



TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHTS FOR LIFE

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

PARSHAS NOACH

TOWER OF BAVEL

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Part I. The Power of Unity

The Post-Mabul Plan

Today, we discuss a mysterious episode in the Torah, and that's the building of the Tower of Bavel. It's something that took place in the dim antiquity of mankind's history and it is reported only briefly in the Torah. But despite the brevity, we see that great emphasis is put on this event because **וַיֵּרֶד ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל** – Hashem came down to view the city and the tower that they were building (Bereishis 11:5). Of course, when it states that "Hashem came down to see," it's only a form of speech, but such a form of speech denotes an especial interest: Hashem was very much interested in what was doing there.

Now, what did He see? So it states there, **וְהָיָה כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אֶחָת** – the whole land – it means all of mankind – had one language. Not only everybody spoke one language but **וְדִבְרִים אֶחָדִים** – they all had common interests (ibid. 1). It means that there were as yet no national distinctions in diet, in habits, in manners. Everybody liked similar food, similar pursuits and ideals.

The Opportunity of Unity

Remember; the people who had come out of the teivah of Noach were all one family, and even though they intended to repopulate the world, the original plan was to remain together.

It was an opportunity for something remarkable because we know that **כְּנוֹס לְצַדִּיקִים הֵנָּא לָהֶן וְהֵנָּא לְעוֹלָם** – when good people come together, it's a benefit for them, and it's also a benefit for the world (Sanhedrin 71b). First of all, it's a benefit for them. A community of tzaddikim is the most comfortable kind of community. You'll always have the best neighbors. Everybody is polite, is righteous to each other, and so it's good for them. In addition, it's good for the world because when the tzaddikim are a united force, that can accomplish things for the world – things that could mold the entire history of mankind.

And so, Noach's family had no intention of breaking off from each other. Of course, as the population would swell, automatically they would push outwards; it would become a bigger circumference. It would have been a small family, closely knit at the beginning, and later a big family also closely knit, and later a very big family. But it would still be the same one family. A wonderful arrangement; all of mankind should be united.

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Settling the Great Plains

That's why after the Mabul it states, וַיְהִי בְנִסְעָם מִקְדָּם – they traveled from the east (ibid. 2). It means the ark stopped on Mount Ararat, somewhere in Eastern Turkey, near Armenia, and so when the family exited the teivah, they headed west because they were looking for a suitable spot where the family would settle and propagate.

וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּקֶעֶה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר – And they found a lowland, a plain in the land of Shinar, וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם – and they settled there (ibid.). Some of the earliest known settlements of mankind are in Iraq. It was called “Shinar” in ancient times, or “Sumeria.” We call it “Babel” as we'll see later in the Torah. They chose as their place a bikah in the area of Iraq.

Now, bikah sometimes is translated as “valley,” but here it means what the Gemara uses the word for. Bikah is what they call a great plain. They found a large lowland, a level land. That's what Babel is; Iraq is a level land without mountains.

Now, a plainland has certain advantages. There are no natural barriers, no mountains or deep valleys that naturally separate communities. And so a city could expand outward without having to scatter and separate. And that's why they left the mountains of the East and settled in Babel.

Affordable Housing for All

Now, they were still using the contraption that the children of Kayin had invented – a portable tent – and they lived a nomadic culture. Any family could easily pack together their tents and then move on somewhere to greener pastures. And that's why, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ – they began to discuss ways and means of remaining together (ibid. 3). And so they decided that it's important to build permanent homes.

But in Shinar, you don't have mountains, and if you don't have mountains there's a dearth of building stones. And without stones, you cannot build permanent houses. And so at that time they fell upon the idea of the invention of brick-making. הָבָה וְנִשְׂרָפָה – “Let's take clay and make bricks. וְנִשְׂרָפָה

וְנִתְּתִי לָהֶם הַלֵּבָנָה – We'll burn the clay in a kiln, לְשֹׂרְפָה – We'll burn the clay in a kiln, וְנִתְּתִי לָהֶם הַלֵּבָנָה – and we'll have bricks as artificial stones” (ibid.). The Torah emphasizes this because it was a new step in their plan to keep everyone together.

And now, with this invention in hand, everybody got busy and said, “This is the place! A big open plain and we have the building materials to make permanent homes!” וַיֹּאמְרוּ – And they said, הָבָה נִבְנֶה עִיר – “Let's build for ourselves a city” (ibid. 4). It means, “Before we end up scattering, let's build one big town, a megalopolis.” The city would become bigger and bigger, and finally, in the course of time, it would cover the earth; but it would be one city.

The No-Scatter Tower

And then something came up, an additional idea. And that was to build that famous tower, the Migdal Babel. Now, not much is told about the plan. מִגְדָּל בָּבֶל – It would be a tower whose top should be up to the heavens, פֶּן נָפוּץ עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ – lest we scatter over the face of the earth. That was their slogan: פֶּן נָפוּץ – Lest we scatter!

Because they knew what would happen. Some people would scatter to the north, some to the south, and they'll be different nations; they'll become estranged from each other, they'll become hostile, and eventually there'll be big wars. And so the idea of a tall tower was introduced; a central point that would keep the growing population focused on the ideal of unity.

Now, the Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 38:6) says a queer thing, that the people said, “Let's make a tower to hold up the sky. The sky shouldn't cave in.” But people who learn the Midrashim in a simple way with their plain meaning are misled. It doesn't mean that at all. You have to read something into the Medrash. It's telling us that a theory was proposed.

The Insurance Policy

We'll see soon who exactly the theoretician was, but the theory was promulgated as follows: אַחַת לְאֶלֶף – “We have statistics,” he said, “and we know that at the end of sixteen hundred and fifty-six years from Creation there was a

commotion in nature and a watery catastrophe covered the earth. And so we have to consider the possibility of recurrence. Maybe it's a natural cycle and it'll happen again." And therefore, in the language of the Medrash, "Let's make a tower to hold up the sky." It means, if there's going to be a catastrophe, we have to be ready. Because what's going to happen when a big flood comes? People will scatter to seek safety.

And therefore, in order to keep true to the plan of Noach and his sons and all of the other great leaders of the hundreds of years since then, an idea was put forward to build a tower to demonstrate right here, *this* is the heart of the city and we have to encircle it. And even if a flood or a different natural disaster will wipe out the entire city and no vestiges remain, at least the tower will still be here, and everyone will know where to come back to in order to resettle in unity around it.

The Trumped-Up Tower

Now, what glamour will this tower have as a symbol of the center of the city if there's nothing divine about it? So you can be sure that they put on top some kind of a symbol of divinity, some kind of a sacred object. After all, people can't be atheists. They have to worship something.

Now, exactly what it was, it wasn't as crass, it wasn't as simple as idolatry in the way we understand. There's no question it was more sublimated; they put an image there as a representative of the Most High, like Shem said, "Kel Elyon." That's all; quite innocent. In the course of time, there were people who worshipped it and bowed down to it, but it's quite possible that it wasn't presented in that way. The purpose was to unify the world.

The Unity Leaders

Now, it pays to discover who was the leading spirit of this plan to keep the people unified by means of building a tower. After all, this ideal of unity had been developed over hundreds of years by great people, but this was a new development now,

a tremendous tower, and every great movement can be judged by its leaders. It's important.

And the answer is revealed to us by the *Torah She'baal Peh*, by the Oral Law, but we have hints of it in the Written Torah, too. In the Written Torah, in the previous chapter, something is told to us about a character named Nimrod. The truth is a good deal is related about this character; and it's remarkable because the Torah speaks so briefly of the ancient generations, and yet it gives attention to Nimrod.

A Mighty Hunter

And here's what the Torah tells us about this character: "Cush gave birth to Nimrod, and he began to be a mighty man, a hero, in the world" (Bereishis 10:8). You hear that? He was a big politician. And that's only one of the trappings of his career. He was a great leader in general.

And he was a גִּבּוֹר צֶדִיק too. He became a mighty hunter. In those days, a mighty hunter was a leader. That's why the kings of India became famous for their prowess in hunting lions. In those days, a lion wasn't an ornamental creature; they weren't yet in the zoos. They were a big nuisance, a menace to mankind. Lions and tigers were man-eaters sometimes. So the Indian rulers — the people were grateful to them when they destroyed a certain man-eater who used to attack villages. They were grateful to the king who had prowess.

A Mighty Builder

And we know that he was involved in building big cities. He was a beneficiary of mankind. You need that, someone who's a doer, an accomplisher. He built Erech and Akkad and Kalneh. Akkad is Akkadia, one of the big cities of antiquity. Kalneh is in the land of Shinar. And from that land he went forth to Ashur and he built Nineveh. Nineveh! A famous city. And he built Rechovos Ir. And he built Kalach and Resen, an ancient city called Ctesiphon — Aktisfon in the Gemara (Yoma 10a). These are famous cities from the earliest antiquity, and the Torah wants us to know this about this Nimrod; he

began to organize society around his good endeavors.

Now, in this story of the Migdal he's not mentioned by name, but we understand he was the one who was interested in promoting the scheme. We can prove it from the Written Torah too, from clues, but we don't have to because that's what our Sages tell us, that the leading spirit in the plan of building a city and the tower was this person, Nimrod.

Keeping an Eye Out

He was the most capable because he was famous as a great and mighty hunter, a hero, a builder of cities, and a big politician. **עַל כֵּן יֵאָמֵר** – *And therefore, it was said*, **כְּנִמְרוֹד** – *if you want to compare somebody, a big k'nocker, you'd say, "He's like Nimrod, צִיד – He is a great and mighty hunter"* (Bereishis 10:9).

But then the possuk adds, **לְפָנָיו** – *in the presence of Hashem*. What does “in the presence of Hashem” mean? Isn't everything in Hashem's presence? It means Hashem had an eye on him already. Hashem was looking at this man. Because when a man is becoming important, you have to keep an eye on him because he has two great potentials: for good or for evil.

Part II. The Danger of Unity

Words and Thoughts

Now, the question is, what could be the evil here? It sounds like something wonderful, to keep people united! So we have to realize when the Torah reports a certain episode, it doesn't mean all of the things that are put in their mouths were said by them. Some things they say for themselves but some things were only thoughts. We have to try to discover which are the things that they said, and which are the things that are attributed to them.

Now, Nimrod and his cohorts said why they wanted to do this. And ostensibly the reason was **פֶּן נִפְּוֹץ** – *lest we scatter over the face of the earth*.” And we understand that they said those words; they

proclaimed it as a banner to rally around. Because it's a legitimate motive: We shouldn't scatter; we should remain one family.

But the next idea – *that they didn't proclaim: “וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם – and we'll make for ourselves a name.”* This was said by some of the organizers inside of their minds. Because **וַיֹּאמֶר** in *lashon kodesh* many times means to *think*. I can prove that by citations from elsewhere, but to save time, maybe you'll take my word for it. The words “*Let's make for ourselves a name*,” they didn't publicize.

The Power Tower

Which means that they were promoting this scheme because they wanted glory and power. They said, “Lest we scatter,” but you have to put those words into his mouth, **וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם** – “*we'll make for ourselves a name*.” It means we'll gain control.

Of course Nimrod used good words. **פֶּן נִפְּוֹץ**, holy words. *Achdus!* Togetherness! Don't you see the liberal Marxists today using smooth words: “Equality!” “Workers of the world unite!” “We're all brothers!” “Social justice!” Beautiful. But the truth is that all these reformers who ride in on white steeds and claim that they came to unite humanity, their words are as hollow as could be. They're posturing for the press, for the public, money and glory. Only that they come with expressions of nobility to trap the masses. And so there's no question that the proposers of the tower did it with beautiful words.

The One Rebel

Now, at that time there was a young man who lived there whose name was Avram. And while everybody was enthusiastic over this new development in this plan of unity – everyone was speaking about all the benefits that this national plan would bring to mankind and all the important people and all the patriots joined in – Avraham Avinu didn't jump on the bandwagon. Everybody followed the crowd except this young fellow.

Like it says (Bereishis 14:13), “Avraham Halvri.” Why is he called “Ivri”? Ivri means a man who's only on one side. **שָׂכַל הָעוֹלָם מַעֲבָר לִזְה** – *The whole world*

was on one side, וְאַבְרָהָם מֵעֵבֶר הָיָה – and Avraham was on the other side (Bereishis Rabbah 42:8). One man against the whole world. That's how it was in the beginning and that's how it will always be until the end. The Jews are on their own; all alone they stand against the world. That's their job. They don't follow the crowd.

And so our Sages (Avodah Zarah 18b) tell us on the first verse in Tehillim, אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים – how fortunate is the man who did not walk in the plan of the wicked ones, that זֶה אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ שֶׁלֹּא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת אֲנָשֵׁי דֹר הַפְּלִגָּה – it's speaking about Avraham who did not go in the plan of his generation who wanted to build the tower. Because when he saw what the idea was and who the leader was, he saw what the results might be of misutilizing the ideal of unity and he expressed his opposition.

Now, if Avraham Avinu would be the president, the ruler of that new metropolis, yes. He would influence the people to yiras Hashem, to seeing Hashem in the briyah, to the service of Hashem. But Nimrod? Instead of the influence that people are supposed to gain from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, he would influence his own personality on them. And so Avraham spoke up.

The Disuniter

It wasn't easy because he was considered a lunatic by his neighbors. Like in some communities today if you express doubts about the value of the State of Israel, so they're shocked. They open a pair of big eyes: "You don't believe in the State of Israel? You mean you're not a Zionist? What kind of a Jew are you?"

And that's how they looked at Avraham when he refused to follow the crowd. Everybody was shouting, "Join! Follow Nimrod, the great benefactor! Everybody together! One family! One nation! One world!" But Avraham said, "Nothing doing. Don't join," he said. "It's too dangerous. The wrong man is in power."

And Avraham wasn't the kind of fellow to keep his ideas to himself. He went out on the street and

he grabbed people by the lapel and he said to them, "Don't listen to Nimrod. He's the wrong uniter-in-chief."

They said, "Shh! Don't talk loud. Come in the alley and tell us about it." But it was too important to hush it up.

Nimrod the Bulldozer

Now, Nimrod wasn't the kind of man to let a nincompoop, a little nobody, stand in his way. He would bulldoze anyone who would oppose him. And so when he heard people speaking about this young fellow he got irritated and tried to get rid of him. That's the story of Ur Kasdim, the fire-furnace.

You know, when Avraham was finally thrown into the fire, it's not as simple as you think – that Nimrod said, "Worship my gods," and Avraham said, "No." It was this plan of Nimrod that was the catalyst. Nimrod already heard people speaking about this troublemaker and he warned Avraham, "I'm giving you one last chance to get on board with the plan. I won't let you ruin happiness for everyone because of your stubbornness. If you can't join us, I'll put you in a hot seat."

And even though Avraham escaped that danger, but how long could a young man persist like that? How long could he last if everybody would carry out that unity plan to fruition? A monolithic society ruled by a tyrant? They'd crush him! He's only one man, after all. Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw it would be impossible for Avraham to do anything in such a society, but Avraham was a gem; and therefore, to save that gem, He came down. That was the purpose: וַיֵּרָד ה' – Hashem came down to rescue the truth, to rescue the future Jewish nation that was there in the person of Avraham.

Nipping It in the Bud

וְהֵן עַם אֶחָד – Hashem said, וַיֹּאמֶר ה' – "They are one people." וְשָׁפָה אֶחָת לְכָלֶם – And they all have one language, וְזֶה הֵחֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת – and this they're beginning to do. It means it's not what they did that's so blameworthy. It's what they're going to do in the future. "I just recently made a cleaning of the world

with the Mabul. I washed the world clean of all the sinners, and now I see there's something new, a plan to consolidate all of humanity into one family under the wrong people. וְעַתָּה – *Therefore now*, לֹא יִבְצֹר מֵהֶם, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת – *there wouldn't be withheld from them anything that they desire to do* (Bereishis 11:6). When you're united, you can do anything.

And therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to break it up. פֶּזַז לְרַשָּׁעִים הִנָּאָה לָהֶן וְהִנָּאָה לְעוֹלָם – *For wicked people, it's better that they should be scattered* (Sanhedrin 71b). Like a gang of crooks who want to make a holdup, but before they come to the bank, they get in a fight among themselves and they all go home and remain alive. The fight was good for them because otherwise the bank guards might have shot them down. And it's good for the bank guards and the bank customers, too.

So disunity among the wicked is good for everyone. And therefore, Hashem said, "Let Me now come down and rescue the future of mankind by confusing their languages."

The Mystery of Languages

Now, how it happened is a mystery because languages don't develop overnight. Even a hundred years is not time enough to develop any language. But according to the *pashtus* of the *possuk*, something happened — somehow their languages became diversified and because of that, their unity was broken up and the whole plan came to naught. They gave up the plan to build the city and scattered over the face of the earth.

Now, the following is my own idea, and nobody has to accept it. And if you'll prove to me you have a better idea or that it's wrong, I withdraw it without any hesitation. But in the meantime, this is what I think is *pshat*: The people in those generations lived very long lives. And during these ten generations when people still lived very long Hashem had done something; He had planted a seed.

The Seed Sprouts

Hakadosh Baruch Hu put an idea into the heads of some of the wise men to think of ambitious plans

of developing their own languages. It was considered by them a *chochmah* and because they lived very long lives they had the opportunity to do it. When people live for hundreds of years and they don't age until the end, they can accomplish tremendous things that are far beyond what the greatest men of the subsequent times could do. Because after a certain stage, you begin to go faster; you pick up momentum. Today, a person grows old, and before he can accomplish tremendous things, he's senile, and he's finished. But if you can live 400 years, you can really go someplace with your wisdom. And these men who were men of genius, people with abilities far beyond what existed in mankind subsequently, they put their wisdom to work and over hundreds of years they began fashioning new languages.

They weren't operative, however; they were theoretical languages like Esperanto. They were developed but nobody would actually use them because they all understood it was imperative to be together; they didn't want to do anything that might crack the human family into sections. But it was there, lurking in the background, for Hashem to use when it would be needed.

Dissension Begins

Now, as long as they were together, it didn't come to a head. But when Nimrod was finally making the plans to keep all mankind together forever, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu put it into their minds that each one should say, "Why not my language?" At that time Hashem caused these people to come forward and say, "You want to make one nation? Let's adopt my language as the language of the nation."

But somebody else said, "Look, Nimrod, I'm all for your idea. Certainly, we should build the tower and be one family. But what about *my* language?"

Each innovator had reasons for preferring his own invention. After all, each language has its own beauty. Aramaic has certain beautiful overtones. The Gemara says for elegy, Aramaic is beautiful. For

certain forms of poetry, the Gemara says that Greek is more beautiful (Yerushalmi Megillah 1:9).

Scattering Begins

And therefore, those people who had perfected their own languages over ten generations, each one wanted his language. And at that time a squabble arose, and there became a disunity, and the plan broke up. The dissension between the various proposers caused the plan to fall apart and the people began to separate. “My way or the highway,” they said.

And that’s why Nimrod left Shinar. It says **מִן הָאָרֶץ** – *From that land*, **יָצָא אֲשׁוּר** – *he went out to Ashur*. He forsook Shinar because the plan fell through. He went to a different place and there he started a different plan; he built big cities and he prospered. But his first plan to be a leader of all of mankind fell through.

Part III. The Power of Disunity

The True Name of Bavel

Now, how important was this confusion of languages for the future of mankind? How important was it to break up the unity of irresponsible people? So it’s interesting to note that the end of this story, it says, **עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ בָּבֶל** – *And therefore* – because of this confusion, the fight over languages – *they called the place Bavel* (Bereishis 11:9). Bavel is from *balal*, to “mix up” the language.

Now, everyone knows that it’s not that simple because Bavel is not *balal* – Bavel is one word and *balal*, to confuse and mix up, is something else. But listen now to this important rule: When the Torah says, **עַל כֵּן** – *and therefore*, the Torah is telling us *it’s not like you think*. The academicians and the historians think they know: Bavel means “Bav-Bel”; they had an idol called Bel and they called that place Bav-Bel, the gateway of Bel. That’s why they gave it a name.

So along comes the Torah and says, “You thought at that time that’s the reason you’re giving it a name.

But actually you were prophesying what’s going to happen, that I’m going to bring confusion in that place.” And I tell you, **עַל כֵּן** – *that’s why*, **קָרָא שְׁמוֹ בָּבֶל** – *I motivated you to give that name Bavel*. It should be a memorial forever. Bav-Bel, that’s nothing; that’s for the dumb archeologists. But actually **עַל כֵּן** – *it’s because of this*. It’s of the greatest importance to know that when wicked people get together, it’s a danger for the world and it’s vital to frustrate that union.

A leader, a king, is a wonderful thing – if he’s good. Everybody is united. One leader with power. It’s efficient. You can accomplish things that you couldn’t do otherwise. But when the king goes wrong, there’s nothing as harmful, as dangerous, as a bad king.

Scattered Jews

And that’s the reason why we are scattered in exile today. In Eretz Yisroel, under the righteous kings, everybody kept the Torah. But when we were together in Eretz Yisroel and wrong people gained power and they had power over the entire Jewish nation, it was a disaster.

In the times of King Menashe, he was corrupting the nation. It says, **וַיַּתֵּעַ מֶלֶךְ הַיְּהוּדָה אֶת יְהוּדָה** – *he caused the nation of Yehudah to go astray* (Divrei Hayamim II 33:9). Not everybody, but he had a very bad influence, however; because the king has power. That’s why the kings ceased. Hashem broke up the nation, they went into exile, and no more kings. Now the Sages regained control.

Breaking Up Unity

Same thing in the Second Beis Hamikdash. The Tzedukim, the Sadducees, gained power. The *apikorsim*, the people who didn’t know Torah, didn’t want to know Torah, and they despised the Torah Sages – they gained power, and they were corrupting the nation. Of course, the nation still was very good despite them. But the time had come to get rid of them. And therefore, Hashem broke it all up. The Romans came. We went away to other countries,

and from then on, nobody was able to gain power over the entire Jewish nation.

If the Jews had been capable of living together in Eretz Yisroel under pious leaders, under the Sages, they would have remained there to this day. But because the wrong people gained power, therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the order: "Scatter!"

Scattered and Safe

And now we're protected. If in one town, in one country, in one continent, wicked people gain power over the Jews, so there are Jews elsewhere who are safe from wicked leaders. Let's say when wicked Jews gained power in Russia. There were a lot of Jews in Russia, three million Jews, but the Communist Jews, the Yevseksiya, gained power, and they ruined the Russian Jews.

The Russian Jews were once the best Jews in the world. You Sephardic Jews will excuse me for saying that, but it's true — Russian Jews were once the best Jews in the world. There was so much Torah, so much *yiras Hashem*. Not long ago! And then when the wrong leaders came, they smothered everything with a blanket.

But there were other Jews all over the world. Hakadosh Baruch Hu had caused us to scatter and so there were Syrian Jews and there were Egyptian Jews. There were some Jews in England and also in America who were keeping the Torah. Oh, that saved us!

And that's why breaking up the wicked is good. When Communist Russia broke up, it was a very great benefit for the world. Like it states in Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos: וְאַתָּה מָרוֹם לְעֵלָם ה' – When are You, Hashem, elevated? יִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי אֵין – When all those who do wickedness scatter.

United for Torah

To come together like the plan of the Zionists now — all Jews should come to Israel — and who should be the president? An atheist. A man who doesn't put on tefillin, who doesn't eat kosher, he should be a leader of Jews.

We can't afford such a dangerous thing. So therefore, it's not advisable we should all get together. We'll get together when Moshiach comes, when there'll be a *tzaddik*, a man who keeps the Torah at the head. Yes. Then we should all stream to Eretz Yisroel. But right now, it's a very big *sakanah* for all Jews to get together under the wrong head.

American Unity

Even here, the American Jewish Congress, it seemed like such a good idea; all the Jewish organizations should unite. It's not such a good idea, however. Because when Jewish *reshaim* get together, it's bad for the Jewish people.

What did they vote on at their last convention? That they have to fight to not allow the government to give a penny to yeshivas. Lubavitch, other Jews, sent a petition: "Please, don't! We need money. We're saving boys." Lubavitch is saving boys from the gutter all over America. They're taking narcotics addicts and rehabilitating them, making *mentchen* out of them. The *frum* day schools, the Beis Yaakov schools, they're taking in girls and teaching them decency. And the Congress was willing to give them money! The government was already handing out the money! But the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League, and some more of these big organizations, got together to fight it. They said, "If we'll allow that, church and state won't be separated anymore. It'll be a wedge."

Now, our Sages, the great Torah leaders, they know all about church and state. You assimilated Jews, don't worry about it. The Torah leaders know all about it and they said, "Don't worry about church and state. It's still America."

And the American Congress was willing to give the yeshivas money. They voted already! But these "tzaddikim," they want to defend the Constitution. They want to be more constitutional than the Americans are.

United We Close

בָּנוּם לְרָשָׁעִים – When the wrong people get together,
רַע לָהֶם וְרַע לְעוֹלָם – it's a terrible thing for everyone!

They have prestige, they have power, they can hire the biggest lawyers. They went to the Supreme Court and won. And now if a poor boy wants to go to yeshiva, the principal says, "How can I take in more boys? I can't even pay my regular teachers. I'm a half-year behind in salaries now, so how can you expect me to take you in? You can't fit in a regular class. I need another teacher." What can he do?

And when the boy goes away, so people think the yeshiva is hard-hearted, that they're selfish for money. But they don't realize that the teachers haven't been paid for six months! They're idealists. But even idealists have to pay rent, they have to pay the grocer.

And they're turning away children. There's so many classes that could have been organized for children that start to learn late. All we need is a few more pennies from the government. "Oh no," they said. "It's dangerous."

And therefore, we see the great principle: that we'd be much better off without such unity. All these organizations, the best thing would be if they united together and closed their offices. It would be the biggest favor to the world. When the wicked break up their organizations, their unity, so it's **וְאֵתָהּ מְרוֹם ה'** – it's a *kavod* for Hashem because now the good ones can accomplish more.

Synagogue Unity

Unity is a great thing! But it depends who says it. And all these beautiful words, we have to watch out *who* is saying them and *why* he's saying them.

Suppose a Reform rabbi is telling his people, "We need unity," he says. "And here I see lately a man with a beard in this town of ours, and he's trying to organize a *minyan*. That's disunity. It's not harmony. We have to see that we don't allow him to do that. We want everybody united in our Reform congregation."

Oh, it depends what kind of unity you want. You know, the wolf says to the lamb, "Let's have unity. I'll eat you up and we'll be one." So it depends what your idea of unity was.

I'm afraid even some Modern Orthodox Rabbis, too, they tell their congregations when they come together, they say, "It's togetherness that counts." That's a word that they all like; *achdus*, togetherness. So they're sitting together, the ladies and the men, and they're munching, they're eating. There's a church supper, a synagogue supper. And they're enjoying themselves.

Once, in a certain city where I used to be, I was invited to come and represent my congregation in a union of all the congregations of the city. So I said I can't; a union would be good if it would be under the right people, but since it's not under the right people, we're better off without union.

And that's the lesson we have to learn: Don't join unless you know that *tzaddikim* are at the head of it. Otherwise, union is the greatest disaster.

Coming Down for Avraham

And now we come back to that significant statement in our *sedrah*: **וַיֵּרֶד ה' לְרִאֲוֹת** – Hashem came down to see. Hashem didn't have to come down. He could see from a big distance. But the Torah writes it anyhow to let you know that this was not an unimportant event.

The fact is, at Matan Torah, on that great day, a similar expression is used. It states, **וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי** – Hashem came down on Har Sinai (Shemos 19:20). And if we have here a similar expression, you understand that the Torah wants you to know that it was something of very big importance, something like **וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי** (see Avos D'Rabi Nosson 34:6).

Coming Down for Am Yisroel

And if we'll understand it properly, we shall see that one couldn't be without the other. There would never have been a Torah – there wouldn't have been a **וַיֵּרֶד ה' לְרִאֲוֹת** – if there hadn't been **וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי** – Hashem came down to take a look at this tower. And so this **וַיֵּרֶד ה'**, that's the preface to **וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי**. Hakadosh Baruch Hu came down to take a look because He understood that union under the wrong leaders is very dangerous. There never would have been a Torah if this affair would have been carried

out successfully – because there never would have been an Avraham.

It's one of the great lessons of this ancient story of the Dor Haflagah. כָּנוּס לְרָשָׁעִים – *When the wrong people get together, it's a terrible thing!* The *kiyum*, the existence of the Holy Nation depends very much on being united only under the influence and control of the Torah Sages. כָּנוּס לְצַדִּיקִים הֵנָּא לָהֶן וְהֵנָּא לְעוֹלָם – *when good people come together, it's a benefit for them, and it's also a benefit for the world.* And anything else, any other unity, is dangerous for the future of the Am Yisroel.

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Let's Get Practical

Unite and Untie

In this week's *parsha*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu “descends” to foil the plans of Nimrod and his followers, thereby ensuring that the world would not end up being unified under the banner of anything other than Hashem. This week, *bli neder*, when reciting the words *v'kabetzeinu yachad* in Shemoneh Esrei, I will have in mind that we yearn to be drawn together only in the service of our Creator.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

1 – Singing in the World | 94 – The Jesters | 145 – Tower of Bavel
526 – Avraham Appears | Pirkei Avos – 69

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Q&A

WITH
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ש א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י יב יג יד טו טז יז יח יט כ כא כב כג כד כה כו כז כח כט ל

QUESTION

There's a halacha that we're not allowed to think Torah thoughts when we're using the bathroom. So what should we think?

ANSWER

You should think what a *chessed* it is that you're able to go to the bathroom. Think about that. Think about the *chasdei Hashem*, yes. It's a tremendous *chessed* what takes place in your body.

Your kidneys are miracle laboratories. Your kidneys are able to take a small amount of blood and continually cleanse it. When people, *chalilah*, don't have kidneys, they have to go for dialysis a few times a week on artificial kidneys for hours and hours. What the kidneys do in a few minutes, you need artificial kidneys to work for hours and hours on you. And those people who don't have kidneys are so jealous of you. “Oooh – if I only had one kidney,” they say, “Just one kidney!” And they're trying hard to get a kidney. There are thousands of people lined up for spare kidneys.

And it's miraculous, too. מַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת means that it's miraculous, the process of the body eliminating wastes. The *mefarshim* sometimes didn't understand it and so there are all kinds of *peirushim* on מַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת (see Tur, Orach Chaim 6) but today we know the process of elimination, *pshuto k'mashmao*, is simply miracles of miracles.

If you would study how the body is able to absorb all the essential parts of the food through the lining of the tubes of the intestines, and leave over only the waste material, you'd see it's a miracle as clear as day. And as your body absorbs the food it transforms it into thousands of different materials. And so in the bathroom we're so happy Hakadosh Baruch Hu is doing this miracle for us. “Ah! What an operation He's performing on me right now.”

And that way, when you get out and make the *bracha*, you'll put all the thoughts that you had in the bathroom now into the words. That's called going to the bathroom successfully.

September 7, 2000