

# אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה  
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר  
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

---

*Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe  
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

## שבועות

*Volume 8 Issue # 26*

Wishing all  
כלל ישראל  
א גוט יום טוב!

## שבועות

ה' מְסִינֵי בְּאֵרֶץ מִשְׁעִיר לְמַזְ (דברים ל"ג ב')

רש"י: שפחה לבני עשו שיקבלו את התורה ולא לנו.

### The Difference Between Klal Yisroel and the Nations of the World

The Yom Tov of Shavuot is approaching, so let's highlight some important points about Kabbalas HaTorah.

The Sifri recounts the well-known events that took place leading up to Kabbalas HaTorah. Hakadosh Baruch Hu approached the nations of the world and gave them each a shot at accepting the Torah. First, He came to the descendants of Esav, and made them the offer of eternity. The leaders of Esav asked: "What does it say in the Torah?" to which Hashem answered, "*Lo Sirtzach - you shall not kill*". Esav was quick to react to this: "Oh, no no no. That won't work for us. You see, the zeide Yitzchok already told us 'על הרבך תהיה' - *you will live by your sword*. We are genetically predisposed to be murderers; this Torah is clearly not for us."

Hashem then approached the descendants of Amon and Moav. They, too, wanted to hear some of the teachings of the Torah before making any commitments. So, Hakadosh Baruch Hu told them: "It says *Lo Sin'af - you shall not commit adultery*." The Bnei Amon U'Moav immediately declined the offer. "Just look at our roots; we only came into existence through *znus* (Lot and his daughters). It's in our blood; the Torah is clearly not for us."

The same happened with the Yishma'elim. When Hashem revealed that it said in the Torah, "*Lo Signov - you shall not steal*," they responded: "The Malach already told our grandmother Hagar that "ידו" בכלל - our hands are forever stepping over the boundaries of what belongs to them. We have no choice but to decline the offer."

Finally, Hashem approached the Bnei Yisroel, who famously answered in unison: "נעשה ונשמע" - "we will do, and then we will hear!"

### Why the Nations Couldn't Fathom Keeping the Torah

The Ohr Hachaim (שמות פרק י"ט פסוק ה') is bothered by this Midrash. Just because you struggle with certain aspects that the Torah mentions - you fail to accept eternal glory? Surely the nations understood that they were giving up the *Olam HaNitzchi* for a world that just comes and goes - a couple of years of freedom to follow earthly desires! How can they be so foolish?

To understand the Ohr Hachaim's answer, let's give some background. Rav Chaim Vital, in his *sefer* Sha'arei Kedusha, poses the following question: Suppose you know two people. One pays no attention to the Torah and its many Halachos - he never keeps Shabbos, he eats *treifeh* food, he never *davens* or learns - but he has a heart of gold. He is extra kind to everyone surrounding him, he would never hurt a fly, and he never speaks ill of others. The second person, on the other hand, keeps the Halachos of the Torah - he *davens* in a *minyan* three times a day, he only eats kosher food, he buys a beautiful *esrog* every Succos - but he has a heart as black as coal. He hurts people's feelings on a regular basis, he cares exclusively for himself and no one else, and he walks around with a sour look on his face all day, ready to lash out with nasty comments the moment he is slightly provoked. Well, which of these two is the better man?

Says Rav Chaim Vital: the first person is the better one. But what about the fact that he disregards the entire Torah? True, but a person who has good *middos* will eventually accept the Torah upon himself. His lack of commitment will dwindle with time, because good *middos* always lead to accepting the yoke of *Malchus Shamayim*. The second person, on the other hand, is bound to fail; as the years go on, he will eventually drop everything - if not outwardly, then for sure internally. The Torah cannot coexist with bad character traits; it requires a healthy ground in order to bear fruit and thrive. So too, if the ground is poisonous, all of its fruit will slowly rot.

The Ohr Hachaim answers his question by saying that only the עם סגולה can accept, and grow from, the Torah Hakedosha. People who

are rotten at the core naturally repel the holy teachings and ways of Hashem; they simply cannot withstand the purity of the Torah. It's not that the other nations were afraid that they would struggle with some of the *mitzvos*; rather, they knew that their reality was deeply entrenched in despicable behaviors, and for them to keep the Torah, they would have to completely alter their nature. Otherwise, the parts of the Torah that they could easily keep would eventually fall by the wayside. And that was a commitment that they just could not make. The Yidden, on the other hand, were descendents of Avraham, Yitzchok, Yakkov and the *Imahos* - people who altered their genes and rose above the negative dispositions of their families and neighbors. It is for this reason that they were able to readily accept the Torah with the confidence that even if some of its rules may be difficult, they had the ability to ultimately succeed. In short, they were the only עם סגולה.

In *Birchas HaTorah*, we say “ אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים, ונתן לנו את “תורתו”. There seem to be two factors here - the fact that we were chosen from amongst the other nations, and the fact that we received the Torah. This should be very clear now: the first factor is that we were chosen because we're the descendants of the *Avos* and the *Imahos*, therefore making us the only עם סגולה that can possibly accept the Torah; and the second factor is the fact that we actually received the Holy Torah as a result of this. Because we have both factors, we can rest assured that each and every one of us is perfectly capable of achieving greatness in our lives - and for this reason, we make this special *bracha* every morning.

### **The Beauty of the עם סגולה**

*When the Mirrer Yeshiva was in Shanghai, the Chinese government sent a professor of sociology to study the lives and mannerisms of the frum Yidden in the Yeshiva. This professor could not wrap his head around what he was witnessing. He saw two Yidden walking together, talking calmly, when suddenly they started arguing loudly. They began shouting, waving their hands animatedly, throwing theories at each other - and then, they both began talking quietly again. He had*

*never seen two Bnei Torah handling in learning before; to him, this was a novel experience. As the days went by, he saw more of these strange mannerisms occurring - the sudden outbursts of debate in the Beis Medrash, the harmonious behavior in the dining room, the fervent prayers, the lips murmuring before consuming food or after exiting the restroom - it was all very strange to him. But sooner or later, it began to grow on him.*

*It wasn't long before this professor became a Ger Tzedek; today, he's buried on Har Hazeisim. The beauty of Jewish life - the devotion to one Creator, the deep dedication to Torah study and prayer - overtook this Chinese man. He couldn't get over the peace and balance of the עם סגולה.*

Yidden, until today, are clearly the chosen nation. With all of their struggles, they are the only people who are able to remain fully dedicated to following all of the commandments of Hashem. The Arabs may have inherited some of the *middah* of *Chesed* from Avraham Avinu; Edom may have inherited some of Yitzchok's *Gevura*; but none of them have the *middah* of *Tiferes* running through their veins like we do. Only the descendants of Yaakov Avinu have within them the perfect balance of *Yir'ah* and *Ahava* that is necessary for remaining resolute to Yiddishkeit for their entire lives. *Tiferes* is all about balancing *Chesed* and *Gevura* - and that is the key characteristic of the עם סגולה. Because they possessed this *middah*, the Yidden knew that they weren't too extreme in any direction, which would make keeping the entire Torah a nearly insurmountable mountain, as the other nations felt.

### **The Three Hachanos for Kabbalas HaTorah**

Let's discuss the preparations a Yid must make for Kabbalas HaTorah.

The *pesukim* before Kabbalas HaTorah tell us: "ביום הזה, באו - *on this day, the Bnei Yisroel arrived in Midbar Sinai. They left Refidim, and they arrived in Midbar Sinai.*" The Ohr Hachaim asks on this - isn't the wording here out of order? We don't normally say, "I arrived in Lakewood. I left Flatbush, and I arrived in Lakewood." The proper way to say it is, "I left Flatbush,

and I arrived in Lakewood." Why does the *pasuk* first tell us about Klal Yisroel's arrival at their destination, and only afterwards return to tell us where they left from - and then repeat where they arrived?

The first answer the Ohr Hachaim provides is that since the Six Days of Creation, the entire physical world was anxiously awaiting the giving of the Torah. Now, the moment that highly anticipated day was in sight, the Torah exclaimed with excitement: "באו מדבר סיני" - *they arrived in Midbar Sinai!* Once that exciting exclamation was made, having expressed the great joy of the entire Creation, the Torah returned to the sequence of events: "They left Refidim, and they arrived in Midbar Sinai..."

The second answer goes as follows: first, the Torah tells us the necessary fact that Klal Yisroel arrived in Midbar Sinai. Then, it proceeds to tell us some vital information: the three preparations the Yidden made before accepting the Torah. The *pasuk* says three statements: "ויסעו מרפידים, ויחנו במדבר, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר." The Ohr Hachaim explains that each one of these is another lesson in accepting the Torah.

### The First *Hachana*: Ridding Ourselves of רפיון ידיים

ויסעו מרפידים - This verse alludes to the importance of not serving Hashem in a mode of רפיון ידיים, meaning lack of enthusiasm or motivation. In order for a person to fully accept the Torah and have it affect his entire being, he must first accomplish the מרפידים - departing from the sluggish and unexcited *avodah* that he has been doing in the past. The only way to grow in Torah is to yearn for it and greatly desire it with every breath we take.

The *pasuk* in the *Tochacha* says that our nation receives retribution due to the lack of happiness in our service of Hashem - "תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלוקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב". There are those that ask: how can Hashem punish us for not serving Him out of happiness? It doesn't say anywhere in the Torah that we are specifically obligated to be happy while we serve Him! But the truth is, this is a foolish question. The Torah doesn't tell us to be happy while we serve

Hashem because it doesn't need to tell us so; it should be self-understood. Let's give a *mashal*:

*A powerful king selects a man from amongst his subjects to be his servant. This is a tremendous honor; hundreds of people throughout the kingdom would give anything to be the king's right hand man. At first, the new servant is eager to carry out all of the king's desires and commands. However, things didn't remain that way for long. A few weeks after taking the post, the king summons this servant and asks him: "Go bring my royal signet and some parchment; I have an important decree to draft!"*

*The servant slumps his shoulders, puts his hands in his pockets, and shuffles out of the room, looking completely disinterested. A few minutes later, he comes back with the items the king had requested, and drops them lazily on the king's lap. "Anything else, your highness?" he mutters, with the words "please say no, thank you," plastered all over his face.*

*Can you imagine how irritated the king will become if this behavior persists? This is the most fortunate man in the kingdom! Hundreds of people would do anything to be granted such an honorable position! And yet, here he is, doing the job while looking completely distracted and annoyed about his job. He'll be lucky if the king lets him keep his head on his shoulders!*

*Similarly, imagine a wife asks her husband to take out the garbage, and each time, he does it grumpily, seeming like he would rather do anything else. Eventually, she'll just say, "You know what? Forget about it, I'll do it myself!"*

My friends, we are the most fortunate people in the entire world. Only we have been given the great responsibility of sanctifying Hashem's name in this world by keeping the Torah. Shouldn't we all be jumping for joy before we make Kiddush on Friday night? Remember, a *goy* that keeps Shabbos is *chayav misah*! Only we can proclaim Hashem as King of the World on Rosh Hashanah, only we have the opportunity to perfect our *middos* during *Sefiras Ha'omer*, only we can dive into the *Yam Ha'Talmud* and elevate our souls through studying its timeless teachings! Is there any room for being

lazy and unenthusiastic about it? *Chas V'shalom!* We must rid ourselves of the רפיון ידיים and get back to serving Hashem with happiness and excitement.

Perhaps this is the reason why we find that Yisro was so happy upon joining Klal Yisroel. "ויחד יתרו" - Yisro was overjoyed to have the opportunity of serving Hashem - to be able to get a *Bris Milah*! The Gemara in Brachos tells us how happy Dovid HaMelech was when he paid attention to the fact that he had a *Bris Milah*. This was the joy of knowing that he had Hashem's inscription on his own body, reminding him that he should always be prepared to do Hashem's will on a moment's notice! Now, that's the happiness and exuberance that we should all aspire to feel as we approach Kabbalas HaTorah.

### **The Second Hachana: Being Like a 'Midbar'**

The second preparation Klal Yisroel made was ויחנו במדבר. This alludes to the teaching of Chazal that one who makes himself like a 'dessert' - his Torah will last. There are many ways to translate the word 'dessert' in this context, but let's focus on the *mehalech* brought down by many of the *sifrei mussar*, that Chazal were referring to someone who deflates his ego, and makes himself desolate like a dessert.

This is extremely *nogea* in the area of *bein adam le'chavero*. When a person gets rid of his ego, he's the first to forgo a fight; when he is provoked by others, he simply shys away from the conflict. He is the first one to say, "You're right; I could have done that differently." Instead of always insisting that he is in the right, he prefers to make himself like a 'midbar', and chooses to stay away from *machlokes*. Only someone who can overcome his ego and accept criticism from others is capable of truly excelling in his learning and his *dveykus* in Hashem.

### **The Third Hachana: Total Unity**

The final preparation was ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר. Rashi famously teaches that the reason why the word ויחן is in singular form is because Klal Yisroel camped in front of Har Sinai "כאיש אחד בלב אחד" - like one man with one heart, i.e. in complete harmony.

*Achdus* is extremely important for Kabbalas HaTorah. This is a process of a few steps:

If we want to fully accept the Torah, then we must first have complete *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem. Otherwise, how will we totally devote ourselves to His will? Well, believing in Hashem while not living in unison with our fellow Yidden is an oxymoron.

Allow me to explain. Let's say your friend seems to have a smoother life than you. He seems to have everything going for him, while you go from struggle to struggle every single day. Suppose you start getting jealous of him, or simply thinking, "Why me? Why do all his *shidduchim* go smoothly, while mine are so difficult? Why does a tree have to fall on my old car, while his brand new SUV is always gleaming and sparkling?" Well, when these thoughts pass through your mind, it's a sign that your *emunah* is lacking. If you would have full faith in Hashem, then the successes of your peers wouldn't be a burden on you. You would realize that every single one of your struggles were tailor-made especially for your growth and reward.

The *pasuk* in *Az Yashir* says: "אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה". The Ohr Hachaim asks: why does the *pasuk* say אשירה - *I will sing*? Wasn't this a song that the entire nation sang out in unison? It should say נשירה - *we will sing!* The Ohr Hachaim answers that this verse was coming shortly after the *pasuk* that says "ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו" - *and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant*. When the Yidden reached this level of total clarity in their *emunah*, they immediately became like one; they therefore sang in total harmony, as though they were one person. This is the idea we were discussing - *achdus* comes through *emunah*.

*Imagine a person works very hard every single day, and he looks forward to his one day off in many months. The day before this long-anticipated break, his brother from Eretz Yisroel calls him, and says: "I have an important request. My Rosh Kollel is going to be in your city tomorrow. It's his first time in America, and he really doesn't know how to get around. He's a very choshuveh talmid chacham and he really needs to collect a large sum of money. Can you drive him around and help him raise the necessary funds?"*

*This fellow could think to himself: "Hashem, I don't understand You. My one day off, and You had to dump this responsibility on my head?"*

There's no such thing as Murphy's Law. If things seem to be going wrong, they are obviously happening for a reason. If a person is able to believe that everything that occurs to him is for a reason - that Hashem planned out this day off just so that he could acquire this *s'char* for assisting a *talmid chacham* - then he will be ready for Kabbalas HaTorah.

### **A True Kabbalah is like an Action**

On the *pasuk* of "ועתה אם שמוע" - *And now, if you will listen* - Rashi brings a Machilta: "אם עתה תקבלו עליכם, יערב לכם מכאן ולהבא", "שכל התחלות קשות" - *If you will accept the Torah upon yourselves now, then it will be sweet for you in the future, for all beginnings are difficult.* This wording is interesting - if the Mechilta is referring to the acceptance of the Torah, then why is it called the 'beginning' of doing the commandments of the Torah? Accepting is the step before actually doing the *mitzvos*.

Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock taught from here that making a *Kabbalah* is already considered like actually doing the intended action. I believe that we can prove this point from another source as well: Hashem told Moshe in one of their first conversations, "תעבדון ה' את האלוקים על ההר הזה" - *[Klal Yisroel] will serve Hashem on this mountain.* The Rashbam says that the word תעבדון in this context is referring to the *korbanos* that Klal Yisroel would bring at Har Sinai; the word עבודה is often used for sacrifices and other forms of service that are done in the Beis Hamikdash. Rashi, however, learns that the word תעבדון is actually referring to Kabbalas HaTorah. So we see clearly that Rashi considers a proper *Kabbalah* to be just like an actual action, or עבודה.

Perhaps the explanation for this idea is that when a *Kabbalah* is just stated, but isn't being accepted upon oneself with complete dedication - then it won't last. As the Gemara teaches: רשעים מלאים - *wicked people are always full of regret.* When a person is

constantly sinning, he walks around with a guilty conscience; he is forever telling himself, "This is the last time I will do that *aveira*," and so on. However, the *Rasha's kabbalos* don't hold any water, because they aren't being done with complete sincerity; he is only stating them because he is feeling bad about himself, but he isn't truly dedicated to a brighter future. What, then, is a *kabbalah* that actually lasts? Those are only the *kabbalos* that are actually coming from a place of growth; from a place of experiencing the desire and longing for purity. When a person yearns with all of his soul to make amends, then he really means it when he makes his *kabbalah*. This is why the *kabbalah* itself is considered like an action - because arriving at a place of true dedication to making amends is a lofty *madreigah* in and of itself.

### **The Meaning of a Sincere Kabbalah**

Maseches Niddah finishes with the following statement: " כל הבא השונה הלכות בכל יום, מובטח לו שהוא בן עולם הבא - *one who studies Halachos every single day, is guaranteed to Olam Habah*. I heard from a certain Rav Gutfarb that he heard from a Yerushalmi Yid, R' Kohen Melamed, the following *p'shat* in these words:

When a woman becomes *tamei*, she needs to count seven consecutive days of purity. Now, if she happens to see *dam* on the seventh day - then she can't just say, "Okay, I'll skip this day and become pure one day later." The days have to be consecutive - she has to start counting all over again! So too, the Masechta that teaches these *Halachos* concludes by teaching us the above statement - conveying the message that a true *talmid chacham* learns every single day; he can't just skip a day here and there, and still be considered a guaranteed *Ben Olam Habah*. His commitment to Torah has to be one that never allows a day off; missing one day would mean that he has to start all over again.

Our commitments must be the same way. They must be done with the sincerity that doesn't allow transgressions here and there; they must be done with the understanding that if we break them, we must start from scratch. May we all truly accept the yoke of the Torah in our lives, and reach the level of a *kabbalah* that is considered like an action.

*To subscribe to the weekly shmuess by email,  
or for audio recordings of the shmuessen,  
Call / Text 848-299-7212  
or email: ohrpneimoshe@gmail.com*

*A sampling of the audio shmuessen can also be obtained at  
[www.shasilluminated.org/rabbi-moshe-rabinowitz](http://www.shasilluminated.org/rabbi-moshe-rabinowitz)*