



Kinder Torah. ©

Parashas Vayakhel/Pikudei



What Are We Living For?

Good Shabbos, Avi!"

"Good Shabbos, Chaim. Do you want to come with me?"

"Where are you going, Avi?"

"To the Beis HaKinesses to hear the Rav's Shabbos drasha."

"I am always interested in a Devar Torah, Avi."

Avi and Chaim make their way to the Beis HaKinesses. They find seats just as the Rav enters. The Rav waits for everyone to settle in, and then he begins speaking.

This week's parsha begins with the words, 'Moshe assembled the entire congregation of the Bnei Yisrael and said to them, "These are the things that Hashem commanded (you) to do.'" The Sefer Eved HaMelech is a wonderful book written by Rav Shmuel Hominer zt"l; a Jew from the Old Yishuv of Yerushalayim. He details all of the mitzvos that are learned from each verse in the Torah. Which mitzvos does he find in the verse that I just quoted? Let me share his words with you.

We are commanded to gather the congregations together each Shabbos to *darshen* and to learn Hilchos Shabbos, Hilchos Yom Tov, all of the laws of the Torah, the ways to break our bad *middos* (character traits), and how to properly fulfill the mitzvos.' My dear fellow congregants, this is the purpose of my *drasha* today, and every Shabbos - to fulfill this mitzvah from the Torah. We are gathered together to learn Torah.

Rav Hominer cites the Medrash Avkir as the source of this mitzvah. The Medrash states that no other parasha in the Torah begins with the word 'vayakhel' - 'and he gathered.' Only here did Hashem tell Moshe Rabbeinu to gather the people together to teach them halachos and *mussar*. When was this gathering supposed to take place? On Shabbos. Therefore, throughout the generations we must emulate Moshe Rabbeinu, and gather together each and every Shabbos to learn Torah.

You may ask, 'What are the details of this mitzvah?' Rav Hominer quotes the Shelah who says that the *drasha* should be divided into three parts. Firstly, we should speak about the events and laws of the weekly parasha. We should choose from the meforshim and even add our own words to understand the Torah. Secondly, we should learn practical *halachos*. The *dinim* of tefillin, tzitzis, mezuza, and Shabbos are laws that every Jew needs to know. Therefore we should learn and review them and other similar *halachos*. Thirdly, we should learn *mussar* (character improvement). The classic *mussar* sefarim teach us how to correct our faults. This is how we come close to Hashem.

My dear friends, we have spoken about the parasha, and we have learned the details of how to fulfill the mitzvah of delivering a Shabbos *Drasha*. Now let us finish with a short, but powerful *mussar* message. Rav Hominer quotes the Vilna Gaon, who summarizes man's purpose in this world in a few sentences. 'All *Avodas Hashem* (Service to Hashem) is dependent upon perfecting one's

middos. They are like an external garb for the mitzvos. The foundations of the Torah and all of the sins are rooted in the *middos*. A person's main goal in life is to constantly work on breaking his bad *middos*. If not this, what is he living for?' Good Shabbos everyone."

The people of the congregation thank the Rav, and begin to get up to leave.

"Avi, that was wonderful. I would like to go over to the Rav to speak to him."

"It looks like he is free now, Chaim."

Chaim and Avi approach the Rav. Chaim begins to speak.

"I just wanted to thank the Rav for the *drasha*, and tell him how much I enjoyed it."

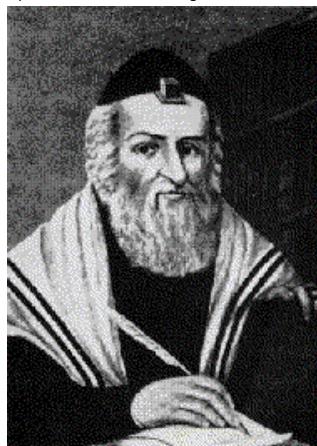
"Baruch ti'hyeh (May you be blessed) young man. What is your name?"

"Chaim. May I ask the Rav a question?"

"Go right ahead, Chaim."

"The Rav quoted the Vilna Gaon who said that the *middos* are like an external garb for the mitzvos. What does that mean?"

"Excellent question, Chaim. I puzzled over that question for a long time. The *middos*



'clothe' the mitzvos, similarly to the way that the clothes cover the body."

"I see. I never realized that the mitzvos have or need any 'clothing.' There must be a deeper meaning to the words of the Gaon."

"There is, Chaim. The 613 mitzvos correspond to the 613 limbs and sinews of the body. Each part of the physical body has its spiritual counterpart. That 'spiritual limb' receives its energy - its life force - from the mitzvah. Therefore, the mitzvos keep the body alive and going. What about the clothing that the body wears? What do they say about the person?"

They are a statement of his humanity. Only people wear clothing. This separates them from the animal world."

"Very good, Chaim. Imagine a person who goes to the *mikveh* on *Erev Shabbos*. He scrubs his body clean, then he *tovels* (immerses himself) in the *mikveh*, and comes out *tahor* (spiritually pure). He is now perfectly clean inside and out. He dries himself off and begins to get dressed. What does he put on?"

"His nicest cleanest Shabbos clothes."

"Wrong! He puts on smelly old *shmittas* (rag-torn clothes). He looks and smells so repulsive, that no one wants to come near him."

"What is the point of cleaning and purifying

his body if he wears smelly clothes?"

"Exactly. The body is like the mitzvos, and the *middos* are like the clothes. The Baalei Mussar relate that Hashem does not want to be in the company of someone who has bad *middos*. He is repulsive. The person may do many mitzvos, and he may do them well. He may take the trouble to buy a beautiful *esrog*. He may give a lot of money to *tsedaka*. He may even learn Torah. However, if his *middos* are not good, people will not want to associate with him. His *gaava* (pride), *tayva* (desires), and *kovod* (honor seeking) take him out of the world."

"Oy vey."

Yes. On the other hand, a person with good *middos* is likened to one wearing beautiful, clean, fragrant clothes. Everyone wants to be near him. They crave his warm smile, his refined speech, his gentle ways, his genuine caring. Just like people gravitate to him, so too Hashem wants to be near him (so to speak). Hashem draws this person close to Him. That is our entire purpose in this world - to come close to Hashem. Developing good *middos* is the way to do it."

"Rabbi, this statement is so compelling, it can change my entire life. My main focus must be on perfecting my *middos*."

"Correct Chaim. May Hashem give you the *Siyata Di'Shmayah* (Heavenly Assistance) that you need to succeed!"

"Amen!"

Kinderlach . . .

*What are we living for? The Vilna Gaon tells us. "A person's main goal in life is to constantly work on breaking his bad middos. If not this, what is he living for?" First we have to identify our bad middos. Perhaps we are impatient and tend to get angry. Maybe we indulge our tayvas by eating too much. We may harbor grudges, take revenge or speak *loshon hora* against people who upset us. Some of us might look for honor by attracting attention to ourselves. To correct these middos requires work. We must study *mussar*, ask experienced people for guidance, and follow their advice. The work may be difficult at times. However, it is very important. How important is it? It is our main goal in life. It is what we are living for. Work on your middos, kinderlach. Live a great life.*

Parasha Questions:

- Which day was the Mishkan erected? (40:2)
- What were the dimensions of the Mizbeach? (38:1)
- How much gold, silver, and copper was used for the Mishkan and kelim? (38:24, 25, 29)



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