אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from Harav Moshe Rabinowitz Zt"l

פרשת וישלח

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לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ג ר' מרדכי דוד זצוק"ל קוקיס
בן יבדל"ח הרה"ג
ר' שלמה בן-ציון שליט"א
נפטר ט"ו כסלו תש"פ

פרשת וישלח

וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ (בראשית ל"ב כ"ו)

What the *Sar Shel Esav* Accomplished

When Yaakov Avinu fought with the *Malach*, his thigh was wounded. It says in the *sifrei machshava* that just as the leg is the support beam that holds up the entire person – so too, the *Sar shel Esav* weakened the support beam that holds up the nation of Klal Yisroel – and this is the secret behind the unfortunate reality of ירידת הדורות.

People often talk about the ירידת הדורות of the level of *Yiras Shomayim* and *gadlus* in Torah – but I have heard from great *tzaddikim* that it also refers to the *yeridah* in *middos*. Of course, there is so much *chesed* in Klal Yisroel today, and there are so many wonderful people, Baruch Hashem – but there are certain areas that we are so much weaker in than the previous generations.

Stop Thinking About Your Social Standing So Much

Take *ga'avah*, for instance. People are so obsessed with their social standing and are laser-focused on only doing things that "*poss*" for them, instead of just living for real. In previous *doros*, if a person needed some *parnassah*, he would roll up his sleeves and milk cows, or bend over and polish shoes (like the names of some of the great Tannaim and Amora'im imply), and then he would spend the rest of the day huddled over a *sefer* in the corner of a *shul*, *shteiging* away unassumingly, not expecting any *kavod* for it. Just think about it: how many of us would be willing to learn in a quiet *shul* for a few hours at a time when no one is around? I'm sure this doesn't apply to any of you – but *Halevai* all of us would learn and grow without any future *shtellar* in mind!

> *R' Baruch Leib Sassoon zt"l was the seventh grade Rebbi in Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim on the West Side. He was a close talmid of R' Elchonon Wasserman, and a dear chaver of Reb Shmuel Berenbaum zt"l. When R' Baruch Leib and R' Shmuel would talk in learning, sparks would fly. He was clearly a great talmid chacham from a previous dor – yet he was just fine being a seventh grade Rebbi, filling out report cards, doing PTA, and all the other exciting things a Rebbi does. There was no concept of "this position doesn't 'poss' for me" by R' Baruch Leib.*

***Middos* are the Foundation**

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein *zt"l* spoke a great deal about *middos tovos*. At one point, somebody approached him and asked him why he didn't give more *shmuessen* about *hasmadah* and *mesiras nefesh* for Torah. R' Chatzkel answered him with the following story. (I once told this story to my friend R' Eliezer Hartman, who confirmed that he heard it from his *shver*, who heard it directly from R' Chatzkel *zt"l*.)

> *There was a tall building in Shanghai that was mysteriously sinking a few inches every year. The owner of the building summoned architects and engineers from around the world to try to pinpoint what was causing this odd phenomenon. Eventually, one of the experts got to the bottom of the mystery: the land that the structure was standing on was once a landfill. The team was able to determine that over 400 years before the building was erected, that very site was used for dumping waste – which doesn't really make for a great foundation. So, it turned out that what seemed to be solid ground was really soil covering years and years of garbage.*

Said R' Chatzkel: this story brings out why we have to focus on *middos* above all else. If the Yid has no foundation – then the Torah will all sink.

Maintaining Our *Middos Tovos* Even in the Worst Surroundings

There's another way to tie the importance of strengthening our *middos* into this week's *parsha*. Yaakov sent his brother Esav a message: עם לבן גרתי – *I have sojourned with Lavan.* One can ask: why did Yaakov think that Esav would have any interest in knowing where he was living? Answers the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: Lavan was infamous for his trickery and crookedness. Yaakov instructed his messengers to tell Esav: "I have lived for twenty years with a man who is a notorious trickster – and yet, we had a great relationship! We were on good terms – he even gave me his daughters and sent me off with great wealth! If I was able to get along with him, then perhaps I'm not such a bad person after all." The Ohr Hachaim concludes that "these words can melt a heart of stone", and therefore even Esav would not be angry at him.

Indeed, Yaakov Avinu *shteiged* tremendously by living alongside Lavan and maintaining his *middos tovos*. One of the biggest proofs to this is the fact that when Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, after learning *b'hasmadah* for fourteen years, he had a dream about *Malachim*; but when he left Lavan, the *pasuk* says "ויפגעו בו מלאכי אלוקים" – he actually saw the *Malachim* while he was

awake. This shows that the great effort that he put into working on his מידות while living with Lavan, brought him to a whole new level.

***Middos Tovos* in Conversation**

My father zt"l used to come back after visiting R' Moshe Feinstein zt"l glowing like a star. "Ah, R' Moshe's ga'onus, his gadlus in psak – it's unbelievable. But his middos? Nobody comes close to them…" he used to say. "Any nebach feels like the most important person in the world after going to visit R' Moshe. He is genuinely interested to hear about every person's life and family, even if it is totally uninteresting. He just loves to make everyone feel cherished." My father said that when he would come in, R' Moshe would ask him: "R' Yisroel, how is the family? How is your shul?" and when my father would give a basic response, he would insist: "I want to hear more."

We find this idea in this weeks' parsha when Yaakov asked his messengers to tell Esav "ויהי לי שור וחמור". The Ohr Hachaim asks on this: why did Yaakov deem it necessary to mention that he had amassed a large amount of oxen and donkeys? How does that play a role in his relationship with Esav?

The Ohr Hachaim answers that when two people appreciate and love each other, they can enjoy even small talk with one another. When a person has a good relationship with his friend, or his Rebbi – they want to hear about each other. They don't need any *chiddushim* in order to be interested in the conversation. This was the idea that Yaakov was attempting to convey to Esav; we're such close brothers, we even want to discuss our livestock.

I often have to give this message over to newlywed *yungerleit*. They sometimes complain about a strange phenomenon: during the period that they were just a *chosson* and *kallah*, they were up late many nights, talking on the phone about everything under the sun; but now that they have been married for a few months, they have absolutely nothing to talk about! So I told them this Ohr Hachaim. When you have a healthy relationship with your spouse, there's always plenty to talk about. Why? Because everything about them interests you – even things as trivial as how their day was at work, how many times the baby cried that day, what they managed to put together for lunch, and so on. When you were just engaged, you were very interested in each other. All you could think about was that this is the person that is bringing me all this excitement – a *chasuna*, new clothes, a new life – of course you just wanted to talk and talk. But the reality is that this interest and excitement is supposed to last for a lifetime. If your spouse is as חביב to you

as the Ribono Shel Olam wants him or her to be, then you will appreciate small talk with each other.

Early Sunset, Early Sunrise

The Gemara in Chullin (91b) brings the following *pasuk* in this week's *parsha* (which discusses the aftermath of Yaakov's brawl with the *Malach*): "ויזרח לו השמש" – *And the sun rose for him.* The Gemara relates that R' Akiva was once in the איטליז של אימאום – the meat marketplace of a city called Eimom – and he met Rabban Gamliel, who was there to purchase meat for his son's upcoming *chasuna*. R' Akiva seized the opportunity to ask the Nasi about this *pasuk*: "*And the sun rose for him* – did it rise for him alone? Did it not rise for the rest of the world?" R' Akiva then proceeded to answer the question as follows:

R' Yitzchok said: The sun that set early for him – rose early for him as well. How so? After Yaakov stopped at Har HaMoriah to *daven*, he was prepared to get back on the road – but Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: "The *tzaddik* came to My hotel – will I not provide him with some rest?" So Hashem immediately made the sun set, and Yaakov stayed for the night. Now, when the sun rose early in order to heal his wound – it was just making up for the time that it set early on that night at Har HaMoriah.

We see from this Gemara that the Eibishter arranged for the entire *seder* of the creation to change around just for His beloved child, Yaakov. But we also learn another important lesson: sometimes, it can seem like our entire world has stopped. The night has come early; a person may still be in his young years, but he has suddenly been afflicted with terrible tragedies, *r"l*. However, he must remember: the 'early sunset' is being calculated into the bigger picture. Although he may not understand it now, he will be repaid for his suffering – if not now, then maybe in two decades, as it was with Yaakov Avinu. And if not then, then perhaps in 40 years. Or maybe not until he arrives at the Olam Ha'Emes. But one thing is for certain: the sun will rise again, in a way that will outshine the darkness that was felt when it left you early.

Why Do the Circumstances of the Story Matter?

We find another Chazal that discusses a similar story of R' Akiva and Rabban Gamliel. The Mishna in כריתות (Perek 3, Mishna 7) says the following:

Rabban Gamliel was going to make a *chasuna* for his son, so he went to the איטליז של אימאום with R' Yehoshua. While he was there, he was approached by R' Akiva, who asked him the following *shailah*: what would be

the Halacha for a person who married his sister, who happened to also be his father's sister, as well as his mother's sister? How many times is he חייב? (The Gemara there clarifies how this scenario would be possible.) Rabban Gamliel answered: לא שמענו – we have not heard the ruling for such a case; but he then suggested a *kal vachomer* to answer the question. But R' Akiva wasn't finished; he had another *shailah*: what would be the Halacha of an אבר המדולדל, a limb of an animal that was hanging onto its body by a small strand of meat – would it be מטמא like a regular piece of אבר מן החי, or not? Once again, Rabban Gamliel replied "לא שמענו", but provided a *kal vachomer*. R' Akiva then asked another question: if someone ate five *k'zeisim* of נותר, how many times is he חייב? And once again, Rabban Gamliel simply answered "לא שמענו", while R' Yehoshua offered an answer.

The question that bothers me about this Mishna is that why was it necessary for us to know the background of the story? Why couldn't the Mishna just tell us that R' Akiva asked these questions and that Rabban Gamliel had not heard any answers for them, without mentioning the upcoming *chasuna* or the location of the conversation?

The *Tiferes Yisroel* answers that the Mishna was teaching us a very important lesson. These are his words: "Although Rabban Gamliel, the Nasi, was involved in his son's *simcha* preparations, and he was in a busy area in the midst of the marketplace, and the Av Beis Din – R' Yehoshua – was there with him, still R' Akiva did not refrain from asking them these questions – even though they involved uncommon occurrences. He did so because he knew that these great men would not be *makpid* if he asked them questions – out of their great *anavah* and love for Torah. And it also teaches us that they indeed did not get upset with him, and were not ashamed to say 'לא שמענו' in the middle of a busy marketplace. This all comes to show us that the primary interest and focus of these great Tannaim was *Toras Hashem*, and their fear of Him superseded any other occupation that was on their hands."

These words blew my mind. Can you imagine the level of *gadlus*? I'm not sure whose greatness is more apparent in this story – that of Rabban Gamliel, for loving the Torah so much that nothing could possibly stop his thirst for it, not the embarrassment from the crowds around him, nor the responsibilities of the upcoming *simcha* – or that of R' Akiva, who adored the holy Torah so much that he felt that right there and then was the perfect setting to *hondel* the most rare Halachic *shailos* imaginable.

This leads us back to the first part of our *shmuess*, how we should try to emulate the *gadlus* of the previous generations. In our current *dor*, many of us have no מושג what it means to learn Torah purely *leshem shomayim*, with zero ulterior motives. *Anavah* and *gadlus b'Torah* go hand in hand. May we

all be *zoche* to reach these lofty *madreigos* and hasten the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

Mesiras Nefesh of the Previous Generations

I would like to share with you a fascinating story that I recently heard, where we can also see the *gadlus* of previous generations.

A bachur told me a story about his great-grandfather, R' Gedalya Moshe Goldman of Zvill, the son of R' Shlomke of Zvill. R' Gedalya Moshe was a tremendous machnis orach; there were always people from far and near staying at his house. At one point, the Russian government suspected that he was a spy, given the amount of foreigners that were always coming in and out of his home. of Zvill

My father was in Siberia for just two years, and he used to tell us that the fact that he survived was an absolute miracle. In fact, the Rosh Hayeshiva of Lomza Harav Yechiel Mordechai Gordon said kaddish for him, assuming that he was already dead. But somehow, through ניסי ניסים, R' Gedalya Moshe managed to survive for eight years.

At the end of his sentence, the guards approached him and told him it was time for him to leave. "There's a transport leaving soon; the next one leaves in three months. So either you get on this one, or you have to wait for a while," they informed him. "All you need to do is sign this form."

However, it just so happened to be Shabbos that day – so signing the paper wasn't so simple. R' Gedalya Moshe thought to himself, and replied: "I'll wait for the one that's leaving in three months." He reasoned that it wasn't a shailah of pikuach nefesh, as he had already managed to survive in Siberia for the past eight years – so he figured he would be capable of managing another three months.

There was another Yid there waiting to sign his name to be released, but when he saw the Rebbe abstain – he refused to sign as well. "If the Rebbe is not signing, then neither am I," he proclaimed. The Rebbe looked at him and said: "No, you must sign. It's pikuach nefesh for you." But the other Yid insisted that he was also going to wait an extra three months. So, the Rebbe turned to the guards, and asked: "Can I please sign for him?"

One of the guards asked the obvious question: "If you can't sign for yourself, then why can you sign for him?" But the answer was simple to R' Gedalya Moshe. He was on high madreigah of emunah, and he

was ready to stay in Siberia for a bit longer; but for the other Yid, it was a real situation of pikuach nefesh…

This bachur told me that his great aunt remembered what it was like when her father, R' Gedalya Moshe, was sitting in a Russian prison. At school, her teacher would torment her, by telling the whole class: "That girl's father is in jail because he's a revolutionist. Don't be like her father." The biggest issue was that her mother wouldn't correct her when she came home and reported what the teacher had said. Her mother figured that if she would tell her kids not to worry, and that their Tatty was really a good man, then the children might repeat her words to the teacher – and then, she would end up in prison as well. And what good would that do? Who would raise her children? So in the meantime, the children were growing up confused, unsure of whether their father was a criminal or a Rebbe.

We have no מושג what kind of יסורים the Yidden in Russia went through. It's incomprehensible to us over here in America. The *mesiras nefesh* that they did surely provided our generation with an abundance of *z'chusim*. But anyway, that wasn't the main story I wanted to share with you. What's important for this *shmuess* is the following memory that the *bachur*'s great aunt shared:

When the young children would go to the Russian public school, their mother would send them with a small piece of bread in their knapsacks, and she would warn them: "When lunchtime comes, eat your bread in the classroom; do not go into the school dining room. They serve treifeh food there." At one point, the kids began to question this rule: "Mommy, they serve the same bread as you give us. Why can't we just go in to get extra bread if we're still hungry?"

But their mother made herself clear. "Kinderlach, if you go to get the bread, then you'll start getting the butter. And then the vegetables. And soon you will be eating real tarfus… The only way to stay away from this Yetzer Hara is for you to never set foot in the dining room."

The greatness of this mother can make a person cry. How often do we recognize this timeless truth in our own lives? If we want to defeat a *Yetzer Hara*, we have to set up clear boundaries. May the *zchusim* of these holy Yidden be a *Meilitz Yosher* for us all.

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