

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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פרשת שמות

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לעילוי נשמת מרן המשגיח
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פרשת שמות

כָּל הֵבֶן הַיָּלֹד הַיָּאֵרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ (שמות א' כ"ב)

"Every son that will be born - into the river you shall throw him!"

The Plan of גוג ומגוג to Fight Klal Yisroel

The Midrash (מדרש שוחר טוב תהלים פרק ב) teaches us: Esav said to himself, "Look at Kayin. He tried to kill his brother and take charge. The problem with his plot was that Adam HaRishon was still alive at the time - he ended up having another son, Shais, who overshadowed Kayin and his destiny. I have to be smarter than that. יקרו בו ימי אבלי - I will wait just a short while, until my father Yitzchok is no longer around, and then - ואהרגה את יעקב אחי, I will kill my brother Yaakov."

The Midrash teaches that Pharaoh, the ruler of Mitzrayim in the beginning of this week's Parsha, denounced Esav's scheme as well. He reasoned that Esav's choice to postpone the murder of his brother resulted in him missing the opportunity: by the time Yitzchok Avinu was niftar, Yaakov was already heading down to Mitzrayim, 70 strong, where he would be under the watchful eyes of Yosef for the remainder of his life. "I'm going to be smarter than that," said Pharaoh. "כל הבן - throw every newborn boy into the river. We must eradicate the enemy before he can even get a chance to thrive."

Then, המן הרשע came along. He felt that the fault in Pharaoh's method was that he was only focusing on one faction of the enemy at a time. The right way to do it would be ביום אחד - אנשים נשים וטף - we must annihilate the entire Jewish population in one day.

The Midrash continues that eventually, גוג ומגוג will join the list of those who wish to wipe Klal Yisroel off the map. But they will come to a realization that none of their predecessors managed to comprehend: as long as Klal Yisroel has the Ribono Shel Olam, none of their foes stand a chance against them. The only way to emerge victorious in this battle is to fight Hakadosh Baruch Hu head on, כביכול. The Midrash then brings the pasuk, וַיִּצְאָהּ ה' וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּגֹיִם הָהֵם - Hashem will wage war with גוג ומגוג during that fateful period.

Now, this Midrash requires some clarification: how exactly do these people intend to wage war with the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth? And when it says that Hashem will fight for us, presumably it is to be taken figuratively, as is the case with many of the pesukim and midrashim depicting the End of Days. If that's the case, then what is the underlying meaning here?

דמשיחא עקבתא

We are now standing in the period of דמשיחא עקבתא - Moshiach is right around the corner. Many people get uneasy when they hear this, and that is perfectly understandable - after all, our Gedolim have been saying that this is the period we are living in for over 70 years.

Here's a good mashal to describe this idea:

I was at a chasuna in Lakewood recently. Everything was going according to plan; the chuppah was well underway, the kallah had already walked around the chosson seven times, and it was time to call up the chosson's Rosh Yeshiva, who was going to be the Mesader Kiddushin.

However, the family quickly noticed that the intended Mesader had not yet arrived. They phoned him, and he explained that there was an accident on Route 9; he wouldn't be arriving for a while. He asked them to give the Kibbud to someone else.

Rav Yeruchom Olshin was present, and the father decided to transfer the Kibbud over to him. Rav Yeruchom hastily rushed up to the chuppah; the assembled crowd had waited long enough. He was about to begin reciting the bracha when the father received a phone call from the originally intended Mesader Kiddushin. He said that the accident had cleared up; he would be by the hall in five minutes. Upon hearing this, Rav Yeruchom immediately returned to his seat; he had no interest in taking away another person's kibbud.

And so, the crowd waited. They had already waited for the family to figure out the last minute arrangement of transferring the Siddur Kiddushin over to Rav Yeruchom - a few more minutes wouldn't hurt. The chosson and kallah were in position, the photographer had his camera in hand, all of the

people receiving brachos under the chuppah were ready, the friends and family were all seated - everyone was perfectly poised for the moment to come; for the other Rosh Yeshiva to stride into the hall and finally make the marriage take place.

That's where we are holding right now. We don't need to wait for the bachur to become a chosson or for the girl to become a kallah. We don't need to wait for the hall to get booked or the catering and flowers to get arranged. We're just waiting for the Mesader Kiddushin.

The We Are Experiencing Today ומגוג גוג

We can learn the necessary steps for bringing an end to galus from Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the one that carried out the geulah from Mitzrayim. When Moshe Rabbeinu went out to see how his Jewish brothers were faring under the terrible מצרים, the first thing he witnessed was a Mitzri hitting a Jew. Rashi tells us that there was more to this story: this Mitzri used to send this Jew out to work at night, and then he would go live with his wife. This was the first factor of the מצרים that Moshe wished to combat: the ניאוף, the טומאה, the ערות הארץ that the Egyptians were forcing down the Yiddens' throats day and night.

Similarly, in our times, we are constantly getting engulfed by an unbridled deluge of ערות הארץ. The liberal agenda of today's Western culture is laser-focused on taking all of the things that would naturally be regarded as shameful and impure and transforming them into acceptable, even coveted behavior. Through their media and technology, they are forever fighting to paint immoral actions as valid and equally acceptable lifestyles - and, unfortunately, they are winning, to a large degree. The things that are considered orderly by the average American today are a far-cry from what the standards were 50 years ago.

This is what the Midrash was talking about when it described attempting to wage war against Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We know that there is a concept of "כי מצא בכ ערות דבר ושב מאחריך" - when there is impurity in our midst, Hashem leaves us. Our foes are conniving against us; they are trying to contaminate us with sin so that Hashem will be further away from us, making us an easier target. That

is why Moshe Rabbeinu attacked this part of our enemy right away - as the pasuk says, "וַיַּךְ אֶת הַמִּצְרִי", Moshe immediately struck the Mitzri.

The Second Tactic: Machlokes

The next incident Moshe encountered was that of two Yidden fighting with each other.

This is the next part of גוג ומגוג - driving the Ribono Shel Olam out through causing machlokes in Klal Yisroel. We all know the famous Gemara that teaches that when a couple is at peace, the shechina dwells among them, but the moment there is an issue with shalom bayis – the shechina leaves them. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is repulsed by machlokes.

In fact, there is a fantastic רמז to this topic in this week's Parsha. Hashem reveals himself to Moshe Rabbeinu for the first time in a burning thornbush. The Pirkei D'rebbi Eliezer says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu revealed himself to Moshe "מתוך השלום", from a place of peace.

It is interesting to note that thorns are extremely flammable; one spark, and they burst into flames. Within moments, they are entirely consumed. Interestingly, if you grind up thorns, then they can be used to extinguish a fire. In other words, the two can't coexist; either the fire is rapidly destroying the thorns, or the thorns are choking the fire. This is how Hashem introduced Moshe Rabbeinu to his role as being the leader of Klal Yisroel: the only path to success is peaceful coexistence. Two Yidden who grew up in entirely different environments and attended diametrically opposed yeshivos have to be able to sit near each other in shul; they have to greet each other with respect, do chesed with each other, and love each other. That is the only way to maintain Hashem's presence in our midst.

Now, machlokes isn't a new thing. Historically, our nation has always been struggling with this disease, one way or another. Today, with the advances of technology in the area of communication, we are constantly in touch with so many different people, making us more prone to getting into disagreements and disputes - especially causing accidental hurt feelings, when we are using texts or emails. We must realize that in order to usher in Moshiach, we must follow Moshe

Rabbeinu's lead and attempt to expunge all disputes and hurt feelings from our neighborhoods, shuls, offices and institutions.

The Third Tactic: Destroying Emunah

The third phenomenon Moshe Rabbeinu faced was the rasha behind it all: Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh denied the existence of an all-powerful G-d who controlled the entire universe.

When Moshe approached him, he said "Who is Hashem that I must listen to his command?" In fact, he used to claim that he himself was a G-d; he was the one who called the shots in Egypt. He would claim that he had no need to use the bathroom, as we were all taught in cheder.

Today, scientists are constantly making new discoveries in the area of creation and life. They are working on developing and cloning full animals from little embryos, along with other studies involving microscopic organisms that transform into large, living creatures. Of course, these discoveries are fascinating; but they lead to the decaying of our pure emunah. These people tend to get so fascinated by their own scientific advances that they begin to deny that Hashem is really a necessary component in their worldview. The power of the human mind is so great, they claim, that perhaps it can fend for itself; does it really have to lower itself into subordination to a higher being, they wonder? Furthermore, these scientists are forever excavating fossils and other natural substances that they then use to explain away the existence of the world without needing a Creator. These discoveries cause them to go astray with their false and distorted beliefs.

We must remember that this area is one of the three main focuses in our battle against גיג ומגוג - because if we allow our emunah to falter, then we will enable our enemies to drive Hakadosh Baruch Hu further away from us.

The 50th Gate of Tumah: Can We Escape It?

The Ohr Hachaim on the pasuk "וארר ואציל" (perek 3, pasuk 8) teaches that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim at the latest possible time; a couple of moments later, we would have succumbed to the

50th gate of tumah, from which we would never be able to recover. Now, why did Hashem have to wait until we got so deep into the 49th gate, to the point that we were on the verge of slipping into the 50th? Why couldn't he pull us out of the most dissolute of all lands a few days sooner? Besides, wouldn't it be a little more respectable for the Yidden to leave Mitzrayim with leisure, as opposed to running so quickly that they couldn't even wait for their bread to rise?

The Ohr Hachaim answers that in order for Klal Yisroel to achieve the loftiest levels of purity - namely, the 49th gate of kedusha - they had to fall into the 49th gate of tumah. These things work like a mirror image; the further we fall, the higher we are capable of climbing. Our slipping into the lowest levels of tumah was a "ירידה" - "לצורך עלייה". Once we remained in Mitzrayim for the longest we possibly could, then Hashem had to yank us out in an instant, so that we wouldn't hit a low that we would be incapable of undoing.

The Ohr Hachaim then adds to this: in the age of דמשיחא, we will indeed fall into the depths of the 50th gate of tumah. But how can that be? We weren't capable of coming out of the 50th gate in the times of Moshe and Aharon - so how will we be able to escape it in modern-day America? Answers the Ohr Hachaim: in the last period before Moshiach, there will be a zechus of wide-spread limud hatorah like never before.

What's happening today in Lakewood, as well as in the rest of the frum communities around America in general, is unbelievable. The Torah has reached every street corner where frum life exists.

I remember when I was a young child growing up in the Bronx, my father used to give a Gemara shiur for the balabatim. The ones who had pencils used to follow along and mark commas and periods every so often, and the others, well, they just sat there. But they all had one thing in common: they didn't understand the slightest bit of what was going on. Abaye and Rava, 'migu', 'chazakos' - they never heard of this stuff before. They were totally lost. These people were mostly union workers, they never had a proper Yeshiva education, and they knew very little about Torah.

Today, there's no such thing as an Orthodox Jew that isn't familiar with a blatt of Gemara. The average young man has learned

in some mainstream Yeshiva, and is well versed in Gemara concepts. The majority of baalabtim in Lakewood are 'kovea itim' on a regular basis. Somebody recently told me about a couple of balabatim that had shtenders installed in the backseat of a van, and would then learn b'chavrusa on the way to New York City and back every day. These are Baruch Hashem commonplace occurrences in our society.

And let's not forget about the countless shiurim and shmuzen that have been made accessible to the masses in recent years. And the abundance of seforim being printed. And the frequency of young married men choosing to learn in Kollel for the first few years, or decades, of their marriage. It's incredible, and it's the only thing that has the power to extricate us from the 50th gate of tumah.

The Time To Change Is Now. Not After Moshiach Arrives

Knowing that Moshiach is around the corner, we must focus on starting to make amends. We must recognize that the time to act is now; it won't be a nisayon to change ourselves once Hashem has uprooted the temptation for wrongdoing.

A Yid was travelling from Toronto to Lakewood. After doing a small portion of the trip, he decided to stay in a hotel for the night. While the hotel receptionist was helping him with the check-in, he mentioned to him, "If you're driving to New Jersey, you should head out early. We're expecting a mammoth snow storm here first thing in the morning." The Yid thanked him and went to bed.

The next morning, our friend woke up at 6:30. He glanced out of the window and saw that it was sunny. He decided to daven, eat a little, take it easy... Basically, he made his way out at 11:00. He assumed that if the predicted snow had not yet begun, perhaps he had lots of time to play around with.

But this turned out to be a big mistake. About a half hour into his journey, the snow started coming down, and it was really bad. He had practically no visibility, and he was slipping and sliding dangerously. He was left with no choice; he immediately checked into the next hotel. The snow was so bad that he ended up staying until the next morning.

This Yid felt terrible. There he was, sitting around doing nothing all day, while he could have had another day to accomplish and spend time with his children.

Now, imagine the painful feeling of losing eternal reward just for not acting fast enough. Instead of procrastinating, we need to act now. We need to strengthen all areas of our Avodas Hashem - especially those of the three imperative areas we mentioned before: Kedusha, shalom and emunah.

The Difference Between Positive and Negative Commandments

When Moshe Rabbeinu encountered the Ribono Shel Olam by the sneh, the pasuk says: “אל תקרב הלא, של נעליך מעל רגליך” - do not come closer; remove your shoes from your feet.”

The Ohr Hachaim points out that the pasuk places the negative commandment before the positive one. He explains that this is an important rule in the Torah - we are always expected to fulfill the lo sasay, or negative commandment, prior to accomplishing the asay, the positive one.

What is the significance of this principle? Aren't we taught that asay docheh lo sasay - a positive commandment takes precedence over a negative one?

The Ohr Hachaim answers that the significance of a lo sasay is that it provides protection for the soul from impurity and spiritual decline. The mitzvos asay only build on the soul that we already possess; construction, however, is pointless where there is no foundation. We must first focus on the basic maintenance and protection of our souls.

The Baal HaTanya (chapter 12) brings the statement made by Chazal, “משביעין אותו תהא צדיק ואל תהא רשע” - shomayim has made us all swear, prior to our birth, to be a Tzaddik and not to be a Rasha. Asks the Baal HaTanya: Isn't this wording somewhat redundant? Why couldn't it just say the second part of the statement - do not be a Rasha? The Baal HaTanya answers with an obvious yet vital lesson: if a person is incapable of achieving the lofty level of a Tzaddik, then at least he shouldn't become a Rasha. It may be difficult to be a tremendous masmid, and to be involved in mitzvos the entire day -

but at least he should protect his eyes and his mouth from doing the wrong things!

This is what a person should focus on while successfully overcoming a prohibition: I am protecting my neshama. I am maintaining my holy connection with the Ribono Shel Olam.

However, Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l used to point out that mitzvos asay also have a massive advantage over mitzvos lo sasay: when a person does an aveirah, there's always a path to cleansing his soul. He can do teshuva as long as there is breath in his body. And if he ch"v does not succeed in repenting before his death? There's something called gehinnom - the ultimate purification process. Yet, when it comes to positive commandments - there are no freebies in Olam Habah. Whatever you acquired in this world - that's all you have. They won't dump more zechusim onto you once you are no longer a bassar va'dam.

We must internalize these two factors. Firstly, we must work every single day of our lives to ensure that our soul doesn't get destroyed, so that it should at least be a candidate for receiving a portion in the World to Come. And second, we must remember that the good deeds that we perform today will be the only things that determine what our lot will look like in Olam Habah - they will determine if we are the ones sleeping on the park bench, or we are the ones lounging in the King's palace, or anywhere in between.

May we be zoche to each maximize our potential, attain the highest eternal reward possible, and bring Moshiach Tzidkeinu to finally complete our chasuna with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. As we mentioned before - the arrangements have all been made, we're already under the chuppah; we're just desperately awaiting the arrival of the Mesader Kiddushin.

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