

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
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פרשת בא

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לעילוי נשמת
מרן ראש ישיבת מיר
הג"ר רפאל שמואל ב"ר אריה ליב
ברנבוים זצוק"ל
לכבוד היארצייט כ"ח טבת

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

פרשת בא

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לֹא כֵן לָכוּ נָא הַגִּבֹּרִים וְעָבְדוּ אֶת ה' כִּי אֶתָּה אַתָּם מִבְּקָשִׁים
וַיִּגְרֹשׁ אֹתָם מֵאֶת פְּנֵי פַרְעֹה (שמות י"א)

"Not so; let the men go and serve Hashem, because that is what you seek." And he drove them out from in front of Pharaoh.

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ פַרְעֹה לֵךְ מֵעַלֵּי הַשָּׁמַר לֵךְ אַל תִּסָּה רְאוֹת פְּנֵי כִּי בַיּוֹם
רְאִיתָה פְּנֵי תַמּוּת (י"ב"ח)

And Pharaoh said to him, "Go from me, do not see my face any more, because on the day you see my face you shall die!"

It is interesting to note that as the *makkos* progressed, Pharaoh became more and more defiant of Moshe Rabeinu. The *Makkah of Arbeh* was the eighth of the *makkos*. Mitzrayim had already been through terrible *makkah* after terrible *Makkah*. They were almost completely destroyed. One would expect that at this point Pharaoh should have become somewhat more humbled in front of Moshe. However, what happened was to the contrary. Before *Makkas Arbeh*, Pharaoh chased Moshe away from him, something he hadn't done until now. After Moshe warned Pharaoh about *Makkas Choshech*, he became even more brazen. He threatened to kill Moshe if he ever saw his face again.

How do we explain this? The *makkos* in Mitzrayim were given to teach the lesson that Hashem runs the world, and He is the only one in charge. Not only did Pharaoh not learn these lessons, but he actually seems to have become worse as a result of them. How could it be that as Pharaoh was given more and more lessons he became worse and worse?

The Inner Human Conflict

I believe the answer is as follows. There are two forces which fight for primacy in every person. There is the *ruach* of *kedushah*, and the *ruach* of *tumah*. Each one of these forces feeds off of themselves. The *kedusha* seeks more *kedusha*, and the *tumah* seeks more *tumah*. Additionally, the *ruach* of *kedushah* has no interest in *tumah* at all, and it deflects any *tumah* from entering the person and bringing him down.

Likewise the *ruach* of *tumah* has no interest in *kedushah*, and it prevents *kedushah* from entering the person and elevating him.

Thus, each of these forces serves a self-feeding cycle. The more *kedushah* that a person has, the more *kedushah* he will want, and the more *kedushah* he wants, the more *kedushah* he will find. It builds on itself to form an upward spiral of growth. The same is true regarding *tumah*. The more *tumah* which enters a person, the more *tumah* he will seek, and the more *tumah* he seeks, the more he will find. More so, a person who is under the influence of the *ruach* of *kedushah*, will be steered away from *tumah*, and one who is influenced by the *ruach* of *tumah* will not find any *kedushah*.

A person who is focused on gashmiyus doesn't enjoy davening or learning. He tries to find the quickest minyan in town so he shouldn't have to spend too much time davening. He has difficulty focusing on his learning, as he does not get any sipuk from it. While he is learning, his mind wanders and he dreams about fancy houses and nice cars. The ruach of tumah has gained control over him and he wants more and more of it. Kedushah just does not penetrate.

The opposite is true regarding someone who is influenced by the ruach of kedushah. He enjoys davening, and he savors each word. Torah brings him to life, and he always loves a good vort. Gashmiyus, on the other hand, doesn't seem to interest him at all. He drives an old jalopy, and he has rarely if ever, been to a restaurant.

A Lack of Torah

This idea is mentioned by the Ohr Hachaim in last week's *parshah*.

The *possuk* says: וידבר משה לפני ה' לאמר הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך (יב) ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים (י: יב) *And Moshe spoke to Hashem saying, "Behold the Bnai Yisrael did not listen to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have covered lips."* Moshe Rabeinu's reasoning here seems flawed. The Torah says that the reason the Bnai Yisrael didn't listen to Moshe, was (שם פסוק ט) *because they were out of breath, and from hard work*. Pharaoh however, was not out of breath. He did not work at all. If so, maybe he would listen to Moshe, unlike the Bnei Yisrael.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that מקוצר רוח does not only mean they were out of breath. Rather it also means that they were lacking Torah. The Bnei Yisrael were lacking the *ruach* of Torah which would have pulled them in to hear Moshe saying the *devar Hashem*. If the *Yidden* were lacking this *ruach* of *kedusha*, how much more so was Pharaoh lacking in this. If the *Yidden* could not here the *devar Hashem*, then Pharaoh who was totally controlled by the *ruach* of *tumah*, certainly could not have heard it.

Pharaoh's Mighty Ruach of Tumah

This is why as the *makkos* progressed, despite the great lessons being taught, *Pharaoh* fell lower and lower. Pharaoh was a person who was completely controlled by the *ruach* of *tumah*. When he was taught lessons about the sovereignty of Hashem, the *tumah* did not allow them to penetrate. In order to counteract these awe-inspiring lessons of *emunah*, the *ruach* of *tumah* was forced to fortify itself. Thus, the greater the lessons became, the more his *ruach* of *tumah* was strengthened.

By the time they reached the *Makkah* of *Arbeh*, Pharaoh had already been through seven stupendous lessons. As opposed to becoming subdued by these *makkos*, his resistance became greater. His *ruach* of *tumah* was thus emboldened, and it brought him down to the point where he actually chased Moshe away from him. After he was warned about *Makkas Choshech*, his *ruach* of *tumah* growing ever stronger, he stooped even lower, and he even had the audacity to threaten to kill Moshe.

A Magnetic Pull

This is a frightening concept. If someone has fallen into the clutches of the *ruach* of *tumah* it is extremely difficult to extricate himself. The *ruach* of *tumah* exercises a magnetic pull, bringing the person into a downward spiral.

This is a familiar phenomenon, both in regard to *kedushah* and in regard to *tumah*.

After learning a full first seder in which we put in all our kochos, we naturally daven minchah with greater kavanah. The kedushah of the Torah brings us closer to Hashem, and we are able to connect more naturally through tefillah.

The opposite is true in the case of a bachur who wastes his time and busies himself with narishkeit. The ruach of tumah has ahold on him, and he is more likely to speak with chutzpah to his parent and rebbeim.

How does one extricate himself from the grasp of the *ruach* of *tumah*? If he has gotten into its clutches is there any hope? The *ruach* of *tumah* actively discourages any *kedusha* from penetrating. What can he do to stop this spiral in its tracks, and to bring himself back up?

Building an Appetite for Ruchniyus

At the end of the Parshah we have the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. The *possuk* says: (יג: ט) וְהָיָה לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וּלְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת הַשֵּׁם בְּפִיךָ; *And it should be for you a sign on your hand and for tefillin between your eyes, in order that the Torah of Hashem should be in your mouth.* The Torah gives us the recipe for growth. By wearing *tefillin* we will come to learn Torah. By doing one small *mitzvah* we will be leading to the next.

It is true that it is very difficult for someone who is *megusham* to appreciate and enjoy *ruchniyus*, but by taking small steps he can slowly develop the taste.

When the Americans liberated the concentration camps, there were some soldiers who would rather have seen these Yidden dead. They devised a plan to kill them under the guise of chess. They prepared lavish buffets for the liberated inmates to enjoy. They understood that the inmates would hungrily eat a lot of food, but that their bodies could not handle it. Many people died this way.

A person who hasn't eaten properly in years needs to slowly rebuild his systems before his body can handle regular food. He should start off eating farina, and after some time he can progress to cooked chicken, etc.

The same is true regarding a person who has not included *ruchniyus* in his diet. He will not appreciate a high level of *kedusha*. His systems can't handle it. The *ruach* of *tumah* ensures that he has no enjoyment in learning or davening. However, he can slowly rejuvenate his *ruach* of *kedushah* with easier mitzvos and from there he can begin rebuilding his connection to Hashem.

He may not be able to learn up a Rashba, but he can say a kapitel Tehillim. He may not understand the Ketzos, but he can give a little tzedakah.

By doing small mitzvos which are relatively easy, he can slowly reawaken the dormant *ruach* of *kedushah* which lies within him. As he takes more and more of these small steps, he will be slowly building up his appetite for *kedushah*, and he will start to want it. He can thus reverse the downward spiral of *tumah*, and he can begin the climb to great levels of *kedushah*.

This requires *mesirus nefesh*. A person who has been weighed down for so long by the pull of *gashmiyus* will find that the *ruach* of *tumah* holds powerful sway over him. However, with perseverance and with eyes on his goal he can nurse his *ruach* of *kedushah* back to health. **הבא** *one who comes to be purified will get help from Hashem.*

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לְבָבוֹ

(שמות י"א)

And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart heavy'

Pharaoh's Stubborn Heart

In the beginning of Parshas Bo, Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe to go to Pharaoh once again, and demand that he release the Yidden from Mitzrayim.

The Ohr Hachaim says that Moshe Rabbeinu was extremely discouraged by Pharaoh's behavior. How can he still be putting up a fight after the events of **מכת ברד**? The hail brought complete devastation upon the land of Egypt, from its crops to its livestock. Many Egyptians were killed. The might of Hashem was in full display during **מכת ברד**.

The *midrashim* teach us that the fire and water made peace in order to teach Mitzrayim a lesson. In fact, the Malbim says that more rules

of nature changed during this *makkah*: normally, light is the fastest traveler, followed by the speed of sound, and finally, the force of gravity. Therefore, during a regular thunderstorm, the first thing that is spotted is the lightning, then we hear thunder, and only afterward does the rain reach the ground. But during *מכת ברד*, things were different. Moshe warned the Egyptians that there would be hail (*ברד*), thunder (*קולות*), and lightning (*אש*) - so, many of them figured that if Moshe's predictions would actually materialize, they would first see lightning and hear roaring thunder, which would provide them the opportunity to run indoors. However, the rules of nature were changed; the lightning, thunder and hail all came crashing upon the Egyptians in one instant, just to show them that there is no way to outsmart the Master of the Universe.

Knowing all of this, it was hard for Moshe Rabbeinu to comprehend how Pharaoh could still refuse their request. Says the Our Hachaim, this is what Hashem was addressing in the first *pasuk* in the Parsha: "כי אני הכבדתי את לבו", for I am the One Who has hardened his heart. You may be doubtful that Pharaoh will ever change his mind, based on his unbelievable show of defiance that you are currently experiencing. However, fear not, for I am behind his stubborn behavior.

Did Hashem Confiscate Pharaoh's *Bechirah*?

Now, we have discussed many times that Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't take away people's *bechirah*. He is in full control of everything, yet we have the ability to choose right from wrong, and that is not a contradiction. We have given *mesalim* in the past to explain this concept. (As a reference - the Sfas Emes tackles this paradox a few times in this week's Parsha.) If so, then how can we explain "כי אני הכבדתי את לבו"? These words surely imply that Pharaoh's *bechirah* was taken from him.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Hashem didn't literally remove Pharaoh's ability to make decisions; rather, he made the test more difficult. How so? At the end of last week's Parsha, the *pasuk* tells us that *מכת ברד* destroyed the flax and the barley, but "והחטה והכסמת לא נכו" - the wheat and spelt were not struck. Now, Pharaoh was perplexed by this; what power caused these two crops to be spared? He summoned his advisors and presented them with his query. Some answered that perhaps this was a test from G-d to see whether the Egyptians would doubt his complete control. Others, however, argued that perhaps there was another power that had control over the wheat and spelt, and maybe

the G-d of the Jewish people had no strength over this other power. Pharaoh preferred this explanation, and then took it one step further, saying: maybe Hashem doesn't have power over us either? And there is proof to this theory: why does this G-d keep sending his messengers to me, to request my permission to release the Jews? Can't he just take them out on his own? This must mean that he really has no power over the Egyptian people.

Pharaoh fell for Hashem's bait - hook, line and sinker. He really should have stepped back and looked at the bigger picture, and recognized that the first explanation was really true, for Hashem had already displayed his might over the Egyptians numerous times throughout the first seven *makkos*. Instead, he chose to focus on an infinitesimal detail - the survival of the wheat and spelt.

Details Vs. the Bigger Picture

We suffer from this weakness in our lives all the time. Instead of focusing on the bigger picture - whether with regard to our financial success, our marriage, our learning, and so on - we zero in on our minute shortcomings, and deem ourselves a complete failure.

Here's another example. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe Rabbeinu that "בַּחצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה" - exactly at midnight - the firstborn of Egypt will all die. But how does Moshe relay the message to Pharaoh? He says "כַּחצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה" - **approximately** at midnight the plague will take place. Why did Moshe change Hashem's wording? One answer Rashi gives is that Moshe was concerned that the Egyptian astrologers would have a different way of calculating the time, and according to their *cheshbon* the *makkah* would not take place precisely at midnight. He felt that this would cause them to once again deny Hashem's absolute control. He therefore modified the words to "כַּחצוֹת הַלַּיְלָה" - approximately at midnight.

But what do we see from here? The very fact that Moshe Rabbeinu suspected that the Egyptians would react that way comes to show that they possessed this terrible *middah* of focusing on the miniscule, unimportant details, as opposed to the obvious, overwhelming truth staring them in the face.

I remember sitting by the Seder as a young bochur and noticing an interesting phenomenon. We were all extremely preoccupied with the shiurim: making sure that our bechers were a real revi's,

that the alcohol content in the wine was sufficient, that the matzos were a full k'zayis, and so on. But my father zt"l was not there. That was just not his focus. He was too busy thinking about Siberia, the Nazis, and the other oppressions our nation has gone through. And I used to wonder: why isn't he focusing on the real deal? Why isn't he getting all passionate about the different opinions regarding the shiurim like we are?

But when I grew older, I understood. Of course it was important to him to be mekayem the mitzvos with the proper shiurim. But those weren't the conversations he was interested in having on the Leil Ha'Seder. His focus was 'cheirus'. His focus was the bigger picture of Pesach and Geulah, not the nitty-gritty details.

Getting Preoccupied

Sometimes people get busy with insignificant things. You can find a fellow spending two hours trying to take apart and reconstruct his toaster that stopped working. In reality, he can probably buy a brand new one for \$11.99 - and let's not kid ourselves, he would never do work for anybody for just \$5.99 an hour - but he won't see defeat. He is completely fixated on rebuilding his toaster from scratch. In the meantime, his son is waiting to do his homework with him, his *chavrusa* is waiting to learn with him - but he's busy. Busy with a silly, insignificant task.

And there's more to be said here. People often get lost on their devices - even filtered devices - just doing nothing. They're not taking a healthy break from learning and accomplishing - they're just wasting time. Hours and hours get wasted this way. Sometimes, they're just playing childish games that were designed literally for the purpose of killing time. What are your priorities? Why don't you focus on real life instead of meaningless distractions?

Minor Details That Can Cost Us a Great Loss

Some people won't take a pauper into their home because they're worried about bed bugs. Is there any realistic reason to suspect bed bugs in such a scenario? Maybe. But what message are you sending your children? That you are repulsed by *mitzvos*? You are teaching them that the slight *chashash* of bed bugs, a miniscule detail, overrides the

incomparable importance of feeling for others and doing *hachnosas orchim*.

This lesson is very relevant for *shidduchim* as well. People say no to wonderful boys who are serious *bnei torah* and phenomenal girls who have sterling *middos* - just because of a silly detail. They heard that he once went on a certain vacation, that she was once friendly with a specific girl - and they discard the resume. They throw away what may be their own child's *bashert* because of nonsense.

Enjoyment That Lasts A Minute

A relative of mine told me that he was once at an auction. There was a con artist there who was hosting a show about various antiques, and he was trying to convince everyone about these items' monumental importance and worth. One couple that was there got talked into purchasing an old vase for \$500.

A few minutes later, my relative saw the couple trying to fit the large vase into their trunk. Suddenly, he heard the husband say: "Why did we do it? Now we're broke! And for what? A great big vase filled with air!"

It's scary, because that's exactly what the *yetzer hara* does to us on a regular basis. He pumps the idea up with loads of hot air, and tempts us to do it - only to discover, a few moments later, that there was absolutely nothing to it. Chazal call sin הנאת רגע אחד - pleasure which lasts for a fleeting moment. They were being brutally honest with us; the *yetzer hara* makes the action sound so tantalizing, but sadly, we crash back down to earth a moment later - only to discover that it was just a miniscule detail, a distraction from the bigger picture; another way to steal our eternal reward in *Olam Habah*.

This is the lesson we must take from the Egyptians. They missed the tremendous opportunity of accepting Hashem's existence after מכת ברד because of the wheat and spelt. They almost missed the massive wakeup call that was מכת בכורות because of a supposed miscalculation of a couple of seconds. Can you imagine? All that death and despair could have been completely in vain. We must learn to focus on the big picture and not get hung up on the little details.

אני הכבדתי - Getting Over Our Past Shortcomings

There is another lesson we can take from Hashem's hardening Pharaoh's heart.

The *pasuk* says in the end of Parshas Shoftim (דברים כ' א'): "כי תצא "When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot - a people more numerous than you - you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d, is with you..."

The Ohr Hachaim says a *drush* on these words: If a person feels that he is made up of רכב - meaning, he is מורכב, or combined with חומר (physical material), and he isn't fully spiritual; if a person feels that he is a סוס - he has a strong battle horse inside of him, i.e. a powerful *yetzer hara* - he should recognize that this is not his main issue in life. He is fully capable of overcoming these obstacles. Then what is his biggest issue? The עם רב - the large army of *aveiros* that he has done in the past. A person's past sins tend to bog him down and keep him rooted in his spot. They constantly send him the message that he is a complete failure, incapable of ever achieving true greatness.

And the Ohr Hachaim reveals the antidote to this terrible predicament: לא תירא מהם כי ה' אלוקיך עמך ... Do not fear the effects that your *aveiros* have had on you, for this too is in the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu - and he is with you, at your side, healing you from your past and aiding you in your journey into the future.

We must learn from this Ohr Hachaim to not focus on our shortcomings; we must never plaster the word 'failure' across our foreheads. We must recognize that the bigger picture is at stake; our Olam Habah is up for grabs, and nobody can take that from us... Not even our עם of sins.

The Sfes Emes discusses this *nekudah* in this week's Parshah: Hashem tells Moshe, "כי אני הכבדתי את לבו", I am the one who has hardened Pharaoh's heart. A person has to appreciate the fact that sometimes, Hashem has enlarged their *nisayon* in order to enhance and amplify their reward. If they have failed so many times, this doesn't in any way mean that they are goners; on the contrary, it is just a tougher - and more profitable - opportunity for them to overcome their *yetzer hara* and to truly soar to the highest heights. Hashem was behind the intensity of the test, and He too will be behind you on your road to recovery.

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