite the danger – he left home and joined us in secret.

Of course, that's only a side story, that *geirim* might join us. We travel through history for more important reasons than *geirim*. Jews lived in Poland for a thousand years and so you can be sure that there were many other purposes too, besides Count Potocki. Only that as we travel we say to the gentiles, “לָכֶה אִתָּנוּ – Come with us if you wish. You don't want to? So don't. Your hard luck. We're traveling on anyhow to our destiny.”

Travel With Purpose

Now, you have to understand what it means that we're traveling. We don't travel just for the sake of travel. I once had in my shul a wealthy man, so for a vacation he traveled to the mountains. And once he was in the mountains, he decided he wanted to travel more. Maybe it's more interesting on the other side of the ocean. So from the mountains he went on an excursion to Switzerland. That's called journeying to nowhere.

You have to understand that the system of the Torah is different; our traveling is arranged by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Like it says in our *sedrah*, על יְהוָה יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל פִּי ה' יִהְיוּ – *We journey according to His arrangement (Bamidbar 9:18). Hashem plans every stage of our journey and everything that happens is for the purpose of reaching the destination of the Next World.*

Now, if we're going to understand this subject properly, one idea must be clear to us without any question. הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה הוּמָה לְפָרוֹזְדוֹר בְּפְנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא – *This world is a lobby, a vestibule before the World to Come (Avos 4:16).* No matter how much you think about it or talk about it, it's not enough, because there shouldn't be the slightest question in our minds that right now we're journeying – even us, as we're sitting here right now, we're traveling to Olam Haba. And the result of that knowledge is, הִתְקַן עִצְמְךָ – *prepare yourself, improve yourself in the vestibule, בְּפָרוֹזְדוֹר בְּרֵי שְׂהַתְבַּנֵּם – in order that you should enter the banquet hall subsequently (ibid.).*

And therefore every place that they visited in the forty years was intended for the purpose of making some improvement in their character.

It was a program that was set by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Sometimes He wanted them to be in one place יָמִים רַבִּים and sometimes only יָמִים מְסֻפָּר. But whatever it was, it was יָסַעוּ ה' יְחַנוּ וְעַל פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ, and the Bnei Yisroel knew, therefore, that they were living for a purpose.

Places of Perfection

Every place, every stage, they understood was an opportunity to get better and better. And because they understood that it was purposeful journeying, that each place intended to bring forth a different perfection, therefore they were the most successful that we ever had in our entire nation's history. They became more and more perfect because of their travels; the nation became hammered out on the anvil of vicissitudes and they became great.

It's like a blacksmith who is hammering on a piece of iron and making it stronger and stronger; every blow on the anvil makes the iron stronger. That's what happened to the Bnei Yisroel as they traveled from place to place — their character became more and more purified. And the end was, אָסַפוּ לִי הַחֲסִידִי – Hashem says, “Gather unto Me, into the World to Come, all of My chassidim, My devoted ones” (Tehillim 50:5). That's what Rabi Akiva says about the *Dor Hamidbar* (Sanhedrin 110b). They succeeded at becoming the best generation in our history because they understood that they were traveling not to Eretz Yisroel but to Olam Haba.

And so we understand now that when Moshe Rabbeinu said those famous words, נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ, he was describing not only the travels in the Midbar but the Am Yisroel's travels through all of history. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is fully in charge of every detail that ever transpired and ever will transpire in the story of the nation. And so as we go from place to place, nothing is accidental. Hakadosh Baruch Hu has fashioned history in such a mysterious way that in every generation all the conditions of nature, all the conditions of society are so manipulated for the maximum benefit of the Am Yisroel; so that each place we find ourselves is a different opportunity.

Stopover in Babylon

There is a certain perfection that we gained in Bavel. Bavel was a great opportunity. The Jews lived in Bavel for a thousand years. Were they failures because they weren't in Eretz Yisroel? *Chas v'shalom*. The Talmud Bavli is a result of their success. The great yeshivas of Bavel, everybody knows. All the Amoraim in Bavel, from Rav, all the way down to after Rav

Ashi, the Rabanan Savorai and the Geonim. Hundreds of thousands of Sages in Bavel. Bavel was a huge success.

The Jews in Bavel were even better than the Jews in Eretz Yisroel. You have to know that. **אין מינים בנהרדעא** – *There were no apikorsim in Bavel* (Pesachim 56a). In Eretz Yisroel, there were *apikorsim* always. We had the Misyavnim in Eretz Yisroel. We had the Tzedukim. Then we had the Christians. But in Bavel it was always **אין מינים**. Always *frum* Jews in Bavel; always nothing but *frum* Jews. It was a success.

Then we went to North Africa. The Rif! We went to Germany. Rashi! Rashi became a success in Germany *davka*. Others, too. There were *Gedolei Yisroel* in Vermeiza, in Shpira, in Magentza. And the “plain” people too; in all the generations they became great in Germany. Some turned out to be failures but by and large they passed the test.

Stopping Off in Spain

Then they went to Spain. Spain was a different opportunity for perfection. It was ruled by the Moorish Arabs and the Jews lived in wealth and with a rich culture. Poetry, even grammar, flourished in Spain. Every facet of Jewish living was enriched in Spain!

Of course, the Torah and the *Gedolei Yisroel* flourished. All the great Rishonim, almost all of them were composed in Spain. The Ritva and the Rashba and the Ran; even the Rosh who came from Germany settled in Spain. All the great ones! Rabi Yehuda HaLevi; and the Rambam came from Spain originally. Spain was a glorious place, a cradle for Jewish culture, for Torah. Spain was a place of great success.

It's true there were some failures too. There are always some who don't realize where they're traveling and they get lost; they go off the right path and go lost. Eventually, it was too much, and that's why they were kicked out of Spain. Hakadosh Baruch Hu made them move; they journeyed to a new opportunity. But for many years, Spain was the test; the succeeders succeeded and the failures failed.

The Wandering Jew

Then they went to Poland. They went to Russia, to Lithuania. They went to England and to America. I say “they went,” but they were *taken* – **על פי ה' יסעו בני ישראל ועל פי ה' יתנו**. We think, “Well, it's because the *goyim* drove us out, *geirush Shpanya*, there were *gezeiros*, so we had to leave.” No. It's all done by the Plan of Hashem for our perfection.

That's Jewish history — traveling. The Jews were on the East Side and then from there they traveled to Brownsville. וַיֵּסְעוּ וַיִּחְנוּ - And then from Brownsville to Crown Heights, and from Crown Heights to East Flatbush. And then to Flatbush. וַיֵּסְעוּ וַיִּחְנוּ, וַיֵּסְעוּ וַיִּחְנוּ - Hashem is moving us through history, and every place where we lived had a certain contribution to our history, certain tests and opportunities.

Like we moved from our old neighborhood in East Flatbush, Rugby, to here. That was arranged by Hashem. It's a different opportunity we have now. We're near the Mirrer Yeshiva and we're among the Sefardim now, the Syrians.

The Successful Wanderer

And it will continue like that. We'll keep moving along to wherever Hashem takes us. And we'll succeed because we know the secret of history that wherever the nation is, it's the **מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה'**. That's why very many people gained great success. Hundreds of thousands of Jews, millions of men and women lived *frum* lives throughout all these generations and brought up children and they're all in Olam Haba today.

They came to the place that Hashem promised them and they're there right now, enjoying the great happiness that He foretold for them.

Part II. Traveling Through Childhood

Traveling Solo

Now, just as the system of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the Midbar and in history in general is to afford the Am Yisroel opportunities to bring out the best from the nation, that's also His system in the life story of each individual. נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ means that we are traveling through life, not only as a national experience, but each one of us, individually, is journeying through life in order to make something out of ourselves. Because actually that's the purpose of life, to accomplish something in ourselves.

That's what the Mesillas Yesharim says, **כֹּל עֲנִינֵי הָעוֹלָם נִסְיוֹנוֹת הֵם לְאָדָם** - *everything in this world is for the purpose of testing*. Now, Hashem doesn't have to test you to find out who you are — He knows already who you are without a test. לְנִסּוֹת, *to raise up*, means to bring out the potential that you have inside of yourself. Every Jew has a gold mine inside, but it's buried

deep in his personality. If you have greatness buried within you, how could you bring it out to the surface? So the tests of this world bring it out.

The Test of Changing Circumstances

Now, one of the most prominent tests that Hakadosh Baruch Hu presents us with is the changing circumstances of life. The Torah doesn't tell us all the stories but every place had different circumstances and they had to utilize each place. Even if they were in one place for thirty-eight years, there was always something new. Different problems and situations came up and the people had to adjust. When they came to a place where there were springs of water and many date palms, it was a test. Will they utilize that properly? Would they thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for this opportunity to have enough fresh water and fresh fruit to eat?

Other places, they had almost nothing. Suppose they came to a place where there was no water and they said, "What will we do?" It's a terrible test. Would they utilize the opportunity to be patient and to look forward to Hashem's help and to pray? Would they complain? Would they question Hashem? Each place was a new test.

And the same thing is by us – we don't stay in one circumstance, one stage, all our lives. We don't stand still. Even if you'll stay in Flatbush your whole life – let's say you don't even go to the Catskills in the summer and you can't afford to go to Florida in the winter – you're still traveling through life. You're a little boy and then you're a teenager. One day you wake up and you're in a new apartment; ooh, you're married now. And then children come along; various stages of raising children. There's middle-age, and then come the grandchildren, great-grandchildren hopefully, and old age. And finally, after 120 years, the journey in this world comes to an end. The traveling is finished and you reach your destination.

Koheles's Times

So it seems to us a natural process. Time passes by and you experience various stages. It happens to everyone; what of it?

But pay attention to what Koheles (3:1-4) says about this subject: לְכֹל ... תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם – *There's a time for everything while you're in this world.* עֵת לְלֵדָה וְעֵת לָמוּת – *There's a time to give birth and there's a time to die,* עֵת לְטַעַת – *there's a time for planting,* וְעֵת לְעִקּוֹר נְטוּעַ – *and there are times for uprooting.* עֵת סִפּוּר וְעֵת רִקּוּד – *There's a time to mourn and a time to dance.* A whole list he gives there; various *itim*, various times.

The question is, what does Koheles intend by these words? So you'll say maybe he means to tell us that you must choose the right time to do the right thing. Let's say on Simchas Torah, *eis rekod*, he's reminding you that you shouldn't sit on the ground and mourn for *churban Beis Hamikdash* – no, now's the time to dance, not mourn. And on Tisha B'Av, *eis sefod*, you shouldn't dance in happiness that we received the Torah. Is that what Koheles wants to tell us? That you should choose to do the right things at the appropriate time?

No, it doesn't mean that. It's true, but that's not *pshat*. Because you see that in the list there's *עַת לְלֵדָת* – *a time to give birth*. That's not your choice; in the olden days, they couldn't induce birth. Also *עַת לְמוֹת* – *a time to die*. Decent people don't choose a time to die; they die when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants them to die. So what does it mean *עַת לְלֵדָת וְעַת לְמוֹת*? What does it mean “there's a time for everything”?

Born to Travel

It means as follows: There are various stages of life that we all have to pass through. From the day we come into the world, the journey begins, *לְלַכְתּוֹת יוֹמָם וְלַלַּיְלָה* – we're traveling by day and by night, journeying towards the Afterlife. And each *עַת*, each period of time, comes in order to afford you unique opportunities to bring out the potential greatness that lies within you.

And so you have to know that once a child enters this world he has now embarked on a career. *נִסְעִים אֶתְנַחֵנוּ* – The child is joining the nation now in our journey, the great function of utilizing the *itim* of our career in this world.

Young Travelers

First you're a little boy or a little girl. Now, to be a Jewish boy or Jewish girl is a wonderful opportunity. Of course, a little child doesn't understand much, but it's important to start as early as you can. And therefore children should be told that right now this is their time. Right now!

“Children, you won't live with your parents forever. This is your big opportunity! You're living at home! Every time you bring a glass of water to the table for your mother – instead of her bringing a glass of water to you – you're doing a mitzvah like *tefillin*!”

It's an easy way of getting Olam Haba, serving your parents. Even coming in and saying, “Good morning, Mama”; you're honoring your

mother with a good morning. Someday you'll regret that you didn't utilize your parents. You can go to her grave and you can weep tears of regret, but it's all over. If you didn't do what you were able to do when you were a child at home, you missed out on that part of your journey.

And so children must be made to realize that it's an especial happiness, an especial opportunity to be a child living at home with that mitzvah always at your fingertips. They must learn to utilize the opportunity of living at home with a mother and father before that part of the journey is over.

Molding Yourself

But not only because of *kibud av v'eim*. To be a Jewish boy or Jewish girl is a wonderful opportunity. A boy can make something out of himself. You can shape your life when you're young. You're still pliable and you can shape yourself. Not only for the rest of your career; *you can shape your Olam Haba by what you do in the fourth grade and the fifth grade.*

Of course, the parents have to fulfill what the *Chachomim* say, **וְהוֹשִׁיבוּם בֵּין בְּרֵכֵי תַלְמִידֵי הַחֲכָמִים** – *see to it that your children are seated between the knees of talmidei chachomim* (Brachos 28b). They have to be in a very *frum cheder*, a *frum yeshiva*. But even a little boy can make up his mind, "I want to utilize my life to become good. I'll listen to my father, to my mother, my *rebbe*."

In the *yeshiva*, that's your big chance to form your character; only you have to make use of that. Instead of kicking your friend under the table with your feet and making trouble for your *rebbe*, you'll be nice and quiet and you'll sit and learn. You'll come home – you'll be helpful to your parents, friendly to your brothers and sisters and you'll learn at night a little bit, you'll review what you learnt in the *cheder* in the daytime. That little boy is making use of his *yaldus*.

He's a boy; he'll make trouble too. But if you understand that life is for a purpose, then *yaldus* is one of the *nisyonos*, one of the opportunities to bring forth greatness. What you learned in your youth, how much you trained yourself, will make the difference between being a *tzaddik gomur* or *chalilah* being a nobody. When you're young you're still very pliable and you can shape your life. Hashem gave *yaldus*, the test of childhood, for that purpose.

Teen Travelers

Of course, when you get older and about to get to the Mesivta you have to utilize that stage too. When you're young, thirteen years old, fourteen years old, a *bochur*, there are other tests. A *bochur* already has a little bit of *yetzer hara*, other things. It's a test; it's all a test. *Chalilah*, a big boy can even lose his *chelek l'Olam Haba*. And you pass the test if you live decently with *tzniyus* and you are busy learning Torah; you're trying to make something out of yourself. Don't waste your youth! You can become something!

Rav Yisroel Salanter once said that all of his *yiras Shamayim* he gained by the age of eighteen. I actually don't believe it; I think he means that the fire of the 18th year was unequaled later. But even so it means that your teenage years, when you're an adolescent, that's the time to put a fire into your *avodas Hashem*. You can be sure in Rav Yisroel that the fire didn't go out, that the fire became greater and greater, but he remembered when it began. That's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us these young years. That's when we kindle the fire.

Beis Yaakov D'Rabbi Miller

And girls too. In the Beis Yaakov schools, the good *frum* schools, girls have to utilize the opportunity to learn how to be Jewish wives, Jewish mothers; not to be an American wife, a spoiled American girl. You have to learn to obey a husband, to cooperate with a husband – אִשָּׁה כְּשִׁרָה עוֹשֶׂה רָצוֹן בְּעֵלָהּ.

You know, if it was up to me, I would institute in all the seminaries courses for success in marriage. I used to speak to the Beis Yaakov girls frequently, and when I brought up this topic of studying for success in marriage they thought of it as a waste of time. They wanted to hear the *mefarshim*, what the Malbim says and what the Kli Yakar says on the *possuk*. That's wonderful, but the *peirush* that is most necessary is what Hakadosh Baruch Hu says on the subject of living with another person in the same house.

Start Out Right

Because if you're not trained for it, there'll be trouble. All your life, up to the age of eighteen, or whatever it is, you were trained by your parents that whatever you said, they said, "Yes, yes." If you stamped your foot, they became frightened. And now you marry a young man who did the same thing in his house. So now, two such people have to learn to live together!

And therefore, when you're traveling through the young years of life, before you marry, it's so important to start out right and join the company of good people who will remind you of this great principle that your time is right now. There's still a long journey ahead but everything you achieve now counts! And therefore wherever you are, your ears are always open for Torah, so little by little you sponge everything up within you and you become changed by listening. Listening changes a man! **יִשְׁמַע הָכֶם** – A chochom who listens always, **וְיוֹסֵף לְקַח** – so he'll add more and more wisdom (Mishlei 1:5). You listen all your life and you'll have happy and successful travels.

Part III. Traveling Through Adulthood

Marriage: The Ultimate Road Trip

Now, one of the most important *masa'os* that a Jew takes is the journey through marriage. When you move into young manhood, young womanhood, a new test – the stage of marriage – comes into being. That's the next part of your traveling to Olam Haba. Marriage, becoming a husband and a wife, is a very great opportunity for **הִתְקַן עִצְמוֹךְ בְּפִרוּזְרוֹךְ**. That's what it says **לֹא טוֹבוֹהִיּוֹת הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ** – it's not good to be alone (Bereishis 2:18). What does that mean it's "not good"? The "good" of life is produced by the opportunities that are afforded by living together with a spouse.

Your wife is a *nisayon*, yes. Your husband is a test for you. Absolutely, he's a test; that's why he's made different. Wives and husbands are different nations – **נָשִׁים עַם בְּפִנֵּי עִצְמוֹן הֵן** (Shabbos 62a). And so it's like going on a journey with a difficult passenger. You don't stop driving and push him out the door – you have to learn to get along with him. It's a test; it's for your benefit.

The Tragic Agunah

So if you become an *agunah* because you kick your husband out of the house or you call the police and get a court order of protection against him, you have to know you're a failure. The old-time *agunah* was a woman whose husband went to war and got lost in battle. If there are no witnesses to prove that he's dead, she can't get married; that's an *agunah*. But a self-made *agunah* who kicks her husband out of the house, that's not called an *agunah*; it's called a failure. You think marriage is romance? She has to suffer a little bit until she housebreaks him. When you buy a dog it takes

time before you teach him how to be civilized. It takes time to learn how to be a wife, to be a husband.

Marriage means you're beginning a career of perfecting your character. The necessity of getting along with somebody else transforms you. It's not always easy? It's intended that way. You have to fight with yourself to always keep your mouth shut. If one partner says something foolish, don't answer. Keep quiet! It's a perfection of character if you keep quiet.

You have to train yourself to be in concord with your wife. You can't do what you want. You have to yield to her and she has to yield to you. And little by little, **לְכוּף אֶת יְצִרוֹ עֲרִיף** – each person bends the *yetzer hara* somewhat, and by means of traveling together it's a perfection. No question that people who live by themselves and do what they want are missing a glorious opportunity to become something.

Traveling With Kids

Now, when you have the opportunity to become a parent, to have many children, that's another greatness available on your journey through life. **עַתָּ לְלָרֵת** – There's a time when you'll have the opportunity to succeed at giving birth. First of all, when a woman gives birth, it's a glorious opportunity for both parents to marvel at the miracle of how a human being comes into existence from nothing. It's a mystery beyond the ability of anyone to explain. A human being! It's remarkable, the *niflaos haBorei!* And so, **עַתָּ לְלָרֵת** is a time to gain awareness of the greatness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu; to see the Hand of Hashem, to see the Creator at work, the glory, the mystery of life.

And the more, the better. The more children you have, the more successful you are on this part of your travels. It's difficult? You're pulling your hair out? You're becoming great! You're succeeding! Besides for a spouse, now you also have children to bring out the best in you. A mother's personality is changed when she raises children. A father's, too, to a certain extent.

Planting Idealism

Of course, raising them is a big part of the journey; it's the big responsibility of **עַתָּ לְטַעַת**, the stage of planting a family. You don't let children grow like weeds; you have to cultivate their personalities. It's a tremendous opportunity, those years. Are you training your children to behave? Are you teaching them Torah? Are you trying to bring them up

with good *middos*? Do you talk to them at the table about Hashem, about Olam Haba?

There are so many ideas you can plant in your children's heads when they're young. Train your child to despise TV. Teach him that he can't afford to endanger his mind by putting it at the mercy of fools and degenerates.

Tell him how great it is to be a *frum* Jew! Talk to him about how much happiness there is in a rainy day! Plant in his little head the love for *tzaddikim*, *talmidei chachomim*. As much as you put into your children and train them, then all the good things your children will do later in their lives are to your credit. When your children put on *tefillin*, it's your *tefillin*. They'll keep Shabbos, it's your Shabbos. They'll learn Torah, it's your Torah. Your daughters will have lots of children, it's like they're yours. Your grandchildren, even through your daughters, all their merits are yours – בָּרָא מְזֻכֵי אֲבָא (Sanhedrin 104a). Forever and ever, all those generations, whatever good things they do accrue to the credit of the ancestors. What else can be as great an opportunity as planting a family?

Midlife Chrysalis

And now you're entering into middle-age, the age of wisdom, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים בְּן לְבִינָה (Avos 5:21). Forty years old is middle age, by the way. People don't want to admit it, but that's what it is. Now you have opportunities to begin realizing things you never understood before. You always heard about it when you were young and now you can reconsider all the great verities, the great teachings, with *binah*. When you were younger, you were too busy to think about them. But now it's עַת לְבִנוּת – A time for building; a glorious opportunity for building up, solidifying what you accomplished all your life.

When you open a *siddur*, the words mean something more than ever before. Open a Chumash, now you begin to understand things. Everything begins to unfold at the age of forty. You begin to understand life. New things occur to you; new mental attitudes, new ways of looking at the world.

The Home Stretch

Of course, you have to put yourself in a good environment. Don't say what's done is done, it's too late. No. You can still do great things if you put yourself in the right place. If you're in a poor environment and you listen to the radio all the time, and read newspapers, so the older you get, the worse you become. זְקֵנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ כָּל זְמַן שְׁמֹקֵינִין דְּעֵתָן מְטָרְפֵת עֲלֵיהֶן – *The older*

the *am ha'aretz* becomes, the more garbage he has in his head, the worse he becomes (Kinnim 3:6). He listens to *reshaim* and he becomes worse and worse. But **וְזָקְנֵי תַלְמוּדֵי חֲכָמִים** – if you're getting older as a *talmid chochom* it's just the opposite. It doesn't mean rabbis by the way; rabbis are not necessarily *talmidei chachomim*. You can be a business man who is a *talmid chacham*; you're a disciple of *chachomim* and you listen only to the words of the Torah in your spare time. And so instead of adding more and more garbage into your head, **וְעָתָּה מְתִישְׁבֵּת עֲלֶיךָ** – you'll have opportunities to create a Torah mind; a mind that's settled with Torah ideals.

Now the children are out of the house and you have more time for all good things. Of course you're a *zeide* now, and a grandfather has grandfather tests. Certainly you're tested as a *zeide*. Are you a good *zeide*? Are you making it your business to try to influence everybody in your family? And so on. But still with the children out you have more leisure for yourself and you start doing things for yourself. All types of experiences and opportunities. I know people who became great in their sixties! You can become closer to Hashem. You can become a *talmid* of your local *rav* and hang around him more and more and listen to him.

And even though you might start having some infirmities as you age, don't get bogged down just because of that. On the contrary, utilize those reminders. The time is getting shorter and shorter! Once you're forty, get busy. Fifty, even busier. Sixty, very busy! **הַיּוֹם קָצֵר וְהַמְּלָאכָה מְרֻבָּה** – *The day is short and there's so much to do* (Avos 2:15). You begin realizing now that your great dream of living 10 million years is being whittled down by reality. No, you won't be traveling in this world forever. All you have is forty more years, thirty more years. Who knows how many? And therefore you have to get busy.

The Last Stop

And then you'll travel on to old age. Old age means the time when you're preparing to enter the Next World. The last stop on the journey – we hope it's a very long stopover – is old age. And now you really have to get busy because there's no more time left. So you want to make sure that your prayers are the very best; the most fervent prayers. You learn how to *daven* properly, in ways you never did before.

Also you're *mekayem mitzvos* you never did before. You watch your mouth. You stop talking a lot in old age; it's **עַתָּה לְחֻשׁוֹת** (Koheles 3:7). You become careful with every word and now you're focused on being a *daveik baHashem*, clinging to Hashem more and more until finally, the last day

arrives. That's also part of the travels; a person can accomplish on the last day too, things that he could never do before.

The End of the Journey

And finally comes that great day, the end of the journey, and that's the day of death. There's an *עַת לְמוֹת*; if man has prepared himself, he'll know how to die. Yes, a person has to know how to die too. I once saw a man in his death throes. He was an ignorant Jew and all he could say is, "Oy, oy, oy." It was a pity; he wasn't prepared. The day of death is a glorious opportunity! Never in your lifetime can you achieve what you can achieve in your last moments. Let's pray that Hashem will allow us to be aware of what we're doing – not in a coma – so that we can die properly.

Here's a man on his deathbed. It hurts him. Besides the fact he's so sad he has to leave this beautiful world. But he knows his moments are counted and that his life is for a purpose; even death is for a purpose. So he remembers what he was saying all his life, *וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' וְאֵלֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְךָ*, *וְבָכָל נַפְשֶׁךָ* – you should love Hashem with all your life, and the Gemara says *אֲפִילוּ נוֹטֵל אֶת נַפְשֶׁךָ* – even when He's taking your life, you should still love Him (Brachos 61b).

It's a mitzvah of the Torah that you should love Hashem even when He's taking your life. Now when will you do that? When you're young, you can't do it; but now the time is approaching. So this old man who has prepared all his life serving Hashem and utilizing every *masah*, every journey, is now at the end of his journey. And in the last moments, he says, "I love Hashem! Even when You're taking away my life, I love You, Hashem." Not "I soured on You, I'm upset that you're taking my life away." No. In your last moments, "Hashem, I love You." Ah! That's the way to spend your last day, with the love of Hashem on your lips.

Goodbye One World, Hello Another

And then, the last moments! Before you take your step over the threshold into the world that you've been traveling to for 120 years, before you say farewell to this life, you make that great declaration: *שָׁמַע שְׁרָאֵל ה'* – Hashem, everything is only for You! Whether or not I knew it all the time, whether or not I made use of all my *masa'os*, I declare now You're the One I was always traveling towards."

Someone once told me he saw a certain man passing away with his children crowded around his bed, and they were saying again and again "Shema Yisroel." Again and again. He was saying it with them. He was

gasping – a dying man finds it difficult to talk – but he didn't want to let go; he was afraid that there might be a gap between these last words and his expiration. And so together with his family he said Shema Yisroel again and again and again till the very last second when he breathed his last breath.

That's how a Jew says farewell to this world and greetings to the World to Come. That's how he lives life and that's how he gives back this life. And he can only do that if he knows that Olam Haba is where he was traveling to always.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

What's On the Itinerary

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah devotes many *pessukim* to the journeys and encampments of Klal Yisroel in the Midbar. But we must know that the Torah is not merely relating historical episodes; its eternal message is that we, too, are on our own individual journey whose destination is Olam Haba.

This week, *bli neder*, I will devote at least one minute each day to actively remind myself where I am headed, and I will write down at least two ways that I can achieve in my unique circumstances in the current stop on my trip.

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י' מנחם אב, תשפ"ה
July 31, 2025

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The Menorah of Shabbos

When Shabbos arrives, we say: "*Ufros aleinu sukkas shelomecha*— And spread over us Your shelter of peace." On Friday toward evening, a shelter of *kedushah* is spread over us. We are entering the Beis HaMikdash, so to speak —the House of Hashem. Torah sources write that Shabbos and the Beis HaMikdash are essentially the same.

In the Beis HaMikdash there was a Menorah. There were three mitzvos involving this Menorah. Two are well known: *hadlakas ha-neiros* and *hatavas ha-neiros*. *Hadlakas ha-neiros* means lighting the Menorah. *Hatavas ha-neiros* means preparing the Menorah to be lit. (According to the Rambam, the *Kohen* would remove the old oil and wicks, and then set up the new ones.) This is a Torah mitzvah, and only a *Kohen* may carry it out.

Shabbos also has these two mitzvos. There is the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles, which is incumbent upon the woman (because she is the "*Kohen*" of the home). And there is an additional mitzvah of preparing the candlesticks (polishing them, inserting the oil and wicks, or candles, etc.). And the *Mishnah Berurah* deems it proper for the husband to do this preparation. (263:12) *Hatavas ha-neiros* is the man's mitzvah.

I (Rav Pincus) learned this halachah when I was engaged and buying candlesticks for my *kallah*. I saw some fancy, decorated candlesticks on display that looked really nice. The storeowner told me, "Actually, it's quite hard to clean these candlesticks. But you'll do it - it's *your* mitzvah to clean the candlesticks *lichvod* Shabbos!"

The husband prepares, and the wife lights. In this way the *hadlakas ha-neiros*, which resembles the lighting of the golden Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash, creates a perfect unity and harmony between husband and wife.

There is a third mitzvah regarding the Menorah. This mitzvah is simply that there should be a Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash. This mitzvah also has a parallel in Shabbos - we find that the Shabbos candlesticks are compared to the Menorah. Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben HaRa'avad is quoted in the *Rishonim* as saying that if the utensil holding the oil of the Shabbos lights is not a proper *keli*- for instance, it is too wobbly and cannot stand on its own without support - it is invalid for the Shabbos lights. Just as the lights in the Beis HaMikdash were placed inside the Menorah, so, too, the Shabbos lights need to be placed inside a proper *keli*. (Of course, it remains to be clarified whether the halachah follows this opinion.)

On this basis, we can explain the common custom of buying silver candlesticks. The candlesticks are similar to the Menorah, and they are an intrinsic part of the mitzvah of kindling Shabbos lights.

As we know, the Beis HaMikdash was where the *Shechinah* rested, and any Jew who entered its gates was surrounded by *kedushah*. And just as in the Beis HaMikdash, so it is on *Shabbos Kodesh*. On Shabbos we are enveloped and surrounded by *kedushah*. For the twenty-four hours of Shabbos, we live surrounded by HaKadosh Baruch Hu!

In Honor of Chava Bat Batya

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

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QUESTION

What do you say about a person going on a trip for relaxation?

ANSWER

It depends what you mean by “a trip.” If you want to take a trip down Ocean Parkway, I’m all for it. It’s fresh air, it’s exercise, and you’re not wasting money. But a trip someplace by a vehicle, airplane or whatever it is, is not refreshing.

Now, sometimes a person is so confused in his mind that he has to do anything to get his mind off his troubles. So I’m not saying anything about that. But ordinarily, for relaxation, you don’t go on trips. Trips make you tired and you don’t get the required exercise and fresh air that help a person come back to normal. And therefore it’s all a hundred percent waste of money.

If you’re serious about relaxation, you would take up a system of touring the city streets – by daytime, not by night – walking for miles and miles, and then coming home and eating a nice meal and going to sleep. And, if necessary, going out again for a walk if you’re so serious.

But traveling is no answer for the problem of relaxation. People travel back and forth; they go to Eretz Yisroel and to Florida, and some go to Switzerland too. And all they do is spend money and get more and more tired, so when they come back they need a vacation.

April 1986

Life Questions? 

Cybersecurity Questions? 

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