

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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פרשת מקץ – חנוכה

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לעילוי נשמת
מרן הג"ר חיים ליב בן הג"ר רפאל
אלתר הלוי שמואלביץ זצ"ל
לכבוד היארציית ג' טבת

פרשת מקץ – חנוכה

אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרְבֶנּוּ מִיָּדֵי תְּבַקְשֻׁנּוּ, אִם לֹא הִבִּיאֲתוּ אֵלַיָּךְ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ, וְחָטְאֲתִי לָךְ כָּל הַיָּמִים:
(בראשית מ"ג ט')

והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך, ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך (מסכת שבת דף כ"א ע"ב)

The Dilemma the Shvatim were Facing

Lekovod Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz's upcoming yahrtzeit, I would like to discuss one of his famous shmuessen.

In this week's *parshah*, we learn about how the ten *shvatim* approached Yaakov Avinu with a serious dilemma. The Egyptians had locked up Shimon, and they made it very clear that his release would depend on their returning with Binyomin. The problem was that Yaakov wasn't ready to part with Binyomin. Leah had other children other than Shimon; Rochel, on the other hand, had only two sons – and the first was already gone. Yaakov wasn't willing to risk the life of the only remaining son of his *akeres habayis* – even if it meant that Shimon would remain behind bars for the time being.

The Commitments of Reuven and Yehuda

Well, Reuven had an offer to somewhat mitigate Yaakov's level of distress: "את שני בני תמית" – *Let my two sons die if I do not return him to you!* However, Yaakov continued with his refusal. Rashi uses strong words to describe Yaakov's reaction to Reuven's offer: "בכור שוטה הוא זה, וכי בניו הם ולא בני" – *My firstborn is a fool; are they only his sons, and not my own?*

Now, it seems from the *pesukim* and Rashi that Yaakov was adamant in his refusal to send Binyomin – and he was likewise very opposed to Reuven's offer. However, a short while later, Yaakov acceded to the *shvatim's* request and reluctantly allowed them to take Binyomin. The interesting thing is that the second time around, Yaakov initially refused as well – except that Yehuda promised him: "אם לא אביא אותו אליך והצגתי לפניך, וחטאתי לך כל הימים" – *If I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time.* Only after Yehuda said these words did Yaakov acquiesce.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz noted this sequence of events and asked: why was Yehuda's guarantee more promising than that of Reuven? After all, Rashi tells us that Yaakov viewed Reuven's offer as that of a שוטה. Why would it make any more sense for Yehuda to put his life on the line than for Reuven to do the same with his sons?

True Responsibility: Being a אחריות בעל

Rav Chaim answered with a big *yesod*. Reuven's offer didn't show a true acceptance of responsibility. It may have shown that he was very committed to the cause, but the potential consequences for his failure would only have been temporary. Yes, it would have been extremely painful for Reuven to lose his two sons – but the pain would be finite. Eventually, he would be able to recover and move on. Yehuda's proposal, on the other hand, was a true display of devotion: he was willing to accept eternal sorrow upon himself; וחטאתי לך כל הימים implies that he was ready to give up his life in this world and the next. There was nothing temporary about what Yehuda was ready to do; he was ready to accept Yaakov's full ire infinitely.

When Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to discuss this topic, he would give an entire *shmuess* about the importance of being a אחריות בעל. He would say that the more *achrayus* a person is willing to take upon

himself, the more of a *mentsch* he is. If a person doesn't learn to take any *achrayus* upon himself, then he will fail in every way.

Taking Responsibility for our Words and Actions

He would then bring out his *yesod* from an additional point in the *parshah*. When the *shvatim* were standing near the pit that they had just thrown their brother into, they began debating whether or not to kill him. At first, they all reasoned that Yosef was trying to destroy them and steal their destiny by having the lineage of Klal Yisroel go through him and not through any of his brothers. They believed that Yosef was bringing reports to his father in order to paint them as the 'bad sons' and have them cut out of the nation's future – just like Esav and Yishmael before them. But then, Yehuda stood up to the plate: "What do we gain by killing our brother? All we want is that our father should continue to think highly of us and bless us with the *z'chus* of being the forebears of Klal Yisroel. If that's the case, then all we need to do is get Yosef out of the picture. We can accomplish that by merely selling him as a slave."

Now, there seems to be an obvious objection to this suggestion: if you keep Yosef alive, then circumstances may change – and one day, you might have to face him! But Yehuda wasn't perturbed by this possibility. He was a true *בעל אחריות*; if it meant doing what was right, then he was ready to accept whatever difficulties may come along at a later date. This can help us understand why the Midrash says that after Yehuda proposed the option of selling Yosef, his brothers immediately appointed him as king. They recognized that the one who was willing to take full responsibility for his actions belongs being the leader.

I think it's pretty amusing that when you look around at the world leaders of today, *להבדיל*, the most successful ones are very good at destroying evidence. Any source of information that may possibly draw question marks over their heads in the future is immediately disposed of and shoved under the rug. Sometimes it looks like the best politicians these days are the ones with the best paper shredders. This is the polar opposite of what a true *בעל אחריות* does; he's supposed to be totally prepared to take heat for his actions! He's supposed to actually believe in what he does, and be ready to face opposition in the long run. Hiding from his previous conduct and attempting to avoid confrontation just means he has no real backbone.

The Prince and the Nazir

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asked an additional question about this *parshah*. Let's illustrate his point with the following Midrash:

A prince once met a nazir. The prince was all fattened up and pampered with earthly pleasures, while the nazir was devoted totally to spirituality, and was accustomed to minimizing his amount of physical gratification. Well, the prince told the nazir that he was hungry for lunch – and he was seeking someone to join him for the meal. He offered the nazir the most lavish meal imaginable – but he declined the offer. "I accepted a fast on myself today," he said.

The prince wasn't discouraged. "I'll tell you what: come eat with me today, and you'll pay back your fast tomorrow," he suggested. But the nazir continued to refuse. "I would love to eat with you and just push off my fast, dear prince," he said. "But how can I guarantee that it will actually happen tomorrow? Who knows what will be in 24 hours? I may die, and then I'll go up to Shomayim with an uncompleted task on my hands."

How was Yehuda able to commit with such confidence that he would be able to return Binyomin to his father unscathed? Who knows what could happen over the long journey to Mitzrayim and back? There could be numerous dangers lurking in the shadows just while they're traveling – and that's besides the terrible treatment that they might receive from the Egyptians!

This reminds me of an amusing tale that tells of a man who was sentenced to death by a king. The man was being carried out to the gallows when he caught the king's eye and screamed: "Dear king!

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I know you want to have me killed – but I don't believe this decision is worthwhile for you. You see, I have been taught a secret method of how to teach horses how to fly. If you give me some time, I will be able to train enough horses to grant you an undefeatable army."

The king was very intrigued by this proposal. "Well, how long will it take you to train the horses?" he inquired.

"I need a year," the man replied.

"Fine," said the king. "I'll give you one year to train my horses – but afterwards, you're going straight back to the gallows," he avowed.

As the convict was making his exit, an old friend of his stopped him and asked: "I don't understand; how are you gonna do it? You can't actually teach horses to fly, can you?"

His friend smiled and whispered, "Of course I can't. But now I have another year to live. You know how many things can happen in one year? The king could die; the kingdom could get overrun by an enemy nation; I could die a peaceful death next to my family; and who knows, maybe horses will even begin to fly?"

Real Will Power

Rav Chaim answered: Chazal teach us that "אין דבר העומד בפני הרצון" – *Nothing can get in the way of a person's will*. If a person really wants something, down to every last fiber of his being – then he will make it happen. There is absolutely nothing that could stop a person from achieving his goals if he truly wishes to reach them with all of his soul and all of his might. Of course, natural tragedies can happen; but a true *אחריות* doesn't think about that. He just commits himself 100% to get the job done – and he relies on Hashem to take care of the rest.

This is one of the biggest disasters in today's *goyishe* society. There is very little respect and appreciation for true *אחריות*. A parent takes no responsibility for his child's mental health when he dumps him in front of a television for hours on end. Who knows what kinds of corrupt and twisted ideologies and gruesome scenes his child could witness in just one viewing session? Take responsibility for your child's normalcy – then you'll at least have a right to complain when he's a total *meshuggener* when he grows up! The same goes for the politicians: they just make hundreds of campaign promises with zero intention of actually carrying them out. Tell me, how are they not embarrassed a year after they were elected and they've done nothing of what they had promised? The answer is because nobody takes *אחריות* for what they say anymore – not the politicians, and not their supporters! Their biggest fans barely even believe a word they say. That's just how it goes.

And it goes even further. The people in the highest offices don't realize that their lack of *אחריות* is causing death. They promise they're going to do something about all of the *רציחה* that's going on in the country, and people believe in them, supporting them with high hopes – but they don't really do anything about it. All they do is explain that this one forgot to take his medications that morning, the other one was bullied as a kid, the third one was angry at his mother – excuses, excuses, but no *אחריות*. So the mass shootings continue to happen, and innocent children die in school, because nobody is ready to take *אחריות* and put an end to the madness. The parents don't take *אחריות* for the gruesome violence they inculcate in their children's lives over the years, creating these crazed monsters – and the activists and elected officials just shift the blame on 'the other party', or 'the child's therapist', and it all ends up as one big disaster – all because of a lack of *אחריות*.

Rabbosai, we have to be so grateful to the Ribono Shel Olam when we make the *brachos* of שלא עשני גוי in the morning. Do we recognize how lucky we are that we have a Torah that teaches us to be *mechanech* our children to be wholesome human beings? Do we appreciate the timeless wisdom of the Torah – the lessons that we learn from the *parshah* each and every week? About living for a higher purpose, being a true *אחריות*, living with extreme will power like Yosef and Yehuda – these are the

greatest gifts that have ever been given to mankind, and they were given to *us*! How are we not all jumping out of our seats, thanking the Eibishter for these golden opportunities and unparalleled gifts?

Living with a Geshmak

During Yosef's second encounter with the *shvatim*, he asks them the following question: "השלום חי – *Is your aged father of whom you spoke at peace? Is he still alive?*" The *shvatim* replied in the same order as Yosef had asked them: "*Your servant our father is still at peace; he still lives.*" The Ohr Hachaim points out the *pasuk* seems to be backwards, both in Yosef's question and in the brothers' response. Shouldn't the first question be whether or not Yaakov was still alive? The other part of the question – regarding the condition of Yaakov's life – would seem to only be appropriate once it was already established that he was still living!

The Ohr Hachaim answers that perhaps the word "חי" in this context is not referring to 'alive' as opposed to 'dead'; rather, the question was whether Yaakov still had his *חיות* – his youthfulness, his vigor, his *geshmak* in life. This way, the order makes sense: first Yosef was inquiring whether his father was at peace, i.e. was he healthy and living tranquilly, and only after that did he inquire whether his father was still full of liveliness and *התלהבות* for his life.

Things Tend to Depreciate

I think this is a great *remez* to Chanukah. The natural tendency of things is for them to go down in value shortly after they reach their peak-performance. Take a banana, for instance: at first, it's green and hard, and it's almost impossible to peel. But soon thereafter, it gets yellow and soft, and the peel slides right off without the slightest hassle. But a day or two after that – the banana is covered in brown dots and is practically inedible.

This rule applies to people as well. When a person is still a child, he is physically and mentally far less capable than he will be when he reaches adulthood. But then, once he's an adult, there's a period where he reaches his peak in terms of physical strength – somewhere around his mid-thirties – and then he starts to decline. The *sechel* usually has a state of peak-performance as well – albeit at a different age, more like in the high seventies for most people. Maybe this is what Yosef was asking his brothers: did their father reach the point where he was already on the way down – in terms of mental and physical *kochos* – or was he still young at heart and full of vibrancy?

Now, Yosef could do simple math; he was able to calculate on his own exactly how old Yaakov was. But he wanted to know whether Yaakov had succeeded in defying his old age and maintaining his *geshmak* for life and *Avodas Hashem*.

How do we maintain our *geshmak*? The answer is by constantly adding to our *avodah*. A person has to keep growing, step by step.

This point is apparent in the dream of the *משקים* in last week's *parshah*. The Torah tells us that he saw in his dream buds that blossomed into full bloom, followed by clusters that ripened fully. The Ohr Hachaim points out that this wordy description is not in any way superfluous; rather, the Torah is teaching us a lesson. When something grows in stages, and it develops from a bud into a full blossom and so on – then it will continue to grow and bear delicious fruit. But if something just gets old and comes to a standstill, then it will just wither with time and eventually lose all of its beauty and health. Hashem was reminding Yosef that the same has happened in the lives of his forefathers; Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov all had numerous struggles throughout their lives – but they all persevered, and just added level after level of *avodah* on top of each test. With each *nisayon* they grew stronger and closer to the Eibishter. So too, Yosef was being reminded that every step of his difficult life story was just another rung in the ladder of growth, and this was his opportunity to *shteig*.

מוסף והולך Chanukah: Being

Many years ago, the Skverer Rebbe came to address Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Toronto on Chanukah. I still remember how Rav Ginsburg got up and told the *bachurim*: "I know many of you don't understand Yiddish, but the Rebbe will be saying *הלב מן הלב*, so I'm sure you'll all understand."

The Rebbe mentioned that the Abudraham says that we light eight *neiros* on Chanukah because the *Halacha* is like Beis Hillel¹. The Rebbe was bothered by this; the Abudraham is a *Halacha sefer*, so why was it necessary to mention Beis Hillel? It should suffice to say that the reason we light eight candles is because we need to add a candle every day, and there are eight days!

The Rebbe answered that the Abudraham was trying to answer the famous question of the Bes Yosef – why do we light for eight days if the first days' burning was actually a natural occurrence? The Abudraham is answering that if we would have only been obligated to light seven *neiros*, then it wouldn't be evident who the *Halacha* was like on the fourth night – because whether we subtract or add a candle each day, the fourth night would have four candles. But if the obligation would be to light eight – then those who follow Hillel would be lighting a different amount than those who follow Shammai every single night.

Now, this is a nice *schtickel Torah* – but why is it so important for to be reminded each night that the *Halacha* is like Beis Hillel – that we are *מוסף והולך*?

The Skverer Rebbe explained that the important message over here is that a Yid has to always be *מוסף והולך* in his *Avodas Hashem*. He said over that the Baal Shem Tov used to say: the Gemara says that the way of the *Yetzer Hara* is "אומר לו היום עשה כך, ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך, ולבסוף אומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה" – *Today he tells him to do this, tomorrow he tells him to do this, and in the end he tells him to worship idols*. Why does it say "do this" every time? Shouldn't it say "Today do this, and tomorrow do more, and the day after do even more – until you reach *Avodah Zara*"? The Baal Shem Tov explained that a person doesn't need to add in his level of sin constantly in order to reach serious *aveiros*. All he needs to do is "do this" every single day; if he does the same exact *avodah* with the same mediocre level of *geshmak* every time, then he will inevitably fall to the lowest levels. A person must always be *מוסף והולך* in his service of Hashem; only then will he be a truly devout servant of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

So, Rabbosai, when you light the *neiros*, don't forget the important message that we discussed today: that we need to constantly be *מוסף והולך* in everything we do for Hashem, whether it's our learning or our *chesed* or our *davening*.

A Freilichen Chanukah!

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¹ וז"ל, חנוכה נוטריקון ח' גרות והלכה כבית הלל, שאמרו יום ראשון מדליק גר א' ומכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך, עכ"ל.