

אור פני משה

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

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פרשת ויחי

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נחמה פעסיא
בת ר' שאול ע"ה

פרשת ויחי

וְאֲנִי בְּבֹאִי מִפָּדָן מָתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבָרָת
אֶרֶץ לְבֵא אֶפְרָתָהּ, וְאֶקְבְּרָהָ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם:

(בראשית מ"ח, ז')

But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Efras, which is Beis Lechem.

Rashi explains that these words of Yaakov were meant as a sort of apology, prefacing his request to be buried in Eretz Yisrael. The words *kivras ha'aretz* are a reference to a small measurement of land. It can also mean that it was summer and the land was dry, and could be compared to a *kavrah*; a sifter, which is filled with holes. Yaakov was saying that although it was only a short trip, and it was during the summertime so travel was not difficult, still he had not extended himself to bury Rachel in the city. He understood that Yosef might harbor resentment toward him because of this. Even so, he asked Yosef to bury him in Eretz Yisrael. He said: "I buried your mother outside the city according to the command of Hashem".

It was the will of Hashem that Rachel be buried where she was. Rashi explains that this is because many generations later, when *klal yisrael* would be exiled from Eretz Yisrael, they would pass by Rachel's *kever*. At that time Rachel would come out and plead with Hashem for mercy, and in her *zechus*, Hashem would proclaim "*vishavu banim ligvulam*", the *yidden* would yet return to their land.

R' Chaim Shmulevitz asked, if the reason Yaakov did not bury Rachel in the city was according to the command of Hashem, why didn't he just say that? Why was it necessary to mention how easy it could have been for him to bury her in the city?

The Power of Negius

The answer to this question, said R' Chaim, is the foundation of all *mussar*. We can explain with the following mashal.

Shmuli was a 22-year-old bachur, learning in Lakewood, who had just gotten his driver's license. He was excited to begin driving, and when the opportunity arose to drive to a friend's wedding in Chicago, he was happy to volunteer. He thought to himself: "I was together with the chassan in Brisk, and we were both in the same yeshiva for eleventh grade. I'm sure he would be devastated if I'm not there. Although the trip to Chicago is a long one, and I will be out of yeshiva for two or three days, it is surely a mitzvah to go." He arranged to rent a car and to drive together with three other bachurim.

The day before they were planning to travel, they received a message that the chassan had ordered a bus for his friends, and it wasn't necessary for anyone to drive. Shmuli's three friends quickly reserved seats on the bus, and they expected him to do the same. However, he procrastinated, unsure if he wanted to make the trip. He said: "after thinking it through, I'm not so sure it's worth the trip. I will be missing so much time in yeshiva, and after all I was only with the chassan for two years. We really weren't the closest of friends. In fact, even if I do go, he probably won't even notice me".

What changed in Shmuli's attitude? He was so convinced that he belonged at that wedding, but then he backed out so suddenly! The obvious answer is that all he really wanted was a chance to drive a car, and the wedding was just an excuse. While the opportunity to drive was still feasible, he had convinced himself that it was a *mitzvah* to go. The moment he realized he would not be driving, and he no longer had ulterior motives, he came to his senses. It really was not necessary for him to go.

As humans, we tend to view the world with our own subjective perspectives. We have our own *negius*. This *negius* can be such a powerful force, that it turns what we want into a *mitzvah*, and what we don't want into an *aveirah*.

We find this idea manifested in the *parshah* of Bilam.

Hashem tells Bilam: "Don't go with them, don't curse the people, for they are blessed". Bilam awoke the next morning and said to the officers of Balak, "Go to your land for Hashem refuses to let me go with you". (במדבר כב: יב-יג) Rashi explains that Bilam was saying

"Hashem does not want me to go with these people, rather I should be sent with higher, more honorable dignitaries".

Bilam's interpretation of Hashem's words was extremely twisted. To an outsider it seems obvious that Hashem was clearly saying not to go at all, because *Klal Yisrael* is blessed. However, Bilam only heard Hashem saying, 'don't go with them'. Because of his inflated ego, Bilam felt that the reason Hashem refused was to afford him more honor. Such is the power of *negius*.

The Tendency to Rationalize

The Mishnah (בבא מציעא ב.) tells us that if two people are holding a tallis, each one claiming that it is his own, they should each swear that it is theirs and then they split it. The gemara asks about a seeming redundancy in the language of the mishnah, and says that it refers to two types of cases. One type is a case of metziah, where each party claims to have found the tallis, and the other is a case of mekach u'memkar, where each party claims to have bought the tallis. The gemara explains that it is necessary to say both cases due to the concept of moreh heter; rationalization.

In the case of metziah there is the possibility of moreh heter. The person will say to himself: "my friend got this tallis for free and without effort, therefore I will grab it from him and we will split it". Thus, had the mishnah only said the case of metziah, I would think that only in that case do they swear so as to discourage this sort of rationalization, and not in the case of mekach u'memkar.

This gemara shows us just how far our *negius* can take us. It is obvious that this logic is absurd. If Reuven found it first, it doesn't matter that he got it for free and without effort. It is perfectly his, and for Shimon to grab it is stealing. However, the *negius* of Shimon can warp his mind, and he can actually rationalize that it's okay to grab it. ("I'm sure Reuven steals sometimes too!")

Rashi expounds further on this concept. He writes: (ד"ה דמורה ואמר) מורה היתר לעצמו לאחוז בה בלא משפט to grab it illegally. The truth is that if the person would so much as speak out his rationalization, he would realize how preposterous it is. In his own mind however, he can be convinced by this logic. Such is the power of *negius*.

Yaakov was not influenced by his *negius*

Now we can understand why Yaakov had to tell Yosef that it would have been easy to bury Rachel in the city. Yaakov felt that it would not suffice if he merely told Yosef that Hashem commanded him to bury her outside the city. Yosef would think to himself that perhaps this was just Yaakov's interpretation of the *nevuah*. Had it been a long way to the city, or if it was wet and rainy, then perhaps Yaakov's *negius* caused him to assume that Hashem wanted her buried right where she was. Therefore, Yaakov added that it would have been easy to bring her to the city. It was a short trip, and the weather permitted. Hence there was no room to assume that Yaakov's interpretation of Hashem's will was tainted by his own subjectivity.

Identifying our own motivations

This is an extremely powerful lesson on the weakness of human subjectivity. Our minds can come up with all kinds of *teirutzim*. Outlandish as they may be, when our own needs and wants are at stake, anything can pass.

A drunkard will explain why his vodka is healthy for him. "It has all sorts of vitamins and minerals, it helps me think, etc."

Even the greatest of men did not hold themselves immune to this frailty. What then, can we do to steer clear of this flaw? How can we be sure if our perspectives are objective or subjective?

Perhaps we can apply the frequent teaching of the *Ohr Hachaim*. We need to cultivate a *taavah* for *ruchniyus*. Closeness to Hashem should become our primary focus. As such, our own subjectivity will help us rather than deter us from understanding the *ratzon Hashem*.

*After Akeidas Yitzchok Hashem said to Avraham: "now I know that you are a yerei Elokim" (בראשית כב: יב). We can explain as follows. An integral part of the test of the Akeidah was whether or not Avraham would correctly interpret the will of Hashem. If we take a closer look at the commandment of the Akeidah we will notice that Hashem never actually told Avraham to shecht Yitzchok. He only said to bring him up as an olah (שם פסוק ב). Avraham could have easily convinced himself that it was certainly not Hashem's will that he actually shecht Yitzchok. Had his thought process been tainted by even a slight *negius* for the love of his son, this would surely have caused him to misinterpret Hashem's will. This that Avraham understood the *ratzon Hashem**

and correctly interpreted that he was to shecht Yitzchok, could only be a function of his sterling Yiras Elokim.

Our primary will is what motivates us, and we tend to view the world from that perspective. When a person is motivated by a strong will to fulfill the *ratzon Hashem*, this becomes the driving force behind his actions. His decisions will then be based first and foremost on whether or not they are in line with Hashem's will. In this way he can utilize his own *negius* to benefit his *avodas Hashem*.

וַיִּמָּאן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדַעְתִּי בְנִי יָדַעְתִּי (בראשית מ"ח י"ט)

Yaakov Switches His Hands

We spoke *b'arichus* in previous years about the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh that deals with the account of Yosef switching his father's hands. In short, the Ohr Hachaim learns that the reason why Yosef was so determined to have Yaakov put his right hand on Menashe's head was because he didn't want his *bechor* to feel inferior compared to his younger brother. He feared that it was that very kind of 'favoritism' that caused him so much anguish when he was young; he believed that his older brothers had a great deal of animosity towards him because of his apparent primacy in his father's eyes. Yosef therefore exclaimed: "לא כן" – *Not so, father!* Please don't go down that road again!

However, Yaakov had a different view on the matter. "ידעתי בני, ידעתי" – *I know, my son, I know*, was his response to his son's concern. The Ohr Hachaim learns that Yaakov was hinting to Yosef that the thing that caused his pain was "בני" – my son himself caused his own pain. If I gave you a כתר, it didn't mean that you had to wear it in front of your brothers. If you had dreams, you didn't have to share them with everyone. In other words, there are many ways to look at every experience in life, and we can often find people to point fingers at – but our responsibility is to try to look inwardly. Others may be partially at fault as well – but that shouldn't be your focus. Your primary goal should be to see what

kind of lesson *you* can learn from the episode; you should be searching for ways to perfect yourself rather than those around you.

Another P'shat: Numerous Interpretations, Yet All True

I would like to add a bit of a *chiddush* to the simple understanding of the Ohr Hachaim. Let's start with a *mashal*:

Before the times of email and cell phones, one of the biggest challenges in a spy's line of work was communicating the information that he gleaned. The only way to transmit information would be through writing, but all letters were screened by the foreign government. The method that was often used was writing with secret codes; the spy would compose a seemingly simple and unassuming letter, and only the intended recipients would be able to decipher the hidden meanings in his message.

For instance, the foreign government's officials would see a letter describing a picnic in a park, with a detailed description of the amount of cutlery and wicker baskets that were there, along with a detailed list of the guests that were invited. They would see the letter as a harmless form of communication and would allow it to pass. In the meantime, when the letter would arrive in the hands of the general of the spy's homeland military, he would be able to decode the message and learn exactly how many weapons and tanks the foreign military possessed, along with a whole host of other pieces of valuable information. Next, the letter would be forwarded to the defense minister, who would be able to glean exactly how many weaknesses there are in the foreign country's defense system. In short, the intricate secret letter was meticulously worded in a way that it could transmit various messages to each person in the field of his expertise – and to the foreign country's screener, of course, it depicted a lovely picnic.

Now, which interpretation of the letter was the correct one? Well, the answer is that they were all true. The fact that there was only one letter didn't mean that there was only one accurate interpretation; it just meant that its writer was extremely clever, and was capable of imparting various messages within one correspondence.

Let's think about *pesukim* in the Torah for a moment. There are so many of them that seem to say one thing, and then Chazal teach us another – and sometimes, more than one *p'shat* is offered. For example, the *pasuk* says “לא תאכלו על הדם” – and although the regular interpretation of the verse is an *issur* that applies to the *kohanim* in the times of the Beis Hamikdash, the Gemara also learns from these words that one may not eat before *davening shachris*. Does that mean that there are conflicting interpretations of the *pasuk*? Of course not, it just means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is able to send various messages through one statement. The same goes for *remez*, *drush* and *sod*; these different methods of learning *pesukim* in Tanach do not contradict each other, but are rather parallel understandings of the verses which are all true and were all intended in the words.

Now, I think the same is true for experiences. When Hashem causes an event to happen, it can often affect many people in many different ways – and they can each take a different message out of the occurrence. These messages were all intentional; they were all sent simultaneously to different people, through a single coded letter! The fact that another person took a different *his'orerus* out of a specific tragedy than you doesn't necessarily mean that one of you misread the event – perhaps Hashem wanted the two of you to work on different things, and He used one channel to transmit both messages!

Maybe this idea can also be learned from the words of the aforementioned Ohr Hachaim. Yosef may have thought that Yaakov was mistaken in the way he treated his sons – but Yaakov reminded him: stop looking at the story from my point of view! You may be right that there was a lesson for me there, but there may also be a lesson for you in those events! “ידעתי בני, ידעתי” – focus on what בני may have done wrong in the past.

Focus On Your Message

I know we said this *meshal* 1,000 times, but now we'll say it 1,001 times:

A man is jumping up and down, trying to get a cup from the tallest shelf in the kitchen cabinet. His wife tries to help him by offering him a stepstool, but he brushes her aside. “I can do this myself,” he mutters. Finally, on the fifth attempt, he manages to grab the cup – and accidentally knocks a small glass vase to the floor at the

same time. The vase shatters into tiny little pieces and scatters all over the kitchen floor. The man turns to his wife and yells: "Didn't I tell you 100 times? Stop buying these silly vases! I don't care if they were on sale! They clutter up the cabinets and topple so easily!"

People are very quick to blame others, or to see what others can learn from an experience. Unfortunately, they aren't always that wise when it comes to learning their own lesson. Instead of focusing on *yenem*, can't we just open our eyes and ears to the message that Hashem handcrafted specifically for us? You're right, He may have caused the event to happen in order to wake up the other person as well – but that doesn't diminish the message that was being sent to you in any way. They can both be true!

The same is true when there's a big story that makes the headlines around the world. Mass shootings, large-scale corruption, war crimes – they are being circulated in the media so that everyone will take the time to perfect themselves. What your friend takes from it isn't a *stira* to what your *his'orerus* was – it was there for both of you.

Getting Guidance to Find Your Message

R' Elya Roth lived with this mindset. I witnessed it many times; whenever something happened, the first thing that he would talk about was: "What can I learn from this?"

A wealthy woman from Brooklyn once came to talk with R' Elya Roth about troubles she was experiencing in her home. When she was finished describing her issues, R' Elya asked her: "When an עני comes to your door, how do you treat him?"

The woman was taken aback. "What do you mean? I always give them some money! Five dollars, ten dollars – whatever I could find in the house!" she said defensively.

"I understand," said R' Elya. "But it's not just about money. Do you try to be me'chabed them? Do you ever offer them something to eat? If they need a place to stay for the night, do you offer them a bed?"

The woman started to cry. "Rebbe, I always want to give to עניים. I know Hashem has given me so much, and I want to offer them support with all of the resources that I have. But my husband

doesn't like when they come into the house! We're very into hygiene – we don't usually let strangers in." She eventually accepted that this was something important to work on, and she committed herself to opening her doors more freely.

I was shocked when I saw this story taking place before my eyes. There were so many different things that the woman could have been *mekabel* – but R' Elya was adept at zeroing in on the one thing that was most important. People don't always open themselves up to take the messages that Hashem is sending them, and sometimes they need an *adam gadol* to guide them. There's nothing wrong with that; big people are more sensitive to imperfections. Their sensors are more fine-tuned than ours. So, if you are struggling to find the meaning in your troubles, it might be *kedai* to speak with a *Gadol*; you may be missing a golden opportunity.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶחָי יוֹסֵף כִּי מֵת אֲבֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יִשְׁטְמֵנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהָשִׁיב לָנוּ אֶת כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנוּ אֹתוֹ (בראשית נ' ט"ו)

Punishing the *Shvatim*: A Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

What does the word "לו" mean in this *pasuk*? Rashi says it means שמא – *perhaps*. Targum Onkelos says a similar translation – דילמא. The Ohr Hachaim takes issue with this translation of the *pasuk*. The word "לו" is generally used in the meaning of "הלוואי", meaning that the person actually desires that the statement will take place. (An example for this is the *pasuk* that says "לו ישמעאל יחיה לפניך".) But over here, the *shvatim* surely did not wish that Yosef would take revenge against them!

The Ohr Hachaim gives a shocking and rather frightening answer. He suggests that perhaps the *pasuk* is hinting at another statement – a message that the Torah was trying to impart to us: "Yosef would take revenge against his brothers." Maybe if Yosef would have caused his brothers some of the pain that they had caused him, then Klal Yisroel would not have to suffer to the degree that they did throughout *Galus*.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that forgiveness does not help for a person who stole his fellow Yid and sold him as a slave. The sole *kapparah* for a sin like that can only be attained through *yissurim*. (He says this, among other reasons, to explain why Yosef didn't just give his brothers a full *mechilah*, but rather said "Am I in the place of Hashem".) Had the brothers received some form of *yissurim* comparable to what Yosef went through, then they would have diverted the rivers of blood and oceans of tears that were spilled by the Yidden throughout the generations.

It is true, the Ohr Hachaim notes, that if a person does a complete *teshuvah* prior to the punishment, then he can be spared the grave *yissurim* that await him. However, this must be a *teshuvah* that includes the many levels listed in the Shaarei Teshuvah – and that is no simple feat. It would appear from this Ohr Hachaim that the *shvatim* did not manage to accomplish this highest *madreigah* of *teshuvah*.

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