

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

שבועות

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שבועות

וּבַיּוֹם הַבְּכוּרִים בְּהַקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַה' (במדבר כ"ח כ"ו)

Beautiful Scenes I Witnessed Over Shavuot

This past Shavuot, I witnessed so many Yidden learning through the night. In Yeshiva, there were thousands of *yungerleit*, along with multitudes of *bachurim* and young boys, *horeving* away in the wee hours of the morning. It was a beautiful sight to see. I saw a *kvutzah* of 11-year-old boys learning with their Rebbe fervently; I later asked the Rebbe what they had accomplished, and he told me they reviewed 20 *blatt* in Maseches Makkos!

I remember when I was growing up, there were a few old *balabatim* sitting up in Shul, schmoozing and learning a bit, taking regular breaks to get some seltzer and *arbis* – and that was just about all there was. But today? You wouldn't believe that this is the same Klal Yisroel!

There's a place here in Lakewood called Minyan Shelanu. It's designed to cater to teenage boys who weren't successful in the Yeshiva system and ended up on the streets. They have all kinds of entertainment programs for the boys – and they also try to squeeze in some learning. I heard from a yungerman that works at the Minyan that this past Shavuot night – it was hard to believe that the place was created for struggling teens. The room was packed; the boys were sitting, rooted in their seats and learning Torah until Shacharis!

The Rays of Moshiach

Let me try to explain this phenomenon. My Rebbe, R' Elya Roth *zt"l*, was the *gabbai* of Rav Shlomkeh of Zvill *zt"l*. R' Elya once told me an interesting story he had experienced with Rav Shlomkeh:

When R' Elya was a young boy, the concept of a Ba'al Teshuvah was very different from what it is today. They were people who were known for being big ba'alei aveirah, and every so often a Gadol or an Admor would manage to penetrate their hearts with divrei tochacha and turn them around. But these people

wouldn't generally go on to living regular lives; they would sleep on the benches and barely ever take haircuts, spending their days mourning over the years that they did aveiros. They would be dubbed "Yossel the Ba'al Teshuvah" or "Yankel the Ba'al Teshuvah" because everyone would know that their entire lives were preoccupied with doing Teshuvah over their past sins.

However, one day in the late 1940s, R' Elya was walking with his Rebbe, Rav Shlomkeh, who suddenly shared the following prediction:

"Soon, a time will come when you will be able to see a chassid walking down the street, wearing the garb of an einikel of the Ba'al Shem Tov – while just a few months prior to that, he was being mechalel Shabbos and eating ma'achalos asuros. You will be able to hear a shiur from a Litvishe Rosh Yeshiva – while just five years in the past, he was an avid anti-religious activist who used to send his dogs after frum Yidden."

Surprised by this bold prediction, R' Elya asked his Rebbe: "וכי לא נביא (are you a prophet)?" Rav Shlomkeh answered: "לא נביא – אני ולא בן נביא – I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet. But allow me to clarify how I know this: when you walk outside a half an hour before the Neitz Hachamah, you will notice that it is somewhat light. Although the sun has yet to rise, its rays of light begin to affect the world well before the crack of dawn. Similarly, we know that the Halacha is that we don't recite תחנון during Mincha on Friday afternoon. Why is that so? Friday is a regular weekday! The answer is that the light of Shabbos precedes the Shabbos itself; before the actual glorious day of Shabbos arrives, its rays already permeate the world, causing us to not recite תחנון."

Rav Shlomkeh then continued as follows: "It's a clear fact that Moshiach is coming soon. Once he does, everyone in this world will know of Hashem, as the pasuk states: 'ומלאה הארץ דעה את' – 'And the land will be filled with knowledge of Hashem.' But before that great time comes, the אורות of this great revelation will pervade all corners of the Earth. Therefore, the whole concept of being a Ba'al Teshuvah will change; people

won't have to be yanked out of the mud by Tzaddikim, and slowly make a gradual and painful climb towards Yiddishkeit. Instead, they will come back on their own accord, and they will do it rather quickly and efficiently."

My friends, this prediction was made in the 1940s – and it is very clear that over the past few decades, we have been witnessing it become a reality. *Ba'alei Teshuvah* are everywhere and anywhere, and the majority of them become regular members of society pretty quickly.

But aside from the *Ba'alei Teshuvah*, we see the tides shifting in other ways as well. Torah learning has become more widespread than ever before, and the numbers of *frum* Yidden and *frum* communities around the world are growing rapidly. And that's what we all experienced this past Shavuot: there were Yidden *shteiging* in Torah in *shuls* wherever you turned. Even the boys at the Minyan learned up a storm!

This should be a tremendous *chizuk* for us all. Moshiach is just beyond the horizon; now is our chance to *chap arein* as many *mitzvos* and *ma'asim tovim* that we can.

Kabbalas HaTorah Happens Every Day

There's a very famous question that is asked about the Yom Tov of Shavuot. We find that the other Yomim Tovim are spelled out very clearly in the Torah: Pesach is explicitly referred to as the time that we commemorate *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, Succos is described as the time that we remember the '*succos*' that Hashem housed us in while we were in the *Midbar*, and the Yamim Nora'im are described very clearly as a time to blow the Shofar and to get atonement for our sins. But Shavuot, on the other hand, is simply referred to as חג הביכורים; there is no mention in the Torah of תורתנו. If the other Yomim Tovim are so unambiguous in the Torah, then why does Shavuot seem to be so concealed?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* was once speaking in Yeshivas Kol Torah, and he answered this question in a very enlightening way. Let me start with a *meshe*:

In the secular world, there's a special day that is designated for honoring and expressing gratitude to mothers, known as "Mother's Day". In the frum community, this day isn't officially celebrated; however, many secular Jews have accepted this newfound custom upon themselves rather religiously.

I once heard that a certain secular Jew was mocking a religious Jew for the fact that his community doesn't take Mother's Day seriously. "Look at you 'religious' people; you don't even care to show your mothers some respect and gratitude for all that they have done for you!"

But the frum Yid wasn't flustered by this charge in the slightest. "Look, people who don't think about their mothers throughout the year need an annual reminder," he said. "For people who follow the Torah, on the other hand, honoring one's parents is a constant obligation; we call our parents regularly to ask them how they're doing, offer them assistance in whatever area they may need, or just to chat about their day. By us, every single day is 'Mother's Day'."

Rav Shlomo Zalman explained that the Torah couldn't label Shavuos as זמן מתן תורתנו – because each and every day is the time of *Kabbalas HaTorah*. A Yid has to accept the yoke of the Torah upon himself continuously; he doesn't merely wait for a certain day to be *mekabel* the Torah and then move on in life. The Yom Tov of Shavuos is the time that we fortify the acceptance of the Torah within ourselves – but it is not the exclusive day of *Kabbalas HaTorah*.

ביכורים The Yom Tov

I would like to discuss another point regarding the Torah's description of Shavuos. We find that the Torah refers to Shavuos as הזבכורים. This needs a little bit of clarification; is Shavuos really all about הביכורים? Isn't the focus more on מתן תורה, as the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch seem to stress?

But there are more interesting questions to ask about the *mitzvah* of הביכורים. The Midrash Tanchuma (in the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo) says as follows: "Moshe Rabbeinu saw with *Ruach Hakodesh* that the Beis Hamikdash was destined to be destroyed, and

the *mitzvah* of ביכורים was no longer going to be carried out by Klal Yisroel. Therefore, he implemented the obligation to *daven* three times a day." This Midrash is somewhat cryptic; what is the correlation between ביכורים and *davening* three times a day?

Furthermore, in the יוצרות of Shavuot, the פייטן describes Avraham Avinu's bringing Yitzchok to the *Akeda* as "bringing a basket filled with ביכורים". What is the connection between the *Akeda* and the *mitzvah* of ביכורים?

The Sfas Emes (Parshas Ki Savo 5656) explains the Midrash Tanchuma as follows: ביכורים means fresh. ביכורים means beginning something new. We find the *lashon* of ביכורים, or בכור, by the first fruit of a tree, by the firstborn child, by the firstborn calf – it always means the התחלה of something new. The Torah is teaching us the importance of making a התחדשות – renewing and rededicating ourselves to the service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu at every interval possible. When we enliven ourselves regularly, then our *avodah* takes on a whole new meaning and a fresh sense of excitement and determination. So too, when Moshe Rabbeinu saw that we would no longer merit to have that sense of התחדשות by bringing ביכורים, he immediately established the obligation to *daven* three times a day – because each time we halt our routine activities and turn to Hashem in heartfelt prayer, we are realigning ourselves and rededicating our *avodah*. By *davening* three times a day, we are effectively reawakening our connection with the Eibishter on a steady basis, preventing us from living a mundane Yiddishkeit.

The same was true when Avraham Avinu brought Yitzchok to the *Akeda*. Yitzchok was Avraham's firstborn son, and he was applying that sense of התחדשות towards his connection with Hashem. (It is true that Yishmael was born first, but the Ohr Hachaim explains that since Hagar was a שפחה, Yishmael was considered an עבד, resulting in his lineage being traced through his mother as opposed to his father. So, in essence, Yitzchok was Avraham's first real son.)

His'chadshus in Learning Torah

This idea is especially true when it comes to *Limud HaTorah*. Chazal (Rashi Shemos 19, 1) tell us with regard to the study of Torah

that we must view what we learn “כיום שניתנה מסיני” – as though it were the day that the Torah was given at Har Sinai. Chazal also tell us “הוי” – one must drink the words of Torah that his Rebbeim teach him as though he is exceedingly thirsty. The Gemara says that when a person is parched and is desperately craving some water to drink, then the experience of finally drinking water is like a novelty to him; he feels as if he has never drank water before. Why is that so? Because when a person is overcome with thirst, then the drinking that he eventually does is a totally new and fresh experience for him. The extreme thirst creates an excitement and injects a tremendous feeling of התחדשות into the routine act of drinking water. This is the kind of feeling that Chazal expected us to have each time we learn Torah; a great amount of excitement and yearning for each word and each סברה. Perhaps this is why Shavuot is referred to as חג הביכורים; the whole purpose of the Yom Tov is to reawaken our התחדשות in our *Limud HaTorah*.

Rabbosai! This may sound challenging – but living in today’s world, we should all be tripping over ourselves in our haste to get more and more Torah into our system. Just look at what’s going on out there! There’s no *saichel* in the secular world. They don’t impart any real values to their children. They teach *shtusim* and they live petty lives filled with nonsense. They have no sense of purpose. Not a week goes by that there isn’t a mention on the news of a shooting or a stabbing. People just walk into a school or a mall and murder dozens of innocent human beings – and they’re not even fighting for a cause! These murderers don’t have any platform or any agenda that they’re trying to promote. They just kill. There’s no sense in their world, and their lives just spiral out of control before they can blink. The political world isn’t a pretty scene either; all of the grand ideas ultimately fail the people. Whether it’s democracy, autocracy, or socialism – there’s always fights between the left and the right, and there is constant confusion and unrest. The only lifeline, the only bastion of sanity and true wisdom is the *Eitz Chaim* – the *Torah HaKedosha*. Shouldn’t we all be running after it tirelessly?

Wherever you go today, there are Shuls filled with people *davening*, and there are *Batei Medrash* filled with people learning. When you walk in, you see the most beautiful sight that is available to mankind on this entire planet. (Maybe there’s some talking during

davening in some Shuls, and it's always important to work on that – but it's a far cry from how the average Shul looked when I was growing up.) We were *zoche* to raise a generation of Yidden who respect the proper decorum for a *Makom Torah U'Tefillah*. We are blessed with multitudes of Yidden who either learn all day or squeeze in serious *sedarim* between busy work hours. It's truly remarkable and it's a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem*.

We all had a major *his'orerus* over Shavuos by witnessing the astronomical amount of *shteiging* that took place over the Yom Tov. The *Yetzer Hara* always tries to cumber and crush our *his'orerus* shortly after we experience it; let's not give him the opportunity. Let's make *kabbalos* to maintain the *madreigos* in *Ahavas HaTorah* and closeness to Hashem that we have attained over the Yom Tov.

Let's summarize the points we discussed:

Moshiach Is Around the Corner!

We discussed how the rays of Moshiach will precede his revelation. We should all try to take *chizuk* from the tremendous amount of Torah learning that happens all around us, each and every day. Whether it's in Lakewood, Monsey, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Manchester, Gateshead or Yerushalayim – there are always thousands of people *davening* and learning.

I was just in Monsey for Shabbos, and in the afternoon, the Rav delivered a Pirkei Avos *shiur*. I wanted to sit down and listen to the *shiur* – but I struggled to find a vacant chair! There must have been 200 people there – many of them not even regular *mispallelim* in the Shul. They came from far and near to hear some Torah; the thirst and yearning was palpable throughout the room. There were *Balabatim*, *Yeshiva-leit*, *Chassidishe*, *Sefardishe* – they all came to hear some insights on Pirkei Avos. Tell me, are we not in Moshiach's times?

His'chadshus

We spoke about the importance of התחדשות; that the entire Yom Tov of Shavuos revolves around the concept of ביכורים, getting a fresh start.

I would like to add something that R' Elya Roth used to always say: "וא איד מעג זאגען צען מאהל א טאג מעתה ועד עולם" (*A Yid is allowed to say ten times a day 'from now on'!*) Sometimes a person realizes that he's doing something wrong, and he begins to feel bad about it. Then, he contemplates his mistake and gets lost in thought, which is simply a way of adding insult to injury. R' Elya would cry, "Just stop and say: 'מעתה ועד עולם I won't do it,' and move on! Get a התחדשות and start fresh! Stop wallowing in the murky waters and just turn a new leaf!

They say a *mashal* from the Chofetz Chaim as follows:

A woman was selling apples in the market. Suddenly, a man walked over and flipped over her table, sending apples rolling all over the busy street. He then began to grab as many of them as he could get his hands on.

The woman just stood there, pointing at the man and screaming: "Thief! Thief! Stop him!"

Watching the scene unfold, an innocent passerby yelled to the woman: "Stop screaming! Just grab a basket and collect as many apples as you can before he gets them all!"

The *nimshal* is obvious. We often spend so much time recognizing our mistakes and thinking about our failures that we wind up allowing ourselves to lose even more opportunities. Just stop thinking and move on! Get a little התחדשות; what has happened is already in the past, and now is the time to start over. So, if you're in the middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and right before you start *Modim* you realize that you were spacing out since the beginning and you have no clue how you got there – don't just stand there and feel bad! You're going to miss *Modim* as well! Just say מעתה ועד עולם and finish the rest of the *tefillah* with *kavanah*!

וַיָּתֵן שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר (שמות י"ט ב')

רש"י: כאיש אחד כלל אחד

Why Did Nadav and Avihu Die?

The *possuk* in last week's Parsha says: 'וַיָּמָת נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא לִפְנֵי ה' *Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered a strange fire before Hashem in the Midbar, and they had no children.* This *possuk* seems to be telling us two unrelated facts: Firstly, Nadav and Avihu died because they brought a strange offering to Hashem, and secondly, they did not have any children. However, the Gemara (יבמות סד.) explains that these two things were connected. The reason they died is because they did not perform the *mitzvah* of having children.

How do we understand this? The *possuk* clearly tells us that they died because they brought a strange offering. How could the Gemara contradict this statement by saying that they actually died because they had no children?

Hashem Is a Righteous Judge

The *possuk* in *Haazinu* says: קל אמונה ואין עול צדיק וישר הוא (דברים, ל"ב ד') *He is a G-D of faith without atrocity, righteous and straight He is.* The Torah describes Hashem as someone who does not commit atrocities. How is this a praise to Hashem? The fact that he does not commit atrocities does not seem like a virtue which is so great that it is the praise of Hashem. What is the meaning of this *possuk*?

R' Elya Lopian z"l explained with the following story.

There was a widow who had five children living with her at home. In order to make ends meet she had an illegal liquor business in her basement aside from her regular day job. Unfortunately, she was caught by the police and she was arrested due to her illegal business.

At her trial, her lawyer presented the following argument to the judge: "You cannot sentence this woman to prison because then who will take care of her five children?"

The judge, however, was unimpressed. He said, "This is a courthouse not a community center. It is not my business what to do with her children. My only responsibility is to uphold the law and since this woman broke the law it is my duty to sentence her to prison."

This is the way of human judges; Hashem, however, has a different system. Hashem will not punish someone if this would cause undue damage to another person. Hashem is a קל אמונה, a faithful judge, but He is also עול, and He does not commit atrocities. Therefore, if a person deserves to die but he has children at home who do not deserve to be orphans, this person's life will be saved. Similarly, any punishment which a person deserves but would cause pain to another person who does not deserve it will not be carried out.

Taking Out 'Insurance' with Hashem

Therefore, says R' Elyah, a person should see to it that he is a much-needed member of the community. He should join committees and other groups and he should have them rely on his services, and in this way, he could save his life. This is because even if he deserves to die, he will be saved because these groups will need him. Hashem will therefore not take his life because it would cause undue damage to these groups.

Based on this *vort* we can understand the Gemara in *Yevamos*. It is true that Nadav and Avihu died because they offered a strange offering to Hashem. However, if they would have performed the *mitzvah* of having children, they could have saved their lives! Even though they themselves deserved to die, if they would have had children those children would not have deserved to be orphans. Thus, although the main reason for their death was their strange offering, it was also partly due to the fact that they had no children.

We Are Truly Are Connected כאיש אחד

This teaches us a very powerful lesson about the nature of *Klal Yisrael*. By working together with other *yidden* we truly become כאיש אחד! We expand the scope of our lives and we become fundamentally interconnected with other *yidden*. Our lives can be saved because we are connected with the lives of other *yidden*!

We can take this even further. It is possible that when one *yid* serves Hashem with extra vigor, he is actually saving the life of another *yid*.

If Reuven finds himself in a place that is filled with tumah and he does not fall prey to his Yetzer hara he is thus deserving of great reward. If in an unrelated story his friend would deserve to die but this would cause Reuven pain and anguish which he does not deserve due to the great levels he has just achieved, his friends' life will be spared!

What a powerful thought! The private *avodas Hashem* of one *yid* can have such a powerful effect on other *yidden* that it can even save their lives. We truly are אחד אחד!

Let us keep these lessons in mind as we prepare for *Kabolas Hatorah*. We must be *mechazek* our feelings of love and connection with all other *yidden*. We must learn to be עם חבירו, נושא בעול עם חבירו, to truly feel the pain of others as if it were our own. If we can truly feel באחדות with all other *yidden* then we will be prepared to relive the experience of ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר.

A Gut Yom Tov!

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