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# PARSHAS LECH LECHA

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## LOST AND FOUND SOULS

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## Part I. Finding Hagar

### The Real Wealth of Mitzrayim

We read in this week's *sedrah* that **וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם** – *there was a famine in Eretz Canaan and Avram went down to Mitzrayim* (Bereishis 12:10). Now, we're not told very much about his stay there except that Pharaoh Melech Mitzrayim heard about a woman of exceptional beauty who came – that was Sarai – and he sent after her to take her to his house. Then it states **וַיִּנְגַּע ה' אֶת פַּרְעֹה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ** – *Hashem sent great plagues upon Pharaoh (ibid. 17)* and informed him in a dream that it was because of Sarai. So Pharaoh called Avram and he said, "Take Sarai back," and in order to appease him he gave him rich gifts. And then **וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם ... כָּבֶד מָאֹד בַּמָּקָנָה בַּבָּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב** – *Avram went up from Egypt ... very heavy with cattle and silver and gold (ibid.13:1-2).*

But of all the things that he acquired while in Mitzrayim, the most important one had nothing to do with gold and silver; Avraham's greatest acquisition was an Egyptian woman named Hagar. We know from what's written later that he returned to Eretz Canaan with Hagar as a *shifchah*, a maidservant, for Sarah. And she wasn't just any Egyptian woman – we have a tradition about Hagar that she was a princess (Bereishis Rabbah 45:1).

### The Teaching Couple

Now, how did such a thing happen? How was it that a princess of the royal Egyptian family should join the family of Avraham? So we understand that when Avraham and Sarah came to Mitzrayim they continued to do what they did previously; they were teaching people about Hashem. That's what this great couple specialized in: **וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה'**, proclaiming the name of Hashem. It was their main occupation, spreading the word about the Creator.

Avraham, you know, was already a famous man, a *nesi Elokim* known for his exceptional greatness, and like all great couples, Sarah was his partner. And so when they came to Mitzrayim and it was made known that there's an opportunity, two great personalities were visiting from Eretz Canaan, so very many people came to hear them speak. **אֲבִרָהֶם מְגִיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים וְסָרָה מְגִירָת אֶת הַנָּשִׁים** – *Avraham spoke to the men about Hashem and Sarah to the women* (Rashi 12:5).

Sarah was a teacher too but her disciples were ladies. In those days you didn't have ladies who went out and spoke in public to men, who tried to make men into pious Jews. They didn't confuse the *seder* in those days – the ladies concentrated on the ladies.

Now among those who came to Sarah, to speak with her and to listen to her *drashos*, were also women from the highest class of Egyptian society; and among them was a princess named Hagar. She was also among Sarah's listeners and she fell in love with Sarah and her teachings. And she was so enthralled, so enthusiastic over the lectures she heard from Sarah, that she decided that she could never part with her.

That, by the way, is a sign of a good soul, of good character – someone who is loyal to their teacher. Like one of the *chachomim* said about Rabbi Akiva: **עָקִיבָא כָּל הַפּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ כְּפוֹרֵשׁ מִן הַחַיִּים** – *Akiva, anyone who forsakes you is as if he forsook his own life* (Kiddushin 66b). Because that is life! To find someone who can lead you to Olam Haba, what's more living than that? And so when you find the right personality who strikes a responsive chord

in your soul and what he says is what you need to hear, so you don't let him go away.

### **Following a Rebbe**

And therefore once Hagar met Sarah, once she realized that Sarah's words, her guidance, were what she needed most, she made a decision that she would join the household of Avraham and Sarah. "Better that I should be a handmaiden in Sarah's tent in Canaan," she said, "rather than a princess in the palace of Egypt".

Now, that was a tremendous sacrifice Hagar was making, because it wasn't just a matter of leaving the palace. To leave your homeland, to give up your kin, your family, is not so easy. Especially in those days when everything was conducted according to the rules of families, extended families. You didn't have communities made up of various kinds of migrants, newcomers. There was no such thing as strangers in a town; everyone was related by blood. They were children of some patriarch, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and that's how the town developed. Everybody was a kin, a cousin or a second cousin.

### **The Danger of Leaving Your Family**

That's why a *ger* had a very slim chance of surviving. A sojourner in the ancient times didn't belong; he was a misfit. Among your family you have rights. They'll take up for you. There was a *goel hadam*, even among the nations too. Anybody who would harm you, there were relatives who would be up in arms to avenge your blood and everybody was afraid to do anything to any person because of his relatives. It was a good thing in the olden days.

It's like how it is even today in Williamsburg. When a bum comes in and tries to harm a Jew so they shout "*Chaptsem!*" and they start pouring out, fifty children from one house. It's like one big extended family and in a minute the street is black with black hats and black coats; and hands and fists too. They don't wait for 'justice'; they send the bum to the hospital instead of to the jail.

Of course The New York Times doesn't like that. They say it's 'frontier justice', it's lynch law. But what else if not that? We'll wait for The New York Times to protect us? We'd rather live.

So in the olden times, if you left your family it was a very big sacrifice. A family meant you had insurance – you had *goel hadam* insurance; you had poverty insurance, health insurance. Everybody would take you in and help you if you needed it. Family was everything! And Hagar had all of that



and she forsook everything because of an ideal. She wanted to be with her *rebbe*, Sarah. That's what she said; that she'd prefer to be a *shifchah*, a handmaiden, by Sarah.

### **The Back Door Sneak**

So you'll ask why a *shifchah*? Why couldn't Sarah just take her along as a *talmidah*? The answer is, in those days it was a monolithic society; it means everything had to be in a certain order. You couldn't just be a hanger-on, like a loose end hanging behind. You had to join the family; either you were a relative or you had some other form of family membership. And in those days if you wanted to become a member of the family but you weren't related by blood so you became an *eved* – it was a way of sneaking into a family through the back door.

And so Hagar became a member of the family, a *talmidah* of Sarah, by becoming a *shifchah*. Because in those early days a *shifchah* was more than just a slave. It's not like by the gentiles, how a slave is treated. *Shifchah* comes from the word *mishpachah*; she's part of the family. Don't you see that when Sarah couldn't have any children she gave Hagar to Avraham from whom to have a child? So you see the *shifchah* in those days was actually a relative. And in the family of Avraham it was more than just a relative – it was a *talmid*, a student.

### **The Rosh Yeshiva's Gabbai**

And what a student she was! She was eager to learn and she had a good head too and so she quickly became one of Sarah's star pupils. And over time she became the right-hand woman of Sarah; she became the *chozer*, the *ibberzogger'ke*. Now, if you didn't live in the *yeshivos*, you may not know what that is: After the *rosh yeshivah* finishes his lecture, so one of the star pupils, the one who understands the *rebbe's* words best, sits down with the other *talmidim* and says over the *shiur*.

That was Hagar! When Rebbetzin Sarah completed the lecture it was Hagar who used to repeat it. Sarah left to take some rest and the women gathered around Hagar and she repeated it and explained it to them.

### **Living Life!**

Ahh! Now Hagar began to live! She was exhilarated at such a glorious opportunity. It was a very great *zechus* for her, and a great happiness too because if you want to make progress in life, there's nothing like teaching others. You know what it means to be a *chozer*? You have to train yourself to listen with acumen; you listen keenly and you perceive all the nuances,

all the shades of meaning that your *rebbe* implies. And besides that, you become greater and greater just because of the repetition; by saying over the great ideas they become engraved more deeply in your mind.

That's a great principle, by the way. Like the Gemara (Taanis 7a) says, **הִרְבֵּה לִמְדָתִי מֵרַבּוֹתַי** – *I learned much from my teachers*, **וְיִוְתֵר מִחֻבְרֵי** – *but still more I learned from my comrades*, **וּמִתַּלְמִידֵי יוֹתֵר מִכֻּלָּם** – *but from my disciples I learned most*. So in case you *yeshivah* men, if you want to become something, organize a *blatt shiur* someplace and start saying a *shiur* in Gemara and that's the way to greatness. I'm giving you this advice free of charge. If you'll ever be able to organize a *shiur* of Gemara, or whatever it is, on your own and teach others, that's the way to become great.

### The Promotion

And Hagar was enjoying this privilege of being **דוֹלָה וּמַשְׁקָה** from the Torah of her *rebbe* for the women – she lowered her bucket into the mind of Sarah and poured out the Torah to her *talmidos*. Her personality was expanding. It was a career of happiness for Hagar.

And you know what eventually happened? She was doing such great things and finally she became so great that Sarah gave her a promotion. Sarah said to Hagar, “I'm going to give you an inestimable privilege. You're going to bear a child to the great Avraham.” For many years Sarah had waited for a child but it didn't come and she wanted Avraham to have a child. But who else would be worthy? Who else but another woman who walked in Avraham's ways?

It was after ten years that Hagar was studying under Sarah and teaching Sarah's *torah* – it was Avraham's *torah* – to others and she became so great and so close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that finally Sarah said, “You are fit for this great function of marrying Avraham.”

## Part II. Losing Hagar

### Making Light of the Rebbe

Now the Torah tells us what happened at that time. **וַתֵּרָא** – *When Hagar saw*, **כִּי הָרְתָה** – *that she was pregnant*, **וַתִּקַּל בְּעֵינֶיהָ** – *the status of her mistress Sarah went down a little bit in her eyes* (Bereishis 16:4). When Hagar saw that *min haShomayim* they consented that she should bear a child to this great man, Avraham the *nesi Elokim*, so it entered her mind

like this: "Look," she was thinking, "Sarah was deemed unworthy by Hashem to have a child from Avraham and I've been chosen."

Sarah was her *rebbe* but now Hagar saw that *she* was the one chosen to have children from Avraham, so in her mind it couldn't be that Sarah should be the most important. After all, the mother of the Jewish people, *that's* most important. And she started thinking that maybe she was like a *talmid* who was once only a disciple but now became what you say in Yiddish *oisgeshtigen*. Maybe she's already an equal to her *rebbe*; maybe even better. And so וַתִּקַּל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ – Sarah became less important in her eyes.

### Hagar's Chiddushei Torah

How did Hagar show that? So I'm going to tell you what I heard from my great *rebbe*, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Isaac Sher *zichrono levrachah*. He wrote these things in his famous *sefer*, *Avraham Avinu*. Everything I've been telling you, all these things up until now are also his, but the following I heard from his mouth.

Hagar had always given all of her energies and abilities to explain Sarah's words to the disciples. That was her pride and joy, to speak over Sarah's words about Hakadosh Baruch Hu, about *niflaos haBorei*, and all the ideals Sarah spoke about. But now that she was carrying Avraham's child she was so elated at the greatness that was accorded to her *min haShomayim*, so after Sarah got through, when it was Hagar's turn to repeat Sarah's words, this time Hagar began adding some of her own additions. I'm sure they were good things but it wasn't Sarah's words. It wasn't Sarah's ideas exactly.

### Not in Sarah's Presence

Now you can be sure that if Hagar had been, let's say, in Egypt saying these words she would have been a hit. Her own ideas, her own *chiddushim*, no question they were important and effective. But when Sarah is around so it's like מוֹרֶה הֶלְכָּה בְּפָנֶי רַבּוֹ; you have to stick to what your *rebbe* says. You can explain it. You can dilate on it. You can plumb the depths of the words. But you cannot inject your own ideas!

Because then you're going away from your *rebbe* and you're competing with your *rebbe*. And that's considered a serious thing among Jews. תִּלְמִיד בְּמִקְוֶה – אָסוּר לְהוֹדוֹת, – he can't say his own opinions (Eiruvim 62b). When the *rebbe* is around it's the *rebbe* and nothing else.



But Hagar made that mistake. Her good fortune went to her head a little bit and she began to speak her own ideas too. After all, it seemed like she was chosen by *Shomayim*. And so she disregarded, to a certain extent, the words of her teacher. And therefore that's *וַתִּקַּל גְּבוּרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ*; that's what it means that her mistress became unimportant in her eyes.

### The Affliction

Now, Sarah, you have to understand, wasn't satisfied when she heard Hagar injecting her own ideas. Because great people when they teach, everything is said with a calculation. That's how *chachomim* speak; they have intentions, they have purposes, why it has to be so. All the words of the *chachomim* are extremely calculated. Sharp and deep. Sharp and deep! And they're not a plaything that anyone can massage this way or that way according to the will of the listener.

And so when Sarah saw what was doing, she understood already that she wasn't that important anymore in the eyes of her disciple, and so she consulted with Avraham. Avraham, after all, was the *rosh yeshivah*. Sarah was one of the *magidei shiur* but Avraham was the *rosh yeshivah*. So she consulted with him what to do.

So Avraham said, "Look, she's your disciple. *עָשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ* - I'll leave it to you. Do whatever you think is necessary." *וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרַי* - And Sarai afflicted her, *וַתִּבְרַח מִפְּנֵיהָ* - and she fled from her teacher (ibid. 6).

### The Demotion

Now people who didn't learn the *pshat* think that Sarah hauled off and gave Hagar a smack and she ran away. But that's not the case. Actually, it was much worse - she afflicted Hagar with the worst possible punishment. Sarah said to Hagar, "The next time I speak, take it easy. You don't have to bother repeating. I'm retiring you from your job.

"Up till now you had the privilege of saying it over to the other ladies but now I see you're becoming too proud, too much *ga'avah*, so I'm taking that away from you." That's what it means *וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרַי*, that Sarah inflicted her. She took away her job as being *ibberzogger'ke*. She didn't give her a smack, no. She took away the *zechus* of being the chief *talmid*.

Now, when Hagar heard that, her world collapsed. She lived only to make progress in *daas Hashem*, and to be removed from her privilege as the one most close to the *rebbe*, that was too much for her and in her great distress she fled. When she lost her privilege of being the *ibberzogger'ke* of Sara's *shmuessen*, she lost her head and ran away.

## The Angel on the Road

And now we come to one of the remarkable stories of the Torah. וַיִּמְצָאָהּ – An angel of Hashem found her in the wilderness (ibid. 7). A *malach* Hashem stopped Hagar as she was on the road and spoke to her.

Now if you would run away because your *rebbe* afflicted you and let's say now you're wandering somewhere on 13th Avenue, don't expect a *malach* to come and speak to you. And even someone bigger than you – let's say there's a certain *maggid shiur* and the *menahel* of the *yeshivah* took away his class or gave him boys that weren't so good instead of his previous good class and he fled in anguish. And now he's wandering someplace in Boro Park; even *he* shouldn't expect a *malach* Hashem should come to him like it came to Hagar. And don't think it's because in the ancient days *malachim* were floating around in such abundance. Even in those days a *malach* would appear only to very great personalities.

Now, as great as Hagar was, it wasn't because of Hagar. Because what did the *malach* say to Hagar, the first thing? וַיֹּאמֶר – He said, הֲגֵר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרָי – “Hagar, maidservant of Sarah ...” That's how the angel addressed her and when an angel talks it pays to be *medayek* in his words. It means, “Now you know why I appeared to you. Hagar, you're very great. You're so great that Sarah Schenirer couldn't come to your ankles. Even greater than Sarah Schenirer couldn't come to your ankles. But as great as you are you should know that you're הֲגֵר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרָי – you're great because you're *shifchas Sarai*. That's where all of your greatness comes from; everything you became was because of her.” That's an important lesson from a *malach* Hashem: ‘Remember what it was, who it was, that made you what you are today’.

## The First Question

Now, what did the *malach* tell Hagar? Pay attention carefully to his words; two questions he asked her. Number one: אִי מֵזֶה בָּאת – “Where are you coming from?” And then a second question: וְאֵנָּה תֵּלְכִי – “And where are you going to?”

Two important questions. First; do you know what you're throwing away? Do you know what you're forsaking, where you're going from? You're going away from Sarah? You're going away from Avraham's house? Do you understand what you're leaving?! That's number one.

## The Second Question

And the second question אֵנָּה תֵּלְכִי – Where are you going to? Where are you going to go now? You'll go back home to Mitzrayim, to Pharaoh? To the

land of *toeivah*? You'll go back to the morass, to the swamp from which you crept out and saved yourself?! You have to know where you're running to.

Now, you can be certain that Hagar was not going back to Mitzrayim. She was too smart for that. Only an imbecile would go back to nothing but wherever she was going to, it was a big question: **אַנְה תֵּלֵכִי** – *Where are you going to?* Wherever you're going it's nothing compared to the tent of Sarah."

### Going Nowhere

Now what did Hagar answer? There were two questions and Hagar answered only one. She said **מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבֵרָתִי אֲנֹכִי בֹרַחַת** – *"I am fleeing from Sarai, my mistress."* She couldn't say where she's *going* because she didn't know where to go. She knew that anyplace else was a dead end compared to Sarah's tent. But she told the *malach* at least why she was running away: "I'm escaping my mistress, Sarah."

Now she said **שָׂרַי גְּבֵרָתִי**. It means Sarai, my *rebbe*. She didn't say Sarai, that bad woman, that mean person. No! **שָׂרַי גְּבֵרָתִי** – *Sarai, my governess.*

So the *malach* saw that she wasn't opposed to Sarah as her teacher. Only she didn't want to suffer the indignity that she should have to come next time to Sarah's lecture and sit and look on when somebody else takes her place. She couldn't tolerate the idea of losing that opportunity to make especial progress as the chief student of her *rebbe*.

### Going Back

"Oh," said the *malach*, "if you understand the greatness of your teacher then I won't let you go away. If that's the case, you *want* your teacher and you *want* to be close to your teacher. And the great rule is **בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂאֲדָם רוּצָה** – *in the way a man wants to go he is led from heaven*; and since that's in your heart, you're not looking to go someplace for some ulterior motive. Your sole desire is to *shteig* and make progress and become greater and closer to Hashem. And therefore I'm commanding you, **שׁוּבִי אֶל גְּבִרְתְּךָ** – *"Go back to your teacher, יְיָהּ, וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדָהּ* – *and let yourself be afflicted under her hand"* (ibid. 9). If your *rebbe* is going to afflict you, nothing bad with that. Go back and be afflicted by your *rebbe*. Don't forsake your *rebbe*."

And therefore Hagar was saved. She went back to her *rebbe* and she continued to make progress for many years. All those years that she continued with Sarah made her so great that even after she had to leave with her son Yishmael, she's not forgotten from our history. When the time comes – don't be in a hurry but the time will come when you'll go to Gan Eden and you'll see that Hagar is established there on a throne not too far

away from our mother Sarah. Believe me, a lot of *tzaddikim* would like to sit in Hagar's place.

## Part III. Lost and Found

### The Lost Sheep

Now, these two questions that the *malach* asked; you think the *malach* was talking only to Hagar? Oh no. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wrote that in the Torah because those questions are intended for all of us. Who's not wandering on the road? Who's not leaving from one place, going to another place? We're all wandering like lost sheep in the desert.

You know who said that? You'll be surprised. It was Dovid Hamelech. Dovid our great king, the man who was closer to Hashem than we could even imagine, said **בְּקֵשׁ עִבְדְּךָ, תַּעֲיִיתִי כְּשֶׂה אֲבֵר** – “I wandered like a lost sheep, **בְּקֵשׁ עִבְדְּךָ** – seek me out, Hashem, and show me the way” (Tehillim 119:176).

Now, was Dovid a lost sheep? We wouldn't say such a thing on our own. But even Dovid felt he needed more *hadrachah* in life because no matter what you think you know, no matter how big you are already, you have to know that this world is a wilderness. And it's so easy to get lost in the wilderness. Thousands of tests are being offered to you, this way or that way, this way and that way; all kinds of ways to get lost. *Olam Haze*h is absolutely a wilderness.

### The Mabul and the Teivah

Especially today. Like a *rosh yeshiva* once said, “We can never expel a *bochur* from the yeshivah today because the *beis medrash* is like Noah's *teivah* and outside is a *mabul*.” He said that to me. “I can't expel any boy from the yeshivah anymore because outside of the yeshivah is a flood of the worst things, the worst ideas and the worst temptations. The only way is to keep him in the yeshivah; it's *pikuach nefesh*!” It means that when the *roshei yeshivah* are thinking of expelling a *bochur*, it's a matter of *pikuach nefesh* that decision because outside there's a terrible world and it's so easy to go lost.

Once a *menahel* of a yeshivah called me up. He has some weak boys. Should he send them away? I said, “Don't send them away.” You can't send boys away anymore. Work on them. Try to get them to keep *sedarim* more but don't send them away. Even if a boy sits in a yeshivah and doesn't learn anything, he's better off than going outside the yeshivah.

But even in the ancient days, and even a great man like Dovid, same thing. No matter how great a person is he has to ask Hashem always, וְכָכָה עָבְדָהּ – “I’m a lost sheep. Seek me out, Hashem, and lead me in the right way!”

### **Ask Yourself**

Now if we’re going to ask Hashem always for help like Dovid did, that’s very good. It means we already recognize the problem. Everyone should ask for help from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And not once. All the time! But still, that’s not enough; because we have to do something about it too. And therefore these two questions that the *malach* asked Hagar when she ran out into the desert, are questions we have to ask ourselves always. Don’t take a step into the desert without questioning yourself: Where are you leaving from? And where are you going?

Let’s say if somebody is running away from a good *shul*. A good *shul* is a *teivah*. Or maybe he’s leaving the yeshivah. A yeshivah is a *teivah*. Even to go to another yeshivah. Maybe you’re running away from a good *rebbe* or from a good *chavrusa*. Anybody who is running away should ask himself these two questions.

### **Running Away from Home**

Here’s a person, a young man or young woman, who wants to run away from his father’s house. He wants to take an apartment by himself. Let’s say because his father is too strict. That’s what he says, his parents are too strict, too overbearing. I don’t know if it’s true but that’s what he tells me.

Do you know what you’re leaving? You know what it means such a house? A strict father is a blessing, a great privilege. You have somebody who is interested that you should be better, more perfect. It’s not a *hefker* place, your father’s home. You’re under control and so you’ll grow up without the flaws from which others are infested. Flaws of selfishness, of arrogance, of laziness.

What happens to the younger generation when they don’t have strict fathers? When everything is permissible? They grow up unfit to cope with the world. They’re misfits. They can’t suffer an employer. They can’t live with a husband or a wife. All their lives they’re accustomed only to hear ‘yes’, ‘yes’ and to do what they want and so they become failures. Not only in *yiddishkeit*; in life. A fortunate boy is the one who gets a slap in the home.

### **Stay at Home Moms**

Girls too. If a father gives a slap to a daughter, it's vitamins for her. She's trained that she can't have everything she wants. And when she marries and she asks her husband, "Let's do this" – something that costs a lot of money – and he says, "We can't afford it," so she can swallow that down. And even sometimes if her husband is careless and he says a word that's not respectful – he shouldn't do it, but if he did – she's not going to take off to California because of that. She's accustomed to rebuke. She understands her way in this world already.

He also. How many men have fled because their wives have stung them with their poisoned tongues? That's a big mistake. **אי מזה באת** – *Where are you leaving from?* From a wife?! A wife is hard to get. And once you have one, hold onto her. Where are you going away from?! You're going away from your home! That's your future! Your wife and your home, that's your perfection!

And **ואנה תלכי** – *where are you going to?* I don't know. Where will he go? He'll sleep in the subway? He imagines he'll find something better. Nothing doing! You're going nowhere.

### **The Greenwich Desert**

And people who leave us altogether? It's only because they never asked themselves these questions. Here's a yeshivah man who used to come to this place and he wasn't successful in a certain big yeshivah. He didn't get along with the *rosh yeshivah*. What did he do? He ran away and he settled in Greenwich Village.

A man who used to come to my house every Shabbos to eat, now he's in Greenwich Village?! That's the only place you could run to? He became a *churban*. He became a ruined person.

I once called him to come see me. We were sitting in Avenue R in his car and I said to him, "What happened to you? Why'd you leave such a good place? And to go to that filthy wicked district, Greenwich Village. It's the lowest place in America next to Hollywood and Las Vegas. You had no other place to go to?"

He was very angry that I had bothered him to come from Greenwich Village to Avenue R.

He said, "Don't bother me anymore." He threatened me.

I said to him, "It's for your benefit I'm talking to you. You need someone to ask you these questions. You're not asking yourself, so someone has to ask you." Otherwise you get lost in the desert.



## Paying for a Pathfinder

Now the Gemara (Bava Kamma 116b) says that when merchants are traveling in the *midbar* with a caravan, so when it comes to the expenses of the caravan it's *l'fi mammon*, each one pays according to how much property he has. Because if you have more property, you're gaining more from the caravan, from the trip.

But there's one expense that they all have to play equally. That's a *tayar*. A *tayar* is a pathfinder, a man who knows how to lead them in the wilderness; he knows which direction to go, how not to get lost. And for him the rich and the poor have to pay equally because to get lost in the wilderness that's a matter of *sakanos nefashos*. It's not just your merchandise, your property – it's a matter of life and death – and so everybody has to pitch in the same amount. If you have a pathfinder who knows the way in the wilderness, that man is saving your life. Everyone needs a *tayar*!

It's very important advice you're hearing now. You must have a *tayar*, a guide to lead you in life. Especially today! You know once upon a time the Jewish street was to some extent a guide. Let's say two hundred years ago, so you walked in the street and the street influenced you to some extent in the right way. But today the street is full of *tumah*.

It's a big maze of confusion outside. And therefore if you don't have a *tayar*, no matter what you say otherwise, you're being influenced by the street, by *amei haaretz*, by magazines, by imbeciles, and you'll make mistakes; sometimes very big mistakes.

## Darkness of the Rambam

And therefore it's so easy to get lost. It doesn't mean you'll go away from Yiddishkeit, no. You're still a good Orthodox Jew but you're walking in darkness. The Rambam says that. When he wants to talk about the materialists he says *הַרְשָׁעִים הַהוֹלְכִים בְּחֹשֶׁךְ* – *the wicked who walk in darkness* (De'os 6:1). Why does the Rambam have to add they walk in darkness? They're wicked. They walk in wickedness!

But the answer is, he's not talking about that kind of wicked people. In the Rambam's time you didn't have people who profaned Shabbos or didn't eat kosher. The Rambam lived in Cairo; in Cairo, in the Rambam's day, you didn't have Jews who profaned Shabbos. You have to realize that. So who were the wicked who walked in darkness?

It was the multitude, what we call the Orthodox. There was nothing *but* Orthodox. And still according to Torah a *rasha* doesn't have to be a man who has thrown away the practical *mitzvos*. *Reshaim* means people who

are good Orthodox people but are always tripping up, always making mistakes. They do what's accepted by the rest of the multitude – they keep everything; they pray, they say all the *brachos* – but they don't have someone to guide them to their real success in this world, the success of living with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and accomplishing perfection, *shleimus*.

### Everyone On the Hook

And therefore everyone needs a teacher, an advisor, a guide. Everyone! **מְחַשְׁבֵּין לְפִי נִפְשׁוֹת** – Everyone is on the hook for a pathfinder. Men and women, boys and girls, should make for themselves a *rebbe*; look for somebody and tie yourself up to that person and live by his advice. Everyone should have a *rebbe* to ask *eitzos*. Even a girl, if she can't ask *eitzos* of the *rav* but she could have her mother or her father ask *eitzos* of the *rav*, yes. A *shidduch*? Ask *eitzos*. Sometimes the *rav* will tell you, "Watch out, it's the wrong one."

You must ask for directions on life's highway. *Az men fregt blundjet men nit* – If you ask questions, you won't get lost. I'll say that again, *az men fregt blundjet men nit* – If you ask questions, you won't get lost!

In marriage especially. When a young couple gets married they must decide on one *rav* and no matter what the *rav* says, they have to accept his words. The *rav* says that the woman is too *meshugeh*, too wild, too nervous, that's it. He says the husband is too cruel, too selfish, too stingy, whatever it is, that's it.

They shouldn't say, "No, he's criticizing me. I'll run away from him." No. **הַתַּעֲנִי תַּחַת יְדֵיָּהּ** – *be afflicted under the hand of the rav*. He is the one who is going to tell you what to do and you should always rely on his *psak*. That's your *shleimus*!

### Afflict Yourself

Boys and girls, husbands and wives, old people too, no matter, take a *rebbe*. And even though the *tayar* may be burdensome, maybe he afflicts you and you're suffering from not being able to do the things you want to do, **שׁוּבִי** – *go back*, **הַתַּעֲנִי** – *let yourself be afflicted* **תַּחַת יְדֵיָּהּ** – *under his watchful eye*. Even though it hurts sometimes, stay there.

I had *talmidim* of mine that sometimes from one little word that I said, they went away from me. A man always used to sit together and walk with me. Once he asked me, "Maybe I could make an appeal in the shul for a certain good cause."

I said “Well, we make appeals for the yeshivos frequently. We're not able to change for something else.”

He heard that and I never saw him again.

From one word? That's called loyalty?! Where are you running from? Where are you going? You have to overlook small things. If people go away because they're offended and stop seeing you, it's a sign of disloyalty; and disloyalty to a rebbe you should know is the same as being disloyal to Hashem.

And even that great woman Hagar had to be reminded of that. And if *she* did, then us surely. All of us have to remember those two questions the *malach* asked Hagar and his advice – it's the advice of a *malach Hashem* after all: “Go back! Go back to your rebbe! Go back to your yeshivah! Go back to your *shiur*! Go back to the good neighborhood! Go back to your home! Go back to your *tayar*!” And that's the way you'll go back to Hashem.

### Have a Wonderful Shabbos

## Let's Get Practical

### Learning From Hagar

When Hagar lost herself in her pain and escaped the home of Avraham Avinu, a *malach* was sent to teach her important lessons for living successfully, lessons that apply equally to all of us. The *malach Hashem* wanted Hagar to understand that the only way to find oneself is by a rebbe's guidance and that often the greatest growth a person makes means accepting the suffering that staying in a good place entails.

This week I will *bli neder* take some time every day to ask myself these two questions that the *malach* is asking all of us always: (1) Where am I coming from? (2) Where am I headed?

Hopefully this will lead me to accept much-needed guidance from a capable rebbe as well as appreciating the benefits of all the situations that I find myself in.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

**46** – Avraham and Lot | **410** – Hagar the Egyptian | **640** – Abraham and Sarah  
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## QUESTION

**Should parents criticize or compliment their children or both?**

## ANSWER

And the answer is both. Certainly! Parents should be lavish in their praise when their child behaves properly. Not only parents. Neighbors. Anybody should praise people when they behave properly. And don't be stingy. People love praise and it's a stimulus to them.

However, parents must also constantly criticize children. Of course in the ancient times they were able to criticize more. Today you have to sugarcoat it a little bit. But whatever it is, you must constantly tell them what's right.

Nobody knows what's right. Even adults like ourselves must be told constantly. We're always slipping back. We always must have somebody to remind us. And if you think that you can never listen to criticism, then you have to know it's called a *leitz*, *לֹא יֵאָהֵב לֵץ הוֹכֵחַ לוֹ* – *The scoffer doesn't want to be criticized*, *אֶל הַכְּבִּימִים לֹא יֵלֵךְ* – *that's why he doesn't go to the sages* (Mishlei 15:12). He keeps away.

People who come here once and they hear things they don't like and they don't come again, it's a sign they don't want to improve. All they want is people should caress them; that we should say, "Yes, you're nice. You're very good." And they go away just as bad as they were.

When you come with the ambition to improve, when you're waiting to hear something that might give you a clue, a hint, what you need to know, then you're very fortunate to be criticized.

So parents should constantly praise and constantly criticize children. Of course it depends on the child and it depends on the circumstances. But we have to see to it that the children are given an impetus to improve themselves.

July 1992

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