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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

DISEASE OF LEITZANUS

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Part I. The Contagious Man

Isolating the Contagious

When we learn about a man who is a leper, a *metzora*, the Torah says, **בְּרֹדֶי יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה**, that he has to be segregated from the people; he is sent to live outside of the city walls (Vayikra 13:46). And he remains there for a certain period while the condition of his skin malady changes, after which he undergoes the required procedures of purification. Only then can he rejoin mankind and live normally among people.

Now some people would like to explain this as quarantining a man with a dangerous illness. Even today, lepers are kept in separate places and so we might imagine a similar thing is happening here. But the truth is that reason is not valid at all; it could be a side benefit, but that certainly

was not the purpose of the Torah. Because if there's a gentile leper, he's not sent away. *Shiluach* of a *metzora* is only a *metzora Yisroel*; only Jewish lepers are sent away.

And so we see that the Torah intends something else; there's a moral purpose, a *ruchniyus* purpose, here. Because *tzaraas* was a *ruchniyus* skin disease; in the ancient times *tzaraas* was one of the phenomena of the *yad Hashem* that was visited on sinners. We find that in the Torah constantly.

When Miriam uttered some words of criticism – it was a delicate criticism but there was some reproach in it against her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu – so she was smitten with leprosy for a short while. When Moshe Rabbeinu uttered some doubts about the Am Yisroel – he told Hashem, “When I come to them with Your signs and I perform miracles for them, וְהֵם לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי, they won't believe in me” – so Hashem said, “Take your hand out of your bosom,” and the hand turned white. It was a punishment. Immediately it was restored to its natural state but for a little bit there was *tzaraas* there. So we see it's a punishment.

Isolating the Sinner

And the Chachomim tell us in many places that it's primarily a punishment for misusing the gift of speech for עָרָב, for wrong things. That's the first thing on the list of why *tzaraas* comes on a person (Arachin 16a). And so the Kuzari explains that in the ancient times when a man sinned and he was visited with this malady he was forced to leave the company of the community and to segregate himself; not so that the *tzaraas* shouldn't be contagious but so *that the wickedness of this man shouldn't be contagious*.

Now, you must know that a *halacha* in the Torah is not only for itself. The Gra tells us a principle, a big Torah principle that I've already said here many times. He says that every mitzvah, besides for itself, is also a general rule, a principle for living successfully according to the *ratzon Hashem*.

And therefore, even though we don't have the *dinim* of *nega tzaraas* today, we should utilize this *halacha* of the Torah for ourselves. The *klal*, the principle that we're being taught of keeping separate from people who misuse their faculty of speech is very important even today when there's no *tzaraas*. If you're going to influence others with your tongue in a way that is undesirable we're better off if you're **בְּדֶרֶךְ יֵשֵׁב מְרוּוֹץ לְמַחֲנֶה**. And the truth is you're better off too.

Dovid's Career

But first an introduction, so we should understand how important a subject it really is. You know, Dovid at the beginning of Tehillim, he's starting us on a career. Tehillim, after all, is not just a collection of holy poems. It's true that the world appreciates Tehillim on a superficial level – even the gentile nations are constantly repeating verses of Tehillim – but when we start studying Tehillim, we become amazed at the profundity of understanding and emotions that is in Tehillim. It's actually a system of life, a system of living with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

It doesn't mean it's all Dovid's own ideas; he inherited the general guidelines from previous generations. You'll find elements of Tehillim everywhere, even in the Chumash; but nowhere will you find that this attitude is so specialized as in this one *sefer*. Tehillim is a *sefer* between man and Hashem to the fullest extent because Dovid spent his life studying these ideas and practicing them and developing them. And therefore he was able to draw up a system of *avodas Hashem*, of speaking constantly to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, of thinking about Him and experiencing all the great emotions that come from association with Him.

And so no matter how great your opinion of Tehillim is – even to the unpracticed eye there's a greatness apparent in Tehillim – it's bigger than what you imagine.

Even if you're just saying the words, it's an accomplishment because you are walking in the footsteps of his thoughts, and you cannot help but be changed by that. But Tehillim is most effective for what Dovid intended when it's accompanied by a certain concentration of the mind; thinking and reflecting on the noble ideals he describes.

It's a *sefer* where a man talks to Hashem and as he talks, his mind develops, his character traits develop, his understanding of the world develops and of course his love for Hashem develops. And so the more you think into his words the more the sublime ideas take hold of your mind and transform you in the course of time.

The Introduction to Greatness

Now once you know that, so you understand that Tehillim deserves a preface, something special that will prepare you for what you're about to hear. That's what we would expect when Dovid began Tehillim. Like Mishlei; when Shlomo Hamelech composed Mishlei, we see he made a preface. He introduces his *sefer* with an explanation of his purpose: **מִשְׁלֵי בֶן דָּוִד לְרֵעֵת חֲכָמָה וּמוֹסָר צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם** – *This is a sefer of knowing*

wisdom and instruction, righteousness, justice and proper conduct, לָתֵת חָכְמָה וְיָשָׁר וְצֶדֶק וְיָדָע וְיָבוּשׁ – to give to those who have been deceived, to give them cunning so they shouldn't continue to be deceived, לְנַעַר דַּעַת וּמְזִמָּה – to give to the youth knowledge and insight. Shlomo's telling you what he's going to tell you in his book. And then he delivers the goods.

But the beginning of Tehillim doesn't tell us about the purpose of his *sefer*. תְּהִלֹּת דָּוִד, לְרַעַת דְּבִיקוֹת וְאַהֲבַת ה' לְתַת לְמִמְבַקְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם – *The songs of Dovid, to give wisdom to those who want to come close to Hashem and love Him.* No; there's nothing like that. It's remarkable that nothing in the first chapter of Tehillim seems to be the preface to the ideas in Tehillim. Instead, "Fortunate is the man who does not go in the counsel of the evildoers, and in the path of the wicked he doesn't stand, and in the place where the *leitzim* sit, where the scoffers sit, he did not sit."

That doesn't belong! Tehillim is a relationship of man to Hashem, not people. It's true that in the course of a man's dealings with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, he develops in ways of behavior between him and his fellowman, but Dovid Hamelech doesn't directly give counsel of proper behavior; he doesn't tell you how to deal with your fellowman in Tehillim. He can't help speaking about it sometimes; he mentions it here and there, but it certainly is not the subject of Tehillim. And so we must understand what Dovid Hamelech intended with his introduction of avoiding this and this type of fellow man.

The Final Warning

Now first we should note what it is that Dovid is warning against primarily. At the end of that first verse, אֲשֶׁרִי הָיִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הֵלֵךְ בְּעֶצַת רְשָׁעִים, he's talking about not walking with *reshaim*. *Reshaim* are bad people, but not that they do sins. They have bad ideas, bad emotions, but they don't necessarily do sins. Then he mentions not standing with *chataim*, people who have already acquired habits of doing sins; all kinds of sins they are practicing, sins of lust, of avarice, other things.

But then he concludes with מוֹשֵׁב לִצְיִים – *scoffers, not associating with leitzim.* And the Gemara explains that every one of these steps that we must avoid, one leads to the other and the final and worst result is *leitzim*.

אִם הֵלֵךְ סוֹפוֹ לְעֹמֵד אִם עָמַד סוֹפוֹ לְשֹׁב אִם יָשָׁב סוֹפוֹ לְלוּץ – If you walk with *reshaim* you'll eventually stand with *chata'im*, and eventually you'll hit rock bottom and become a *letz*. That's the final result of yielding at the beginning to evil company: you'll become a *leitz*.

Now we would have said that the result of evil company is to fall into sins. To us that seems the worst kind of result; the end of associating with bad people, the final result will be he'll commit serious sins. But he's not saying that. Dovid is saying, what's most serious is that he'll fall into the habit of being a scoffer, a *leitz*.

It's a remarkable thing! We see Dovid HaMelech is concerned primarily with the *middah* of *leitzanus*. It's such a serious thing that Dovid HaMelech considers it the final pit into which a man will end up if he goes one step down after the other; and it's the most important attitude to avoid if you want to walk the path of all the great ideals that Dovid is teaching in Tehillim.

Frum Leitzim

Now Dovid is not talking about people who ridicule anything of the *emunah*. In Dovid's time there didn't exist such people. It's a remarkable thing. All kinds of sins are blasted by the *Neviim* in the Tanach; they criticized everything, but never once do you find a *Navi* criticizing somebody for disbelief. If you look through the entire *Torah*, *Nevi'im u'Ksavim*, never once do you find that a *Navi* spoke against somebody who expressed disbelief in Yetzias Mitzrayim or in the *yeridas hamann* or in Matan Torah. In the ancient times, there was no such disease as disbelief. The facts of history were clear to the entire Jewish nation.

And so a scoffer that is mentioned here is not somebody who disbelieved, who belittled the Torah or even part of the Torah. And still there was such a thing called scoffing. We'll take it in general as an attitude of belittling, of not taking things seriously. He makes the important ideals of life not so important; he trivializes the great verities of life.

Now Dovid said, "Once you have that poison in your system, of taking idealism lightly, then nothing that I say will have any effect on you. I am now beginning a course of instruction and you're approaching my *sefer* with the intention of getting benefit from it, so I must warn you: If you associate with people who aren't interested enough in the great purposes of life, that's going to ruin you. It'll cool you off and ruin you.

Separating from the Leitz

"So if you want to utilize whatever I have to give to you, I'm warning you beforehand, וְבַמְּוֹשֵׁב לְצִיּוֹם לֹא יֵשֵׁב – 'Don't sit in their company.' If you want to succeed according to my instructions, the *leitz* must be avoided. Have nothing to do with anybody who is of questionable idealism. He

may be *frum*. He may be a man who keeps everything, but if he is of questionable idealism, if he's a man who has in himself the attitude of belittling, of scoffing, watch out because that's a peril that's going to make all my teachings useless."

And that's how you'll be able to succeed at achieving all of your great ideals, all the achievements you want, but that always seem to slip out of your hands. Everyone wants to live a career of successful service of Hashem, of understanding the great verities of life and not merely living an ordinary humdrum existence. And if you have the germs of scoffing in you, of *leitzanus*, then you must get rid of them before you begin, otherwise your efforts are going to be thrown out. It's a waste of time. And so we listen to Dovid who told us that the first step is **יָשֵׁב מְחוּץ לְמַחֲנֵה**, make sure there is no *moshav leitzim* around the holy camp. Where the Am Yisroel lives they should be free of the influence of the scoffers.

Part II. The Contagious Mouth

Leitzim and Meilitzim

Now I have to explain a little more this subject of *leitzanus* before we continue. And it's good to begin with the derivation of the word *leitzanus*, where it comes from. Everybody knows, Shlomo Hamelech explains in the beginning of Mishlei his purpose in writing this *sefer*: **לְהַבִּין מַשָּׁל וּמְלִיצָה** – He made his *sefer* that people should understand *mashal*, parables. Ah! Parables; excellent! Parables make things more real to us; you hear a *mashal*, it becomes more vivid and more effective.

But in addition to parables, **וּמְלִיצָה**. *Melitzah* means expressions. When you speak to people and you want to influence them, it's not enough to use the simplest of terms. You're going to have to clothe it in language that's interesting and impressive. It's very important. Even Moshe Rabbeinu when he spoke, spoke with *melitzah*. Of course he spoke with the inspiration of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu put *melitzah* into his mouth.

יִעֲרַף בְּמַטֵּר לְקֹחֵי תוֹל בַּטַּל אֲמַרְתִּי; that's *melitzah*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have skipped all those words. He could put into Moshe Rabbeinu's mouth only the short sentence, "Stay away from the ways of the *goyim*. Be loyal to the *Toras Hashem*." That's all. But no! You want to be effective when you speak, and that requires dressing up your words.

Pearls of the Mouth

Just like when you want to eat nourishing meat, although meat without any condiments is nourishing, however it's more appealing when there's a little bit of salt, and some onions and garlic mixed in. Besides for the nourishment, the food has to be made appealing. And ideas must also be made appealing.

And that is a system of all our great men. The *Nevi'im* all spoke with *melitzah*. *Melitzah* made it appealing. Of course, we have to understand the *melitzah* too. Even though they did it for the purpose of being more effective, they didn't just want to entertain you, no! They wanted to teach you something. And every form of their *melitzah*, of their expressions, is meaningful.

Now, since *melitzah* is such a fine word - the Torah uses it, Shlomo used it - so how does it come to have any relationship to the word *leitz*? *Melitzah* comes from *leitz*, there's no question about that, and so how could they be connected?

Germes of the Mouth

And the answer is *melitzah* means to speak with the purpose of making an impression. It means 'to talk', in a certain fashion. It's a form of speech, a better form of speech, but it comes from the word that means 'to speak. A *meilitz yosher* is somebody who speaks to defend the accused person. *Melitzah* comes to make an impression to defend a certain ideal or to make it more appealing. And a *leitz* is somebody who talks and makes impressions on the listener.

A *leitz* is first and foremost a talker. That's not the only form of *leitzanus* - a person can be a *leitz* with a wink, with a wave of the hand - but primarily he's a talker. And the purpose of the talking is to make an effect on the listener. Of course, what the effect is is a different story, but that's what the *leitz* does. That's the danger; the word pinpoints the danger.

And if the *leitz* has a *loshon limudim*, a good tongue, then you should beware of him especially. The smooth tongue of a *leitz* is as dangerous as the poisonous fangs of a snake. It doesn't mean he looks dangerous. Sometimes he is a professional man and he wears a suit. He hangs up a sign outside, 'Psychologist', and people come in and sit down and pay him to hear his *leitzanus*. And he says it seriously and he cites his authorities. He has a textbook with the principles of *leitzanus*, and he tells his patients that it's based on certain scientific methods. If you study my methods -

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The Epidemic of the Newspaper

The same is reading a newspaper. The Magen Avrohom, when he talks about *gazetten* (newspapers), he says they're *ossur* to read because of *moshav leitzim*. That's what he says, that a newspaper is a *moshav leitzim*. Now, today nobody thinks about that. *Leitzim*? Where's the *leitzanus*?

But the truth is it's all *leitzanus*. The gentile newspapers ridicule whenever they can. Anything good or virtuous is belittled. And most of all, they belittle *emunah* in Hashem. And even though they may not speak about it, the lack of mention is in itself the greatest attack on the *emunah*. Do they mention the Borei in the newspapers? The newspaper will never under any circumstances write a headline that G-d did this or that.

So it's *leitzanus*. They're *mevatel* the whole *inyan* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The Name of Hashem is not mentioned once. How could you read for a half hour or an hour and omit the Name of Hashem? That's *leitzanus*.

So what kind of Jew would make contact with *leitzim*? There was a Bais Yaakov school once that told the *talmidos* each one has to bring in a New York Times every week for current events. They're ruining the girls! Better they should eat *chazir*. *Chazir* at least is only in the stomach. This is in the brain. They're poisoning the brains! How could you teach anything else, all the great ideals of the Bais Yaakov, if they're full of *leitzanus*?

No Soul Radio

Now, I'm not going to tell you not to listen to the news; I'm not going to tell you that as a *p'sak halacha*. But don't think it's innocent! There's no question that there's a very great peril to a person's *neshama* if he engages in listening constantly to people who don't belong to our nation; to people who are preaching the opposite of the teachings of our nation.

Even the good ones, a conservative talk show, it doesn't matter. Because you have to know that the best *goy* is a big *leitz*. Now, I am for the Christians, by the way. I am for the right-wing Christians, because they're trying to save America from the liberals. The liberals are ten times worse than the right-wing Christians and so even the talk show people, maybe they're trying to save America. Very good! But for you? Why should you listen to them for even a minute?

I once saw a man from this synagogue standing outside talking to a pastor, a gentile pastor. It happened to be a good man who was fighting for morality and they were planning together ways and means of fighting against the gays. Very good. But I called him aside. I said, "Don't speak too long with him. He's a good man, but don't talk too long with him. He's a gentile and he has all types of foolishness in his head. He can't help it. And he'll tell you things."

You know, when somebody hears something it never leaves his mind. He may try to get rid of it. He may try to push it in his subconscious mind, but it is filed away. It's not lost. That's the miracle of a human mind. Nothing goes lost. And whatever he said in that minute has an influence somewhere. And even though you're not aware of it, it's very deep in the files of your subconscious mind, it's working on you. It's affecting you. The words enter like the poison of a serpent and it's going to spread.

A Beautiful Mosaic

Now of course I understand there are people here, this the first time they came maybe, they say, "It's exaggerated. I listen to *leitzim* many times. I'm still around. I wasn't harmed by it. I'm still a *shomer mitzvos*." He doesn't realize that he's becoming a ruined man. He doesn't realize that. It's unailing, however. That's what we're learning now. The effect of *leitzanus* is unailing.

After all, what is a human being? He is a mosaic. You know what a mosaic is? Sometimes you see a floor that is made of many small stones and the arrangement of the stones, the different colors, make designs or pictures. Now, man is put together the same way – from hundreds of thousands of little details. Each one of them was contributed by a person whom he encountered or by something that he read or heard and it becomes part of the mosaic of his personality.

So if you hear from many *tzaddikim* and you learned from *seforim*, a mosaic is formed in your mind. It's put together with thoughts from here and from there, this *chochom*, this *sefer*, this *tzaddik*. In the course of time, your character is built up on the basis of all contributions that were made to your mind by all the good people that you met. And every part that they contributed remains forever with you. Of course, it's better if you continue to repeat what they said, you should be aware, you should be mindful. However even if you forget, to some extent it influences you. You are all the things that you once heard and saw. That's what you are.

A Ruined Mosaic

And therefore the *leitz*, in that minute that he spoke to you, he has contributed to your mind and to your character and you will never be able to take it out of your mind *l'olam va'ed*. And there's a *sevara* that in the Next World also you won't be able to get rid of it. You'll take with you into the Next World whatever you heard in this world, everything you heard from the radio, other places.

And it's your responsibility! Nobody else will take responsibility for your mind! That's what Shlomo Hamelech says (Mishlei 9:12) about associating with people. אִם הִכְמַתְתָּ חֲכָמִים לְךָ – If you learned wisdom, you heard from wise men good things, it's something that you're going to keep. When you learn from great men, from *tzaddikim*, even from fine ordinary people you hear good things sometimes, הִכְמַתְתָּ לְךָ – it's a possession, a wealth, that belongs to you now. It's something to be happy with like any other property. Let's say you walk in the street and you find a 10 dollar bill, it puts you in a good mood. And if you walked in the street with a *chochom* and he said something that was useful to you, when you walk away, you found more than 10 dollars.

Take Responsibility for Yourself

But the same thing, וְלִצְתָּ לְבַרְדֵּי תַשָּׂא – if you're going to engage in *leitzanus*, you're going to keep it too; you'll have to carry it with yourself. It means that you are going to bear the responsibility for it. Just as *chochma* is something that becomes part of your possession, וְלִצְתָּ – if you engage in *leitzanus*, it's also your possession. תַשָּׂא – And you're going to carry it with you forever. לְבַרְדֵּי – And it'll be your problem alone; don't think that the man who put it into your head will take responsibility.

Like some people go and buy in a place that's not so kosher and they say, "Let the *cheit* be on the man that sells me the merchandise." Oh no! You're the one going to eat the meat. You have to inquire if he has a good *hechsher* or not. Here also, since you bought from this man his merchandise, you listened to him, so you're going to suffer the consequences yourself. לְבַרְדֵּי תַשָּׂא – You'll bear the consequence yourself.

And so the health of your mind, the preface to all of the great achievements you came into the world for, depends on you – on how careful you are with who you speak with, who you listen to. Because ideals and attitudes are contagious. A human being is a sponge and he accumulates attitudes immediately from those with whom he associates. And so when it comes to people who will make the wrong impressions on

you, *alein iz de neshama rein*; the more you're alone, the better off you are.

Part III. The Contagious Mind

Home Alone

Now the question is what to do. If *leitzim* are so dangerous, if *leitzanus* is so pernicious, what can we do? And the only answer is what the Torah recommends: Keep them away! That's the intention of the Torah, **בְּרֹד יֵשֵׁב**. It means you shouldn't get close to him. Of course, today you can't pick a *leitz* up by his collar and deposit him **מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה**, outside the city in the sanitation dump. He'll just come back. So you have to be the one to make sure to keep away. That's called listening to the advice of the Torah.

That's what the Rambam says in Hilchos Deios (6:1). What should a man do if all around him there are people who are not good? So the Rambam says, **יֵשֵׁב לְבָדוֹ יַחֲדָי** – sit alone and have as little business as possible to do with anybody. It's like a time when there's an epidemic *chalilah* raging in the city. So the Gemara (Bava Kama 60b) says, what should you do? **בְּנִים רִגְלֶיךָ** – *When there's an epidemic in the city, דָּבַר בְּעֵיר* – gather in your feet. Stay home; don't mix with people. Don't go to weddings and bar mitzvahs because you're going to catch something. It's good advice. When there's an epidemic, stay home. Even when there are colds extant in certain times in the season as much as possible stay home or you might catch something,

And surely if you'll catch the wrong ideas. That's more certain than catching germs. Ideas you don't notice. And they're more effective, they're more dangerous than germs. And so the Rambam says, **יֵשֵׁב בְּרֹד יוֹדִים** – Let him dwell alone as much as possible and be silent. He brings that *posuk* from Eichah (3:28). Even though he has nobody to talk to, he should do it anyhow. That's the very best thing for him.

At Home With Leitzim

Now, today a person can be at home alone and he's in contact with all the *leitzim* anyhow. And so if we would translate this into action today, it would mean first of all, don't have a television. There's no question about that. Anybody who puts a television into his home is now embarking on a career of being a *leitz*. And that's as true as could be.

“Oh, I don’t intend to listen to them,” this dumbbell says. “I’m just amusing myself.” Like a man that sits down in the company of *leitzanim*, he just wants a little refreshments for his nerves, a little cheering up, that’s all. He doesn’t care what they say; he just wants a little merriment. “Oh!” Dovid Hamelech said, “You’re lost.” וְאַם יֵשֵׁב סוּפוֹ לְלוֹחֵץ – If you’re going to sit down with them, you’re going to participate in *leitzanus*.

Now, we took the example of a television because it’s such a clear-cut case. But it’s like telling somebody that he should guard his health and he shouldn’t jump off the roof because it’s unhealthy. Same thing when we say that having a television in your house is harmful for your mind. That’s already suicide and we have to talk about things many steps before committing suicide.

A Nation of Extremists

Now, before I introduce the next part of the subject I have to explain one thing in order that it should settle properly on your minds. Otherwise you’ll say that I’m just being extreme, that I’m overstating the problem.

You have to know that to be a Jew means that you’re going to be an extremist! It can’t be helped. Listen to the words of the Torah. וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם – *You should speak in words of Torah*. So we say, “Alright, we’ll speak once in a while.” But it goes on, בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ – *when you sit in your house*. You’re sitting in your house, you have to speak in the Torah; not news or other things, gossip. Only Torah ideas and ideals.

Now, that’s already very far out! Very extreme! וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם – *You should speak only in them*. The Gemara says in Mesichta Yoma בָּם וְלֹא בְּדָבָרִים אֲחֵרִים – *don’t talk about anything else*. But you’ll say, “OK, in the house I understand maybe.” No, that’s nothing yet. וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בְּדַרְךָ – *When you’re walking on the road*, וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ – *when you’re going to sleep*, וּבְקוּמְךָ – *and when you get up*. All the time?! And so the Torah is a very extreme Torah.

It’s a demanding Torah. מָה ה’ אֵלֶיךָ שׂאֵל מְעַמְךָ – *What does Hashem ask of you?* OK, let’s hear what He wants from me. בִּי אִם לִירְאָה – *He asks you to fear Him*, וּלְלַכֵּת בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו – *and to go in all of His ways*, וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ – *and also to love Him*, וְלַעֲבֹד אֹת ה’ אֵלֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ – *and to serve Him with all your mind and everything you have* (Devarim 10:12). There’s a lot in that *possuk*; a whole program. “All I want from you,” Hashem says, “is everything.”

A Nation of Moderates

So we see the Jew is expected to be extreme. Now I understand that today, a call has gone out for moderation. “Let’s not overdo it; let’s be moderate.” And so we say we’ll go along with that. Be moderate when it comes to spending money. That’s right. Don’t make such luxurious weddings, luxurious bar mitzvahs. Don’t spend so much money. Don’t travel so much. Airplane travel costs a lot of money. Be moderate and stay home. Don’t go to expensive country places.

Be moderate when it comes to eating expensive things. There are plenty of good foods that don’t cost so much money. Be moderate when it comes to drinking. You don’t have to have an expensive basement full of all kinds of liquors. Be moderate when it comes to having in your home collections of china, collections of stamps, other expensive collections. Be moderate. We don’t need those things. Yes, be moderate. You can be moderate in talking, moderate in everything.

You have to be moderate in everything *except in the service of Hashem*. With Hashem, you’re not moderate. A Jew must be an extremist. The Jew cannot be a *beinoni* – you cannot take the middle road in Judaism. You must be ready to love Hashem with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.

Talking Tachlis

And so, because I’m talking to good people here – all of you want to be idealists who try to live up to the demands of the Torah – so we have to talk straight. And the first straight thing is you have to keep away from crookedness, from crooked people.

Let’s say newspapers, kosher newspapers. There are certainly good things in some of the kosher newspapers, no question. But even the best ones are full of wrong ideas. They advertise things, ideals, pursuits, that if even if they’re not harmful, they’re entirely unnecessary. That’s included in *leitzanus*, absolutely. They give people thoughts of pleasures or of pastimes that are nothing but a waste of one’s life

The newspapers and magazines are feeding people all types of ideas, various forms of entertainment, and *gashmiyus* – chandeliers and couches and electric gadgets and expensive toys – and other things, worse things. And so, it certainly is an ideal if you can keep papers out of your house. Of course, if it means a battle with your wife, so you have to use your judgment and buy those magazines that are least harmful. But if possible, if you can get your family into the habit of reading better

material, that's the right way. There are plenty of nice Torah English books to read.

Avoiding Bad Impressions

And so you'll throw out your televisions and your magazines. Very good! A good start. But you have to be aware of people too; of acquaintances, friends, neighbors, strangers. Sometimes you just have to avoid people. Now, they should never see that you're avoiding them. Always be polite, but find some excuse to avoid his company. Don't hurt his feelings, but make it your business right away to disappear from the scene.

Let's say you're at a family wedding and all the relatives come over — you had to go because of your wife — and all the people come over to talk; don't stop and talk. Be pleasant, be cordial. Smile and shake hands and wish them *simchos* in their life, many happy occasions, and then quickly excuse yourself. You have to go to the bathroom downstairs.

Don't associate with certain people until you have discovered that they will not harm you. Would you go to a physician without ascertaining that he is certified by the state board? Maybe he is a person who just put out a sign Dr. So and So, but he knows nothing of the subject. Would you go to a pharmacist who is not licensed and allow him to mix a prescription for you? And just like a person who is not capable will poison you with his medicine, a person can also ruin you when he chews off your ear.

Choosing Wise Company

You know among the great ideals, the great achievements of life, is the matter of *emunah*. And *emunah* you don't get merely by saying, "*Ani maamin.*" You have to believe that this world is only the *prozdor*, it's only a vestibule before the World to Come and never should you lose sight of that great principle. But there are very many people who haven't the slightest thought about *Olam Haba* and never stop to think about it. And their world begins and ends right here. And therefore you must avoid them.

Which means you can't have much company. You cannot spend your time with many people. You can be friendly with everybody, yes, but you don't need cronies. If you'll get into the habit of inviting people to your home, it's a big *nisayon*. And it's a big waste too. They're not *orchim* who have no place to eat. They have plenty of food in their homes. If you invite them to your house, what *mitzvah* are you having?

And you're sitting down and talking to them and while you're talking, shooting the breeze. It's a *moshav leitzim* because the talk demonstrates there's nothing in the world except Olam Hazeh. You wouldn't bring up Olam Habah at such an occasion. You'd look ridiculous. But since you do talk and you're listening to them too, so little by little any *emunah* that you ever gained in *nitzchiyus*, in eternity, becomes fainter and fainter; it becomes erased from your mind. After such an evening when you go home, it's very difficult to have any thought of the *yesodos* of *emunah*.

The Most Important Subject

What about the subject of Hakadosh Baruch Hu? הַשְּׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח – *Beware not to forget Hashem*. Now suppose you're in the company of *frum* Jews and the Name of Hashem is not mentioned once a whole evening, you know what a propaganda that is? It's like a Bolshevist propaganda against belief in Hashem. It's like the evening was spent in saying, אָמַר נִבְּל בְּלָבוּ אֵין אֱלֹקִים. It's the same as atheism.

Now you say, "How is it possible in regular conversation to introduce Hashem?" With some people you can but with some people, it's impossible. And if the conversation will always be that kind the whole evening without *shem Shamayim shogur befihem* at all, then it's a *moshav leitzim* and you have to beware. If they're speaking *divrei Torah*, at least there's some echo of the words of Hashem. Yes, very good. But if you're going to avoid anything that's connected with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and with His commandments, then the effect is devastating.

And so one of the big principles that everyone must constantly repeat to himself is הִרְזֹק מִשְׁכֵּן רַע – *keep far away from a neighbor that's not good*.

The Lucky Loner

And so we have to listen carefully to Dovid who said, number one, before we embark on the career of Tehillim, of *ahavas Hashem* and *dveikus* and *yiras Hashem* and Torah, number one is keep away from wrong company. How good it is for a person, how lucky you are if you are able all your life to avoid the company of anyone who will cool off your idealism, anyone who will put ideas into your head that won't help you in the Next World.

Of course, if you're together with *tzaddikim*, that's the best company. But otherwise, solitude is one of the biggest achievements for a person. We don't appreciate that today, but it's still as true as ever. Because if you're always among people, then you're going to be like they are. You'll

think like they do. It's important to give yourself a chance to make progress on your own and to free yourself from the trammels of your environment.

That's what Dovid Hamelech warned against before anything else: Don't sit with those who aren't idealists! Because he learned the lesson of *metzora*. He listened to the Torah advice carefully and implemented it into his program to greatness. And so, he said, it's of the utmost importance when we want to learn the ways of succeeding in this world, to keep in mind the lesson of separating from the *letz* as much as possible.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Bringing Hashem Into the Conversation

In this week's parsha, the metzora is sent away not because of germs, but because of influence. Speech that trivializes, cools, and strips life of its seriousness is contagious. Dovid Hamelech warns that before one can grow in *avodas Hashem*, he must avoid *moshav leitzim* – company that lives and talks as if this world is all there is. When Hashem is absent from conversation, idealism slowly erodes.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once each day in a regular conversation, I will consciously introduce a spiritual dimension. I will try to steer the discussion toward purpose – perhaps mentioning *Olam Haba*, *hashgachah*, or a thought about what Hashem wants from us in this situation. Even a brief sentence that lifts the conversation above *Olam Haze* will be my way of keeping *leitzanus* at bay and reminding myself that Hashem is present in every part of life.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

13 – Most Precious Possession | **218** – Righteous Love | **534** – A Nation that Dwells Alone | **535** – Leitzim: Opposition to Idealism | **695** – The Sad Jesters

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Shabbos Inspired

לע"נ שרה נטשה בת דבורה שהין דינה ברכה בת שרה נטשה דבורה מזל בת שרה נטשה

זכור ושמור ~ ביראה ואהבה Unifying Fear and Love of Hashem

We read the *Aseres Hadibros* in *parashas Yisro* and again in *parashas Va'eschanan*. There are a few differences between the two. Probably the most famous is that the first time, it says, "*Zachor es yom haShabbos*," whereas the second time, it says, "*Shamor es yom haShabbos*." As we know, Hashem performed a great miracle by speaking these two different words simultaneously. (*Rosh Hashana 27a*) But what message did Hashem teach us through this feat?

Here lies the proper approach not just to Shabbos but to all the mitzvos. *Zachor* includes all the positive mitzvos we must remember to keep. *Shamor* includes all the negative mitzvos we must guard ourselves from transgressing. Usually, keeping positive mitzvos stems from love of Hashem. If a person loves Hashem and delights in fulfilling His will, then he will certainly put a lot of energy into positive mitzvos such as learning Torah, davening, Shabbos, etc. Keeping negative mitzvos, on the other hand, usually stems from fear of Hashem. If a person fears Hashem and the severe punishments for sin, then he exerts himself not to transgress negative mitzvos such as theft, unfair business practices, Shabbos desecration, *lashon ha-ra*, etc.

Ordinarily, love and fear stand in complete contradiction to one another. I can't love someone if I'm afraid of him. And I can't fear someone I love. Fear makes me pull back and keep my distance, whereas love draws me close. These are polar opposites, going in reverse directions.

But *avodas Hashem* is different. When a person fears Hashem, this feeling itself is the greatest pleasure, causing him to love and draw close. Thus, fear of Hashem doesn't distance us - on the contrary, it brings us close. As R' Shlomo ibn Gevirol expressed it in his well-known *piyut* entitled *Keser Malchus*: "I will flee from You -to You." When a person flees out of terror of Hashem, to where does he escape? To Hashem! He draws close to Hashem and increases his love for Him.

The same is true when it comes to love of Hashem. The closer a person draws to Hashem and the more love he has, the more fear of Hashem this generates, until the love and fear unify. The negative mitzvos become beloved, and the positive mitzvos become awesome. Everything is one.

Some people think that fear of punishment and extreme concern about what's forbidden make a person nervous and unhappy. But the opposite is true, for exercising care and caution in Torah matters is actually the greatest pleasure. The more careful a person is about keeping the commandments and not violating the Torah, the more pleasure he has in life! This is tried and true. Sometimes even serious *b'nei Torah* are misguided in this area and are afraid to dedicate themselves too much to davening and Torah learning. But in truth, the closer a person draws to Hashem, the more beautiful and pleasant his life will be.

And that is why *Zachor* and *Shamor* were said simultaneously: In a Jew's heart, love and fear of Hashem should be completely unified!

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

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