



פרשת וארא

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Consulting The Sages

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Part I. The Sage In Egypt

The Free Tribe

In this week's *sedrah*, we find that Moshe and Aharon were constantly coming into Pharaoh on a mission to have the Bnei Yisroel sent free. They would come into the palace delivering messages from Hashem, negotiating, and then they would walk out and go home. A few days later they would be back again with a new message, a new ultimatum. Again and again, back and forth, back and forth.

Now many people are surprised by this – and rightfully so – because why weren't Moshe and Aharon busy performing the tasks that Pharaoh's slave masters imposed on all the Bnei Yisroel? Who gave them a pass to have so much freedom, so much time off from work? What's that all about? Weren't all the Bnei Yisroel subjected to a program of hard labor?

And the truth is that it's an even bigger question because it wasn't only Moshe and Aharon – we know

(Shemos Rabbah 5) that the entire *shevet* of Levi was free! Isn't that a remarkable thing? We forget about that when we think about the 210 years of *shibud Mitzrayim*. The tribe of Levi was never enslaved; they continued to live their own regular lives in Mitzrayim. I suppose they suffered some run-of-the-mill gentile persecution. I'm sure that epithets were hurled at them. Maybe some physical attacks too; I imagine they had stones thrown at them every so often. But still, as much as the Shevet Levi suffered from the Egyptians, it's an interesting fact of our history in Mitzrayim that this one family was not *meshubad*; they weren't subject to Pharaoh's system of hard labor.

A Surprising Answer

And so the question arises, how did that happen? How could such a thing be? The Bnei Yisroel were one family after all. What was it that saved the Shevet Levi from all that trouble, all those years of slavery?

Now, listen to the answer because it might surprise you. The answer is that they had an old

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grandfather around, an old grandfather who was mean to them.

What was the story? When the Bnei Yisroel began to increase so Pharaoh began to worry and so he said to his people, his advisors, “We have to do something about this. Before we know it they’ll be swarming all over and **וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ**, the end will be that we’ll have to leave. It will become the land of the Hebrews and they’ll throw us out.”

The Smart Generation

Now, Pharaoh couldn't just come out and make a decree, “Stop having children” or something to that effect. It wouldn't work such a thing; the people in the ancient days were too smart for that. Today, in a stupid generation, so stupid ideas can take hold, and therefore ZPG is the style. That's *roshei teivos* for Zero Population Growth, which means to stop having children. They made a big fuss in the world, a panic, that children are pollution. Every child uses up so much water and so much air, so much energy and fuel, and we have to do something about it. But in those days people had children; nobody thought otherwise. The old time Egyptians didn't reach the lunacy of today's gentiles.

And so Pharaoh came up with a plan to break the Bnei Yisroel down by means of heavy labor – they would become a tired people with no *koach*, no interest in having children. But he couldn't just say, “You must come. I want to enslave you.” To just enslave a people willy-nilly? The Bnei Yisroel weren't captives of war and Pharaoh wasn't a wild tyrant. He was a decent king who had regard for public opinion. What will they say in Egypt, among the populace? What would they say in other countries?

So he couldn't just come out one day and make them slaves; such a thing wouldn't work. And therefore he had to lead up to it gradually. **הָבָה** **נִתְחַכְמָה לּוֹ** means it was done with cunning. First he announced a new building campaign, a patriotic endeavor to establish big edifices that would be a glory to the Motherland and give a name to Egypt in the world. And they did; even to this day the

pyramids are associated with the glory of ancient Egypt. And so Pharaoh began by appealing to the patriotism of the citizens of Mitzrayim.

The Patriotic People

Now who volunteers first when it's a matter of showing loyalty to your country? The Bnei Yisroel. They were grateful for the haven that Egypt had given them in the time of famine. When their father Yaakov sought asylum in Egypt, Pharaoh had welcomed them and he gave them the land of Goshen. And therefore the Bnei Yisroel felt a debt of gratitude.

That's how it was here also until recently. Up until recently Jews were so happy with the country that they kissed the soil of America. Because they were fresh from Europe, they appreciated the freedom that this country gave them, and therefore in all patriotic things the Jews were first. When it came to war bonds the Jews had campaigns in the synagogues. Jews had American flags hanging from their homes.

Today already the climate has changed and it went out of style to be patriotic. Once the spirit of lunacy began to pervade America, all the values changed, but until recently being a good Jew meant you were *makir tov* to a country like America and you participated enthusiastically in all patriotic endeavors.

And in order to appeal especially to the Bnei Yisroel, Pharaoh said, “We are going to continue with the great work that was begun by your forefather Yosef, the Tzofnas Paneiach who led our country for so many years. The building plan that your great Yosef began, we're going to continue.”

Symbolism and Fanfare

Pharaoh even took a golden brick and hung it by a golden chain around his neck and with that he went forth to the people to let them know that the drive was on, a drive to build Egypt. Just like sometimes the governor comes when they're starting to build a new hospital or some other big

institution, and he has a spade and he gives a symbolic dig into the ground. Sometimes it's a little difficult; it's winter time and he has to break the hard earth, so with his foot on the spade he tries to knock it in. He does a little publicity work and it's photographed in all the newspapers.

And so Pharaoh came with a brick around his neck as a symbol of the program they were undertaking. And he encouraged the people, "We're all in this together! Everyone should come and take some clay and each one should mold a brick. Be builders!" he said. "And don't be knockers! People shouldn't criticize when things go wrong. Everybody should just lend a hand and do their fair share."

There were no photographers in those days but there was applause and speeches and there were honors. And everyone was excited to contribute a symbolic brick on that first day just like Pharaoh; they were happy that they had made a token contribution to the beginning of this great campaign.

And the Bnei Yisroel joined in. Why not? Nothing wrong! "We're building up our country, the country that's our home for now. It's only right!"

The Old Zeide

There was one person there however who didn't like the idea, somebody who said it's *not* right. There was one old man, a very elderly Jew, who was standing there watching everything unfold and he saw through the whole thing.

Who was that? And so listen now to the rest of the story. When the time had come to volunteer so the Shevet Levi also wished to volunteer like everybody else. They weren't any less *makir tov* than all the *shevatim*, but they possessed what no other *shevet* had. They had an old grandfather, an old patriarch. Levi ben Yaakov was still around. Levi was the last of the brothers to survive. All the brothers had already died out but Levi, the old patriarch, was still around. And he had the old wisdom that he imported from '*der alte heim*'. He wasn't a real Egyptian. He still spoke with an accent; he couldn't speak Egyptian perfectly. And more

importantly, he didn't have Egyptian brains on him. He had an old time Jewish brain and old-time Jewish traditions and he saw through it.

And so, the old *zeide* spoiled their fun. When they wanted to go out together with all the people of the country so he was mean to them. "Don't go. Don't mingle with the *umos haolam*. It's not healthy for you to fraternize with gentiles. I want you all to stay at home and skip the whole thing."

This Booklet Is Written In Goyish

It's like the family that has living with them the old *zeide* who came here from Europe. He was in the *yeshivos* in Europe, in the *shtiebelach* in Europe and so he has a different spirit, the flavor of the old-time Yiddishkeit. And when he hears the children talk English he pipes up, "*Kinderlach*, don't speak *goyish*; we don't talk in a gentile language."

Many years ago, that was a given – Jews don't speak a gentile language. When I was in Europe, I spent a little time in a small town. Nobody spoke Lithuanian. If you had to do business with them, you spoke their language but otherwise nobody spoke anything but Yiddish. Even the *reshaim*. There were plenty of *reshaim* in those days already. Before World War II there were plenty of *reshaim* among the Jews but even the *reshaim* didn't speak a gentile language. If a Jew spoke a gentile language, it was a *bizayon*. And this old *zeide*, he lets the children know what he thinks.

So the children protest: "But Zeidy, this is America. We have to know English."

"Know shmo," Zeidy says. "Whatever it is, you don't have to speak *goyish* in the house."

That's what happened in Egypt too. "But Zeidy Levi! Everybody is doing it!" And the old patriarch said, "Everybody *shmevrybody*, that's why you shouldn't go. Whatever everybody else does, you shouldn't do.

The Elder's Opposition

"I don't like the idea," Levi said. "All of a sudden, they're going to build up Egypt? Yosef Hatzaddik

already established enough granaries. If they needed more, wouldn't Yosef have made more? Are you going to cover the whole land with granaries? How much grain does Egypt produce even in the good years? I don't like the idea. It smells rotten – there's something behind this.”

Now, the other *shevatim*, the younger fellows, they didn't have any old grandfather to be mean to them. And so they ridiculed Levi's opposition. I'm sure they didn't say it with their mouths but they were thinking: “Look at this old fashioned fellow; he just doesn't understand. He's still living in the past, in the old country, with his tribal ways. In Canaan they didn't know of granaries. This is something new in modern times. You have to look ahead to the future. You have to plan ahead; not like you lived when you were in Canaan. You lived from hand to mouth and whatever grew that year you ate, and then the next year you starved. But the Egyptians, they know what they're doing. They have heads on their shoulders. After all they're organized, they're civilized, they're cultured. They are more advanced.”

And so all the patriots – I don't mean to ridicule patriotism – like I said earlier it's a good *middah* to be a patriot. But not against the advice of the Sages. If the *roshei yeshivah* say “Be a patriot,” then be one. But when they tell you “Watch out,” then it's their advice we have to follow.

Part II. The Sage In Judea

Champion Of His People

Now, this brings us to the story of one of the great men we once had among us. There was an old sage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, who was one of the famous Gedolei Yisroel. In addition to the fact that he was one of the chief Torah sages – he was the Av Beis Din of the Sanhedrin – he was also the champion of the Jewish people in their disputations with the sectarians of all kinds.

In those disturbed days, after the *churban* Beis Hamikdash, a number of sects arose in the Am

Yisroel. The Christians were prominent among them but there were others too. And these sectarians, because of their hostility to the body of the Nation who remained loyal to the Sages, they had the practice of defaming their fellow Jews to the Roman government.

Now, when somebody was needed to be a defender of our people, so the Am Yisroel inevitably turned to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah. He was a man of quick mind and a ready tongue and he was courageous too. And he was so successful and adept in disputations that he became the one who stood up to defend the Am Yisroel against all their enemies.

Whenever the Nation had to be represented, it was Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah. The Gemara in Bechoros (8b) even tells us about how he traveled to Athens and he disputed with the Senate of Athens; he took on the Senate singlehandedly. He used to open his mouth and talk back to Romans, to Christians, to Gnostics, to every form of heretic. And because of that he acquired the title – among the gentiles too – **חֲכִימָא דִּיהוּדָאִי**, *the wise man of the Jewish people*.

The Losers Are Frustrated

Now, the fact is that when the *apikorsim* used to go into dispute with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah he made them into idiots. Usually, that was the result; they couldn't keep up with his quick wit and sharp retorts – besides for the fact that the truth was on his side. And he was no patsy either, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah. He would ridicule their foolish interpretations and shame them.

Now, the Gemara tells us that one time Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah was involved in a disputation with a certain *min*, and he's described as speaking with an especial sharpness. There's a description there of how he showed up his opponent. And upon losing the argument, his opponent announced – I imagine he was frustrated – that Rabbi Yehoshua is an unpleasant person. And he quoted the following verse: **טוֹבָם כְּחֶדְק יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּסוּבָה** (Micha 7:4) which means as follows. **טוֹבָם**, *the best of*

them, כְּחֵרֶק, *are like thorns*. It means the best of the Jewish nation, their leaders, are thorny, That's their nature. יִשָּׂר, *the righteous ones*, מְמַסּוּבָה, *are like a fence of thistles*. He was complaining about his interlocutor, Rabbi Yehoshua: "Your pointed retorts are too sharp for me, too prickly and painful."

Now, that's true – Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah had to be a thorn when he was defending the Am Hashem, the Torah. He's not going to sit back and allow half-baked Jews or quarter-baked Jews or Jews in-name-only to uproot authentic Torah Judaism. But Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah looked into this verse and he saw another meaning.

Fence Of Thorns

You know, thorns have a purpose. Nothing in nature is useless and thorns have an important function. What is the function of a thorn bush? It is to protect fields so that animals should not come in. Before men invented barbed wire, they didn't go to the hardware store; they planted fences of thorns. It was a cheap and natural commodity and it meant that you have armed plants with daggers protecting your property.

A fence of thorns around your property, would keep your cows in or keep your cows out according to your desire. And also intruders. It's quite efficient; a thick hedge-wall of thorns is just as good as barbed wire.

That's what the sharp-witted Rabbi Yehoshua replied. He said, "The *mashal* is exact. The Sages are like thorns who protect our people. *Tovam kachedek* – that's the purpose of the good ones in the Am Yisroel. They are like a hedge of thorns to keep out the wrong influences and they keep in those who might stray out." And so when his opponent said to him, "You old Jews are like thorns" Rabbi Yehoshua said, "Ein hachi nami, it's true, and it's these thorns that save the Jewish nation."

It means that when our leaders are thorny – when they tell us no and no and they act as a thorn fence, not letting us stray from the straight path,

and not letting in the influences from the outside – and we are loyal to them, that's our success.

In every generation that's the job of the *Chachomim*; instead of flattering or even remaining silent against people who are veering off the beaten path of Torah tradition they'll be that thorn bush on the side of the path that won't let you move off to the side. You might try but you'll get a poke. Without the good ones who protect the people, there always are individuals who are going to attempt a sally into the outside world. There are always *frum* people who do risky things.

Canceling The Cheering Expedition

Last week a girl called me up and asked my advice about a question in *yichud*. She's in a group and they're going to a certain place of irreligious Jews, and she was worried about the *sheilah* of *yichud*, maybe it's not *kosher* to be in that house because you don't have enough men there, or whatever the technicality it is.

So I asked her, "Why do you go to such a house for Shabbos? What's your business there?"

She tells me she's going to cheer up a sick young man. "A *mitzvah*," she says.

I was thinking, "A girl, a *frum* girl, is going for Shabbos for the purpose of cheering up a sick young man and they're only worried about the *sheilah* of *yichud*? How do you cheer up a sick young man?!"

And so acting in a role of thorns – of course, I'm not one of the righteous ones, but a thorn I am anyhow – so I told her, "Nothing doing! You're worried about the wrong problems. A technicality of *yichud*?! Is that the problem here?"

And she obeyed. A *frum* girl, a Beis Yaakov girl, and she accepted the prick of the thorn. And she's only better off because of that. Better off in both worlds that she didn't go on that cheering expedition.

Televisions and Toilets

Now, it didn't take too much brains on my part to give her a poke but the really great ones, our Torah leaders, that's one of their jobs all the time –

to be a fence of thorns, to fence us in and to keep the outside influences outside. And therefore Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah said *tovam kechedek*, the good ones are like a fence of thorns.

And it's our job to want that. If you go only to places where you find smooth people who don't have thorns on them, so you'll lose out. Let's say you'll go to a big synagogue someplace out in a modern neighborhood where five hundred people come Shabbos morning. Why do they come? Because the man who speaks is not thorny. He's a pleasant kind of personality. He's affable. No thorns on him. So he'll never tell you that you must stop shaving with a razor, or that you must get rid of your television set.

A real rabbi tells you the truth, that if you have a television set, then you might as well forget about having a holy Jewish home. Why deceive yourself? It's just as possible to have a Jewish home with these machines in it as having a clean home with a pipe from your toilet bowl leading directly into the dining room. Every time you flush, the contents empty out on your dining room floor. And that's an understatement.

Peril In Midtown

And therefore, a fence of thorns is our salvation. We must keep the good ones home. They shouldn't stray. Outside of the fence there are lurking many perils. To go out on the search for the holy grail in Midtown seeking to buy a bargain – many times you're exposing yourself to perils. It's not so simple for a woman to be waltzing around in New York today. It's not so simple.

Things have happened unfortunately and people just close their eyes and say, "There was an accident." Three years ago something happened. A woman went shopping, a young woman. They took her to a wholesale place where she gets special prices and a tragedy happened in the elevator. An evil man followed her into the elevator and a tragedy took place. And after that tragedy she ended up losing her life too, unfortunately. He took her into

the basement there, in that building and he held her head in a furnace until she passed away.

And so I'll be a thorn to you and I'll tell you, "Jews beware! Jewish women especially. If you can keep out of Manhattan, do so. Manhattan today is teeming with crooks and with perverts, and they're experienced in performing crimes. And therefore, stay away from Manhattan if it's at all possible! If you have to go there to work, it can't be helped, but try to shop in your neighborhood. It pays to shop locally and lose money."

Beware Of The Office

Of course, if there is no alternative, it couldn't be helped, but otherwise wherever a woman ventures, she is risking. Even to go to work, so that her husband can learn in the kollel, it has to be done with *chochmah*, fenced in by tall and thick thorn bushes. It doesn't pay for a girl to ruin her soul for the sake of her kollel husband. Should a woman be in a place mixed with men? She should be among *chatzufim* and *reshaim*?! That's a very delicate question and you must exercise caution.

This I know from much experience. People call me up every day. My phone, my two phones, are ringing every day with questions, and I know what happens. Sometimes they do very terrible things to pious women in the offices, very fresh things. And the fact that the pious woman doesn't succumb is not enough. Because there remains a stain on her soul, however. So it doesn't pay. That's just my private advice, but it's built on solid experience. Don't mix. Don't mix!

And not only women, men. Men must beware of adverse environments. Now sometimes they can't help themselves. Men must make a living. But you must know if you're a school teacher in the public schools, so you're mingling with many others of low character, men and women, and you're exposed to adverse influences.

Listen To The Zeides

I know a case of an orthodox man, a *ben Torah* who was a school teacher and he was lured away from his wife by a gentile teacher in the same school, and he forsook his family for the sake of a gentile girl. It was unthinkable that this should ever happen, but that's the result of wandering in different fields, straying.

Of course, physically, geographically, it's not possible always to be locked in, but if a person has *tovam*, has some good ones over him, if he's in contact with the good ones, who will stand over him and supervise and criticize and scold and serve as a thorny fence, so he'll remain inside, at least spiritually.

Now, what happens when you ignore the thorny old *zeide*? That's what we learn in our *parshah*. It was years and years of *shibud*! That's what happened to the *shevatim* who didn't appreciate the thorns of Levi

All the people who had volunteered to do a little bit – the whole Bnei Yisroel except for Shevet Levi – they were hooked and they had to continue to come. It took some time but that's what happened. And even though they were suffering now, they were carrying heavy loads on their backs of clay and bricks, but it was too late. The scheme had worked. The trap had been set and they were caught. They had snuck through the fence of thorns and it was to their detriment.

Part III. The Sages In America

Stories As Commands

Now, these stories, the Torah stories, are not meant for entertainment. It could be they're interesting, they're entertaining, but that's not the purpose. You have to know that whatever is written in the Torah, even in the form of a story, is a *tzivuy*, a command to us. Hashem says, "Are you listening? I'm telling you something now about what happened with Shevet Levi so that you'll learn a lesson for how

to succeed in this world." And what's the lesson? That the Am Yisroel must listen to its elders.

Any *zeide*, any *bubbe*. Any elder! If you have somebody around who's willing to tell you something you don't want to hear, someone who can be a thorn in your side, that's your *yeshuah*.

The old-time Jewish people understood that. I still remember when an old Jew would stop you in the street and wag his finger at you, "Boychik, don't do that!" And we paid attention. A woman passed by and rebuked a little boy or a little girl for being wild, "Zei nit vild," and the children didn't answer back. We looked with respect and quieted down. Not only because we were embarrassed. We knew that the *zekeinim* were there to tell us off.

Right and Left

And the *ziknei Chachomim*, *kol shekein*, even more so. In the Torah (Devarim 17:8) it says that **כִּי יִפְּלֵא מִמְּךָ דָבָר** – *when something will be too difficult for you, so you should go up to the Sages in the Lishkas Hagazis in Yerushalayim and they'll tell you what to do*. The old Sages, they are the **עֵינֵי הָעֵדָה**, *the eyes of the nation*, and whatever they say, you should obey them even though it seems to you to be wrong. If they say go right even though it seems to you left, or if they say left, and it seems to you right, you have to follow their words. The Sages are called *einei haeidah* all throughout the Torah. They're the eyes of the people.

Only what? Every Jew, no matter how ignorant he is, he thinks he sees as well as anybody else. If you know people, that's a fact. There isn't a Jew, no matter how ignorant, who doesn't think he understands as well as anybody else.

But Torah, you have to know, is not a simple matter. You can't learn Torah on one foot; it's a very big job with many branches. But like a teenager who looks at the adults and he's not impressed – he thinks he knows everything already – every ignorant and half ignorant Jew thinks he knows. Who needs experts when you know everything?

Follow The Experts

Now, the question is why is it that when it comes to medicine these same people admit that there are experts? They go to people who are acknowledged as experts and they pay them good money and they obey their judgment. But when it comes to Torah practice, to Torah ideology and policy, they're willing to go anywhere – or usually nowhere at all. Are spiritual matters less important than matters of health of the body?

The answer is – and it's the plain truth – that Torah is not really important to them. When it comes to a growth on his brain, or whatever it is, he goes to an expert because it matters. But when it comes to a growth on his *neshamah*, he thinks that even without Torah he understands what's what. He thinks that Torah is not important for his life – that's the plain truth.

And therefore the story of Shevet Levi comes to tell us, "Don't make a move without the *zekeinim*. Otherwise you're negligent!" It's like a person who is lost; he's sitting in his car and he's not sure if he should be going on this street or that street. And he's in a different neighborhood; it's not so safe. So, the common sense procedure is, the first gas station or the first policeman he meets, he asks directions. To ignore such a simple expedient means that this man is reckless.

Same thing, to ignore the simple expedient of approaching the old Torah authorities, the ones most competent to guide the people, that's plain recklessness. And all the negative results, *chas v'shalom*, in your own life and in the lives of your children and grandchildren and the whole Jewish community, you only have yourself to blame.

Public Policy and Leaking Radiators

And not only in *halachah* matters; in all matters of policy, the old Gedolei Yisroel – the older the better – are the ones most fit for this function. When you need to come to a decision in Torah or a decision in public policy, we do only what our Torah leaders tell us to do. If the Gedolim tell us to march

out in the street for this and this purpose then it's your duty to do it. Otherwise, you stay at home. If they tell you to vote for this and this candidate, that's it. If they say that this and this thing or this and this book or this and this machine can't be in a Jewish home, then there's nothing to talk about.

Sometimes there are dangerous questions, things that could not be discussed in public without harm, things that are new that need a great deal of deliberation, and young men, hotheads, rush in where Gedolim fear to tread, and they not only offer their opinions, but they publicize them with fanfare, as valid Torah opinions.

Of course, if you want to ask how you can repair your leaking radiator, don't go to him. But if you have questions relating to matters of public policy – any question of behaviors of communities or of how to deal with people, with current events and current problems, they are the ones. And don't tell me stories that the Gedolim are busy sitting and learning Torah and that it's the political *manhigim* who know what's going on in the world. That's a statement that cannot pass unchallenged. The Gedolei Yisroel are the ones who should make public policy!

The Ones To Listen To

People don't understand that. They think, let's say, that Rav Kamenetzky in Monsey or Rav Moshe Feinstein on the East Side, are good for asking them a question in *halachah* – especially when you want a *kulah*, a leniency. You call them up and he says yes, so now you can say, "Rav Moshe Feinstein said it's *muttar*." That's all you need. But to ask him about a matter of public policy? It's not necessary, you think, because my head is as good as his head.

Don't think that there are areas where a *gadol* has a right to say and areas where he doesn't have a right to say. A *gadol*, a Torah *gadol*, has a right to say on *everything* because the Torah is the only source of true wisdom and the ultimate source of all *eitzah*.

On East Broadway, we have a Rav Moshe Feinstein. He's the one! Rav Kamenetzky is in

Monsey. From Williamsburg, the Satmar Rebbe is a tremendous influence everywhere. There's a *rosh yeshivah* right here in Flatbush – I won't mention his name because other *roshei yeshivah* will be jealous – who's been heading a big *yeshivah* for a long time; many, many years. When I see him, I think, "That's one of the *Chachmei hador*." He's an *anav*; he runs away from *kavod* but he's a *gadol baTorah*.

These are the ones to listen to. They're the ones to control all the affairs of the Jewish people in America. I remember there were some modern rabbis who rebelled against Rav Aharon Kotler. One of them said – he said it in public – "We are going to refuse to make any appeal for the Lakewood Yeshiva unless you stop being so extreme." A *chutzpah!* I embarrassed that rabbi in public because it's a question of being a Jew. He's lucky I only embarrassed him – I was itching to take a swing at him. I don't know how long he will have to be in Gehinom for that! It's *apikorsus*. It's against *kol haTorah kulah*. A Jew has to know where to look for leadership. אָבִיבֵי וְיִגְדְּרוּ וְיִאמְרוּ לָךְ – ask your elders, the Sages, they'll tell you. You can't ask anybody else. You just can't help it. You can't get away from the principle of the Torah.

Do You Belong Here?

We only believe in *Gedolim*. And not in little rabbis, in public speakers, in radio speakers, in television speakers; not in synagogue rabbis, in newspaper editors. In the newspapers, there are people who are incompetent; writers, half-baked Torah scholars, self declared authorities, who answer every kind of question; new *sheilos*. No, we're not interested! We don't believe in anybody except the great *Chachmei HaTorah*. It's a principle on which our whole *Torah* stands. If you don't want to accept it, you don't have to, but you don't belong here, that's all.

It's the difference between being a Jew and a non-Jew. A Jew listens to *Gedolim*. That's it. There's no two ways about it. If you don't listen to *Gedolim*, you're not a *frum* Jew. This, I would never yield to you. Some things you can argue with me; you can

say "It's Rabbi Miller's opinion," but when it comes to whom do we ask for leadership, we ask only our great men.

Now, it doesn't mean that you have to take up their time to sit hours with them – they're not therapists, they're *Chachmei haTorah* and they can tell you in a few minutes what you need to know. The Jewish nation is blessed with capable *Chachomim*. If you live in Brooklyn you are especially privileged – there is no lack of people to whom you can go. Don't ask me who though. I'm not going to molest any good man and bring a landslide on him; but *boruch Hashem* there are very many whose guidance we should be following.

I Don't Decide

That's what the success of *Shevet Levi* teaches us; that we should follow one rule. Whether something is right or wrong is not for us to decide. When it comes to asking for counsel, whether it's about your future or about the future of your family or your community or the future of the country or the nation, who are the ones who are most trustworthy? The old heads. Old Torah heads are calm and seasoned heads; they're the ones seasoned by Torah experience.

Now, I know my audience. Not everybody here is steeped in Torah yet, and it will take many years to get this across. Because people come from the street with the street ideas that rabbis should take care of rabbi business. Outside of rabbi business they have nothing to say. And today especially, the youth think that they can see better than the *Gedolim*. Today every *Chaim Yankel* thinks that he can make decisions for the Jewish nation! A little *yingel* is deciding what yes and what no. We can't allow that! We have to hammer it in over and over again, for years and years, until we get it into our heads that there's no other way. The Torah view is we have to ask everything to the *Gedolei HaTorah* and *Gedolei HaTorah* means the *ziknei hador*. The *rabbonim* of the *shuls*, of the communities, all have to turn to them for every question; that's the *kiyum* of the *Am Hashem*.

We are the Torah nation and we walk on the same path that the Shevet Levi walked. That's the program for life. That's the way the Jewish nation is and that's how we will be until Moshiach will come. We're not going to change. Despite America we won't change! We are a nation that lives according to the Gedolei Yisroel! The Torah covers *every phase of life* and therefore if we want to succeed in our lives – not only as Jews; if we want to succeed as human beings – we have to take guidance from people who are competent. And who is competent for the Jewish nation? The Gedolei Yisroel. We have great Torah leaders, great men, old men, who are willing to be the fence of thorns that we need. May the Almighty give them long lives and may they increase.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Appreciating Our Sages

In this week's *parsha* we see how the children of Levi were saved from slavery by clinging to the instruction of their elders. It is our duty to realize that "Egypt is not different" and neither is America. We do not follow new fads and ideas, we follow the sage advice of our elders, the *ziknei Yisroel* who are the *einei haeidah*. Every day we *daven* for the *tzaddikim* of our generation who guide us in everything we do. This week I will *bli neder* use the opportunity of that *bracha* in *shemonah esrei*, Al Hatzadikim, to reflect for a half minute about how important the *tzaddikim* are to us and how I will strengthen myself in following their advice and guidance.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

R-22 - Hyrcanus' Downfall | 74 - Consulting The Sages
 248 - Clinging To The Sages | 320 - Levi | E-267 - Remember Me
 Listen: 718.289.0899 Press 1 for English and 2 for Thursday Night Lectures



On Shabbos Mevorchim we ask Hashem for a חיים של עושר וכבוד, a life of wealth and glory. But didn't we learn that glory is something that is inappropriate to run after in this world?



Good question. Why do we ask for a life of *osher v'chovod*, a life of wealth and glory?

The answer is this: We are not looking for glory – but we hope Hashem will help us behave in such a way that we *deserve* glory. If people will honor us because of our good character, we don't mind. We want to succeed in behaving in such a way that we *deserve kovod*, yes. I would like people to say, "Miller – he's a nice fellow!" I would like that, yes. Because that means that most likely I did something that would please people.

So you should do things in such a way that people should approve of you – but you're not living for *kovod*. And so, in that *tefillah* we ask Hashem, "Please, give us a life of *kovod*. Please help us this month so that we should behave in a dignified manner; decently and *Torah'dik*, and then we *deserve* to get *kovod* from people." Oh, if we succeed in doing that this upcoming month, then we'll be very happy because that means that we've had a successful month.

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