

Special English Shiur

15 Av 5772

Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

In merit of Moshe Arye, Channah, Yoshavam, Dov Ber, Shifrah, and Shneur Menachem

Today is a holiday. Every mitzvah that we do is a shiduch, the word mitzvah comes from tzavtah and each mitzvah is a joining of masculine and feminine energy. The topic today is about memory and aging. We'll talk about many segulot to strengthen memory, one is to say le'chaim. Of all of the 15th days of the month, the strongest is today. On the 15th the moon is whole, this symbolizes the redemption. 15 is the yichud of yud and hei, the two first letters of Havayah, the mother and father principles, that union itself is the secret of memory and of getting old. Getting old is reaching higher and higher levels of yud hei. So today is most connected to memory and aging.

There are two roots in Hebrew that need to be contemplated to better understand memory and aging. זכר, to remember, and זקן, old age. The same root also means a beard. If we'll understand how they relate, relatively they are rare words that begin with the letter zayin, yet both of these begin with a zayin. Already this is a segulah, a lot of mitzvot are a segulah to strengthening memory, to mezuzah, מזוזה, the secret of two zayins and in our context they are these two important roots, to remember and to age, זקן, זקן, means to push away death. This is the fear that people have of aging and losing their memory, it's the opposite of life, and this is the power in the Torah to push that fear away. Not to fear aging, the prelude to the opposite of life. The two zayin's in mezuzah represent again these two important roots of זכר and זקן.

The first phenomenon is that the root זקן = נקבה, the feminine. זכר means male, so to remember is masculine. But, from this we learn that to age is related to femininity. It also means beard, and women don't have beards. What happens to each of us when we grow older. The female side in us becomes more predominant according to this, we lose our masculinity. The female part becomes rich and important in value. We see this in parshat ערבין, when a person pledges his own value (or someone else's value) to God, and the amount of money is determined purely on the basis of age—it's a mitzvah that has to do with again—and the Torah tells us that as age increases, the female becomes relatively more valuable and the male less so. The male is still a bit more valuable, but relative to one another, the ratio moves in the direction of the female. This is a very clear source in the Torah that aging is feminine. Rashi brings a parable, that a grandmother in a house gives blessing in the house, while a grandfather is just an obstacle. This is Rashi, the literal meaning of the Torah. He learnt this from this phenomenon. Each of us has to flow in this natural way that as we age, our good part is to become more and more feminine. Even with the whole Jewish people, as a whole, everything is aging, Mashiach comes at a very old age for our collective consciousness, so everything about history is the elevation of the feminine persona, as she becomes taller and taller until when Mashiach comes she becomes of equal height with the masculine. After Mashiach comes, she goes even higher than the male, and this is in the verse, אשת חיל עטרת בעלה, So again, זקן

is equal to נקבה. The word “women” נשים, the letter נ falls out and it returns in the plural. אשה doesn't have a nun in it, it's there but hidden. נשים is cognate to נשיה, meaning to forget. So זכר, to remember is male, and נשים are about forgetting. So what makes the grandmother preferable to the grandfather? Why is the world becoming more feminine? Obviously this means that there are things that it's good to forget: forget the negative and then remember the positive. When we pray to Hashem, we should pray that we forget all the bad things and that what we remember the good. Then one becomes a positively more feminine person. He has the merit of getting rid of all the negative things and impressions and things that were done to him—this is very important in the family context (this is why it's so important for women to learn how to forget—unfortunately there are many women that only remember the bad things that their husband did to them). The blessing though is that you can forget all these bad things, it's all nothing and remember only the things you should which are all the good things that your wife/your husband did for you, that Hashem did for you.

So this is the good clarification process in the soul—to use the natural cleansing of the soul as we age to forget what needs to be forgotten and remember what you need to remember. A famous story that emphasizes this is that on 9th of Av is the yahrzeit of the Seer of Lublin. One of his greatest students was Rebbe Bunim. Once he saw his teacher a little sad, and when he asked him for the reason, the Seer said that we are commanded to continuously remember Hashem, but I don't understand how that is possible, even the greatest tzadik in the world, even Moshe Rabbeinu cannot do this every moment of his life. Obviously, he was also referring to himself too. As the BST teaches, how happy is the man who if he doesn't think of God for one second, in his own eyes that is the greatest transgression (אשרי האיש אשר לא יחשוב לו ה' עין). Rebbe Bunim consoles him and says, there is a mitzvah in the Torah of שכחה, if a person forgets some of the harvest in the field he has to leave it for poor people to collect. But, there is a halachah that says that if what was forgotten is significant, it is not considered shichachah, it remains in the field owner's possession. If you forget something that is very important in your eyes, you really have not forgotten it, even if you think you did. Says Rebbe Bunim, the same is true with your awareness of Hashem. If the most important thing for a tzadik is Hashem and his connection with Hashem, then even if he forgot Him for a moment, it's not considered to forget. The Seer was very consoled by Rebbe Bunim's words.

Besides forgetting bad things, which is good, what other type of forgetting can be good. Forgetting is sometimes called היסח הדעת. What type of such phenomenon is positive? It says that Mashiach only comes with this hesech hada'at, when the collective consciousness of the Jewish people for a moment will take itself off of Mashiach, then Mashiach will come. To make room for Mashiach, we have to make room for him. To find something that was lost, you also have to take your mind off it, then there's a good chance that you'll find the treasure waiting for you where you least expect it. The best things in life come when we don't expect them. That's also a type of positive forgetting. In words of Kabbalah, we will say that when we reach the keter, to get to keter, we have to be like אשת חיל עטרת בעלה, we have to take our mind off the topic, and then suddenly Mashiach himself will appear from keter elyon.

The process that should be happening with age, is the clarification between what we should continue to hold on to and what we should let go. Always in life, we have to learn how not to hold on to things, like one's bank account. Holding too tight is a way to lose everything. A person needs to know how to balance this. One of the most famous saying of the sages is the distinction between old Torah scholars and old people that are not Torah scholars. The latter, as they grow old, their consciousness, their mind deteriorates. Whereas, the Torah scholars, as they grow old the opposite is the case, the more their minds become settled. In the Zohar it says that this is like wine, when all the dreads go to the bottom and the win on top remains pure. This is what should be happening to a person as he ages. This is a separation process. For this to happen in you, for your mind to be more settled, that depends upon your true connection with Torah. In Chassidut, we understand this means not just the external part of the Torah—how much you learn and understand the Torah—but also how much bitul you have towards the Torah, because Torah comes from Chochmah. We should all have the aspiration to be a scholar, a talmid chacham, which as we age, our wine becomes more pure, and our mind more settled. Young scholars are not like this, they boil. But the more the connection with Torah is proper and serious, the more the mind settles down. This implies more and more femininity, as a woman is more settled, כתפארת אדם לשבת בית. This is the introduction. When you age and remember you should only remember the good, remember that it was all with Divine Providence. How do people feel they are forgetting, when they begin to forget names and addresses. Who cares? The problem is that people don't have the right value, a value system (like ערכין), of what is valuable, what is and what is not worth remembering. With the right value system, you already pave the way to a settling down with age. As you settle down, suddenly Mashiach will appear. It's forgetting the bad things but at the same time bringing down the best things which can only come down by forgetting about them for a moment.

Now we'll talk about different things in the Torah that have to do with memory and aging. Since a well settled mind has to do with being connected with Torah, there should definitely be explicit things in Torah that are good for memory. One of them is in the final book of the Pentateuch, which we began before Tisha B'av. As soon as we reach a low point like Tisha B'av, things begin to grow positively, and then after 6 days we reach the high point, the 15th of Av, today. Since this is all related to Devarim, it is very fitting that the whole book of Devarim is Moshe Rabbeinu, reaching in his last 37 days of life on earth, approaching his grand 120th birthday, and now he spends these last days remembering everything. In Hebrew it is להזכיר, which is to re-mind, like re-winding the mind. A person has to remember and then remind everyone else of what he is remembering. This is what Moshe Rabbeinu is doing. He knows that he's now leaving the world and he's rewinding his entire life, the whole life of the Jewish people, and reminding us of what happened. There must be some very special segulah now in Chumash Devarim to strengthen and identify with Moshe Rabbeinu's remembering and reminding. The fact that the form להזכיר means to remind someone else teaches us that you should be considerate of other people, remind them not to forget benching, or say Sefirat Ha'omer, or don't forget to put your pajamas on at night. If you do it out of

consideration, that itself is a segulah for remembering. Even though the Book of Devarim is Moshe's rebuke, we thank him for that too.

There's another relatively smaller part of the Tanach, one of the minor prophets, his name is זכריה, Zachariah, which means to remember. If you want to strengthen your memory, read this book. This is a segulah. It contains many beautiful prophecies and visions. We'll read one verse in which he describes Jerusalem in the time of redemption. It's one of the most beautiful verse, chapter 8, verses 4, 5, 6. So says the God of Hosts, yet the elder men and women shall sit again in the streets of Yerushalayim. The vision is seeing all these old guys, all our old chevreh here sitting together on a bench in Yerushalayim. Each one has his cane in his hand. It's a beautiful thing. The old men and the old women are sitting on benches. Each one has his cane in his hand from old age—they're really old people. That's the beginning of the vision. And all the old guys are sitting, because they're so old and in the streets, the streets are filled with little boys and girls playing. Everything is full of boys and girls. The next verse says, So says Hashem Tzevakot, if this vision is surprising to imagine, it's a wonder that you can't comprehend in your mind, so it is a wonder in God's eyes. There's no other verse like this where God says that the vision is a wonder for Him too. It seems like a simple vision, yet somehow it's a wonder even to God. If you're an artist and you want to paint a picture of Mashiach—some people will paint the Beit Hamikdash, or something else—but here... For example with Rebbe Nachman, to remember means to remember the future, not to lose sight of it. And this is what Zechariah is saying. You have to remember the future.

If you're in a car in LA and you forget where you're going, that's a big problem. So you have to remember the future in this case, where you're going. To remember the vision of the future. On Shabbat Chazon, everyone sees the future Temple. But, here it is apparently after that, and it is all nechamah, comfort. To see the Temple is before Tisha B'Av, but now after Tisha B'Av it's to see the consolation. To see the old men and women and the children playing in the streets. They're not even in school. The only people that might be doing something are the middle aged people, and everyone else is having a great time. The whole book of Zachariah is a book of memory and this is the greatest thing to remember. If you're a painter this is the greatest thing to paint.

Before the children, come the old people. Apparently in virtue of the old people sitting on the benches, all these millions of kids appear on the street. And Hashem says just as for you this is a wonder, for Me it's also a wonder.

כה אמר ה' צבאות עוד ישובו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים ואיש משענתו על ידו

The two words זקנים וזקנות, each has 5 letters. Just זקן equals נקבה. But זקנים equals 207, which is the value of אור, רז, אין סוף, ארון עולם. Old men are "infinity" (אין סוף). Old women, זקנות, equals 563. When we add them together we get 770. This is a vision of 770, which equals זקנים וזקנות, which is apparently what you see in 770. Since there are 10 letters here, then the average value of each letter is 77, מול. Nothingness is the mazal of Israel, אין מול. לישראל. The true mazal of the Jewish people is reaching this grand old age. What does the cane represent? Both the old men and the old women have canes. You can make Mashiach canes, a grandpa cane and a grandma cane. In Kabbalah this represents, the

two mazalot, the higher mazal goes to Abba and the lower to Ima Ila'ah. They support the old men and women. Each one has a cane מרוב ימים, from a great amount of days.

The verse has 10 words until the etnachta, and then 5 more words, 15 or yud hei words, alluding to the two canes we talked about. The full value of the verse is equal to 30 times זקן, the root of both זקנים and זקנות. The average value of each word is then 2 times זקן, one for the old man and one for the old woman. The average value is י-י.

We said that the fifth Chumash, Devarim especially relates to memory. In general, Zachariah, of all the prophets he is the most Messianic, even the picture of Mashiach coming on his donkey is from him, he himself that this is the most amazing vision of the times of Mashiach. For the world this is a prophecy of universal peace. It's very universal. We have to have this universality in mind when we think about Mashiach. The comfort of the Jewish people is related to that of all mankind. The peshat is that these old people are Jewish, because they are in Yerushalayim, but still the vision is universal. Meaning that the whole identifies with this, they would like to see the same thing reflected on themselves.

What else relates to memory? One thing is that every day at the end of davening, it says in Hayom Yom not to forget to say this on special days like Shabbat and Yom Tov, are the 6 remembrances. According to some versions there are 10 of them, one of which is זכור כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל, that God gives you the power to succeed. This verse, appears in next week's parashah. The mitzvah of remembrance in this week's parashah is that in all of the Ten Commandments, the memory is regarding the Shabbat. Shabbat is a day of remembering. It's remembering the Shabbat of Genesis, and it's also remembering the World to Come, which is a day of Shabbat. Shabbat is divided into 3 times, 3 meals, on each we remember something else: remembering Shabbat of Genesis, remembering the Shabbat of the Giving of the Torah, and then remembering the Shabbat of the future. Even though remembering the Shabbat appears in parashat Yitro, the sages say that Shamor and Zachor (remember) were said at once. Now, since Moshe Rabbeinu is here recollecting what God said, it would make sense that here he would say "Remember the Shabbat." BTW, in English we also say recall. This is like in Purim where we read, והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים. The day of Purim is a day of remembering more than any of the other holidays. The Arizal and the BST explain that if this is remembered properly, it is called back into existence again, even more than it was present the first time. So, to recall something, is indeed to call it back into existence. This is a power of memory that derives from Purim.

So returning to the Ten Commandments. The sages say that remember and keep were said at once by Hashem (זכור ושמור). We can't understand how two different words were said simultaneously. This is the origin of paradox in the Torah. Shamor, the remember is feminine, Zachor is the male counterpart. The fact that they were said as one, this is a tremendous union of male and female. Usually to remember Shabbat means to keep Shabbat in mind all week long. To keep means to sanctify. But sometimes, to keep also means to remember like in the verse, ואביו שמר את הדבר. In this week's parashah there is another example of this, השמר פן תשכח, remember lest you forget. This is the first time this idiom appears in the Torah. After Moshe says this he begins the Ten

Comandnemnts. This makes sense then why he first says then he says guard the Shabbat.

The very same commandment to remember is said later about Amalek. There's something about the negative, don't forget to sanctify the day of Shabbat, which is deeper. Because with reference to Amalek is says that to remember is in one's mouth, like reminding, to remind you have to say it. So to remember things is to remind yourself, say it to yourself. But "do not forget" is to hold it in your heart continuously. We better understand now what the advantage of the feminine side is, it is the inner continuous consciousness. It's never forgetting. The woman wants to never forget Shabbat. We seen that of all the mitzvot of the Torah, the Shabbat weighs equally like all of the mitzvot, and it is about memory.

Rosh Hashanah is called "the day of remembering" in the Torah, *יום הזכרון*, which in the Torah is juxtaposed with blowing the Shofar. RH is a great day for strengthening one's memory. In all Chassidic tradition, it is the most important time to be connected with the Rebbe. The Rebbe represents the epitome of remembering, remembering Hashem. Connecting with the Rebbe on this day enhances my memory of God.

In Megilat Esther there is another mention of memory with the book of memories, *ספר הזכרונות*. The king had a deep worry in his heart. To sleep is to forget everything real and to start dreaming unreal things. But, here the king's sleep is gone. So he asks for the Book of Memories to be brought to him, to see what he forgot: maybe someone saved my life and I forgot to pay him back. This is the essence of the miracle of Purim. Remember good things that people did to you so that you repay them. So we have Rosh Hashanah, we have Purim, and Pesach, which in the Torah is called a memory. All of the holidays are a continuation of Pesach, they recall the events for which we celebrate Pesach. So the 3 holidays are Rosh Hashanah, Purim, and Pesach, that strengthen memory.

The next thing that relates to memory, the next part of our partzuf—Shabbat and Yom Tov are wisdom and understanding. Shabbat is pleasure and the holidays are happiness. The next thing is related to da'at, knowledge. One of the six things we have to remember every day is Amalek. The story is in Shemot, but the mitzvah is at the end of Ki Teitzei in Deverim. The BST says that Amalek is doubt, *ספק*. In Kabbalah it says that Amalek is the power that opposes da'at. Da'at is retaining continual consciousness of Hashem. There is a mitzvah not to forget Amalek and to eradicate him from our minds and the world. He is the archenemy of the Jewish people. That mitzvah, that consciousness that a Jew before Mashiach comes has to fight this enemy, this corrects the central part of memory. Because, even though before we said that memory is a union of father and mother, it is in essence da'at, having pure concentration. So of all the different mitzvot that relate to memory the most essential is Amalek. Like secular Jews want to remember the holocaust. What they do with it is something else. Every Jew will say that this means something different to them, but the idea that we should not forget what happened is almost universally Jewish. The Torah says that the memory is for the sake of eradicating him. But halachah says that you can't really do this before Mashiach comes. There are 3 things that occur before: Appointing a king, then the king together

with the Jewish people is to eradicate Amalek, and then to build the Beit Hamikdash. If you're getting old and are not remembering names, etc. try to strengthen yourself with those things that have to do with memory. One thing is to say these remembrances about Amalek. In fact, the one deteriorating your memory is Amalek himself. If he could get our memory, he would destroy Jewish history—there was never a Temple on Mt. Moriah, etc, these are the ridiculous things and claims that Amalek likes to say.

The next thing, corresponding to loving-kindness. The all-inclusive mitzvah of the Torah is chesed, tzedakah. One of the places where the Torah says that a mitzvah is for memory is with respect to מחצית השקל, the half a shekel. There are few such mitzvot, that it says that the mitzvah is for memory. The מחצית השקל is a form of tzedakah. To abstract then all tzedakah—for the sake of the Temple, or for any institution like the Temple—is what strengthens memory.

Another such mitzvah is one that we don't keep ledorot, the trumpets that Moshe was commanded to make. Part of what took place with the trumpets is not for all generations, but part is for all times, like blowing them when faced with war. There it says that it is for the sake of the Jewish people. If you're losing your memory, take trumpet lessons. Maybe any musical instrument is good for memory. In a certain sense, the trumpet is an inclusive instrument. This is also related to זכרון תרועה, on Rosh Hashanah, the mate of the trumpet is the Shofar, they were blown together in the Temple. Playing a musical instrument is the avodah of the Levites, so it goes in gevurah, might.

The common denominator between tzedakah and the trumpets is that you are uniting two halves here. Why do we give half a shekel and not a whole? Either because we have to have in mind that we are not complete without another Jew or alternately without Hashem. The same is true with the trumpets as the Magid taught, that each trumpet is half a profile. Only when you join them do they become a whole. These are the only two mitzvot where two things come together, and about which the Torah mentions the word זכרון, memory. The other half is either my spouse, and everyone's other half is Hashem. There's something about knowing that you're a half and that you need another half that strengthens memory.

Tiferet: one of the things about tiferet, is that it has to do with clothes. The clothes of the high priest. There is also the crown of clothing, the tefilin of the head, about which it says, וליזכרון בין עיניך, a memory between your eyes. Meaning that if a person wants to strengthen his memory, if you're a man, make sure that you have two pairs of tefilin. Also, as the Rebbe said, try to have your tefilin checked once a year. How do we know that tefilin are related to not taking your mind off of God? Because there's a relationship between the ציץ the forehead plate of the High Priest. The High Priest is never to take his mind off the tzitz, ציץ. Likewise, every Jewish male cannot take his mind off the tefilin. The ציץ is the highest 8 garments. Two more garments have a connection with memory, the אפוד has זכרון, on its shoulders. Then on the Choshen it also says, לזכרון. So there is something about dressing properly with the right clothes that aid memory. If you don't or you forget to dress, that is not very good for memory. This all has to do with memory because it is called עוטר ישראל בתפארה, the head tefillin. This is also related to the verse, כי

תפארת אדם לשבת בית. The woman is more similar to the High Priest because she has more clothing than a male. The High Priest himself is more like the female in the Temple.

Another important thing about memory is that Yosef was punished for asking a non-Jew to remember him. If you rely upon non-Jews to remember, you will get into trouble. This has to do with remembering Amalek.

We're up to netzach and hod, two halves of one thing. The mitzvah in the Torah in this case is making blessings. The first allusion is that the root זכר equals ברכה, blessing. So there's some essential connection between them. As we said, don't forget to make a blessing. The mitzvah of making blessings is in next week's parashah, Eikev, it all comes from the blessing after meals. The blessings before are from the sages. What's the difference between before and after. The word ברכה also means knee. The blessing before is the right knee, the blessing after is the left knee, the hod (which is why it's easier to forget the blessing after). When eating, you have to remember with the blessing, why you're eating, it's remembering the future. The blessing after is remembering the past, that's explicitly hod, giving thanks to Hashem. The blessing after is the passive trust in Hashem, the left knee. The right knee is taking initiative, because I want to do something in my life. If I give up, I stop eating, like in certain psychological diseases when people have no motivation to do anything so they also don't eat. When a person has no motivation, the segulah is to eat because it's an opportunity to make a blessing. The blessing is valuable in and of itself, but it's about remembering the future, having a destiny, an objective in life. Keep on eating, as the BST said. Especially simple Jews, they have to keep on eating. Like the BST sent his students to see simple Jews eating. If you love your friends, your spouse, you remind them to make their blessings. In the Oral Torah, the laws of blessings, ברכות הנהנין, is a segulah to strengthen memory.

The next thing is the mitzvah in the Torah, and a custom among the Chassidim to learn in the Torah during Sefirat Ha'omer, which is Sotah, the disloyal wife. She brings a mincha, an offering which is described as an offering of memory, it recalls transgress, מנחת זכרון מזכרת עון. In this context it is not about forgetting transgression. It teaches us that the woman who really betrayed her husband is punished. But, also the one who committed adultery with her is punished. Just as Amalek deteriorates memory, so the one offense that destroys the memory, ruins the mind, is sexual betrayal. It's also related to clothing, in Hebrew בגד, which is related to betrayal which is בגידה. If a man is afraid of forgetting things when he gets old, he has to do teshuvah for any thoughts that had to do with other women. This is almost explicit in Tanya. This obviously relates to yesod, foundation.

We'll end with a good point. A very beautiful verse says, ויכתב ספר זכרון, Hashem inscribes you in His book of memory, meaning that no matter how old you grow, you will have a good memory and this depends on when two Jews come together and sit together and relate stories of tzadikim. Like in the vision of Zachariah. נדברו means speak in a spontaneous (נפעל) manner, with love. Hashem pays great attention to these gatherings and he inscribes the God-fearing souls that contemplate His Name in His book of memory. The יראי ה' are simple Jews who fear God. יראת ה' is related to malchut. At the end of the verse it says, חשבי ה', which means both people who

contemplate God's Name, but it also means that Hashem is very important for these individuals. The most important thing for them is to sanctify Hashem's Name in their life. Good interpersonal relations, sitting with another Jew and talking about the most important thing in our lives, how to bring Mashiach, how to sanctify God's Name, this causes you to be inscribed in God's book of memory, proclaiming that you will have perfect memory.