

EMBRACING THE YOKE OF AVODAS HASHEM

IN THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM

Our *parshah* begins with eleven *pesukim* loaded with amazing *brachos* for people who toil in Torah. At the end (Vayikra 26:13), it says as follows: *אני ה' אלוהיכם, I am Hashem, אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים, Who took you out from Eretz Mitzrayim, מהיות להם עבדים, from being slaves to them.* I saved you. *ואשבר, and I shall brake, מוטות עולכם, it is referring to the supports (or bars) of your yokes.* According to the simple interpretation, Hashem is saying, "I broke the yoke of the your *avdus* that the Mitzriyim were *machbid* upon you, *ואולך אתכם קוממיות, and I took you out, standing up straight like benei chorin (free people).*

But, the Chasam Sofer in *Parshas Vayechi* says that this *passuk* is not *stam* history. It's a *brachah*. It's another *brachah*, after Hashem gave us a whole list of *brachos*, of *נתתי שלום בארץ, and "you will pursue your enemies" and "they will fall before you" and more and more.* The *passuk* says, "I am Hashem who took you out of *Mitzrayim*" and the *passuk* then goes on to say, "I will break," *מוטות עולכם - your yoke.* It doesn't say that "I broke *עולכם,*" because, obviously, if I took you out of *Mitzrayim* from being *avadim*, I broke everything that was on you. It says, "I am Hashem who took you out of *Mitzrayim* and I shall break the support of the yokes upon you and I will take you out *קוממיות.*" The question is what kind of yoke is Hashem promising us to break?<sup>1</sup>

The Chasam Sofer says that, *lema'aseh*, every Yid is *mekabel* upon himself *על מלכות שמים* That is the *din*. That is the *halachah*. But people have a difficulty with being *על מלכות שמים*. By nature, people like freedom. This is especially true in today's world, where slavery has been essentially abolished, where the concept of democracy and freedom courses through our blood. But yet we say that we want every Jew to train his child to be *על מלכות שמים* to accept the yoke of the Heavenly kingdom. There are no exceptions to this rule.<sup>2</sup>

CARRYING THE YOKE, NO MATTER WHAT

Now, what does it mean to accept the yoke of Hashem's Heavenly kingdom upon yourself? What is your understanding when you say *shema*? What do you think when you say, "מקבל עול מלכות שמים"? The answer is many do not think about it. What are most people willing to accept? I'm willing to accept upon myself to do the will of Hashem as long as I can handle it, as long as it doesn't feel like a yoke. But when it starts to feel like a yoke, by nature, a person who simply thinks about a yoke, starts to move his shoulders around to see if he's stuck. However, *על מלכות שמים* means that you are going to do the will of Hashem whether you like it or not, whether it pleases you or not, whether it speaks to your fancy or the opposite. You have to do the will of Hashem.

If you don't train yourself from a young age to do that, it becomes very difficult because most of us grow up - especially in our teenage years - saying, "I'm going to do whatever pleases me," or "I'm going to do what I want to do." Of course, I'll be *frum*. But I'll be *frum* like *I want* to be *frum*. My hair is going to look like I want it to look like. My clothes are going to be like I want them to be. My speech will be like I want it to be. I'm going to wake up when I want to wake up. Ai, Hashem says you've got to get up by a certain time? No. Ai, Hashem says you have to learn? No. Ai, Hashem says you have to do this? No. And people struggle with this.

<sup>1</sup> יחי יעקב. למה פ' זו סתומה מכיון שמת יעקב אע"ה נסתמו עיניהם מצרות השעבוד. וקו' מפורסמת הא כל זמן שא' מן השבעים הי' קיים לא נשתעבדו למצרים (ש"א א' ז') כתיב אני ד' אלקים אשר הוצאתי אתכם מא"מ מהיות להם עבדים ואשבור מוטות עולכם ואולך אתכם קוממיות (בחקות) וצ"ע הא ברכות דפ' בחקותי הם הברכות הגדולות שלע"ל שעדיין לא זכינו להם (רמב"ן שם ס"פ יב'), ואיך בסוף כל אלו הברכות אחר שכבר נאמר ונתתי שלום בארץ, ונפלו אויביכם לפניכם לחרב וכדומה, איך אחר כל אלה מבטיח ואשבור מוטות עולכם ואיזה עול יהי' על צוארם ח"ו אז שיצטרך לשבור מוטותיהם. אבל האמת תחת היותנו עבדים לפרעה ולמלכי או"ה בעו"ה צריכים אנו להטות שכמנו לקבל על תורה ומצוות ולהיות עבדים לאלקים, כי עבדי הם אשר הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים ופירש"י שטרי קודם (ויקרא כ"ה מ"ב). נמצא אנו עבדים מכורים במוסרות התורה, ומה יעשה ישראל ואפסי בבשר חזיר והלך בבתי טרטיאות ובקציצת פאת ראש וזקן אבל מה יעשה והתורה אוסרתה (רש"י ס"פ קדושים) והוא יהודי כשר ואינו רוצה למרוד על אדוני ית"ש שהוא עבד נמכר לו, עול עובד ד' כל ימיו והוא לעול על צוארו אך הוא יהודי כשר. ועל עבודה זו נאמר תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל ועבדת את אויביך וגו' ברע ובצמא וגו' ובחוסר כל, אעפ"י שאמת הוא שאפי' עול תורה כבד על צוארנו היינו מחויבים לקבל ולסבול כי עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים ויציאנו ה' משם, אבל חלילה וחס אין זה עול כבד כ"א שמחה וחדוה אשרינו מה טוב חלקינו מן התועים והשוטים האלו יושבי בתי טרטיאות אכלים ושותים בחייהם, ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקים חיים כולכם היום. היינו בסוף כל הברכות אמר, אתן לכם לב טהור לעבוד ה' בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל אני ה' א' אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים מהיות להם עבדים והי' ראוי שתהי' עבדים לי, אבל לא כן אנוכי עמדי אלא לחירות עולם הוצאתי אתכם ואשבור מוטות עולכם היינו עול תורה לא יהיה לכם לעול כי לא תתאוו תאוה רעה ואולך אתכם קוממיות (חזק סופר דרוש לח' טבת תקצ"ט לפ"ק)

<sup>2</sup> כתב חזק סופר וז"ל: יש לפרש הנה בעת צאתנו ממצרים אם גם קמלנו תוה"ק אבל לא באהבה, והיתה תוה"ק עלינו לעול, אך לא ע"ד עול מצרים, אמנם מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה (פסחים נ' ע"ב). וז"ש "אני ה' אלקים אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים", אבל רק "מהיות להם עבדים", כי אם עבדים לי, כי היתה קבלת מלכותי עליכם קבלת עול עבד, אבל יבאו הימים אשר "אשבור מוטות עולכם", שלא תהיה תוה"ק לכם לעול, כ"א "ואולך אתכם קוממיות" בקומה זקופה, ברצון ונחת רוח תעבדו אותי (חזק סופר על התורה, ויקרא, כ"ו י"ג)

The fact that a person has to have a yoke is a given. When we were under Pharaoh's yoke, Pharaoh didn't give us a choice. Pharaoh said, "Do this," and you said, "Okay." He gave you crazy quotas, he didn't give you straw, you produced or you tried to produce as best as you could.

Then Hashem took us out from under the yoke of Pharaoh and he told us, "Now, you're *avdei* Hashem. Before you were *avdei Pharaoh* and now you're *avdei* Hashem."

### LOOKING FOR SOME FREEDOM?

But there are very fundamental differences between individuals who do the *ratzon* Hashem. Not all Jews are created equally. There are some people who really feel all the time that there is a heavy yoke on their neck and they live with a continuous feeling that they're being forced to conduct themselves in opposition to their own will. I've met many people like that. I'm sure you have also. That person may even be yourself. And even if this inner opposition is not reflected in all things that you do, it definitely appears in some areas of your *avodas* Hashem. People are not very comfortable with being *ovdei* Hashem. I've met many young people who were going off the *derech*, or went off the *derech*. I hear this all the time. "I can't be forced. You have to do what you want." But a person has to know that there are certain things in life that he has to do whether he wants to or not. You can't always do what you want.

Somebody just called me to ask if I knew of a *yeshivah* who takes in boys who like freedom. I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "A place that allows smartphones." That was his first condition. Then he wants the *yeshivah* to allow him to go to movies. You understand what's going on here? He wants that the yeshiva should be "understanding." No pressure. You can do what you want, when you want, where you want.

### THE BIGGEST CHIDDUSH OF A FRUM LIFE

But a person doesn't have that option. I can understand when people ask me, "Does Hashem want to force me into this?" Yes. You're forced. How and to what degree you accept this yoke - is your choice. But if a person doesn't want to rebel against Hashem, he has to be *mekayem* Hashem's *ratzon*. Even if he does it with a heaviness and not from love or willingness or appreciation, we're still going to call him a 'good Jew.' We're going to call him a 'good Jew' because, *lema'aseh*, he does what Hashem wants! But we understand that that's not the service that Hashem wants from us or expects from us. Hashem wants you - like the Torah says in this week's *parshah* - to serve Him *בשמחה ובטוב לבב*. That's the goal.

I used to ask many non-observant people what they think will be the biggest struggle they are going to find with a *frum* life, I used to say: "What do you think it's going to be?" They would all say different *narishkeit*. If you ask a *yeshivah bachur*, "What's the most difficult thing?" he'll invariably tell you that it's having to get up by a certain time for *shema* or having to learn all day, (*ke'eilu* the guy learns all day now) and so on and so forth. I used to tell them, "Do you know what the biggest novelty and the biggest struggle is?" They used to say fear, fear of social pressure. I said, "All that is *narishkeit*. The biggest difficulty is accepting the fact that there is a yoke of Hashem and you have absolutely no choice." The only choice you have is to ask, "What do I have to do now? What is expected of me to do now?" And when you hear what is expected of you, try to do it in the best possible manner. No one is putting a gun to your head, but you don't have a choice. You're going to be responsible for keeping mitzvos.

Let's say a person works for a company and he's given clear directives. He thinks the boss is not around so he can do what he wants. Let's say that he's told, "Don't eat food at the worksite. Eat your breakfast or your lunch before you come to the worksite." So one day he's running late. He makes himself a couple of sandwiches and he shows up to the worksite with his food. He looks around. He sees the boss is not there. So he figures, "Okay, fine. I'm good to go," and he eats his sandwich. Comes the end of the month and the guy gets his check docked. He gets a little note, "You broke the rules of the company. This is your last warning. Next infraction - you're out." The guy says, "How did the boss know?" He would never say, "Did I do the right thing?" or, "Did I do the wrong thing?" He never asks that! "Who ratted me out? Where are the finks? Where are the rats?" Then somebody tells him, "Oh, they didn't tell you that the boss installed cameras in the room?!"

It's amazing how people take no responsibility. They really think and they really feel that they can break rules.

Now, there's a certain group of people, where their whole *mahus* (essence) is that they can't follow rules. It's part of their 'psychology.' They're wired to go against rules. You say, "Yes." They say, "No." You say, "Do it now." They say, "No, I'm doing it later." Whatever you say, the person says, "I'll do *farkert*." There are some people who have that. It's part of them. People who have ADD or ADHD suffer from this a lot. It's across the board. Whatever rule they hear, they have to break it, and they often do it in an extreme way. That's why when you meet such people - if they've already broken their *ol* - the things that they've been exposed to are absolute 'no nos' for many other people. This inability to follow the rules always bothered me. Why did Hashem make these people in such a way?

## RECOGNIZE YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

The answer is, Hashem is letting them know exactly what it is that they came to this world for. If a person in the last lifetime was somebody who broke Hashem's yoke and he didn't give two hoots to what Hashem wanted, so Hashem said, "Let Me make you aware of what your challenge is. I'm going to put you in a world, in a *frum* world, where people accept an *ol*. I could have put you in a zoo, but I didn't. I put you with people who are *frum*. Now, let's see you learn how to accept, how to sit, how to do what you're supposed to do and how to follow rules."

These people really believe in their minds that they just can't follow rules. Rules are made to be broken. So that's how Hashem lets you know what your *tachlis* in life is.

There are people who think because they have certain conditions, they can never go to *shul*. There are many people who struggle with the AD's who can't sit in *shul*, and therefore, they don't go to *shul*. I've met many of them across many different states. I remember when I met the first one, I thought, "Oh, maybe he's the only one." I realized that it is very common. So I tell people, "That's your *tafkid*, to learn how to *shtell tzu* (adhere to rules), how to be *machnia* (humble) yourself, and how to accept the yoke."

Everybody would love to know, "What is the purpose that I came to this world for?" The Vilna Gaon tells us (Sefer Yonah 4:3) that the area where you see a big weakness, that's the area!<sup>3</sup>

## A FELLOW WITH ODD

I once had a *talmid* whom I made aware of this concept. I spoke to him for one year. I spoke. I begged. I beseeched. I told him to leave. He told me, "No." I said, "Okay stay." I was hoping he would say *farkert*. No, he didn't say *farkert*. One year had passed. At the end of the year I notified him that he's got to move on to greener pastures. I said, "You have ODD - Oppositional Defiant Disorder." I said, "You don't realize this. Anything anyone says to you, you always do the opposite." It was a *pelah*. I could speak to the guy until I was blue in the face. I told him, "You can't be in any *yeshivah*. Forget about it."

He was different from most people and he wasn't a bad guy. He really had *gevaldige ma'alos*. I told him, "You need medication." He said, "I'm not taking medication." I said, "You've got to get some psychological help." He told me, "I'm not getting any psychological help. I know better than all the doctors and all the psychologists and all psychiatrists."

It was funny because there was one thing that he did, which he liked - *davening*. I would tell him, "You can't *daven shemoneh esrei* for more than fifteen minutes." He would stand there for an hour. I'll never forget, one time I told him that he could *daven* a little longer. It was a *ta'anis*. He started *davening minchah at 1 o'clock*. At 5 o'clock he was still *davening shemoneh esrei!* The *olam* was teasing him. The *olam* teased him all the time. He didn't care. Nothing bothered the guy. I told him, "Now it's time to learn *gemara*." He would open up a *Tehillim* and say *Tehillim, beretzifus*. On Shabbos, I would tell him, "Now it's time to learn *chumash*. You can learn *chumash* now." *Chumash?* He would open a *gemara*. The whole day was like this. He wasn't lying around in bed. Whatever he was told, he did the opposite. It was unbelievable!

At some point, he decided he liked Chabad *sefarim*. I said, "Fine." I told him, "Listen, I like Chabad *sefarim* too, but you have to know when to learn them." Whenever I told him he could learn them, then he wouldn't learn them. Whenever he couldn't learn them, that's when he would learn. I told him, "I want you to sleep on a bed," because I heard he was sleeping on the floor. What did he do? Well, he moved onto a cement floor. From a carpeted floor he moved onto

<sup>3</sup> כי טוב מותי מחיי. כמ"ש "ושבח אני את המתים שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר הם חיים כו'". ולכאורה "שכבר מתו" וכן "אשר הם חיים" ייתור דברים, אלא שרצה לומר שטובים הם המתים שכבר מתו ולא נצטרכו לבוא בגלגול מאותן שהם חיים עדנה שבאו בגלגול, ובוה מיושב דאמרו נמנו וגמרו טוב לאדם שלא נברא כו' עד יפשפש במעשיו [עירובין יג]. דקשה היאך אפשר לומר שטוב יותר, אם כן למה נברא. ועוד, "ועכשיו שנברא" קשה להולמו, ועוד, מאי "יפשפש" כו', הוה ליה למימר יעבוד את ה' ויעשה טוב, אלא נראה דנחלקו בשוב אל הגלגול השני, שאלו אומרים טוב לו שנברא, כי בכל פעם הוא עושה מצות כמו שכתבו קצת מפרשים. ואלו אומרים טוב לו יותר אם היה מתקן גלגול ראשון ולא יצטרך בגלגול שני. וכן נמנו וגמרו כו'. והוה "ושבח אני את המתים כו'". וקאמרי "ועכשיו שנברא" על כרחך לתקן מעשיו שמקודם ולא בשביל מצות לעשות, כי טוב לו כו' כנ"ל, ועל כן יראה עיקר לתקן במה שפשע מקודם כמ"ש אבוד במאי זהיר טפי כו'. והיאך ידע מה שקלקל מקדם, יש על זה שני סימנים, א' במה שנכשל בה בגלגול זה הרבה פעמים. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו" באיזה עבירה נפשו חשקה לו מאד לפי שהורגלה מקודם ונעשה טבע, ולכך יש בני אדם שחושקין בעבירה אחת יותר וזה בעבירה אחרת. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו", שימשמש מעשיו.

a cement floor. In the middle of the winter when it was *mamash* freezing outside, he wanted to sleep on the porch. I told him, "What's with you? What do you care to sleep inside?" He said, "I'm more comfortable on a screened open porch." I told him, "It's six degrees here with the windshield!" It didn't bother him. I'm not sure if it didn't bother him or he was just such a tough guy that whatever you told him, he had to do *farkert*. He was nice and he was lovely, but I said goodbye to him.

### "I AM COMING BACK"

Then he had a miracle. He took sick. He did something crazy that I told him not to do, but he did it anyway. He ended up in the hospital with the doctor saying all his blood became poisoned. The doctor said he had about three hours left to live. *Baruch Hashem*, he came around and he made it out.

When he was in the hospital, I went to visit him. The hospital was in a different state, but I happened to be there and I drove to visit him. He was half sick and he said, "I'm coming back." I said, "No, no. First, get better and then we'll find you something. Don't worry. We'll find you something. You'll have a support group. People will help you." He said, "Rebbi, I'm coming back." I said, "I'm not talking about it right now." The guy was just coming out of the death throes. It was just amazing that the first thing he was planning on doing was, "I'm coming back."

He called me when he got better, or I called him myself - I don't remember. I said, "I hope you weren't serious. You were just talking out of your state of deliriousness." He said, "No, I'm coming back." I said, "I can't work with you anymore. It's not healthy for me and it's not healthy for you. I can't do it. You don't know what stress you put on me under." I'll tell him to wake up at 7 o'clock, he was getting up at 5 o'clock. Whatever I told him, it was always the opposite! Then he said these words to me, "You think that I didn't hear what you said the whole year? I heard every single thing you said and now I'm ready to do it!" I said, "Oh, come on, give me a break! Are you cured from this sickness?" He said, "I got it. I figured it out. You won't have any challenge from me anymore." I told him, "Tell me one area where I didn't have a challenge with you!" (One example was that I told him to eat this, so he ate that. There were rotten fruits, rotten vegetables. I told him don't eat it. He took it. He cooked it up. He mushed it together. And then he ate it like soup! He put it in the refrigerator and offered it to people! I told him, "What are you doing? It's unhealthy." I told him to eat some chicken. "No. I'm not eating any meat." First he ate meat. Then, when I told him it's good to eat meat, he stopped eating meat. *Mamash*, there was not one single area! Oh. His clothes. I told him, "Wear these clothes or those clothes." He wouldn't wear the clothes). So, this time I asked point blank, "Give me one area where we didn't have an argument!" He said, "You're not going to have one argument from me!" I told him, "Listen, I'm a glutton for punishment. I just can't argue with you anymore. I argued the whole year. I can't. I hope you're telling the truth."

### AN UNRESOLVED MYSTERY

Then, he *mamish* came back. There wasn't one thing he argued with me about anymore! I could not believe it! I kept on asking him, "What happened? Give me the secret. I'll know how to deal with the next guy. Do I have to put him through an accident? What do I need to do with him? What do I have to do to wake the guy up?" He said to me, "I heard what you were saying but something told me not to do it. You were rational." I used to tell him, "Do you hear me? Do you hear what I'm asking?" He would say, "Maybe." I would ask, "What do you mean maybe? It's a yes or no question." "Well, I'm not sure." I asked, "Are you happy with your life?" He said, "That's a very big, loaded question. Happiness has very many different definitions to many different people." I said, "Shrek! Just tell me if you're happy or you're not happy." You just can't imagine! The guy told me, "I'm never going to touch medication no matter what." I said, "I'm going to lock you up in a nuthouse!" He said, "No, I won't touch it."

I want to tell you something: that fellow really changed. I'm in love with him. I have such an *ahavah* for this fellow that I can't express it to you! I was afraid to tell him anything at first. I remember asking him, "Maybe you should eat a little chicken?" He said, "Do you really feel that?" I said, "No, I was just testing you. You don't have to eat the chicken." I wanted to see if he changed even in those areas where we previously had strong conflicts. He learned *gemara* solidly when he was supposed to. He *davened* exactly how long he was supposed to. He was a pleasure to have around! Hashem should help him. The guy became a super *masmid*. He became *mamash* an *oved Hashem*. Anybody who calls me about a *shidduch* I only tell them about the second part. Not about the first part. People said, "What happened to him beforehand?" I said, "Before then? That was before he was created. He was created at this age in life." Silence on the

phone. “What do you mean?” I said, “I can’t explain it.” I really couldn’t.

A person has to know that we are him (i.e. this fellow), in part A. It’s just that we try to *shnook* and we try to fool Hashem and people. We think Hashem is not looking. We think that there are no cameras. My friend, today there are cameras everywhere. Wherever you go, there are cameras. It’s amazing. This fellow is now happily married to a very special woman with a child, and he’s learning very diligently.

### FEELING FORTUNATE AND UNSHACKLED

Now, a person has to have a goal to acquire *simchah* in *avodas* Hashem. He has to realize that doing *mitzvos* is a *zechus*. An opportunity to learn Torah, is a person’s great opportunity. To play baseball is not an opportunity. It may tickle your fancy right now. It may make you feel good, but it’s not a *zechus*. It’s not something you’re going to have in your hands. A person says all his life, “I’m someone who’s *מקבל עול מלכות שמים*” and his goal has to be to get to the point where he says, “Thank You Hashem for giving me *עול מלכות שמים*.”

*Zugt* the Chasam Sofer (ibid) that for those people who say this, there’s no *ol kaved*. It’s not a difficult *ol*. It’s just joy. They’re happy. They feel fortunate to be able to be a *frumme* Yid and do *mitzvos*. They think *אשרינו מה טוב חלקנו* - thank you that You didn’t make us like the *toim* and the *shotim*, the *יושבי בתי טרטיאות*, those who go to movies, those who live their life to fulfill their desires, but instead You made us feel a connection of *היום כלכם חיים אלקיכם בה’ אלקיכם*!

*Zugt* the Chasam Sofer, the Torah says, I, Hashem took you out from being *avadim* to *Mitzrayim* and I will break the supports of your yokes. That means Hashem said, “I made you My *avadim*. Don’t think that I want you to be *avadim* to Me like you were *avadim* to Pharaoh. I don’t want it to be *ויאנחו* (groaning) [Shemos 2:23].<sup>4</sup> I don’t want it to be *ויצעקו* (crying out) [ibid]. I don’t want there to be any outcries. I don’t want there to be any *קוצר רוח* (crushed spirit) [Shemos 6:9].<sup>5</sup> I want you to feel like you have no yoke. I want you to conduct yourself

like what’s supporting the yoke is not stifling you. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “I am giving you a *brachah*. If you commit to the *mitzvos*, I will grant you, I will bless you. It won’t feel like a yoke. If you aspire to accept My Torah and *mitzvos* and you will do the Torah and *mitzvos* with *simchah* and with *ratzon* - it won’t feel like an *עול מלכות שמים*. That’s what you have to *daven* for. When you *daven* *בפינו דברי תורתך* בפינו *והערב נא ה’ אלקינו את דברי תורתך* בפינו, what you’re asking Hashem for is: “Hashem I know I have to do these *mitzvos*. Could You grant me the *brachah* that I shouldn’t feel like I have a yoke?”

### STRAIGHT TALK

I once went to speak to some very Modern Orthodox Jews. I looked at them and I said, “I have to tell you, that as you know, I come from the Charedi community, as they say, the Ultra Orthodox, and you’re the Modern Orthodox. I want you to know what I think of you guys. I never told you this, but I’d like you to hear it straight from me. I’m blown away by you. I’m amazed at you.”

Whenever I meet Modern Orthodox (and I was learning at that point in time with a lot of them), I see they really feel that Yiddishkeit is a thorn in their *kishkes*. It really crimps their lifestyle. They do *mitzvos ba’al korcham*. You would think somebody put a gun to their head and is forcing them into *shul*, forcing them to wear a yarmulke, forcing them to wear *tzitzis*, forcing them to *bentch*. It’s amazing how many of them don’t *bentch*. If I ask them, “Why don’t you *bentch*?” “Oh, we only *bentch* on Shabbos,” is what I often heard.

I remember we had a *talmid* here who brought his cousin and I asked him, “What is your status in life?” He said, “I’m a Modern Orthodox young man in his 20s.” I said, “Do you struggle with Torah and *mitzvos*?” He said, “No.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “Whenever it gets hard I don’t do it, so I don’t struggle. But I do it. I subscribe.” I said, “Do you realize that you can’t remain *frum* [for long] because [eventually] something is going to give.” Just today, my *talmid* told me,

“Remember my cousin came here?” I said, “Yeah.” “He just married a *shikseh*. He married a non-Jewish girl.”

So, I told that group that I was amazed at them. “You’re so stubborn. You can’t stand it. It gives you no joy. *Mitzvos* don’t talk to you. *Brachos* don’t talk to you. *Tzitzis* make you hot. Yarmulkes make you hot. Obviously, you try to get the smallest one on your head to make sure that it doesn’t heat you up too much and give you fever. And you’re still Jewish? I’m amazed! I’m impressed! But you should know that that’s not Hashem’s intention. Hashem wants us to exude joy. He

<sup>4</sup> ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויצעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבדה  
<sup>5</sup> וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה

wants us to show that we enjoy His mitzvos.” That’s what a person has to know.

## THE JOY OF LEARNING

The *gaon hatzaddik* Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, who was a *rosh yeshivah* and an author, once said to one of his *talmidim*, “I want to share something with you. I’ll tell you the *emes*, many times I sit down to learn. I look at the *gemara* and it seems to me blacker than black. My head struggles to understand what the *gemara* is saying. I have no sweetness in my mouth whatsoever. I feel the opposite. I feel bitterness.” Do you hear this? This is when he’s already a *rosh yeshivah*! He was already an *adam gadol meod*, a *tzaddik*. He continued, “But after I *chazer* the *gemara* a number of times and I go over it again and again, I begin to understand the words of the *gemara*. I start to understand what the words are saying and my eyes start to open up and I start to see the light. And the light grows stronger, and then - I’ll tell you the truth - it becomes very difficult for me to leave the *gemara*.” That’s the level of joy [that Hashem wants us to reach].

I want to end off with an amazing story that Rav Yankel Galinsky used to tell. Many people know him from his *sefarim*. He used to come around the *yeshivos*. Whenever he came it was a Yom Tov. He was a very short man. He always used to joke: “When people ask me how tall I am, I say a kilometer.” A kilometer? He was barely three feet. So he said, “Well, I weigh one kilo and I’m one meter tall - thus, a kilometer!”

He told a story that when he grew up in the city of Krinik in Poland, there was an *alter Yid* there, a very old *Yid*, whose name was R’ Zev. He was *aza moradike masmid*. He never stopped learning in the *beis medrash*. All day long you saw him with a big *gemara*, bent over pounding. Whoever came, watched him, because it was always a pleasure to see him learn out loud, with a *simchah*, with *hislavus*. He would come to the *beis medrash* every Motzei Shabbos. He would leave before Shabbos. He stayed there the whole week. He didn’t go out of the *heichal beis medrash*. His family would bring him food, which he would eat very quickly and go right back to learning. He slept on the *shtender*. He got some *kochos*, and then went back to learning. Rav Yankel Galinsky said that on Erev Shabbos, he remembers how R’ Zev’s grandkids would come and they would accompany him back to the house, and on Motzei Shabbos they would bring him back to the *beis medrash* for another week of *hasmadah*. He never talked *narishkeit* with anybody. He never had an interest in anything other than learning.

One day they caught him when he stopped for a second. Rav Yankel Galinsky said, “I was there with some of my friends.” They said to this R’ Zev, “Tell me what’s the secret of your *hasmadah*? Where did you get this sweetness? How did you get there?” Listen to what he said. “I’m going to answer you,” he said. “I want you to hear what I have to say. When I was younger, I learned in the Volozhiner Yeshivah, the great *yeshivah* of Volozhin. The *rosh yeshivah* then was Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik. (That’s the Beis Halevi. The *rav* of Brisk). In the *yeshivah* I acquired a name. My name was that I was the biggest *batlan* of the *yeshivah*. With a *hei hayediah*, a capital *hei*. Every day I came to the *beis medrash* and I pretended to learn but, *bepoel* (in reality), I had no pleasure from learning. I had no interest in Abaye and Rava. Minutes after I began my *seder* to learn, I got up from my place and I started to look for people to *shmooze* with. One time I bothered this guy. Another time I bothered the other guy. That’s how I would go all my *sedarim* of the day busy with *shtusim*.

“One day, in the middle of the *seder*, the Beis Halevi got my ‘telephone number.’ He put his hands on my shoulders. He actually leaned on me, and he said in a very scary voice, ‘Velvel, Velvel.’ He said, ‘Chazal say every *talmid chacham* that sits down to learn Hakadosh Baruch Hu *yoshev kenegdo*, Hashem is sitting in front of him learning with him. When you open the *gemara* and you start to learn, the *shechinah bekevodah uveatzmah* comes to learn with you. When you’re *mafsik* from learning, you’re saying to the *shechinah*, ‘Excuse me. I have other business to take care of right now that’s more important. You blow Him off *beyadayim. Meilah*,’ *zugt* the Beis Halevi, ‘you want to do that, okay. You don’t want to learn okay. Why do you disturb others? I watch you,’ the Beis Halevi said. ‘You go to the second guy and then the third guy and then you walk around and you start making *pitputim* and talk and *shmooze*. You’re *meagresh* the *shechinah* from them. So, a whole day you know what your business in the *beis medrash* is? *Siluk hashechinah* - you are removing *shechinah* from everyone! That’s what you’re doing. You are being *mesalek* the *shechinah* from Volozhin! Tell me, what did the *shechinah* do so bad to you that you go around all day long driving Him out of every corner of the *beis medrash*?’

“Then he concluded. He said, ‘Velvel, Velvel, remember *gedenk gut*. Whoever learns Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu

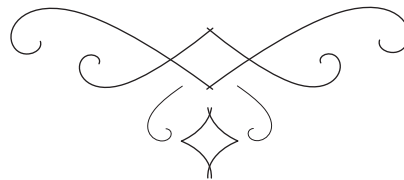
sits in front of him.”

Pay attention to this. R' Zev said, “The words of the Beis Halevi are ringing in my ears. I couldn't get them out. They made such a *roshem* on me. I couldn't sleep at night. I was struggling with eating. I felt that the words the Beis Halevi said, were דברים היוצאים מן הלב, the *heilegeh lev* of the Beis Halevi. I understood, for my own benefit, I couldn't continue like this. So I decided I have to change myself *mikatzeh el hakatzeh* (completely). The next morning I said, 'I'm changing.' The next morning, I went to the *beis medrash* and I sat down to learn *behasmadah*. You understand - my *yetzer* was driving me nuts. *Pashut* he wasn't letting me rest. The *yetzer hara* was pounding me. Get up! Get up for a little bit. Take a walk. Okay, don't talk to other people but you can't sit. You can't *drey*. Don't ask what he was trying to do to me,” he said. “He tried to convince me to stop my plan, and you should know there were times that he almost won. I almost gave in but I never gave in because I wanted to give it a shot.”

He said, “Day after day, week after week, I learned *behasmadah*. I'll tell you the *emes*,” he said. “The first four months I felt the *ta'am* of Gehinom *mamash*. I felt *Gehinom mamash*. I felt the bitterness. But after time went by, after four months I started to suddenly feel the light. *Aza mesikus* (such sweetness). I was *zocheh* to feel it. And now it's not *shayach* for me to be *mevater* and give it up.”

Rav Yankel Galinsky said over this *ma'aseh* and said, “You see, that was the *koach* of the Beis Halevi.”

That's called the ואשבר מוטות עלכם, Rabbosai. Hashem tells us, “If you start to learn, if you start to do *mitzvos*, if you commit yourself to Yiddishkeit, yes it's going to feel difficult at first. You're going to feel like you're locked into a yoke. ואשבר, but I took you out of Mitzrayim,” Hashem says, “And I'm going to break these מוטות עלכם also. I'm going to break those yokes and you're going to feel the *simchah* and you'll feel the *ohr*. You'll feel like you're succeeding in life.” Rabbosai, don't allow yourself to miss this opportunity.



#### ❖ THE BOTTOM LINE ❖

The biggest struggle in leading a frum life is accepting the fact that each one of us has the yoke of *avodas* Hashem placed upon us, and there is absolutely no choice but to accept it. In fact, the only choice we have is to ask what is expected of us as *avdei* Hashem and how we can fulfill our role in the best possible way. While we are called a 'good Jew' if we fulfill *mitzvos* from the sense of obligation, Hashem ultimately wishes us to serve him *mitoch simcha ve'tuv levav*. When we do *mitzvos*, learn Torah or are עול מלכות שמים we should do it with *simcha*, *ratzon* and *pride*! This coming week, instead of saying or thinking “I want to do whatever pleases me,” I am going to remember that Hashem took us out from under the yoke of Pharaoh, and we are now *avdei* Hashem. I will choose one *mitzvah* that is a little challenging for me, and make a repeated effort in fulfilling the *mitzvah* until I feel its sweetness. I will try to reach the point where I can say, “Thank You Hashem for giving me עול מלכות שמים,” and feel truly fortunate to be a *frumme* Yid who has *mitzvos*.