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AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE
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Part I. Holy Fortifications

No Backsies

There is a law in the Torah that if a man sells his ancestral home in Eretz Yisroel, the Torah gives him a special prerogative to buy his home back from the buyer. גְּאֻלַּה תְּהִיָּה לוֹ - *You can always redeem your ancestral home* (Vayikra 25:31). Even many years later he can come back to the buyer and claim “seller's regret.” And even if he chooses not to take advantage of this Torah right – maybe he can't afford it – eventually it reverts back to him in any case. וּבְיֹבֵל יֵצֵא - *When Yovel comes, the home goes out from the buyer and becomes his again (ibid.).*

It's interesting to note however that these *dinim* apply only to a house that is sold in an open town, an unwalled place; בְּתֵי הַחֲצֵרִים it's called. But if you have a home in a walled city, בְּתֵי עָרֵי הוֹמָה, it's a different story altogether.

First of all, he's not given that right to buy it back forever — he has one year and that's all. After the year is up, the buyer can say, "I'm not selling it back to you." And he'll never get it back after that. **לֹא יָצָא בְיָבֵל** - *Even at Yovel, when all the properties go back to their owners, the home in the walled city does not (ibid. 25:30).*

Mah Nishtana Habayis Hazeh?

And so right away we see that something is going on here that requires a little study; why should a walled city home be any different from another home? All the homes in Eretz Yisroel have one *din*, and the walled cities are something entirely different; they have *dinim* that are more strict for the seller.

The answer is that *the Torah doesn't want a person who lives in a walled city to move away*. So if he sells his home, right away, there begins a pressure campaign: You have only one year now to redeem it, otherwise you lost your home forever. You don't have fifty years to think about buying the house back; no, there is a certain sense of urgency. Buy it back now! Like when the department store wants you to buy their product, so they make a deadline: "Sale Ends in Two Days!" It puts the pressure on you; you have to make your purchase before it's too late. And that's what the Torah says here: It's now or never! You won't get your home back at *Yovel*.

Location, Location, Location

And so the owner of a house in the walled city has to weigh his options very carefully before selling his home; he knows that he's making a decision that will soon be irrevocable. Once he moves out of the walled city it won't be so easy to move back again.

We see here Hakadosh Baruch Hu's intention of encouraging the original residents of a walled city to remain where they are. He wants the resident of a walled city to forever remain a *walled-city man*. A city out in the open, the *batei chatzeirim* — not so much. But a walled city, that's too important to leave.

Walls Work

There is something special going on here, and so we'll understand it according to our limited abilities and say as follows: In ancient times walls meant security. Today it's much less so because the enemy can go with a helicopter and drop bombs down, but in ancient times all fighting was ground combat, so if you had walls you had security.

A walled city was — and in many places it's true even today — the safest place to live. Not only against foreign armies; the walls were a bulwark against bandits and marauders too, they afforded the residents security and safety. Today, people don't understand that because the liberals bring the bandits into the cities and they set them loose on innocent citizens. Every day, people are falling before the bullets and knives of these murderers who are protected by the ACLU and the other *reshaim*, the Jewish liberals. But back when politicians were still sane, the criminals were locked up behind bars or they were thrown out of the city, and inside the city was the safest place to be.

Therefore, houses in a walled city were a permanent establishment and they soon became very crowded. Because the walls limited the expansion opportunities — you couldn't keep building outward — so the walled cities of Eretz Yisroel naturally developed into safe cities crowded with *frum* Jews.

Safe Spaces

Now, you know what crowds of Jews, streets filled with *frum* Jews, does to a city? Not only is it a better place, a safer place to live; that surely. Go into Italian or Puerto Rican neighborhoods — everyone has a knife. They carry knives; sometimes scissors. A policeman will stop him? Oh, it's just scissors. Scissors are a utensil; it's not a concealed weapon anymore, so the policeman can't do anything. So they learn tricks to avoid being arrested.

But Jewish boys aren't violent; they don't carry weapons and they don't mug people. So there's no question that to live in a *frum* Jewish neighborhood is an excellent thing. You'll live longer because of that. You won't get mugged. You won't be afraid to go out after dark. But that's not it; that's nothing yet. Because not only does a Jewish city become a *safe* place, it actually becomes a *holy* place. When it's crowded and established and secure it actually becomes a holy city.

Walls of Holiness

I'll prove that to you. Everyone knows a *metzora* is sent out of a walled city because he is *tamei*. *Tzaraas* is a *tumah chamurah* and he can't be in the *machneh Yisroel*, a place of *kedusha*, while he's still *tamei*, so he's sent away outside the city walls until he heals.

Now, why the *metzora* would be sent out of Yerushalayim, the city of the Beis Hamikdash, the city where Hashem resides, that we understand. It's an *עיר קדושה*, a city of holiness! But the mitzvah of *shiluach metzora m'chutz la'machneh* means any walled city in Eretz Yisroel. It could be far away from the *makom ha'mikdash*, but if it's walled, then it's holy.

Now, for us today, who live among *umos ha'olam*, and the ideas of atheists, *reshaim*, percolate even down into the best minds, the idea that the Shechinah is in a certain place is not so easy to grasp. But we have to work on it because that's what the Torah is teaching us. The crowded place where there's a strong and permanent settlement of Jews, that's where Hashem is most.

אֶהָב ה' שְׁעָרֵי צִיּוֹן – Hashem loves the cities of Tzion, the big walled cities with gates. Because those are the places where the most permanent families lived, and therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “My Presence is there.”

And that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu insists, “I don't want you to sell. I want families to live there forever and ever and keep the same traditions they received from their forefathers.” And He says, “I'm going to punish you if you sell. If you don't get it back within a year, then it's lost forever.” It's a punishment. Don't sell a *בֵּית בְּעִיר הוֹמָה*. Don't move away! “Your *neshamah*, your wife's *neshamah*, and your children's *neshamos* are too important to Me.”

Painful Lessons

Now, before we continue, I have to mention a painful subject. We see sometimes that even *frum* Jews, *nebach*, *chalilah* – it should never happen – have certain *puraniyos* come upon them. Now when you talk about a specific instance, we're not going to be *matzdik es hadin*; we won't say, “He deserved it.” We have pity on him. We go to his *hesped*, and we'll say *shevachim* about him. But between ourselves, we have to learn lessons. Hakadosh Baruch Hu never does anything unless there's a reason.

There's a man, a *frum* Jew with five children, and he moved to a small town in Connecticut. Connecticut! Far away!

“What about your children?”

“Oh, my children will go to a day school thirty miles away.”

A bus comes every day to take his children. What kind of children are in that day school? TV children. They sit together on the bus, and his children learn filthy things. A terrible influence. It's a big *taanah* on him. You were living in Brooklyn, and you took your family to a small town in Connecticut?

Maybe he never considered it. He didn't come here and hear us talk about the subject, and so even though he lived in a good neighborhood, next door to a good synagogue and to *talmidei chachamim*, he didn't appreciate it enough. So when his wife pressured him to move way out someplace, she nagged him and hassled him, he gave in. He never appreciated how valuable proximity to the synagogue is, how good it is to live on a street where there's

a big yeshiva and many *frum* Jews. He lived there so long that he thinks that's how it is everywhere.

Out there is a wilderness compared to here. No matter how many fairy tales they feed you about how good it is out there, how they finally opened a kosher butcher shop, and there's one store that's closed on Shabbos. Oh, wonderful progress! But where he lived before was a hundred times better. And now he's living in this small gentile town in Connecticut, on a gentile block.

A few months later, he was commuting on the train and a freak accident happened. Two trains crashed into each other, and he was the only one that died.

The Gemara and the NY Times

So the New York Times correspondent asked the relatives what kind of man he was. "Oh, he was a fine man!" They don't know why it happened. The New York Times is happy. A *frum* Jew was killed for no reason. "Aha! You see! There's *לִית דִּין וְלִית דִּין*. A proof! It's a random, sad world."

That's because the reporter is a *beheimah*. *אין מביאיין ראיה מן הבהמה*.

But I want to tell you something now. The Gemara tells a story (Kesubos 111a). There was a man, a fine man, who moved from Pumbedisa to Astonya. Now, Pumbedisa was a crowded city. In Bavel, although they were farmers, they lived in cities, packed together in Jewish neighborhoods. Pumbedisa was especially remarkable. It was a yeshiva town, and twice a year there were month-long *yarchei kallah*. People came from everywhere and learned Torah day and night. All day long, they sat on the streets and on the roofs and said, *אמר רב יהודה אמר רב*, and *amar mar*, and *mishnayos* and *braisos* and *gemaras*. And then they slept in the streets. It was something to see. Even the *goyim* were amazed when they saw that. The Gemara says many *goyim* became *geirim* when they saw that *kiddush Hashem*.

But what did this young man do? He moved from Pumbedisa to Astonya. Now, Astonya is not far away, but it's outside of Pumbedisa. And what happened to him? He passed away. The Gemara says that he died because he left Pumbedisa: *אִי בְּעֵי הָאִי צְרָבָא מִרְבֵּנָן הָוָה חָיִי* – *If he had wanted, he could have lived*. By going away from the most crowded part of the Jewish population, he lost the right to live.

Staying Close

Now, this man takes his *frum* children from the streets behind Chaim Berlin – blocks and blocks where *frum* people live. And these children would

see *bnei Torah* every day on the street. On all sides, the children would see *yiras Shamayim*. And now they'll see nothing at all. "Oh," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "If you do that, you know what you deserve?"

Now, you're not going to say anything when the righteous man passes away, *chalilah*. You have to feel sorry for him. But still, we have to know, there is no such thing as an accident. There's a reason for everything and we have to learn from these situations as much as we can. For him, it's too late. But for us, it's not too late. הַיָּהוָה רְחֵקֵי יַאֲבֵרוּ - *Those who are far away from you will go lost* (Tehillim 73:27). You have to remain together with *frum* Jews.

Of course, this doesn't mean only Flatbush. Wherever you go, you have to remember this lesson – you want to live where the best are. *Baruch Hashem*, today we have yeshivas in Cleveland, in Baltimore, even in Los Angeles. Live close to the yeshiva, where it's most populated with the best *frum* Jews. And the *frummer* they are, the better off you are. The more crowded, the more established, the better. That's what our *parsha* is telling us; that the best thing is to live among multitudes of *frum* Jews. And we'll take a little time now to study how important that is.

Part II. Holy Encouragement

Hiding the *Nevi'im*

In Mesichta Sanhedrin (39b), they discuss the famous incident of how Ovadia, the official in the house of Achav, rescued the *nevi'im* from certain death. At that time, Izevel, the wife of Achav, was persecuting the *nevi'ei Hashem*. Even though she was a *giyoress* and had a certain loyalty to *Elokei Yisroel* – she even named her sons Yehoram and Achazya after Hashem – she was offended that the *nevi'im* ridiculed her family god, the Ba'al, and she went out of her way to persecute them.

And so the *nevi'im* were in *sakanah* now. Eliyahu himself was able to flee, but he had many disciples, a hundred *bnei ha'nevi'im*, who needed to find safety. So Ovadia took upon himself to protect them and he hid them in the mountains. וַיִּקַּח עֶבְרִיָהוּ מֵאֶה נְבִיאִים וַיְחַבֵּיאֵם הַמְּשִׁים אִישׁ בְּמַעְרָה - *He concealed fifty men in one cave and fifty men in another cave* (Melachim I, 18:4).

Now, the Gemara asks about that procedure; why did he hide them in separate caves? If he found a safe hideout, let him put all hundred *bnei nevi'im* together in one place.

Dividing the Nevi'im

So there are two opinions in the Gemara. Rabi Elazar says that Ovadia was following the example of Yaakov Avinu. When Yaakov Avinu was about to encounter Eisav, who was coming towards him with four hundred men, he was afraid what would happen, so he divided his family in two camps. אָם יבואַ אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאֶחָד וְהִבְהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לְפִלְיָה – *In case Eisav should attack one of the machanos, the second one might escape and be saved.* And therefore, Ovadia did the same thing; he put them in two separate caves in case Izevel's people discover one of the caves; the other *nevi'im* in the second cave would not be discovered. That's Rabi Elazar's opinion.

Rabi Avahu says that the reason he put them in two separate caves was because they couldn't find a cave big enough to hold a hundred men. It's as simple as that. לְפִי שְׂאִין מְעַרָה מְחֻקָּת יוֹתֵר מִחֻמְשִׁים – *There wasn't enough room for all of them.*

Uniting the Nevi'im

Now, on the second opinion we can ask, why does he disagree with the first opinion? After all, it certainly makes sense to take the precaution to disperse them like Rabi Elazar explained. And so it seems like the second opinion holds that if Ovadia would have found a cave big enough for all one hundred *bnai nevi'im* to be together, the right procedure would be to keep them together in one place. Even though there's a benefit to dividing them in two separate camps, nevertheless it's preferable that they should be in the same cave. Despite the peril, it *pays to be together*.

And that's because when there are one hundred of them together, it's a bigger encouragement to one another than if there are fifty. Numbers are a very important factor. When there are many people who side with you, who have the same opinion, it's easier to be courageous; it's easier to stand your ground and do what's right. Therefore, the second *mann d'amar* holds that even though it's a sacrifice to have them all together, the advantage of being encouraged in their conviction, of being strong and confident in their *emunah* in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, is more important than anything else. Because at the end of the day, that's what makes a person; the strength of conviction in your mind is who you are.

Of course, you can be a *frum* Jew living alone out West in a little agricultural town among gentiles. But a Jew in a cattletown in Montana saying "Shema Yisroel" all by himself is nothing like being in a big Torah community, where there are many *frum* Jews saying the same words. It's the same *Shema*,

you'll say? Yes; but it's not the same Yisroel! No comparison! The *vada'us*, the conviction, the firmness of his belief, is reinforced by the numbers of Yisroel!

Uniting the Chassidim

That's what it says in Tehillim: תְּהַלְתוּ בְּקִהְלֵי חַסִּידִים – *The praise of Hashem is in a gathering of pious men* (149:1). So you'll say why is a gathering necessary? Couldn't one pious man all by himself also successfully praise Hashem? But it emphasizes here בְּקִהְלֵי חַסִּידִים, when they come together, that's when you hear תְּהַלְתוּ, the real praise of Hashem.

And the answer is that this verse is teaching us that if you want real success in understanding, believing, and trusting in Hashem, you need the company of people like you. Because you look at each other and you're reinforced in your *emunah*. Oh yes, that's when it becomes much more real; when you're together, it goes into your blood. You have enough strength of your beliefs in order to articulate it with the utmost conviction.

Don't deceive yourself that it's the same thing either way. You'll remain maybe an observant Jew; you'll have the same beard, the same *peyos*, and the same *tzitzis*, but inside there's a big difference. That's what Ovadia was thinking; although they would *outwardly* remain strong – these *bonei nevi'im* wouldn't kneel to the Baal, absolutely not – but in their *hearts*, they would become a little weaker the fewer they were. Therefore, in order to maintain the courage of their conviction, it was necessary for all to be together and see each other.

It's a big lesson you're hearing now! In a time when we're fighting a majority of wicked people, it's imperative to live together with as many of our kind as possible to encourage us to continue, not only in our exterior but in our hearts, with a firmness of conviction that we're right. It's so important! בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אֶנְכִּי יֹשֵׁבַת – *I live among my people* (Melachim II, 4:13). You're a different personality because of that. The more you see *frum* Jews, the more you become convinced in your attitudes, your beliefs, and your practices.

Rivevos Alfei Yisroel

I once was invited to speak at a girls' gathering. Two thousand *frum* girls from all over came together to listen to me. I was excited when I saw that! Two thousand *frum* girls, all ambitious to become Jewish mothers! *Chasdei Hashem!*

Somebody said to me later, "It's nothing. In Beis Rochel, we have two thousand girls in one *kehilla* alone." *Baruch Hashem, kein yirbu*. But when I saw it with my own eyes, that was tremendous! *Baruch Hashem, Baruch Hashem!* I was excited when I saw that. Absolutely, I was strengthened when

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I saw that. Of course, the eyes of our enemies are popping out when they see that — they should pop *veiter* and *veiter* — but we're more interested in *our* eyes. It's a tremendous encouragement to see a lot of *frum* Jews, to be among them.

The Fortunate Ghetto Jew

And that, by the way, is why we don't look back at the ghetto of the Middle Ages as a sad story. For hundreds of years in Europe, the Jew lived in the ghetto and was not allowed to leave without special permission. There were walls, and in front was a gentile soldier who watched to ensure nobody went out and no gentiles came in. So the writers, even Jewish writers, speak with bitterness about the ghetto. What an injustice it was! A Jew couldn't move into a nice home in the gentile neighborhood; he was forced to live in a ghetto. And the ghettos were crowded, little streets. "It was a tragedy," they say.

Now pay attention. Inside the ghetto, they lived a national Jewish life. I saw a picture, a painting of *kiddush levanah* in the ghetto. It was interesting to see. They were jumping: **כָּשֶׁם שָׂאֲנִי רוֹקֵד כְּנִגְדֶּךָ** – We say to the moon, "I jump towards you." We get up a little bit on our tiptoes, but they used to leap up high in the air. In the picture it shows how they leaped up high in the air. We're ashamed a little bit; we're among *goyim* today. They are passing by in their cars and looking. "Look, the Jews are jumping in the air." So we're nice and polite people; we go on our tiptoes, that's all. But in the ghetto, among all Jews, they lived a natural Jewish life.

In the ghetto, weddings were on the street. No halls. They didn't hide in a hall; the *chuppah* was in the street. The guests were singing and dancing in the street. They had musicians playing in the streets. And so inside the ghetto they lived a full, rich life with their own ideas, their own Torah ways. All you could see was *frum* Jews, people observing the *minhagei Yisroel*, dressed like Jews. There was a *ruach haTorah*.

A Poor Rich Life

Now, it's true that it wasn't simple. The ghetto had very narrow streets. You couldn't build new homes. When they got married, they had a problem finding a *dirah*. It was a crowded place, no question about it. There was no place to expand. The ghetto Jew couldn't go out of the ghetto. He couldn't travel to Florida or to Acapulco. He had to remain in the ghetto with his fellow Jews. Not like the American Jew who can go anyplace he wishes. He goes on a bus to Atlantic City and can sit in the casino and gamble with the gentiles.

But I don't have to tell you who is the more fortunate one, who finds more favor in the eyes of Hashem. In the ghetto, they were stewing in their own juices and it was a place of *kedusha*. Of course, even if you live in the best place, outside the ghetto there is a gentile culture which seeps in. It permeates, oh yes. But the strength of being inside among Jews inoculates us to a certain extent.

That's why it doesn't pay to move to far-off places where there are hardly any Jews. No, I don't agree with that. I was speaking to a woman who was far away in a place with a very small Jewish community. She was telling me about her big house and her garden.

I said, "Why don't you move back to Brooklyn?"

She said, "I'll move back to the ghetto?"

Yes! That's where you should move back! That's where the Shechinah is. You think there aren't beautiful, expensive homes in Brooklyn? You could waste a lot of money in Brooklyn too! Come back to the multitudes in Brooklyn. "It'll be the best thing for you and your children," I told her.

Good Gatherings

That's why it states **בְּיָנוּם לְצַדִּיקִים טוֹב לָהֶם וְטוֹב לְעוֹלָם**; that when *tzaddikim*, good Jews, come together it's good for them and good for the world (Sanhedrin 71b). Now, why it's good for the *world*, we'll leave for another time. But pay attention to the first part of the *maamar*; it's good for the *tzaddikim* too. Don't think because you're a *tzaddik* you don't need any reinforcement. No. It's very important even for *tzaddikim* to stay together as much as possible because you can never have too much *emunah* and *chizuk*. The world is pounding away at us. The outside influences are trying to break us down all the time. Whatever we can do to strengthen ourselves is never too much. That's why it's so important, **בְּיָנוּם לְצַדִּיקִים**, *tzaddikim*, *frum* Jews, should always be together.

It's never too much and it's never too crowded. A person who says, "There are too many *frum* Jews around here," *chas v'shalom*, is an enemy of Hashem. A gentile man once said that to me. "Too many *yarmulkes* in Flatbush." he said. So for a gentile we understand that it's too many. But for us it's never enough. We have to adjust our minds to this attitude, that the more troops of little boys going to the *cheder*, the more troops of Beis Yaakov girls, the more mothers pushing carriages, the more big yellow buses on the streets on *erev Shabbos*, the more the streets and the shuls and the stores are crowded with *frum* Jews, the better *we* become. It's a very important principle — the *chizuk* that we gain just by being surrounded by *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*.

Part III. Holy Assimilation

Clinging to Hashem

Now, besides the *chizuk* of numbers, there's another consideration that we have to appreciate. We'll give it the name "assimilation," but pay attention now and you'll see it's not what you're thinking. It's a different form of assimilation, something positive.

There's a mitzvah in the Torah, וּבו תִּדְבֹק – *you should cling to Hashem* (Devarim 10:20), but the question is how do you do that? So, number one, you can do it by thinking about Him; absolutely, having Hashem in mind is an important form of *dveikus*. But Chazal say something else; you can fulfill this mitzvah by וּבְתַלְמִידֵיהֶם וּבְחַכְמֵיהֶם, *joining the chachomim and their talmidim*. It means the yeshiva people, their wives, their families; they're all included in *talmideihem*. Live in their neighborhood, associate with them. The Rambam says that (Deios 6:2). He says it's a mitzvah to be among them, to talk to them, walk in the same streets as them, to eat with them, to do business with them. That's a physical union with Hashem; just by living in close proximity to the *chachomim v'talmideihem* is already a mitzvah of clinging to Hashem.

Judaism 101

But that, the Rambam says, is only part of the story. Because he adds a few important words over there; he says you should live among *chachomim* and their students, בְּרִי לְלִמּוֹד מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם – *in order to learn from their ways*." And you have to be *medayek* in the words: He doesn't say you'll learn from their Torah lectures, their *shiurim*. It says מִמַּעֲשֵׂיהֶם; you'll learn from their behavior, their deeds, how to be a decent Jew.

You hear that? Learning Torah is very important, but what about learning how to be a Jew? It's not a small matter. Don't think that just because you want to be *frum*, you know how to do it. No; it's a science to be a *yarei Hashem*. The Mesillas Yesharim quotes the *possuk* הֲיֵן יִרְאֵת ה' הִיא חֲכָמָה – *Behold, yiras Hashem is a chochma* (Iyov 28:28), and he says, הִיא לְבִדָּה חֲכָמָה – *it's the highest and most difficult chochma*. To learn how to be a *yarei Shamayim*, you have to study the subject. It's a study. And there's graduate study and post-graduate study and post-post-graduate work. It's a big job. But if you stay close to *chachomim v'talmideihem*, you'll make progress; just by walking with them, talking with them, and watching them, you'll have models to emulate. It rubs off on you.

Good Assimilation

But I want to tell you something now. Even just to be among *frum* Jews, good Orthodox Jews, is already a tremendous opportunity. Because when you live in a place crowded with *frum* Jews, when you associate with them always, you learn how to be an *oved Hashem*. You pick up intuitively what it means to be a good Jew. Not only practices, *minhagei Yisroel*, but attitudes. The air in a *frum kehilla* is saturated with *kedusha*, with correct ideas.

Just like, *chas v'shalom*, if you live among *goyim*, it says, וְיִתְעַרְבוּ בְּגוֹיִם – you'll mingle with them, and then what happens automatically? וְיִלְמְדוּ מִמַּעַשֵׁיהֶם – You'll begin to learn from their ways (Tehillim 106:35). Just by being among them, you can't help yourself; you assimilate their ways and manner of thinking. So it's the same thing when you live among the *frum* Jews. When you're together with them, you become like them. By means of living among good *frum* practicing Jews, among *bnei Torah*, you assimilate.

And so it's a very important principle you're hearing now; in order to learn the career of being a *yarei Shamayim* you must be integrated in a community that has *yiras Shamayim*. All the noble instincts and practices are reinforced by being together, by living among and associating with *frum* Jews. There's nothing better for making progress in your spiritual life. Just living among Jews, being surrounded on all sides, is a great opportunity for training yourself in the lifelong career of being a Jew.

From the Ghetto to Brisk

And don't deceive yourself that you'll be a philosopher, somewhere all by yourself, and you'll succeed. No; you're going to be only a shell of a Jew. Inwardly, you'll be hollow as could be. If you live somewhere way out in Queens, the only Jew on your block, you should know that you're losing out. Yes, you can learn there too a little bit, but it's nothing compared to what you can gain in Flatbush, Boro Park, Williamsburg, and other places too. No comparison.

That's what we're trying to emphasize now; in a Jewish city, the air is saturated with *emunah*. The streets are full of *emunah*. You can't help yourself; it comes in by osmosis. I meet old acquaintances that I knew forty years ago. I don't recognize them. They have long beards today. I remember them. They were very weak in their Yiddishkeit. But they changed entirely because they stayed in a *frum* environment. Their children are in Brisk today, in Yerushalayim.

How did such a thing happen? Because they settled in good neighborhoods, among *frum* Jews. It soaks into you from the environment.

When you live among *maaminim*, it soaks into your heart. Things you won't be able to achieve in a small town you'll get with almost no effort in the Jewish ghetto.

From PA to NY to EY

We had a case here of a Jew from Wilkes Barre who knew almost nothing. He wasn't even observant. He heard about our Torah telephone program where you can begin from scratch and you can study and then report on the telephone once a week. We have a system; a program with monitors, mentors. It doesn't cost any money and anybody can join. So he joined and began studying his little lessons; a little *Chumash* every week. And once a week he called his monitor to report his lesson. He made progress. He learned two *sedros Chumash*. Then he learned six *perakim Pirkei Avos*. Then he learned *Eilu Metzios*, the whole *perek*.

Eventually he had to leave his place. In Wilkes Barre, a good *frum kehilla* is as scarce as hen's teeth, so he came to Brooklyn. He was a good Jew already, but he said that to be in a place far away, among very few Jews, he couldn't accomplish as much as in a big *frum* place. Today already he went off to better places. He went to Eretz Yisroel and he's sitting in a *kollel* and learning all day long; a man who never even knew the word *kollel* before.

Soak it Up

And so the environment is important for soaking in Yiddishkeit. Of course, you have to learn too. It's important to have a connection with *seforim*. But even those who don't are saturated through their pores. To a big extent they just breathe it in. It's the things a *frum* Jew talks about, his way of speech, his behavior, his mannerisms.

Even the facial expressions of a *frum* Jew are different. It was said that you could spot a Kelmer *talmid* just by his facial expressions. He had a certain deportment. He never had his head too high or too low. He always spoke in a subdued voice and always counted his words. The students of Kelm were all like peas from one pod. Not only because they were under constant surveillance and were constantly being trained by their teachers; merely being around others who were especially careful, after some years, each one came to resemble the other. They even learned to adopt facial expressions. Just being around good ones, soaking in the good environment, has a lasting effect on your *neshamah*.

Growing With Lubavitch and Ger

In a good Jewish neighborhood, you go on a bus and you'll have a chance to sit next to a good Jew. You're a fortunate man! Not merely because he won't pick your pocket or start a fight with you. It's much more than that; sometimes you'll hear a good thing from him too. I remember when I was sitting on a bus with an old Lubavitcher *rav*, Rabbi Kastel, *alav hashalom*. We were riding together and in front of us was an old Jew reading a Jewish newspaper. So the Lubavitcher *rav* said to the old Jew, "*Farvus patturst du di tzeit?* Why waste your time? Why don't you say Tehillim on the bus?" He said it warmly but he gave him some good advice.

It's a good idea. It didn't occur to me. Why read a newspaper? An old Jew should say Tehillim on the bus. And so I had the benefit not only of sitting next to this old Lubavitcher *rav*, but also to learn something from him. Just sitting together with him was worthwhile, but now he gave me an idea, how to talk to old Jews on the city bus.

Another time I saw a Gerrer *chassid* sitting on a bus next to me looking in a *sefer*. I was thinking, "Very good, very good." Just to see that is a good reason to live in Flatbush. He was reading Mesillas Yesharim. It was a *chiddush* to me; I didn't know that *chassidim* learn that *sefer*. So I said, "By you they learn Mesillas Yesharim?" He said yes. And they learn it on the bus too. Then I was sitting on the bus years later and another Gerrer *chassid* was urging me to teach Shemiras Halashon and Chofetz Chaim in my *shul*. So you see what a bus ride is like in Boro Park.

Make Brooklyn Great Again

So even though the *dinim* of walled cities are not applicable today, the lessons of the *pessukim* are just as important today. There's a *kedusha* when you live among crowds of *frum* Jews. It means there's more Shechinah there, among other important considerations.

That's why I say if you're listening to this tape in Wichita or Topeka, you should come back. As much as possible, move back to places with big populations of Jews. If I could, I would recommend that they should issue from some headquarters, let's say Agudas HaRabbanim or another rabbinical organization, a *kol korei* for all Jews to move back to Brooklyn. Come to Boro Park, Flatbush, Williamsburg.

Not only Brooklyn. Monsey, Monroe, and Lakewood too. Even Passaic, other places. Wherever there are big communities or yeshivas, that's the place to settle. The more crowded and permanent *frum yishuv*, the better. Of course, it's not always easy. It's not feasible sometimes — not everyone can

pick up and move. But at least we should know the *ratzon Hashem*, that He wants multitudes of Jews living together.

Prepping for Moshiach

At least make your place more crowded with *frum* Jews. Have a lot of children. Bring the spirit of the Shechinah wherever you are. Our goal should be to build up the big *frum* communities – “walled cities” – with a spirit of the *kedusha* of multitudes. That spirit will have a big effect on all the people who live in that community. And the more together, the more we’ll succeed.

That’s one of the ways we’ll prepare for that great day when Moshiach will come and sound the great *shofar*. We’ll all board huge jets and **וְנַעֲלֶה לְצִיּוֹן וְנִבְרָנָה**. It’ll be **יְחַד וְיִקְבְּצֵנוּ יְחַד** *Yachad!* All of us living together in Eretz Yisroel. That’s our great wish, our greatest desire, to be crowded together with multitudes of *frum* Jews in Eretz Yisroel, with the Presence of the Shechinah, all of us benefiting from each other and growing *maaleh maaleh* in *avodas Hashem*.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let’s Get Practical

Joining the Crowd

In this week’s *parsha*, the Torah says that if a person in a walled city sells his home, there is a great urgency to redeem the property. This is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to remain isolated and insulated in the fortifying, idealistic bubble of the Jewish ghetto.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once a day I will spend ten seconds during the *bracha* of *al haTzaddikim* to appreciate all of the benefits of being part of a crowded and growing Jewish *kehilla*, and say the words *v’sim chelkeinu imahem l’olam* with more sincerity. I will also consider ways to “join the crowd” of *ovdei Hashem*, such as by attending a *shiur* or learning in a bustling *beis medrash*.

This week’s booklet is based on tapes:

323 – Utilizing the Righteous | **905** – One Nation in the World
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Revolutionizing

Since many people have never actually attended a *kiruv* seminar, I will describe it briefly. The organizers take completely non-religious people, who lead a solidly secular lifestyle, and put them up in a hotel for a few days. They bring in talented speakers who speak on topics of interest. As the days go by, the people attending the seminar begin to change. You see tears in their eyes. They start donning yarmulkes and covering their hair, and they go on to become complete *ba'alei teshuvah*. They don't make do with just laying *tefillin* once a day or ceremoniously lighting Shabbos candles - they start observing even the most demanding aspects of halachah.

The *teshuvah* revolution came about largely by means of these "seminars." Then some wise people realized the "seminar" technique also suited a different type of audience: full-fledged Torah Jews and men learning in yeshiva or kollel. Great numbers of such Jews from many countries have since participated in such seminars, returning home changed people.

Let us consider how this technique worked in its original form. A totally non-religious Jew walks in. He doesn't know what Shabbos is, what *tefillin* are, or anything. Where do you even start? The task of turning him into a *ba'al teshuvah* seems akin to climbing a towering mountain. And you can't sit down with him and explain all about Torah, because it won't work. Judaism is not acquired through careful explanations about how to daven, how to learn Torah, and how to observe the many different laws.

And a revolution doesn't happen by itself. You have to open his heart, and *Chazal* say only one thing can open the heart of a Jew: "*I created the yetzer ha-ra, and I created the Torah as its cure.*" (*Kiddushin 30b*) The nature of Torah is that when you take a Jew and learn Torah with him - "*Behold, My words are like fire, 'says Hashem, 'and like a hammer that shatters a rock.*" (*Yirmeyahu 23:29*) The words of Torah break through the *yetzer ha-ra* and reach the heart. But how do you take a Jew and sit him down to learn Torah? How do you get him to feel that he and Torah have something in common? If you offer to bring him to the *beis midrash*, he won't agree.

That's why seminars for the non-religious are composed of topics involving a special combination: they're relevant and fascinating, and they're connected to Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. This is the trick of how to get these non-religious Jews to absorb Torah over several days. And the nature of Torah is that it sparks a revolution in a Jew's heart.

In truth, this "technique" is already mentioned in the Torah: "*Three times a year, all your males shall appear before the Master, Hashem.*" (*Shemos 34:23*) In ancient times, all Jews would ascend to Yerushalayim for the *Shalosh Regalim*, the "pilgrimage festivals," and gather in the Beis HaMikdash, Hashem's house. There they saw the *Kohanim* performing the service, the *Leviyim* singing, and the *Yisraelim* standing by as representatives of the entire Jewish people. The *regel* was a whole week of living in a spiritual world - a "seminar!" Indeed, this week revolutionized their lives. They went home transformed into completely different people.

This is one goal of *Shabbos Kodesh* as well. *Chazal* say: "Shabbos and Yom Tov were given to Yisrael so [its people] would engage in Torah study on them." (*Yerushalmi, Shabbos 15:3*) During the week, people are occupied with their business, with their various occupations, whatever they may be. On Shabbos, Hashem says to us, so to speak: "Today everything stops. Today we're having a 'seminar,' a day devoted to Torah!" This day is capable of revolutionizing our lives. It can make us into higher and more uplifted Jews on a totally different level!

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a zechut for you and your families!

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

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QUESTION

Is it better to go to a mini-kollel out of town where you will be an example to the community, or to stay in Brooklyn and continue shteiging?

ANSWER

The answer is, do what's good for you. If you can learn better where you are now, don't go away. It says, **וְיֵלֵךְ לְמָוֶתָא אַחֲרֵיָתָא** – *if it's not good for you in this town, go someplace else* (Bava Metzia 75b). But if it's good for you here, don't go anyplace else. If you're learning well, after all, there's nothing more important than your own perfection.


Now, you'll say what about people out of town; they need your presence. So there are plenty of people who are not learning so well, plenty of people who need money and they give bigger money in the mini-kollels. Let them go. A person should first and foremost think about his own spiritual success.


That's very selfish, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves selfish people. You hear that? Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves people who perfect themselves, who become more beloved by Him by learning Torah and becoming greater in the service of Hashem. It's a crown on your head if you're in a place where you become better and better.

So instead of becoming a lifeguard and going out to save other people's lives, first learn how to swim well. Save your own life. Your life comes first. And the opportunities that are available in Brooklyn are not available elsewhere. If you'll come here and listen all the time, little by little your mind expands. New panoramas open up that you never dreamed of before in your life.

If you're young, it's an opportunity to become great in Brooklyn. Why not? It's a Torah community. And although it's a very big achievement to go out and help other people, there are other people who will do it. They have reasons why they will do it, but you remain in the place that's the best for you to make progress for yourself.

April 1990

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