



IS YOUR ENTERTAINMENT KOSHER?

MITZVAH OBSERVANCE AS AN IMPOSITION?

Today's subject, to some people, is going to be a sensitive one. Most subjects that are sensitive to people are usually subjects in which people are challenged by the topic. For example, if we'll speak about the importance of giving *tzedakah* and you're a person who is not into *tzedakah*, and *tzedakah* is not your strong point, that's going to be a sensitive subject for you.

Today's subject is a subject that a lot of people are sensitive to because it addresses a dynamic in a person's life that not everybody is aware of; and even if you are aware of it, you don't think about it and you don't focus on it and the parameters are not so clear. *Tzedakah*, you know you give your *ma'aser*, you give your *chomesh* and you're good to go. If you give less than that you didn't give enough. You give more than that, *tavo alecha brachah*. But there are subjects that are not so clear.

We all know that our role in this world, in our life, is to be a *shomer Torah umitzvos*. Observing *mitzvos*, however, is not just something that a person 'also does.' That's where the sensitivity of the subject touches a raw nerve because living in America under the *hashpa'ah* of America and society at large, our observance of *mitzvos*, at best, is something that we accept as a reality of life because we're Yidden, and at worst, we look at it as an imposition on our lives. It hampers our freedom in many areas of our life: what you wear, when you wear, how you go, where you go, when to go. It gets in the way of people's lives. Those kinds of people are not observing Torah and *mitzvos* in the way Hashem meant it to be.

ובחקתיים לא תלכו THE MESSAGE OF

In the *parshah* of *Acharei Mos* (Vayikra 18:1-3), Hashem tells Moshe דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם, tell Klal Yisrael אני ה' אלקיכם. Rashi says that means remind them אני הוא שאמרתי בסיני, I am the One who said at Sinai, אנכי ה' אלקיכם וקבלתם עליכם מלכותי, remember you were *mekabel* upon yourselves My *malchus*. You accepted to live with Me, by My dictates, by My direction that I would direct you. מעתה קבלו גזירותי, now accept My *gezeiros* that may be sometimes challenging to you, you may not understand them, but they are My *gezeiros*.

The *passuk* then goes on to say as follows. כמעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה, like the behavior, of the people in Mitzrayim in which you had dwelled for so many years, לא תעשו, do not do. וכמעשה ארץ כנען, like the behavior of the people in Eretz Canaan which is Eretz Yisrael אשר אני, now accept My *gezeiros* that may be sometimes challenging to you, you may not understand them, but they are My *gezeiros*.

So the question is obvious. Once it says you don't follow the behavior of the Mitzri'im and you don't follow the behavior of the people from Eretz Canaan, why does it say ובחקתיים לא תלכו? What is the message in ובחקתיים לא תלכו? What is added? Once it covers "all the actions of Eretz Mitzrayim you shall not do," what is included in ובחקתיים לא תלכו?

Rashi poses the question in the name of *Chazal*.¹ מה הניח הכתוב שלא אמר *Chazal*,¹ the *passuk* refers to *ma'asim* that are not terrible *ma'asim*. They're not things that are obviously bad. They're not *aveiros*. But it's behavior which *goyim* do. What is that? *Nimosos shelahen*, these are the behaviors, the conduct, the *minhagim* that the *goyim* established for themselves that are called *chukoseihem*. Their *chukim*. Why? Because they are דברים החקוקין להם, they are things that each nation establishes for themselves and they're like *chukim*. You know why they're like *chukim*? Because they don't necessarily have a rhyme or a reason why they're done. They're just done because that is the culture of this country, of this people. כגון, for example טרטיאות, theaters where people gather together to watch shows, and אצטדיונות, stadiums where people come to watch animals fighting or people fighting, boxing matches, wrestling matches, fighting with bears, with alligators.

NOT AN INTRINSIC SIN, BUT CAN BE

People have a hard time accepting this because you're not transgressing a direct *aveirah* by doing any of these things. Now, there are some people that are not comfortable watching humans fight with animals. Let's say bullfighting. They think it's *tza'ar ba'alei chaim*. They're animal lovers. They don't like to see animals being abused. We all grew up with the famous circus of Barnum and Bailey. I don't know how many years it was around, for over a hundred years, until some gooders got together and they decided that you have to respect elephants more. So, instead of giving elephants a little *kavod* and having them jump around and everybody clap for them, they decided to put them out in the pasture and they closed up the circus. But there are *chukim*. You have to know the fact of the matter is that there is behavior that *goyim* do, and that's *chukoseihem*. They are things that are not necessarily *mekulalim*. They're not terrible actions per se. Yet the Torah says ובחקתיים לא תלכו. You're not allowed to do their *chukim*.

DROP YOUR STANDARDS AFTER ONE NIGHT

Today, we live in a world where we're so *mushpa* from America, it's unbelievable. Rav Elchonon Wasserman z"l, after returning from his last trip to America, told the following story. The first night he was in America, he was in a hotel, and the guy brought him a coffee with milk. He declined. He said, "I made a *kabalah* that in America I don't touch milk. There's a big problem with *chalav Yisrael*. I don't want to get into any problems." It was one of the things he was *makpid* on. He didn't eat meat, and other things either. The guy said, "Okay." He gave him a coffee without the milk.

The next morning, the fellow brought him coffee with milk again. Rav Elchonon said, "Do you mind? You forgot. But last night I told you that I was *mekabel* not to drink milk in America." And the guy with the straightest of faces said, "Rebbi, that was before you slept a night in America. By me it was *barur*, I was certain that after one night of sleeping in America that *kabalah* is going to be by the wayside."

¹ ובחקתיים לא תלכו. מה הניח הכתוב שלא אמר? אלא אלו נימוסות שלהן - דברים החקוקין להם - כגון טרטיאות ואצטדיונות, רבי מאיר אומר, אלו דרכי האמורי שמנו חכמים (שם):

It's such a telling thing it's unbelievable! That's what the *koach of hashpa'ah* is. This innkeeper in America understood that. This *chalav Yisrael* business, in America you don't keep it anymore.

GETTING BENT UP OVER CHALAV AKUM

Today, we live in a different era. When I grew up it was *taka* hard sometimes to get *chalav Yisrael* in certain food items. In the New York area you could always get milk. I don't remember a time you couldn't get milk that was *chalav Yisrael*. But again, candies and ice cream, there was a time it was hard to find it made with *chalav Yisrael*. That a kid should grow up without ice cream is like being a deprived child! This is abuse! It's unheard of! There was no *safeik* that *chalav Yisrael* had to fall by the wayside. There was no *shaylah*, *chalav Yisrael* had to fall away, because a kid growing up without ice cream is going to be dysfunctional!

I asked my grandfather, "Zeide, did you have ice cream when you were a kid?" My zeide told me he had butter. I said, "What do you mean?" He *mamash* told me a *meshugene zach*. He said they used to go and get a cone with a scoop of butter. I said, "Zeide, that's disgusting!" He said, "We thought it was great!" Then it changed a little bit. They put a little salt on it. A little sugar on it. I guess that's where butter pecan came from. It's a residue from the old way.

You go to a lot of places and *chalav Yisrael* is not so accepted. You don't see it. It's shocking. This is all the *hashpa'ah* of America. And you have people today who are so far gone, they're so toasted that they don't even begin to understand, "What's so terrible with *chalav stam*?!" Of course, they always hang it on Rav Moshe's *teshuvah* about *chalav Yisrael*... I think if Rav Moshe would have known what people would have said in his name, he would have never answered any *teshuvah* about *chalav Yisrael* because everybody just hangs it on Rav Moshe. Dump it on Rav Moshe. They forget that Rav Moshe wrote other things too. In the *zelbe teshuvah*, Rav Moshe writes if you have a *yeshivah*, wherever it may be, and it will cost you a lot of money to get *chalav Yisrael* and the not *chalav Yisrael* is much cheaper and it will be a big *hefsed mamon*, you should still get *chalav Yisrael*. People forgot that *shtikel Torah* from Rav Moshe. That they don't mention. He says it's okay for *cholim*. So people say we're all *cholim*. You're *choleh* for *chalav akum*? You're not a *choleh* for *chalav akum*.

Today, it's so accepted.

I met a guy in Lakewood recently who told me he eats *chalav akum*. I said, "Are you *meshuga*? You live in Lakewood! *Chalav akum* in Lakewood?! How far gone are you?" A *shtick goy*, that's what it is. What's the *pshat*? He lost his sensitivity. Maybe he never had the sensitivity. He never gained that sensitivity. He doesn't even begin to see what's wrong with it.

OUT OF OUR WORLD OF ENTERTAINMENT

The Torah tells us there's a concept called *בחקיהם לא תלכו*. Now, let's see what *chukoseihem* are. *Chukoseihem* are things that express who a nation is. Every nation has their own culture. Every nation is different. Their essence, their view of things, their temperament is different. Their *teva* is different. People are different. Not everybody is the same just because they're human beings. The Europeans are different and other countries are different. They're all different. And people in life develop what's called 'behavior that doesn't have any rationale.'

One of the most common behaviors you find in people is entertainment. You have what's called 'down time.' In the history of the world, it was also a *chelek chashuv* of people's lives, and the more *chashuv* the person was, the more into it he was in these types of behaviors. The richer you were, the more cultural entertainment you had. The *pashute* people had simple entertainment. They had different *chukim* that were developed based on their personalities.

For example, if you grew up in America, you grew up with baseball. There's nothing to talk about. Baseball is like the *alef beis* of an American. It's what every kid does. You play baseball. You talk about baseball. You live baseball. Football also. You talk football. You live football. You go to Europe. What do they play? They don't play baseball there. They don't even play football. They call it football but it's really soccer. They play soccer. And it's a religion over there. You go to Eretz Yisrael, soccer there is *mamash 'oneg Shabbos*.' Any time your kids go on the street, they've got to kick that ball around. That's what you do. You live it and you eat it. I learned in Canada for a few years, it was *mamash* a religion - ice hockey. Every kid had his little *shtecken* (stick) over there. They used to wait for the snow. The *yeshivah* was located on a cul-de-sac, a dead-end street, and everybody used to go out there and get dressed up in all '*shemoneh begadim*.' You wear all these kinds of things for your knees and for your elbows and you go and you *klap* this little puck on the ice. A *meshugas she'ein kamoso*. But everybody does it religiously! That's what they do. And it's all the nature of people that develop these things, and everybody buys into it and this becomes their '*chukim*'.

When you go to Spain, they have bullfighting there. People go from America to Spain to watch the bullfighting and to be part of it. I remember I met a Yid whom I made *frum*. He told me he met his wife there. He said, "I went to the bullfights. I went for a couple of years." The bulls used to chase you. You used to run from the bulls. He said he saw some people get killed. "Usually people just got wounded, but I saw people get killed," he told me. He met his wife over there. She became a *goyores*, and then he was in Cleveland and became *frum*. Today, he lives in Eretz Yisrael and his wife is a big teacher of Yahadut. If someone wants to go through the conversion process, she's like the *rebbetzin* for that type of person.

This is how people are. You say, "It's very interesting. That's very nice." You understand? Does anybody ever think that there's something wrong with playing baseball? No. No one thinks about it. I remember the time I discovered something wrong with it. My *rebbe* (Rav Meir Halevi Soloveichik) explained it to me. One time, I was thinking of playing ball. Someone told me, "I don't think you can play ball in Yerushalayim." I said, "Why not?" He said, "No one plays ball in Yerushalayim." "What am I doing wrong? Am I being *mechallel* the *kedushah shel Shabbos*? I'm not playing on Shabbos." Friday afternoon I wanted to play a little ball. What's the big deal? I decided I'm going to ask my *rebbe* about it.

NO FOOTBALL IN YERUSHALAYIM

I remember when I asked my *rebbe* this question, I remember I could see the pain in his face. I could see the thought, that *shrek*, "This is the *talmid* I have to deal with. The guy is clueless. The guy is asking me to play ball in Yerushalayim." Of course, he didn't say anything like that. He was very nice to me. He gave me a whole *shiur* how one of the *milchamos* for the *kedushah* of Yerushalayim was made over sports. How it is one of the great influences that the modern people, the Tzionim, Mizrachnikim and the *frier* brought, and how they wanted to introduce Eretz Yisrael to the concept of sports. Before that, Eretz Yisrael didn't know what sports was. The most they knew about sports was swinging a chicken around your head once a year Erev Yom Kippur. That was the only 'sport' they had. More than that, they didn't know about it. All of a sudden they brought these new sports and they fought *milchamos*, he told me, in Yerushalayim.

He told me, "If you have to play in Yerushalayim itself, don't do it," because that's going too far. He made it sound like there were wars. "Blood was spilled on this *inyan*. It has no *makom* in Yerushalayim. But out of Yerushalayim, you can do it quietly, without publicity."

But he was *masbir*, “Did you ever hear of a *yiddishe zach* of a Yid playing sports? Have you ever heard about them playing sports in Europe, in Chevron? Have you ever heard that in Slabodka they were playing sports? Have you ever heard of that in Telz?”

I remember growing up hearing they always went on *dacha* (i.e. countryside vacation home). That you always heard about it. *Dacha*. You heard about vacations in the summer. This guy went to Pologne. This guy went here. They went to hot baths. They went to the mountains. They went to the water. That they did. But you’ve never heard of such a *zach* of playing sports. I heard, exercise, taking walks, daily exercise, daily walks I heard of, but not sports. It was never part of the worldview of a Jew.

BOXING, BOWLING...

That’s what the Torah tells us, בחקתיהם לא תלכו. *Goyim* came up with these activities because this is their nature. Their nature brings out the concept of sport. You have wild sports. You have very crazy sports, extreme sports. You have extreme fighting. Lately, I haven’t heard about it so much, but when I grew up, everybody was into boxing. I remember my dentist wanted to be ‘*mekarev*’ me, so he bought me a pair of gloves. I remember I was a very good client. I would go every week to the dentist. I was the last patient and afterwards we would both put on the gloves and he would teach me how to fight with gloves. He said, “Sruly, these are your gloves.” It’s like, *ke’eilu*, I’m giving you a *matanah le’asid lavo* over here.

People got into that and that’s what people did. Then there’s bowling. Everyone went bowling. Every *goy* went bowling. My father never let me go bowling. My father told me bowling alleys were dens of iniquity. On the way to *shul* we used to pass a bowling alley and we used to hear bum! Bum! I said, “Ta, what are they doing down there?” It was a basement. You went downstairs to go in. He said, “It’s a place you don’t want to go. You don’t want to go there.” I remember one time I walked down the stairs to peek in. I wanted to see what was going on. I couldn’t imagine what I was going to see over there. Then one day, I went to a guy’s house on Sunday for a playdate. His father was a *rav*. He said, “Today, we’re going bowling.” I knew I shouldn’t have gone. I knew it was the worst thing in the world. I felt like I was *mamash* being over on *kol haTorah kulah* over there. But he was a *rav* and he was taking his kids. A *talmid* of my grandfather. I figured it can’t be that bad. So I went bowling with them. It was *gornisht*. I came home and I said, “Ta, I went bowling.” I was shocked that he brought me up in such a fashion that bowling is a *goyishe zach*. But you have to understand, this is part of *chukoseihem*. They have their own leagues. They have their own balls. They *shlep* around these big balls. They have special shoes. You have a special bag. You have a special thing for the fingers. They’re always polishing their bowling balls. It’s like a whole religion. That’s what it is. And it becomes a whole *metzius* and people don’t realize, it changes your whole view. Your whole essence of your *Yahadus*.

Hashem also has *chukim*. Hashem has a lot of *chukim*. Hashem who is the king of *chukim* says, “When I gave you My Torah, I gave you *anochi*. I gave you over who I am. You’re *kedoshim* כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי. I transmitted to you that *kedushah* and I gave it to you.”

I tell people that today, it’s gotten terrible; every *frum* kid wants to belong to a Yid’l league. Not little league. They made it kosher. They called it “Yid’l league” with a *lamed*. They even put a big *lamed*, so it looks like it’s Jewish, and now every kid wants to get his uniform. All the *goyim* have their football uniforms and their baseball uniforms. The guy carries his bats and his balls. These parents, these nice parents who are mistaken, take their kids and what they do is they make them into *shtick goyim*. They tell them, “You’re truly American. No, we keep *mitzvos* too,” instead of transmitting to them what’s underlying *Yahadus*.”

FRUM JEW WITH A GOYISH CULTURE

Rav Yerucham writes it’s possible that a person could be a complete *shomer Torah umitzvos* and his whole *chukim*, his whole culture, be completely *goyish*. His whole *ma’amad*, his whole *geshtalt*, his whole enjoyment, his whole thing that he lives for, is for the *chukim* of the *goyim*. That’s what he lives for. You understand, he says, how far he is from Torah!? *Rav Yerucham* writes in one of his *ma’amarim* that it’s *barur* that when it says בַּחֲקֵיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ it means *kadur regel*, football, which we call soccer, but it doesn’t make a difference.

You don’t realize how people become sold and bamboozled. *Frum* Yidden, nice people. They can’t get it out of their *kishkes*. They never grow up and become Jewish. I told somebody, “If you didn’t mature, and you still act like a baby, that doesn’t bother me so much. But if you never became Jewish, and you’re not developing your *Yahadus* and becoming a *shtick* Yid, that’s where your problem lies.” The guy that’s eating *chalav Akum* because, “What’s wrong with it?” The guy that’s playing football because, “What’s wrong with it?” The guy that follows football - that person is lacking the most basic understanding of what *Yiddishkeit* is. *Yiddishkeit*, Torah and *mitzvos*, creates the persona of a Jew. Torah and *mitzvos* creates the mindset, the worldview of a Jew. The worldview of a Jew is totally different from the worldview of a *goy*. The *hashpa’ah* that the Torah is concerned about that we get from the *goyim*, is this *hashpa’ah*.

If you take a look at the *Sfas Emes* in this *parshah*, he says that the *ikar* message Hashem is conveying is not that we shouldn’t behave like *goyim* and do *devarim asurim*. The Torah is conveying to us the awareness that the behavior of a *Yisraeli* is totally different from the behavior of a *nochri*. You have to know that the behavior of a *Yisraeli* should be completely Torah oriented. It should be sourced from Hashem and the Torah. The reason why Yidden don’t play sports is not because the *Chafetz Chaim* wasn’t a sportsman type of guy. He was a sitter. He liked to sit all day long. No. The reason he was a sitter is because he had a lot of *zerizus* in him and a lot of energy - but it was with a Torah perspective. We’re not talking over here about doing things *Ieshem Shamayim*. We’re not talking about living here on a higher level. We’re talking on a basic level to understand, to develop one’s relationship with Hashem and His Torah. A person could *mamash* be a total *shomer Torah umitzvos* but his *penimiyus*, his whole inside completely reflects the world view of *anshei Mitzrayim*. It’s something to think about because it’s reflected in everything. A person has to ask himself, “Am I willing to face it?”

Especially if a person grew up in a modern background or in a non-observant background or his father or mother came from those kinds of backgrounds, he has to understand that he’s automatically going to be tainted. Becoming *frum* and accepting *Yahadus* is the easy part. But to make *Yiddishkeit* part of your *penimiyus*, that is where the great difficulty lies. This is something that we have to educate ourselves about. I told somebody, “If you would listen to a football game once in a while, knowing that you’re *goyish*, that would be a *halbe tzarah*. But when you listen to a football game and you think you’re doing a *davar tov*, because I could be doing a lot worse, or you’re doing it because you are drawn to this kind of thing - then you are somebody who is challenged in your *Yahadus*.”

TWISTED WORLDVIEWS

The *emes* is, people who are ‘into sports’ are people who live for sports. That becomes what they live for. They think about it all the time. They plan their games. They plan their life around their games. They plan their life around their sports. It’s unbelievable! I know of a *yeshivah* where the *rebbe’im* used to have a basketball game once a week. I went to speak to them and I said, “You know, it’s a real *bizayon*. I don’t care if you play basketball. But it’s a *rebbe’im’s* basketball game?! You’re supposed to be the people they look up to. You have a weakness, you like to play basketball, so play basketball. I don’t care. But there’s no such thing as a *rebbe’im’s* basketball game!”

I remember once in Cleveland, they put in a kosher hotdog stand in the arena. The first game after they had it, *rabbanim* went, *frumme* Yidden went to the game, and they ate there. I met a *rav* who wore a homburg and I had a lot of respect for this fellow. I said to the guy, "What did you go for?" He said, "Do you know what kind of *kiddush Hashem* it was?" I said, "What? A *kiddush Hashem*?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "Do you know, to have a kosher hotdog stand in Cleveland Ohio, do you know what kind of *kiddush Hashem* that is?" I said, "Could you please explain to me how exactly is Hashem's name being *meskadesh* here? The whole ballpark thing is an antithesis of Yiddishkeit and you're standing there." And he wore his homburg at the game. He told me, "I wore my homburg." He thought he was making a *kiddush Hashem*. That's how people are.

CHOOSING PRIZES WISELY

The school wants to give kids a prize because they learned well. They say, "We'll take you to a baseball game." Take them boating, instead! Take them on a hike in the woods. Find a real high mountain you can take them up on. It takes a long time to get there. You can do that. There's nothing wrong with hiking. At least on the top of that mountain you can think about and praise Hashem a little bit! Can you do that at a basketball game?! It's so *pashut*, *rabbosai*! It's mind boggling that some many well-meaning people don't see this point!

ADDICTION TO THE SPORTS CULTURE

There are *yiddische zachen* and there are *goyishe zachen* and that's the thing people are drawn to. If you ask anybody who is honest with you about his sports, it's like a cellphone. You become addicted to it. I know people who swore off sports. They couldn't stop calling their friends on a daily basis. I said to one of these people, "What are you doing?" He said, "First, I'm finding out what the scores were. Then second, we have to 'talk in learning.' We have to talk over the game to see who did what. What was the play? What was not the play? What was the *geshmake* play? What were the foolish mistakes the guys made." It's *pashut* like guys talk about *yeshivische zachen*, *lehavdil*. What was the *chiddush*? Who said a *shtus*? Who didn't say a *shtus*? Who said a good *vort* in the *sugya*? He told me, "I'm sick." I said, "Do you want to get better?" He said, "I'm not sure." He *taka* wasn't sure he wanted to get better. I told him, "You're sick." I don't care if a guy looks at the game and knows he's sick. If you're bound to it, you have such a *kesher* to it, and you can't become *patur* from it, then you have to know you're not well.

Let's say a guy thought that bowling was *mamash* a part of his life. The guy is losing Yiddishkeit. If a guy just wants to waste his time going bowling, *nu meilah halbe tzarah*. But the guy who is convinced this is what a Chol Hamoed is, this is what a *simchas Yom Tov* is, this kind of behavior is born of a serious misconception.

HASHEM'S ESSENCE IN OUR CULTURE

People don't realize this. They don't think about this. The Torah tells us *ושמרתם את חוקותי*, Hashem says, "These are My *chukim*." Ask yourself, "Does it look like this behavior is the *teva* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu?" Hashem says, *אנא נפשי כתיבת יהבית* (Shabbos 105a), when I gave you My Torah, I gave you My essence. I gave you My instincts. I programmed you with My essence. Are you reflecting that? Are you *davuk baHashem Elokeichem*? That's very difficult in today's lifestyle, especially if the father is like that, then the kids are like that. The kids know what the father is crazy about.²

WATCHING FOOTBALL IN THE CLOSET

I once had a *talmid* who was a football freak. I gave him a *shmooze*. He said, "Rebbi, I hear what you're saying, but I don't think you've got it right." I said, "What about your kids?" He said, "My kids don't know what I do." "How is that possible?" He said, "When I watch my football games, I go into my bedroom. I have a walk-in closet. I go into the closet, I close the door, I sit on the floor and I listen to that game for a couple of hours." I told him, "I want to make a bet with you. This Friday night, I want you to pose the question." I told him, "I'm going to have your wife ask the question."

I called his wife up. I said, "Friday night, I want you to ask the following question at the table: What does Tatty like to do best?" This guy would learn with me. He was involved with me. He was involved with the *yeshivah*. "What does Tatty like to do best?" With *peh echad* they answered, "Watch football!" The guy said, "When do I watch football?!" "Every Monday night," they said. "How do you know?" "You lock yourself in your room." They were trying to tell him, we don't think you're learning *kabbalah* over there or you're learning Tosfos. You understand? We asked him, "What do you do in the room?" They heard 'Mondays' and 'football.' So all these *chachamim*, the kids are smarter than this guy was. I said, "Do you understand what happened? You're *mechanech* your kids that this is a *zach* you're *moser nefesh* for. That's bad news."

DON'T GIVE YOUR BAGGAGE TO YOUR KIDS

I told another guy who was a *ba'al teshuvah*, "You have a lot of baggage you're carrying with yourself. Don't give that baggage to your kids."

WHISKY AS A CULTURE

I remember there was a *tekufah* I was working with *bachurim* and alcoholism. It became a plaque. I remember the first time I was in a certain place. A father came to me and said, "Can you talk to my child. He's getting into alcohol." I said, "Sure." I sat down with the kid. I said, "Where in the world did you get the *musag* to drink alcohol? I grew up in America. I never had the *yetzer hara* to drink alcohol. Where did you get it from?" After going back and forth, he said, "My father has a safe. My father has a locked cabinet. He doesn't have gold in there. Not silver. What he keeps in this thing is his whisky, under lock and key. And on occasion when he comes home from work he takes his key out and unlocks the cabinet and he sits there. He pours a *lechaim*." Ahh! He sits down with his *yarmulke* that he put on a couple of years ago. Maybe he's wearing *tzitzis* too. He sits down. This is how you relax. It's a way of life. The second they walk into the house the first thing they do is they pour themselves a drink. They go over to the whisky bar. I never saw it in any Jewish house. I never saw a whisky minibar, where you pour whisky. And on TV, every time a guy came home, he's got to pour the whisky. Pour the whisky, pour the whisky, pour the whisky. What's going on over here? Everybody is pouring whisky over here. This is what *goyim* do!

This father came from a *frier* background. He was a whisky man and he taught his kids. "I have to keep it under lock and key. My *sefarim* I don't keep under lock and key. I don't lock my *sefarim* up. This I keep locked up." So you know what the kid did? The kid says to me, "I got the key. It's no big deal. I knew where my father kept the key. My father was out of the house. I opened the thing and I started drinking." Finally after speaking to the kid for some time, the father comes in. He says, "What did you find out?" I said, "I discovered you're the source of his being an alcoholic. You taught him a very important *chashivus* in life, a very fundamental enjoyment is liquor." I told him, "You never became 100% *frum*, because liquor is not part of a Yiddische focus."

² רבי יחזקאל דידיה אמר "אנכי" נוטריקון "אנא נפשי כתיבת יהבית", רבנן אמרי אמירה נעימה כתיבה יהיבה, איכא דאמרי אנכי למפרע יהיבה כתיבה נאמין אמריה. (רש"י אנכי - מדלא אמר אני; אנא נפשי - אני בעצמי; אמירה - שהיא נעימה)

I'm not saying there were no Polische Yidden, who, after *shacharis*, had marble cake and a little *bronfen*. They'd take a little shot. Nobody drank up a *gantze* bottle and no one ever thought this was a Jewish value. This was their coffee. Strange coffee, but this was their coffee. I used to watch them every day, these *altere Europische mentschen* drink up these little shots and a little kokosh cake, a little marble cake. They went to work after that. But no one, from that, is going to learn to have a *yetzer hara* to drink.

WINE AS A CULTURE

But in America, alcohol is a *davar chashuv*. A *davar chashuv meod*. That's what happens. The same thing with wines. You know how people go into the wine business? Wines, *pshhh*. It's not a Yiddische *zach*. I don't care what name you call it. It's a *goyishe zach* to be a *shoseh yayin*. It's going to be a *nes* if the next *dor* is not going to be a bunch of winos. In Yiddische homes you're going to find, instead of the kid bringing in a gun with bullets, he's going to bring a bottle of wine in his briefcase. That's what he's going to do, so during recess he can drink a little bit. That's what he's going to want to do.

GUNS AS A CULTURE

People don't understand. Somebody asked me once what's wrong with guns? Today, we're a very big gun society. By *goyim*, having guns is a religion. I'm not talking about gangsters. Fine *goyim*. Upstanding *goyim*. They live for guns. They have a gun rack, ammo, and different things. All kinds of special things on the wall and in a cabinet, this way, that way, little ones, big ones, automatic, semi automatic, bump stock. They have all kinds. Today, we live in a world that is like this. What is it for? For safety? No, it's not for safety. It's because that's what a *goy* is. A *goy* lives by guns. It's a *goyishe zach*. It's not a *yiddische zach*.

I was talking to a young man recently. I was trying to find out what his vices are. I said, "What do you live for?" He told me one of the things he does is he goes to camps with his guns and he puts on a show of guns for camps. I said, "Where do you get the guns? Where do you have access to guns? You're a Yid!" He starts giving me a whole *shiur* about safety. I said, "You have your guns for safety? For that you need one little gun. You don't need twenty-five guns for that!" And to go around to camps? What's the purpose? What's the *shaychus* to that? That's a *goyishe zach*, completely *goyish*.

That's תלכו לא תלכו. We have to become aware of this. We have to educate ourselves. You have to tell your kids it's not a Jewish *zach*.

IN AWE OF AVI MORI

Every time I think about it, and about my father, I stand in awe of him. In awe. When I grew up, I thought my father didn't know anything about baseball. I used to talk all excited about baseball. He used to laugh. I said, "Ta, you're out of the world. You don't know what's going on. Baseball is where it's at." My father was an expert in baseball *she'ein kamoso*. My father was on the radio when he was 11 years old, he was a trivia expert. And I didn't know about it. I found out about that when I was older.

I was once visiting one of my uncles. He said to my father, "So who are you following these days?" I interjected, "Following what?" "What team are you following?" I said, "My father doesn't know anything about sports." My uncle starts to laugh! He takes me to a room in his house and he has these old, yellow newspaper clippings all over the wall. I look, and I see my father's English name! Pictures of my father in the newspapers - he was a trivia expert whiz! People used to call him up and try to *shlug* him up to see if he doesn't know a guy's sports records. I said "Ta, you knew about sports?!" He never told us.

My father never ate pizza. He liked pizza. He never ate pizza. He never ate grilled food, barbecued food. He used to smell it sometimes, when a neighbor used to do it. He would go like this (sniffing the smell). I asked my mother, "What's the *pshat*?" She said, "He likes grills." I said, "We never see it here." "That's why you don't see it. Because he grew up in America." This was an American pastime, grilling time. That's what you do. He was *oker* (removed) it from his *penimiyus*. I was blown away! He could have told us, "You don't know a thing about baseball. You're going to tell me about baseball, kid?! Let me teach you a lesson or two about baseball." But he was *oker* it from within himself.

A *mentsch* has to know בחוקותיהם לא תלכו. That's what Hashem wants from us.

IN CONCLUSION

Rashi tells us that the seemingly extra words of ובחוקותיהם לא תלכו in the pasuk, which had already warned us not to copy the actions of Egyptians and Cannanites, include a new prohibition against copying the practices, such as theaters and stadiums, that the surrounding nations have established, as "*chukim*." These practices aren't necessarily *aveiros* in the conventional sense, but they bring out the non-Jewish, secular and sports cultures. Other examples include alcohol use, prevailing gun culture, etc. A Jew living in these countries and surrounded by these "*chukim*," can be completely *shomer Torah U'mitzvos* on the outside, yet behave in a non-Jewish fashion on the inside, by looking forward to and deriving inordinate enjoyment from these types of "pastimes" and entertainments, says R' Yerucham. Many people literally live for that. To begin the process of introspection and dealing with this issue, we need to ask ourselves: have we truly developed our Yiddishkeit yet? Have we grown up and matured and absorbed the dynamic of understanding of what Yiddishkeit is all about and how it is supposed to create a persona of a Jew, a mindset, a worldview guided by Torah's principles? Is our behavior truly Torah oriented? Does our *penimiyus* reflect the culture of the surrounding nations? Are we more excited to attend a baseball game on Chol Moed and find ourselves among the tens of thousands of screaming fans, or to take our family to a quiet nature preserve and enjoy the views, instead?