

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
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סוכות
פרשת בראשית

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סוכות

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חג הסוכות תעשה לך שבועת ימים ושמחת בחגך... והיית אף
שמח (דברים ט"ז י"ג-ט"ו)

*A Yom Tov of Sukkos you shall make for seven days.....and you shall
rejoice in your Yom Tov...and you shall be only happy*

The Mitzvah of Simchah During Sukkos

Although the Torah commands us to have *simchah* during all *Yamim Tovim*, regarding *Sukkos* the Torah repeats the *mitzvah* three different times. From this we learn that on *Sukkos* we are commanded to have an extra degree of happiness. In fact, the Vilna Gaon used to say that the *mitzvah* of *simchah* on *Sukkos* is one of the most difficult *mitzvos*, because one is required to have *simchah* during every moment of *Sukkos*. What is the understanding of this special *simchah* of *Sukkos*? Are we not required to have *simchah* in every *mitzvah* that we do? If there exists an ability to experience even more *simchah* than what we usually feel in doing a *mitzvah*, should we not then be required to have that higher level of *simchah* in every *mitzvah*?!

A Happiness over our Kapparah

One classic explanation of our rejoicing on *Sukkos*, is that it is due to our having attained forgiveness for our sins on *Yom Kippur*. We rejoice over the actual forgiveness, and even more deeply, we are inherently in a happy state because we are free of the load of our sins.

The city of Yerushalayim is called (תהילים מ"ה ג') משיש כל הארץ /the Joy of the Entire World. Chazal (שמות רבה נ"ב ה') explain that in Yerushalayim the air was constantly permeated with a joyful atmosphere. This was because the Korban Tamid of the morning and evening used to atone for each day's aveiros. The people of Yerushalayim therefore had a serenity about them, free from the load of their aveiros. It was so important to preserve the joyful nature of the Holy City, that one who wished to make an accounting of his business revenues was not permitted to do so in Yerushalayim. The Chachamim were afraid that he may conclude

that he had suffered losses in his business, thus causing him to be despondent. Such a feeling did not belong in Yerushalayim.

Similarly, in the few days following *Yom Kippur*, we are still in a pure, sin-free state. In fact, Chazal explain that the reason *Sukkos* is called *Yom Harishon*/the First Day, although in reality it is on the fifteenth day of the month of *Tishrei*, is based on this concept. *Sukkos* is the First Day in the *cheshbon* of our *aveiros*. This is because from *Yom Kippur* until *Sukkos*, the Jewish People are on an elevated state without any *aveiros*. The previous year's *aveiros* had been forgiven on *Yom Kippur*, while in the four days between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos* there is no concern that *aveiros* were done. The preparation for the Yom Tov of *Sukkos* with all its *mitzvos* simply does not leave time for any *aveiros*. Thus, the first day in which *aveiros* can be done is after the Yom Tov begins.

The Simchah of Sukkah Despite our Living in Uncomfortable, Makeshift Dwellings

Along with the wonderful *simchah* that we have on *Sukkos* which is based on the forgiveness that we were granted, there is also a powerful message in this *simchah* which is conveyed to us as well. This message is communicated to us through the *sukkah* in which we are commanded to dwell during this very time of intense *simchah*. Through this 'overlap', the Torah thus dispels a misconception which the *yetzer hara* instills into our consciousness.

Throughout the year, we can become highly attached to our material possessions. It becomes so important that we have a beautiful home, a fancy car etc. When a gadget in our kitchen is not the latest model, we become upset.

Our impression is that attaining happiness is dependent on the quality and quantity of the physical possessions we own. On *Sukkos*, however, we leave all of that behind. The Torah tells us כל שבעה הימים צא (סוכה ב') *Medirah* עראי ושב בדירת קבע (סוכה ב') *All seven days [of Sukkos], exit your permanent dwelling and live in a temporary dwelling.*

All through Sukkos, we are busy rolling the shlock up and down, fixing loose walls, schlepping beds back and forth etc. It is certainly not the easiest and most comfortable living.

Nowadays, the mitzvah actually is somewhat easier to fulfill. Most people are able to have a sukkah on their porch, or near their door to their house. However, in the earlier years in America, it was

quite difficult to perform the mitzvah. Most Jews lived in massive apartment buildings and building a private sukkah outside one's home was out of the question. The only possible way to fulfill the mitzvah was through the sukkah at the shul. It was necessary to carry the food in a pan or a thermos for several blocks before being joining in a communal seudah with whomever else was also eating there. Oftentimes, the family members would be ashamed or uninterested in trekking all the way to the sukkah, and the head of the household would be forced to go alone. It was a difficult nisayon to overcome.

Material Possessions Bring Unhappiness

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that when we achieve a *simchah* on *Sukkos* notwithstanding this temporary mode of existence, we learn that *simchah* is actually not dependent upon our material possessions. On the contrary, explains Rav Moshe, material possessions generally cause a person to be unhappy.

When a person purchases a brand-new car, he will immediately find reason to be disappointed over the fact that he didn't purchase another model with this-or-that gadget. As soon as the car gets scratched, he is terribly upset. Regardless, after two weeks of driving the new vehicle, he is already used to it, and the thrill wears off. He must seek another new 'toy' to give him excitement.

When one lives an existence in which he does not require so much materialism, it is then that he is free to be truly content. He discovers that the true *simchah* is one of *ruchniyus*, one that is achieved through a relationship with HaKadosh Boruch Hu. Such a *simchah* resides in a person's very being and is unlimited by any physical or finite dimensions. A person can constantly *shteig* in his Torah and *mitzvos* and his *Ahavas Hashem*, and his *simchah* grows with it. We thus enter a *sukkah* and remove the limits to our *simchah* which are normally placed upon it by our material existence. By entering the *sukkah*, we can experience the fullest extent of the joy of the closeness to Hashem which we attained through our *kapparah*.

Rav Moshe explains that it is for this reason that the *mitzvah* of *Sukkah* is called a *מצוה קלה*/*an 'easy' mitzvah*. This easiness does not refer to the *mitzvah* itself, which is, in fact, not always that easy. It is the lesson

of the *mitzvah* which makes our entire life easier. If we will lessen our attachment to our material possessions as the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* teaches us, we will discover a contentment in our life in place of the worry and stress that were there beforehand.

Simchah in all Mitzvos

In the *mitzvah* of *Sukkah*, as explained, the Torah emphasizes the concept of *simchah* explicitly, based on the forgiveness that we attained on Yom Kippur, and to convey to us the message that our *simchah* is not dependent upon our material possessions. In truth, however, *simchah* is a necessary quality in all our *mitzvos*. As the passuk says חַחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבַדְתָּ (דברים כ"ה מ"ו) אֶת ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב [The sufferings of the Tochachah are meted out] because you did not serve Hashem with happiness and goodness of heart. I heard the Mashgiach, Rav Matisyahu Salomon, explain this idea with a *mashal*.

A king orders an officer to carry out a certain task. The officer in turn, sets out immediately in order to begin his mission without delay. However, as he is taking leave of the king, he mutters loudly about how the king is always burdening him with annoying jobs.

What will be the attitude of the king toward this officer? Will he thank the officer and praise him for his quick, efficient service? He will obviously not feel any such appreciation for the officer. Instead, the king will be furious at him for his comment. Perhaps the king will demote the officer from his position or impose some other severe punishment. The negative attitude of the officer overshadows the positive aspects of how he fulfilled the command.

Similarly, our attitude in our *Avodas Hashem* is of utmost importance. Just as we must be meticulous regarding our performing all the physical aspects of the *mitzvah* properly, we must also see to put our hearts into the *mitzvah* as well. Rabbeinu Bechaya in his Introduction to Parshas Naso explains further that the *simchah* one feels in the performance a *mitzvah* is not simply an enhancement of the *mitzvah* which he is doing, but rather a *mitzvah* in its own right. For this reason, explains Rabbeinu Bechaya, the songs of the Levi'im were such an integral component of the *Avodah* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was crucial that the *Avodah* be performed with the full measure of *simchah*.

The Exemption of a מצטער / One Who is Uncomfortable

Based on the understanding that the *simchah* of *Sukkos* is a manifestation of the *simchah* we should feel in all *mitzvos*, we can perhaps explain why the Torah exempted a מצטער / one who is uncomfortable, from the *mitzvah*. In all other *mitzvos*, although *simchah* is a vital component in the fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, one nevertheless discharges his minimum obligation even if he did not feel the proper joy. With regard to the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, however, the attitude of *simchah* is so fundamental that without it one cannot perform the *mitzvah*. If one is feeling uncomfortable, let him remain in his home. The *mitzvah* requires that it be performed wholeheartedly and with full enthusiasm.

ראשון / In the Zechus of the Mitzvah of the 'First Day', I Will Be Revealed to You First'

Let us delve more deeply into the effects of the *simchah* of *Sukkos*. The Medrash (ויקרא רבה ל' ט"ז) tells us that in the *zechus* of the *mitzvos* we perform on *Sukkos* about which the *passuk* says ראשון / on the first day, HaKadosh Boruch Hu will be revealed to us 'ראשון' / first. What is the meaning of the statement that Hashem will 'be revealed to us first'? [See the Shem M'Shmuel who discusses this at length.]

Perhaps we can suggest that the Medrash is referring to the concept that we find in Chazal (איכה רבה ה' כ"א) in which there is a debate between HaKadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel. Klal Yisroel davens to Hashem (איכה ה' כ"א) / 'Return us Hashem to You, and we will return!' We entreat Hashem to help us begin the process of *teshuvah*, and we promise that if Hashem will just help us get started, we will pick ourselves up and continue. Hashem, in turn, answers with a counterproposal. (זכריה א' ג) / 'Return to Me' says Hashem, 'and I will return to you!' Hashem tells us that it is up to us take the initial step; afterward, He will help us to continue.

Regarding this dialogue, it is known that the Arizal said that although generally speaking, Hashem has the 'upper hand' in this debate, on the night of Pesach, there is a different set of rules. On the Seder night, Hashem bestows an awakening of *Emunah* into each *yid* even without any effort having been initiated by the individual. Perhaps we can explain that the Medrash is teaching us a similar exception regarding *Sukkos*. The *mitzvah* of *Sukkos* about which the *passuk* states ראשון, generates an extra

zechus for us, through which Hashem will reveal Himself to us ראשון/first, without any initiation on our part.

The Mitzvah of Sukkah Raises us to Levels Beyond our Normal Abilities

According to this explanation, the *mitzvah* of *Sukkah* emerges as a method through which we can achieve levels of *ruchniyus* that are higher than those of which we are normally capable. This idea can be found in the famous Gemara (ע"ז ב:) which describes the events that will transpire in the End of Days, as Hashem is preparing to give reward to those who served Him in this world.

The Nations will gather around HaKadosh Boruch Hu claiming that they built up the entire physical world, with all its buildings and various infrastructures, all with the intention of making it possible for the Jews to learn Torah.

Hashem will summarily dismiss this claim. "Everything that you did was for your own benefit! You deserve no reward!"

The Nations will not be put off so quickly. "Nevertheless," they will finally plead, "give us another opportunity!"

At this point, Hashem will begin to mock them. "World-class fools! He who has troubled himself on Erev Shabbos [to prepare for Shabbos] will have what to eat on Shabbos; one who has not troubled himself on Erev Shabbos, what will he eat on Shabbos?!" [i.e. It will be too late for the Nations to earn their reward; they should have done so while in this world.]

Hashem, however, will then accede to their entreaties, and He will indeed grant them a chance to regain their standing. "Nevertheless, [I will grant your request.] I have an easy mitzvah – the mitzvah of Sukkah. Let us see how you will perform it."

All the Goyim will then immediately build Sukkos. HaKadosh Boruch Hu will then remove the sun from its sheath, and an intense, burning heat will envelop the world. Each goy will exit his sukkah, giving an angry kick as he leaves. This will be the proof that they are incapable of keeping the Torah.

The Gemara questions this narrative: Is not the halacha that a person who is uncomfortable in the sukkah may, in fact, leave it and go elsewhere? What, then, will the Nations have done wrong?

The Gemara answers that it is true, that they may be exempt, but they still did not need to kick the sukkah. Such a contemptuous attitude surely disqualifies them from any connection with the Torah.

In this future exchange that will transpire, it is the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* through which the *Goyim* are offered a shortcut to achieve some reward for the Torah. Although they did not keep the Torah, the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* would allow them to regain a form of connection to it. We can similarly suggest that the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* allows for Klal Yisroel to have an easier path toward *teshuvah* and closeness to Hashem than they would otherwise have.

The Special Power of Sukkos

What is the special power of *sukkah* which grants this 'shortcut' to Torah and *teshuvah* both for the Nations and for Klal Yisroel? Perhaps it is the *simchah* which, as explained, is an integral component of the *mitzvah*. By feeling the intense *simchah* of *Sukkos*, we demonstrate that our true and innermost desire is to fulfill the will of Hashem. True, we sin, but that is a result of the difficult *nisyonos* which the *yetzer hara* places upon us. When Hashem sees our genuine desire to fulfill the *mitzvos*, that stands in the place of the initiative that is necessary for *teshuvah*.

The Nations, too, are offered this opportunity, but they will squander it and cause it to backfire. Not only will they leave the *sukkah* when they are uncomfortable – an act which is permitted for Klal Yisroel as well – but they will kick their *sukkah*. They thus demonstrate that do not have any desire to subjugate themselves to the will of Hashem at the expense of their own comfort. Klal Yisroel, however, performs the *mitzvah* with joy. Even when they are compelled to leave, they do so in a spirit of submission, demonstrating that their true desire is to fulfill the *mitzvos*.

Bez"V we should be *zoche* to perform the *mitzvos* of *Sukkos* with true *simchah*, and it should be a *zechus* for us to be brought back to Hashem with complete *teshuvah* and the *Geulah Shelaimah Bimheirah V'yameinu*.

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בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (בראשית א' א')

In the beginning Hashem created Heaven and earth.

בראשית/The Beginning of Creation

The Torah begins its recounting of Creation with the words בראשית ברא אלוקים which literally means *In the beginning of* – Hashem created. The obvious difficulty which Rashi and many *meforshim* raise with this rendering, is that the *passuk* does not conclude the phrase – the beginning of what? The Ohr Hachaim deals with this same difficulty in a deeper dimension. The term 'beginning' necessitates that there is a whole unit, of which the component referred to is its beginning. At the very first moment of Creation, however, nothing was in existence. If so, how can it be stated that the very first creations were the beginning? At that point, they were the only creations in existence, and hence, were not the beginning of anything! It would seemingly have been more correct for the Torah to say בראשונה/*First*, which merely implies that these creations were created before all other creations.

To answer this difficulty, the Ohr Hachaim first cites Chazal's statement in the *mishnah* in Avos (אבות ה' א') בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם /*With ten Utterances the world was created*. This means that in the *parshah* of Creation, there are ten different commands that Hashem issued, from which the entire world came into existence, i.e. יהי אור /*There should be light*, etc. The Gemara (מגילה כ"א:), however, questions this statement: When we read through the *pesukim*, we will only find nine such commands. Why does the *mishnah* state that there were ten? The Gemara answers that the word בראשית itself was a מאמר/*Utterance*. This is seen from a *passuk* in Tehillim which tells that a 'word' was used to create *Shamayim*. ד' שמים נעשו (תהילים ל"ג ו') /*With the Word of Hashem the Heavens were made*. As the creation of the Heavens is recounted in the first *passuk* of the Torah, it follows then, that there must have been a **statement** – or '**word**' – in the first *passuk*. This teaches us that the word בראשית is itself a statement uttered by Hashem which brought about the creation of *Shamayim* and *Aretz*.

The Ohr Hachaim expounds further on the creation that issued from the Utterance of the word בראשית. At that moment, explains the Ohr Hachaim, ALL of Creation came into being. The rest of Hashem's act of

Creation was simply placing all of the materials into their proper forms and places.

The Ohr Hachaim likens this to one who is commissioning the building of a large mansion. One truck arrives with sand to be laid, another comes and dumps bags of cement, another brings cinder blocks, and yet another one comes with all sorts of construction tools to be used. After all the necessary materials have been brought, the construction workers come and begin their labor.

Similarly, HaKadosh Boruch Hu brought all of existence into being at the very first instant of Creation, and from therein, Hashem was only forming each object and force into its proper form. It is for this reason, explains the Ohr Hachaim, that the Torah employs the word בראשית. He had asked that at the moment of the very first creation, there was no other matter in existence, and that facet of Creation could therefore not be referred to at that time as the 'beginning'. Based on this idea, the question is answered. As all matter of the universe began at that instant, it follows that everything was indeed a beginning – of all the rest of the universe which was created simultaneously!

The Purpose of the Ten Ma'amaros

Why did Hashem employ ten different utterances? Nothing is difficult for Hashem, and there is no difference to Hashem in creating a formless universe, or one with all the different forms. Certainly, He was able to not only create the 'material', but to bring out the 'form' of Creation at that instant as well. Why then did HaKadosh Boruch keep the forming of Creation for the subsequent nine *ma'amaros*?

The *mishnah* in Avos poses this question, to which it gives the following answer: ולתן שכר טוב לצדיקים שמקיימין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות מהמרות *to exact punishment from the wicked who destroy the world which was created in ten Utterances, and to bestow a good reward upon the righteous who sustain the world that was created by ten Utterances.* The purpose of the ten *ma'amaros* was to increase the punishment of the *reshaim* and the *schar* of the *tzadikim*, for destroying or sustaining a world which took ten *ma'amaros* to complete.¹

¹ Before we attempt to understand this concept of why these ten *ma'amaros* increase reward and punishment, let us first focus on a seeming difficulty with this answer: Why is Hashem seeking to increase the punishment of *reshaim*? We understand that He wishes to increase reward for *tzadikim*, because Hashem is the

Respecting the 'Effort' that Hashem Invested into the World

What is this message of the ten *ma'amaros*? Hashem is telling us that there was כביכול 'effort' that was invested into the world.

A six-year-old child works hard on a massive Lego castle. Afterward, his parents are careful not to allow his younger sister to come and knock it over.

"Chani, careful of the castle; Yossi worked hard on it!"

Why are the parents so protective of Yossi's Lego creation? It is only a toy, after all! The answer is that it is not the actual toy that is valuable; it is rather the kochos/efforts that were invested in it. Yossi worked hard to build the castle, and such effort deserves respect.

We must realize that our actions determine the fate of a world which was a major 'undertaking' to create, a product of ten distinct *ma'amaros* of HaKadosh Boruch Hu. Will we sustain this great world that Hashem brought into being, or will we *chas v'shalom* disregard the *kochos* that Hashem invested, and bring about destruction, nonetheless?

Chazal (קהלת רבה הובא במסילת ישרים פרק א') tell us that when Hashem warned Adam not to eat the Eitz Hada'as, He first gave him a grand tour of Gan Eden, showing him all its beautiful trees.

"Adam!" Hashem told him. "Look at these beautiful and praiseworthy trees that I've created! Take care that you do not ruin and destroy My world!"

ultimate טוב/Goodness, and He therefore wishes to bestow goodness upon his creatures. However, why does He wish to bestow more punishment? Does this not contradict the *pesukim* which tells us that Hashem does not desire the death of *reshaim*; He rather wishes for them to do *teshuvah* and achieve forgiveness?

The answer to this is that indeed, the *mishnah* does not say that Hashem desires to punish the *reshaim*; He certainly does not. However, punishment is a necessary component of the world, because it serves as a deterrent against the *yetzer hara* who tries to lead us to sin. When we recognize the great punishment in store for the *reshaim*, who destroy a world created in ten *ma'amaros*, we will become even more watchful and defensive against the *yetzer hara* from leading us astray.

The message is applicable to all of us in our own *nisyonos*. Let us choose to consider the great world of Hashem, and to demonstrate respect for it by living in a manner that will sustain it.

Respecting our Own Efforts of Elul and Tishrei

Besides for the general concept that this *mishnah* teaches about all actions of human beings, this lesson can be applied specifically to the period of the year in which we presently stand, as we begin our regular lives, at the conclusion of the *Yamim Noraim*, *Sukkos* and *Simchas Torah*:

For the past nearly two months, we applied a tremendous *avodah* in ourselves, in *teshuvah*, in *shteiging*, and in in our closeness to Hashem. We attempted to pinpoint specific areas in which we could correct ourselves, and we tried to raise our general *madreigah* of *ruchniyus*. During *Sukkos*, we tried to fulfill the *mitzvos* of *lulav* and *esrog* with as much devotion as possible. We tried to feel a true *simchah* over our new-found closeness to Hashem, which we experience both while in the *sukkah* and as we dance with the *Sefer Torah* on *Simchas Torah*. Now, as the period draws to a close, how will we cause our behavior to affect the *avodah* that we applied? If we do not act mindfully and vigilantly to protect what we have accomplished, we can destroy it in a very short time. Will we try to maintain what we have achieved, or will we *chas v'shalom* destroy it all? Let us try to hold on to the *madreigos* we have reached for as long as we are able to. Even when we will inevitably sense that we have slipped, let us ensure that it will be a gentle descent, in which we cling to the memories of the days that passed, rather than speeding away from them willingly.

The Actions of Reshaim Destroy the World

Aside from the outright lesson that the *mishnah* teaches, enjoining us to choose the path of sustaining the world rather than destroying it, there is a more overt lesson that is conveyed by the *mishnah* as well. How are the actions of *reshaim* described in the *mishnah*? As destroying the world. The message is there is indeed such a power in the hands of every single person. We are capable of either sustaining the world, or the opposite – destroying it.

When Hashem created the world, He specifically placed creatures within it which have the power of destroying it.

An owner of a business is in need of new workers. As he is deciding amongst several potential workers, information is revealed to him by a friend concerning one of the candidates, that this individual

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will be harmful for the business. This worker is known to have sabotaged his previous employers, robbed them, sowed discord and havoc among all his fellow workers etc..

The owner hears this information, and he thanks the bearer of the information profusely.

"Thank you so much for warning me," the owner tells his friend. "You can be sure that there is no way I will hire him! I have no desire to bring in a worker who will be detrimental for the business!"

Although in the way of the world, one does not, as illustrated, knowingly bring in characters who will damage the venture or undertaking that he is starting, Hashem did not act in this manner. Hashem knowingly created people with the capability of destroying the world, and it is up to us to control ourselves and refrain from doing so.

The Destructive Strength of the *Livyan*

It would seem that Hashem conveyed this lesson to us through the creation of the great *livyan*. Chazal tell us that when Hashem created the world, He originally created the *livyan* and its mate. However, Hashem saw that if the pair would be enabled to progenerate, the offspring would destroy the world. Hashem therefore killed the female, storing it for the *tzadikim* in the Future, and He removed the ability from the male to procreate. (בבא בתרא עד:) The question we may ask is, why did Hashem originally create them with the ability of procreation, only to kill one, and remove this ability from the other? Why did Hashem simply create them without the ability to procreate?

It would seem to me that Hashem was hinting to us this message. 'This world contains destructive creatures within it! Beware that you do not join their ranks!'

People have a Choice whether to Destroy or Not

As explained, the *livyan* and its mate were created with the capability of destroying the world, and furthermore they have no free choice about doing so. Hashem therefore killed and altered them. People, however, have *bechirah* about whether to do so or not. We must exercise control over ourselves, not allowing ourselves to be swayed by the *yetzer hara's* destructive advice.

Near the ape/gorilla section in the Bronx Zoo, there is an exhibit in which one can view the most dangerous creature in the world.

The exhibit is surrounded by a strong heavy cage, and as one enters, he expects to see a most ferocious, violent animal. He walks further inside, until he comes face-to-face with – a mirror! The message is clear: A person can be the most dangerous creature in the world.

Whether the openers of the zoo intended their message properly or not is irrelevant. The message holds true. A person can accomplish tremendous goodness in the world, or the opposite. He can destroy it if he chooses.

Indeed, there are many countries in the world which hold vast arsenals of nuclear weapons. Scientists say that the weapons are so powerful that when exploded, they can actually alter the position of the Earth in relation to the sun. There are certainly wicked people and leaders in the world who would not hesitate to use these weapons on the smallest whim. The only reason these weapons have not been used until now is because Hashem is protecting the world and preventing these people from setting them off.

Achitofel's Indifference to the World's Destruction

We can learn this lesson further from the story which occurred between Dovid Hamelech and Achitofel at the time when Dovid was digging a foundation for the *Bais Hamikdash*. Dovid had dug so deep, that he had inadvertently removed the *Even Shesiyah*, the stone which lies at the very foundation of the world. The waters of the underworld began rising, and if the hole was not stuffed, the waters would overtake the world in a matter of days. Dovid understood that the only way to recontain these supernatural waters was by placing a shard upon which was engraved the Name of Hashem. The problem was that doing so would cause the Name of Hashem to become washed away by the waters. Was this act permitted in these circumstances? Dovid was unsure of the *halacha*.

Dovid issued a proclamation at that point, declaring that anyone who knows the answer to this question should step forward. No one, however, came forth with the answer. The Gemara tells us that the wise Achitofel did, in fact, know the *halacha*, but he was unwilling to reveal it, and he remained silent. Dovid then saw that a more compelling proclamation was necessary. It was announced that whoever knows the answer and does not come forward will be cursed to be strangled to

death. Fearing this curse, Achitofel finally stepped forward and demonstrated that it was permitted to employ this measure.

The question is, there seems to be a contradiction in the behavior of Achitofel. There were two potential eventualities of death in front of him – either of the world being flooded, or of him being strangled – and yet he seemed to relate to them differently. Regarding the world being flooded, he was content to remain silent, even at the cost of the flooding of the world. Regarding himself being strangled, however, he revealed the information in order to avoid that end. How can these two behaviors be explained? Was he afraid of death or not? If he wished to remain alive, why did he not come forward immediately to avoid the world being flooded? If he was not frightened of death, why did he feel compelled to come forth at the threat of his own strangulation?

The answer is that Achitofel indeed would allow the world to be destroyed, all in order to for him to be the sole bearer of the knowledge of the *halacha*. That, however, is only if the entire world would be flooded. For himself to be strangled while the rest of the world would remain alive? That, he could not tolerate. He could not bear the fact that he would suffer more than everyone else.

This story clearly demonstrates the way a person will indeed literally destroy the world knowingly should it suit his needs. As Achitofel wanted the pride of not revealing the *halacha*, he would continue that way even as the world would be destroyed as a consequence.

Taking Responsibility for One's Actions

Adam Shifts the Blame to Chava

Let us focus upon another area in the *parshah*, in which we will see how a specific *middah* may cause a person to bring destruction.

After Adam ate from the Eitz Hada'as, Hashem confronted him.

"Adam, did you eat from the forbidden tree?"

Hashem was specifically giving Adam a chance to own up for his sin, and express sincere regret. How did Adam answer?

להאשה אשר נתתה עמדי הוא נתנה לי מן העץ ואכל / "The woman that you placed with me, she gave me from the tree!"

The Sforno immediately takes Adam to task for this reply. 'Adam,' says the Sforno, 'Hashem opened the door for your *teshuvah*; take responsibility and admit your guilt! Don't blame others for your own wrongdoing!' As the Viduy of Rav Nissim Gaon states, in the Heavenly Court, one is vindicated not through denial of his sins, but through admitting them. (משלי כ"ה י"ג) /*One who admits his sin and abandons it will merit mercy from Hashem.*

In truth, the Ohr Hachaim explains that Adam himself was unaware that Chava was giving him from the *Eitz Hada'as*, and he trusted that the wife that Hashem granted him would not feed him forbidden foods. For this reason, Adam felt that he was justified, and in fact, the Ohr Hachaim explains that to a certain extent, he was justified. However, that is still not a reason for Adam himself to excuse himself. His job was to admit his wrongdoing, and to open the possibility that he could have been more careful. He should have acknowledged the fact as well, that had he told Chava the full nature of the prohibition,² he would not have sinned. By not admitting his sin, Adam was causing further destruction in the world.

Kayin Shifts the Blame

Later in the *parshah*, Kayin displayed this same *middah* of not taking responsibility for his action. The Sforno explains that Hashem questioned him about Hevel's whereabouts, to provide him an opening for *teshuvah*. As the *passuk* says, (אם אחפץ במות הרשע (יחזקאל ל"ג י"א) – *Hashem does not desire the death of the wicked man.* Kayin, however, rather than admitting his guilt and express remorse, tried evading the question by arguing that Hevel is not his responsibility.

The Damage and Destruction Caused by not Taking Responsibility

This lesson is so important for our own lives. We must be willing and open to take responsibility for our mistakes. Through doing so, we will be able to rectify them, or at least to apologize for them. Not so if we only seek to excuse ourselves. Our pride will then prevent us from ever correcting ourselves. Who knows what damage can be fixed if we would own up the error, but will remain when we do not?

² The Ohr Hachaim explains that Adam did not reveal to Chava the fact that the wood of the tree is equally forbidden as the fruit. See the Ohr Hachaim for other aspects that Adam Did not reveal to Chava.

פרשת בראשית

A girl in Eretz Yisroel had a broken arm, and it was placed in a cast by a doctor. Over the next few days, the parents noticed that the arm seemed to be healing wrong, and they brought her for an x-ray. The x-ray revealed that the arm was indeed not healing properly, and the doctor was alerted.

The doctor, however, refused to admit his mistake. "Don't worry," he insisted, "you'll see that it will turn out the right way."

The girl ended up needing a major surgery, in which her arm was rebroken, in an even greater way than before. This was due to the stubbornness of a doctor, who refused to acknowledge his mistake and to correct it.

This doctor's pride would not let him admit that he did wrong, yet the result was that he was exposed as a stubborn, selfish doctor – who not only made a mistake, but also refused to admit it. Had he admitted it, he would have earned respect and trust as a responsible doctor who puts the patient's wellbeing before his own pride.

Not admitting a mistake will only cause harm and destruction. As explained earlier, a *rasha* can, and will, knowingly bring destruction to the world. The trait of not admitting one's guilt is a clear example of this behavior. A person will go to all lengths to cover his mistake, not worrying at what drastic consequences will result.

Repeating a Sin to Avoid Admitting One's Guilt

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would point out that this practice also leads one to repeat his sins. עבירה גוררת עבירה – The sin of insisting on the correctness of one's ways will cause him to repeat his deed, even as he knows that he is committing a sin!

Chaim is shmoozing in shul during Chazaras Hashatz. Another mispallel walks over to him and motions for him to quiet down. Perhaps he shows Chaim a sefer that speaks about the evil that lies in this act, of the disrespect to the King to whom the chazzan is addressing. Chaim glances at the sefer and dismisses his admonisher with a wave of his hand. He then continues to shmooze for a minute, after which he stops.

Why did Chaim stop talking? Because he recognized the truth of the rebuke that he received. He perceived the gravity of the sin that he was doing, and he understood that he must stop. Why then

did he not stop immediately? Because doing so would be acknowledging that his admonisher was right while he was wrong. He continues to sin with full knowledge of his transgression, all in order to protect his pride.

In a similar vein, there is a *pshat* that is explained in a Gemara that reflects this point. The Gemara (ברכות י"ט) tells us, 'If you witnessed a *talmid chacham* commit an *aveirah* in the evening, do not harbor negative thoughts about him in the daytime, for he certainly already did *teshuvah*.' The simple explanation in the Gemara is that a *talmid chacham* realizes his wrongdoing, and he seeks to rectify it immediately. However, if an individual is guilty of the fault that we are discussing, the opposite explanation of the Gemara holds true: We can assume that he already wrote a full-length '*teshuvah*'/Torah responsum to justify his behavior!

Let us be so careful to keep far from this trait. Let us not cause destruction *chas v'shalom* by insisting on the correctness of our positions; let us rather bring positive energy into the world, by admitting our mistakes and correcting them.

Maintaining the *Madreigos* the We Achieved

The *Yetzer hara* Attempts Bring a Person Down to His Previous State

The Baal Shem Tov explains yet another *pshat* in the above-quoted Gemara, which is also relevant to this time of year. If a *talmid chacham* sinned, it is because he has just done *teshuvah* previously, and had *shteiged* to new *madreigos*. The *yetzer hara* attempts to bring him back to his earlier level, and therefore puts an increased effort into causing him to sin.

Holding our *Kabbalos*

This lesson is certainly relevant at this point of the year. After we *shteiged* during the months of *Elul* and *Tishrei*, the *yetzer hara* tries so hard to cause us to stumble back into our earlier low level. We made various *kabbalos* to which the *yetzer hara* tries its utmost to prevent us from keeping them. We must be prepared to fight this *yetzer hara* and hold on to our *kabbalos* with all our strength.

We can see this concept applied by Dovid Hamelech in the *passuk* (תהילים קט"ז י"ד) *I will pay my promises to Hashem in the presence of all of His nation*. Why does Dovid 'boast' of

fulfilling his promises, implying that it is an 'extra', a practice for which he would be considered on a level of righteousness above the common person? After all, even a common person is required to keep his word! Furthermore, if it is indeed a level of righteousness beyond the norm, why does he perform this practice publicly? Shouldn't he act with modesty, and remain private regarding his levels of righteousness? The answer is that fulfilling a promise is certainly required of every person, and Dovid was indeed, not boasting about his elevated level. However, Dovid Hamelech recognized within himself and others the tendency to back away from one's promises after the moment of inspiration passes. To combat this tendency, Dovid laid a safeguard against this: He made his vows in a public setting, in order to cause within himself a feeling of shame, should he be lax in keeping his promises.

The Difficulty in Keeping our Promises

We, too, must take an example from Dovid Hamelech. Certainly, as we accept our *kabbalos*, we should see to accept something which is achievable for ourselves. However, there will always be an area of which at the time seems doable, and later seems beyond our capabilities.

During a moment of inspiration, Shloimy accepts upon himself to finish 100 blatt of Gemara in the next three months.

Later, he thinks to himself, "100 blatt?! What am I – crazy?! I can't learn that much; I'll never be able to manage!"

This is not necessarily an indication that we accepted too much for ourselves; on the contrary, we should accept that which is slightly above our present level. That is how we will *shteig* from that inspiration. It follows, then, that it will be difficult later on. That difficulty is what will cause us to grow. Furthermore, as explained earlier, the *yetzer hara* specifically tries to bring us down from our levels that we achieved, and it will therefore set tremendous difficulties for us as we try to fulfill our *kabbalos*. As we accept our *kabbalos*, we need to establish safeguards against stumbling. Furthermore, we must be ready to catch ourselves, even when we realize that we have fallen from the *madreigah*.

Let us be so careful not to destroy our *avodah* of *Elul* and *Tishrei* and let us strive to retain some of the *madreigos* that we reached. Iy"Y by acting in this way, we will surely be *zoche* to a *siyatta d'shmaya* to continue *shteiging* throughout the year.

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