

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

פרשת וירא

Volume 8 Issue # 2

נתנדב לעילוי נשמת
מֶרֶן בַּעַל אֲבֵי עֲזָרֵי זִיע"א

פרשת וירא

וְהוּא יָשָׁב בְּתַח הָאֵהָל כָּחֵם הַיּוֹם (בראשית י"ח א')

רש"י: הוֹלִי'א הקדוש צדק הוא חמה מנתיקה שלא להטריחו באורחים, ולפי שראהו מלכוד שלא היו אורחים באים, הביא המלאכים עליו בדמות אנשים.

Avraham's Desire for *Chesed*

The *pasuk* says that Hashem went to see Avraham היום, *when the day was hot*. Rashi says that generally, the sun resides in a 'case' that diminishes its extreme heat, but on this day—Hashem removed it from its case, so that potential guests who may cause Avraham to exert himself would not be out and about. However, Hashem observed that Avraham was longing to be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* of *Hachnosas Orchim*, so he sent the *Malachim* to be his 'guests'. The obvious question is: if Hashem decided that He wanted to present Avraham with *orchim*, then why did He have to send *Malachim*? Couldn't He simply return the sun to its case, thereby removing the cause of the lack of travelers?

Harav Gavriel Ginsburg Zatzal from Ner Yisroel Toronto proposed the following answer: Hakadosh Baruch Hu took notice of the fact that Avraham Avinu so greatly desired to do *chesed* despite the fact that he was in tremendous physical pain. On top of that, it was clear that Avraham desired to do this *mitzvah* despite the intense heat wave that was taking place on that day! If he was indeed prepared to do *chesed* on such a high *madreigah*, Hashem did not want to take away from the *s'char* that he would have received had he done the *mitzvah* during the heatwave. He therefore chose to leave the sun outside of its case, and instead sent *Malachim* to be Avraham's guests.

Don't Overdo It

I would like to share with you the following story that I heard from Rav Chaim Brim: (This story was later printed, but the ending was portrayed slightly differently than how I heard it from Rav Chaim.)

Rav Isser Zalmen Meltzer zt"l was once walking down the steps outside his home in Yerushalayim when he spotted the Chazon Ish zt"l walking in the distance. Rav Isser Zalmen was shocked; the Chazon Ish almost never left Bnei Brak—what was he doing in Yerushalayim? (In fact, I believe there are only two recorded episodes wherein the Chazon Ish traveled to Yerushalayim.)

Rav Isser Zalman understood that the Chazon Ish was walking towards his house, so he quickly ran back inside and informed his family members of the surprising news: the Chazon Ish was coming! The entire home immediately transformed into preparation mode; the table was cleared, and they covered it with a shabbos'dikeh tablecloth; the floors were swept swiftly, and Rav Isser Zalman donned his shabbos'dikeh garments. And then came the knock on the door. Rav Isser Zalman answered the door, and... the man standing there was actually a total stranger. He wore a similar hat and glasses to the ones that the Chazon Ish would wear, and he had a similar stature and gait—but he was a totally different person.

The rest of the people in the household recognized the mistake and carried on with what they were doing—but not Rav Isser Zalman. He continued to treat this man as though he were the great Chazon Ish: he greeted him warmly, with great honor; he escorted him to the table and offered him a hot tea; and, once the man was done making his short request, Rav Isser Zalman walked him outside, all the way down the steps.

When he returned to his home, his family members questioned him about his strange behavior. (In the published version, they say that Rav Isser Zalman replied that since Hakadosh Baruch Hu caused him to mistake this man for the Chazon Ish, then it must be that he was deserving of great kavod, and he therefore chose to treat him as such. It's possible that he said that as well, but I heard a different response from Rav Chaim Brim.) Rav Isser Zalman replied the following: "In truth, this is the manner in which we should treat every single Yid who walks through our door. Doesn't the Torah in Parshas Vayera tell us all about Avraham's outstanding treatment of the three Malachim—who he thought were a few Arabs? He shechted them three cows; he washed their feet; he requested that Sarah bake them fresh pastries. Shouldn't we treat Avraham's descendants at least as well as he treated a

couple of strangers? Now, the fact is—we don't treat our guests the way Avraham did. Why not? Because we simply don't have the same kochos he had. We would stop allowing any guests into our home if we were to treat them all in the same manner as Avraham treated the 'Arabs'. However, once we already did all the preparations thinking this man was the Chazon Ish—of course we should proceed with treating him as Avraham would have!"

Besides the great *tzidkus* that Rav Isser Zalman displayed in this story, he taught us an important lesson. It reminds me of the words that Rav Shlomo Miller *shlit"a* of Toronto once told me: "A person has to always try to do a little more than he is comfortable with—and not more." Why? Because if we do more than we are comfortable with on our level, then eventually, we will stop doing the deed entirely.

For example, let's say a Yid from Lakewood travels to Boro Park frequently. Every time he is about to start his journey back home, he drives over to *Shomrei Shabbos* to see if there's anyone there who needs a ride to Lakewood. However, every time he gives these rides—the passengers have very specific locations in Lakewood where they would like to be dropped off. Soon, he begins to realize that at times he has multiple passengers—and all the taxiing around Lakewood is costing him 40 minutes of his time, aggravating himself and his family. You know what's going to happen next? Not only will he begin to limit his offer—he will stop doing it entirely. He will burn out from the *mitzvah*. It will come to a point where he will sit in traffic and take the long route home rather than pass anywhere near *Shomrei Shabbos*.

Treating Your Guests Just Like Bnei Bayis

The Chofetz Chaim makes a similar point. It says in the Mishna: בֵּיתָךְ וְיָהוּ עֲנִיִּים בְּנֵי בֵּיתָךְ—and *paupers should be the inhabitants of your home*. The Chofetz Chaim explained that this means that we shouldn't be trying to treat our guests in a better manner than how we treat our spouses and children. For instance, if the average supper in one's home varies in level of quality from day to day—then he should serve his guest with the same variance of quality. He shouldn't feel obligated to serve them a gourmet meal every single day of their stay; if he will do so, he will avoid having guests altogether. Rather, he should keep the standards at the same level as that of his own בית בני; in other words, he should treat the עֲנִיִּים as though they were the regular inhabitants of his home.

Stay On the Level You've Reached!

Let's add one more point regarding this topic. We learn from Rav Ginsburg's answer that when we arrive at a level in *Avodas Hashem*, we must do what we can to stay on that level. Avraham was holding by the *madreigah* of hosting guests during an intense heat wave—and Hashem allowed him to retain this *madreigah* by leaving the sun out of its case. Why? Because when we achieve a spiritual high, we must do our best to stay on that plane rather than slip back to the lower one. This is a tremendous *yesod* in serving Hashem.

The *pasuk* in Shir HaShirim says: איככה אלבשנה, *I have removed my cloak; how will I don it once more?* The Vilna Gaon offers a fascinating *pirush* of these words. Allow me to illustrate his explanation with a *mashal*:

A fellow plays an intense game of basketball. After the game is over, he heads over to the gym and runs on the treadmill for 45 minutes. Once he is done running, he goes to the gym's shower area, removes his sullied clothing and takes a thorough, hot shower. After the shower, he starts getting dressed—and he notices that he forgot to bring along a fresh undershirt.

This fellow contemplates his options. He needs to get a fresh undershirt—but they're all folded nicely in his bedroom drawer, across town. But he can't walk in the street without a shirt! The only remaining option is to slip on his undershirt from before the shower—but it's soaked in sweat! He can't possibly bring himself to put on that disgusting article of clothing after his meticulous, refreshing shower!

The Gaon explains that when a person removes his 'cloak' filled with sins, he gets a sense of reawakening and rejuvenation. Once he's on that spiritual plane, he finds it unthinkable to don that cloak of sins once again; by ridding himself of the *aveiros*, he has become repulsed by the sin and how it used to affect his life!

Rabosai, Yom Kippur was only a short time ago. Many of us have reached higher levels by ridding ourselves of our sins and making *kabbalos* for the future. It may be hard to maintain these levels; surely some of us have already slipped a bit. But we must remember to think! Don't let yourself lose that feeling of being pure! You may have gotten a little soiled—but you're not filthy! You know what it feels like to be clean;

it is incumbent upon you to do what it takes to keep that appreciation of your purity.

We often talk about the importance of perfecting our *kavanah* while *davening Shemoneh Esrei*. And, as we have mentioned in the past, the smartest way to tackle this task is by working on one *bracha* at a time. Now, let's say a person succeeds in perfecting his concentration on the words of *Avos*, and he moves on to *Gevuros*. Before long, he has mastered that as well; now he moves on to *Kedushas Hashem*. If he focuses too much on this *bracha*, and thereby forgets to maintain his *kavanah* by the first *bracha*—then he's losing ground! He has to make sure to remain on the level that he's on—and never lose it. This theme will constantly repeat itself in our daily struggles in *Avodas Hashem*, and we must therefore always keep it at the forefront of our consciousness: when you obtain a level, stay there!

A Continuous Upgrade

This idea is echoed in the *shmuessen* of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt"l* in the beginning of Parshas Chayei Sarah. When the *pasuk* says that Sarah lived for “one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years,” Chazal comment: כולם שווים לטובה—they [Sarah's years] were all equal in greatness. Rav Chaim interpreted this to mean that Sarah's entire lifetime—including way back when she was a young child—was one continuous upgrade. Sarah would never allow herself to fall backward; she was always climbing upward, from one level to the next.

An airplane needs to reach very high speeds on the runway in order for it to take off from the ground. Suppose you have a novice pilot who's attempting to take off—and every time the plane starts reaching high speeds, he applies some pressure on the brakes. The speed gets a little closer to the required amount—and then he brakes again. If he keeps on repeating this process, you know how long it will take for the plane to get up in the air? Forever! The only way for the plane to become airborne is for it to constantly accelerate until it lifts off the ground. If the speed isn't following a continuous pattern of acceleration—then the plane will remain on the runway.

Says Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz: if a *bachur* or *yungerman* invests all his energy into his *seder*, but then loses his entire *madreigah* during *bein hasdorim*—then he will be starting over from scratch by second *seder*. If

he spends an entire summer *zman* growing and growing, but then plummets during *bein hazmanim*—then he will be starting over from step one when Elul comes along. Of course, a person needs to relax a bit—but he can't lower his level every time he takes a break.

If You Stopped, Don't Start Again

Rav Shach *zt"l* shared the following story with me:

Rav Shach used to be a heavy smoker. He often couldn't sleep through the night without waking up for a cigarette or two. He found it much easier to concentrate while he was puffing a cigarette; he never saw any reason to stop. (In those days, the adverse effects that smoking has on the body were not yet well-known.)

At one point, Rav Shach got surgery for a hernia. After the procedure, the surgeon told him that he shouldn't smoke for two weeks. "Smoking causes you to cough, and too much coughing can potentially damage the stitches," he explained. Rav Shach accepted the instructions and didn't touch a cigarette for the following two weeks.

*Towards the end of the two-week period, Rav Shulman *zt"l*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka, came to visit him. After a few minutes, he told him: "R' Laizer, I don't like the way you look. When was the last time you had a cigarette?"*

"It's been two weeks since my last cigarette; those were the doctor's orders," Rav Shach replied.

"I think you really need to start smoking again," Rav Shulman said. "It really calms you down."

Rav Shach decided to ask his doctor for permission to start smoking again once the two weeks had passed. The doctor replied: "הפסקת? אז אל תתחיל עוד פעם" – "You managed to quit? Then don't start again." The doctor explained that smoking is likely to cause other health issues. Rav Shach told me that after the doctor told him that, he never smoked another cigarette.

Rav Shach's power of self-control was clearly remarkable, but there's another *nekudah* to be learnt from this story: הפסקת? You managed to get to a higher level? אז אל תתחיל, then don't start again. Don't go back

to the lower level. Growing a *madreigah* is not something that should be taken for granted; if we have already managed to get to the higher level, then we should do our best to only move upward from there on.

Rav Uri Zohar once shared with me that when he was becoming a Baal Teshuva, he was told that he had to get rid of his television. "It was like getting an amputation," he told me. It was literally a part of him.

Years later, he was once visiting a friend, and the family was huddled around the television. At one point, he began to cry. His friend asked him: "Uri! What's going on, you're getting emotional about what they're showing on the screen?"

"Not at all," he answered. "I'm crying because I can't believe I spent so many years of life watching this nonsense, hours and hours each day."

When Rav Uri Zohar chose to climb from level to level, he knew that he had to do it in a way that there was no option of looking back; he got rid of the television completely, he got rid of *maachalos asuros* completely, and he just looked forward, following a constant upward trend.

Issuing Commandments to our Children

The *pasuk* tells us that Avraham asked Sarah: "לושי ועשי עוגות" – "Knead and make cakes." However, when he presented the calf to his son (Rashi tells us the verse is referring to Yishmael), the *pasuk* doesn't state that he commanded him anything. Yishmael prepared the meat exactly how Avraham wanted him to, without him breathing a single word. This seems a bit interesting; why did Avraham need to give Sarah an exact description of what needed to be done, while Yishmael didn't seem to require any instructions?

I was in the house of Rav Shalom Eisen on a few occasions, and I noticed a remarkable thing: he would never 'command' his children to do anything. For example, if he needed a taxi, he would say: "Abish, if you would call me a taxi, I would very much appreciate it." So, of course, I asked him why he acted in this manner.

"It's simple," he said. "What happens if I command my son to do something, and then he gets distracted and forgets to do it? He

would be transgressing the chiyuv of Kibbud Av! I try to be mezakeh my children with Gan Eden, not Gehinnom..."

Obviously, this is an extreme level, but there's definitely an *inyan* to talk in this manner to our children. I actually once said this over to the *bachurim* in Yeshiva, and one of them asked me the following: Chazal teach us that a wife has an obligation to listen to her husband, even in the event that it contradicts a direct commandment from her father. From this we see that a wife also has a *mitzvah* to listen to her husband. If so, then perhaps Avraham should have avoided giving direct commandments to his wife as well; she too could have ended up transgressing her *chiyuv*!

So I explained to the *bachur* that his question was predicated on a false premise. And I'll explain why. I once asked Rav Shlomo Miller *shlit"a*: how could it be that a woman's obligation to listen to her husband overrides her *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av*? The latter is a *chiyuv mi'deoraisa*, while the former is not explicitly stated in the Torah! Rav Miller answered me as follows: suppose a woman is working in an office, and her father suddenly walks in and asks her to make him a hot tea. This woman is not supposed to stop working in order to do her *Kibbud Av*! She has a job; she is obligated to work for her boss right now! When a person has a contractual *shibud* to work for another, then he is not allowed to ignore it in order to do a *mitzvah*. The same goes for a wife; she has a *shibud* to serve her husband, and she must therefore follow his instructions even if it clashes with a direct request from her parents. Once we understand it this way, then it is quite clear why Avraham didn't have a reason to avoid issuing direct commandments to Sarah.

Now, how does all of this pertain to us? I'm not suggesting that we should all follow the example of Rav Shalom Eisen; if you're not on that level, it's just not worth it. If it's not carried out correctly, then it could lead to frustration and misunderstanding. But one thing we can take from this is that we must do our best to avoid situations which are likely to cause confrontation with our children. Before we ask our child to do something which we know may not be so easy for them, we must try to warm them up to the idea. Why should we directly command them to do something if we know they may not follow through, causing them to neglect their duties of *Kibbud Av*?

Test the Waters Before You Instruct

In fact, we see that Yaakov Avinu behaved in this manner precisely. When Yaakov wanted Yosef to go see how his brothers were doing in Shechem, the *pasuk* tells us that the conversation went as follows: “ ויאמר ישראל אל יוסף, הלא אחיך רועים בשכם, לכה ואשלחך אליהם, ויאמר לו – “*And Yisroel said to Yosef: ‘Your brothers are pasturing in Shechem, are they not? Come, let me send you to them.’ He said to him, ‘Here I am!’ And he said to him, ‘Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers.’”*

We see from the *pesukim* that before issuing the direct command, Yaakov brought up the idea, almost as though he was trying to see if Yosef was ready to carry out the request. Once Yosef replied with an enthusiastic הִנְנִי, Yaakov repeated his idea in the form of a request.

As parents, we should always test the waters before asking for something big. If we will just bark commandments all the time, we will ruin our relationships with our children—and we may even cause them to transgress their obligation of *Kibbud Av*.

Your Guest's Time is Important

I would like to add one more piece of *hadracha* before we finish.

The *pasuk* says that Avraham told the *Malachim*: “ יקה נא מעט מים – “*Let some water be brought and wash your feet... I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on.”*

This is a bit odd. Avraham barely invited them for a little piece of bread—and he’s already telling them to go back on their way? That doesn’t sound very welcoming! This is a stark contrast to the episode with Manoach and the *Malach Peli*; there, Manoach offered to *shecht* a young goat and prepare a delicacy for his guest, and he didn’t mention anything about Peli leaving. This is much unlike Avraham, who just offered a mere morsel of bread, and ‘reminded’ the *Malachim* that they will be able to go on their way immediately afterward.

However, there is another difference between the two episodes. By Manoach, the *Malach*’s response was simple: “Don’t hold me up.” He just declined the offer entirely. By Avraham, however, the guests accepted the offer and ‘dined’ lavishly.

Perhaps this is a lesson in how to treat our guests. You know, people enjoy food—but they also like their time. Time is of utmost importance to many people. They have things to do; they can't always accept an open-ended invitation with no conclusion in sight. This happens very often by *simchos*; there are numerous uncles and great uncles and *shvuggers* and brothers, and they all have something to say about the *chosson*. And not only are there ten speeches, but each one of them is a half an hour long! Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz used to bang on the *shtender* and say, "Why are people so *maarach*? Why do they hold everybody up? Say what you have to say and move on!" Sometimes, you have a fellow get up, and he says: "Rabbosai, I know it's getting late, and you all have things to do, so I will be very brief. In fact, before I start, let me tell you a story about the importance of being brief..." It's insensitive. It's true that there's a tremendous *mitzvah* in praising a *chosson* and *kallah*, but we have to keep the guests in mind. They have lives to take care of.

Avraham presented the *Malachim* with a beautiful spread. The ambience was perfect: the delicious meats, the shade under the tree, the *Divrei Torah*... But from the beginning, he made his intentions clear: I won't be holding you up for long. I will serve you a little bit of food, and then you will be on your way. This is the prime way of inviting a guest: we let them know that we will provide them with food and shelter, and we give them a clear timeline of how long their sojourn will last.

May we be *zoche* to treat our guests properly and respectfully, whether at our Shabbos *seudos* or at our *simchos*, and may we *Be'ezras Hashem* merit to enjoy the greatest *simcha* of all—the bringing of Moshiach speedily in our days.

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

*A sampling of the audio shmuessen can also be obtained at
www.shasilluminated.org/rabbi-moshe-rabinowitz*