

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

פרשת משפטים

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לעילוי נשמת
הרב יעקב משה
בן שמעון גדליה זצ"ל
לכבוד היארצייט כ"ז שבט

פרשת משפטים

רק שבתו יתן ורפא ירפא

(שמות כ"א י"ט)

Why Does the Doctor Need a Heter?

In this *pasuk*, the Torah is teaching us that if someone hurts his fellow Yid, he must reimburse him for his time off of work, and for his medical expenses. The Gemara in Bava Kama (85a) says that we learn from the double-wording of "ורפא ירפא" that a doctor has 'permission' to perform medical treatment. One can wonder: why does the doctor need express permission from the Torah to heal others - an act that would seem to be nothing but good and virtuous? Rashi answers that one may have thought that if Hashem chose to inflict someone with a disease, then it must have been His desire for that person to be sick; trying to heal that person would be going against Hashem's will. Therefore, the Torah tells the doctor, "It may have been Hashem's will for the person to take ill, but you have the right to heal him nonetheless."

The Chofetz Chaim (al hatorah) asks an interesting question on this Rashi: This explanation would be logical if the *pasuk* was referring to a person who requires healing due to natural causes - contracting a virus, tripping down a flight of stairs, and so on. In those cases, there would be room to think that healing the afflicted person would be a form of defying Hashem's will. But in fact, the *pasuk* was talking about an entirely different scenario - a person who was hurt by his fellow Jew. Surely nobody would consider this person's wounds as Hashem's direct will!

Who Is Really Behind Your Pain?

The Chofetz Chaim answers with a *yesod* that we discussed in the past numerous times. When a person chooses to hurt his friend, he is not causing him to undergo pain that he wouldn't have sustained otherwise. The Ribono Shel Olam deemed it necessary for this person

to go through pain; the assailant just happened to have used his *bechira* to become the initiator.

Imagine Reuven walks up to Shimon and beats him with a baseball bat. He then throws the bat on the floor and walks away. A few minutes later, the bruised and bloodied Shimon gets back on his feet, and begins kicking the bat. He then lights the bat on fire. A bystander asks him, "Why are you kicking and burning that old bat?" to which Shimon responds, "This bat hurt me terribly, so I am now taking revenge."

Clearly, this fellow is out of his mind. Well, the Chofetz Chaim is trying to tell us that this is exactly what we look like when we try to get even with someone who wronged us. He may have done an *aveirah* by hurting you, but it was a heavenly decree for you to suffer in the manner that you did; there is no one to blame but yourself.

Your Doing and Hashem's Doing

The Bais HaLevi once met an old talmid. "Shalom Aleichem, Rebbi," the talmid began. "Shalom Aleichem to you!" responded the Bais HaLevi. "Vos machst du?" ("What are you up to?")

"Baruch Hashem, life is great," said the talmid. "I own a sugar factory, and my storage houses are filled with sugar. Just my luck - the price of sugar skyrocketed, and I made a lot of money," he said.

The Bais HaLevi then asked him again: "Vos machst du?"

The talmid found it strange that his Rebbi was asking him this again, but nevertheless, he repeated his description of his sugar business. But, to his surprise, his rebbi then proceeded to ask him once again: "Vos machst du?"

*Perplexed by this incident, the talmid questioned one of the Bais HaLevi's relatives about his Rebbi's queer reaction to his success. The relative smiled knowingly and explained, "The Bais HaLevi was asking you what **you're** doing with your life. He wasn't asking you what **Hashem** was doing."*

Our learning, our *middos*, our accomplishments in *ruchniyus* - those are our doing. The rest is not – it's up to Hashem. We shouldn't be attributing our financial successes to ourselves, nor should we be blaming others for our failures and losses. So often, we hear people complaining about how their entire business failed because "somebody double-crossed me" or "somebody stole my idea" and so on - but this is utter foolishness. Hashem decides which business is profitable, and if someone else chooses to be crooked, that is his personal עסק with the Ribono Shel Olam.

Applying this Concept to Shalom Bayis

We can also experience this kind of *yetzer hara* with regard to *shalom bayis*. People sometimes have terrible relationships with their spouses, *r"l*, and they then convince themselves that it was all "the shadchan's fault". Had he known that his wife would be lacking in this particular character trait, (which, of course, the shadchan was surely aware of,) then he would have never agreed to the shidduch. Why do people utilize this mindset? Because it feels great to shirk your responsibilities as a spouse and blame it on someone else's blunder. But the truth of the matter is that if Hashem wanted him to go through this challenge, then he would have ended up in the situation one way or the other. His job now is to identify the source of the disharmony - and get to work.

The Bobover Rebbe zt"l used to relate a beautiful story during his chosson shmuessen: There was once a fellow who had terrible shalom bayis. He was barely on talking terms with his wife; they were almost like two strangers living under one roof. It just so happened that this fellow was quite stingy - it was hard to squeeze a dollar out of him.

When the community began a campaign to raise money for building a mikvah, this man wouldn't offer a dime. The community's Rebbe wanted to get to the bottom of this man's parsimonious nature, so he came to his door to collect money for this great cause; but he only got a couple of cents. The Rebbe tried clarifying to him the significance of supporting something as imperative as a mikvah - but to no avail. Eventually, the

Rebbe asked him, "Is there anything that I can do for you to get you to donate an appreciable sum for the mikvah?"

The man responded, "Sure. Kill my wife. Then I'll give you whatever you want."

The Rebbe didn't flinch. "Fine. I have an idea for you. We'll give you an aliyah in shul this Shabbos. By the Mi Shebeirach, pledge the entire Mikvah." The man began to protest in disbelief, but the Rebbe continued. "After Shabbos, when the Gabbai comes to collect the money, just refuse him. Tell him you're not willing to give him a single penny. The Gemara says that a man's wife dies when he is a נודר ואינו מקיים - when he doesn't keep to his pledge!"

The man loved the idea. "Rebbe, it will be great. Once my wife is out of the way, all the criticism and complaints I go through all day will vanish - my life will be peaceful and productive again!"

The following Shabbos, he proceeded to do exactly as the Rebbe advised. The entire congregation was in a jubilant mood; the mikvah was going to be fully covered! But on Motzaei Shabbos, when the fundraising committee came to his house to collect their promised sum, he announced proudly: "You're not getting anything from me. I am not keeping my pledge!"

The man slept well that night, hoping to find his wife dead the next morning. But, alas, the Gemara's prediction seemed to be taking its time. Days turned into weeks - and his wife seemed to just be getting more vocally disapproving of him by the day. He just couldn't take it anymore.

He called the Rebbe demanding an explanation, but the Rebbe reassured him that the Gemara indeed said what he had told him. "So what can I do now?" he asked desperately.

"Let me ask you," the Rebbe inquired, "do you talk nicely to your wife?"

The man recoiled at the question. "Of course not," he spat. "She doesn't talk nicely to me; why should I talk nicely to her?"

"But that's just it," the Rebbe exclaimed. "Your wife is בצער because you say hurtful things to her. When a person has צער, they are given an enormous amount of protection from evil decrees. If you just choose to be nice to your wife for a week or two - she'll be dead before you can blink."

The man readily accepted the Rebbe's suggestion. He immediately began abiding to his wife's requests, and he swiftly adopted a soft tone to his voice. No matter how nasty she was, he responded gently, and he even complimented her. Slowly but surely, their whole shalom bayis began to turn around.

Before long, however, his wife took ill. The man ran to the Rebbe, and began to cry, "Rebbe, is it really happening?"

"Well, the Gemara says..."

"But Rebbe, I don't want my wife to die!"

The Rebbe looked at him sharply and replied: "There's only one thing for you to do - write out a check for \$75,000 for the mikvah, like you promised!"

The main point I want to take from this story is that all too often, people blame their lack of *shalom bayis* on their spouse - sometimes, to the extent that they believe the only option is to end the marriage. But in reality, the key very often lies within themselves; if they just choose to perfect their own behavior, they will very likely change everything. Hashem puts a person in a situation to grow from the experience; just blaming everybody else is missing the whole purpose. And, as the Chofetz Chaim explained, it is shortsighted; it is like beating the stick. We must focus on fixing the problem from within, not without; the situation - no matter how wronged or attacked we feel - was orchestrated by Hashem, and we must learn how to solve it.

Living With the Awareness that Hashem is Behind Everything

Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l was once sitting with his wife when she accidentally spilled a cup of boiling water all over her hands. Surprisingly, the first thing Rav Aharon did was quickly

summon one of the Bachurim in the Yeshiva. When the bachur arrived, Rav Aharon told him, "I must apologize to you."

It turned out that that morning, the bachur had told Rav Aharon that he was experiencing a terrible headache, and he was wondering whether he should go see a doctor. Rav Aharon had responded, "just go learn; the Gemara says, 'עסוק, חש בראשו, בתורה' - when you feel pain in your head, learn Torah." But the moment his Rebbetzin burnt her hands, Rav Aharon took it as a message that he was too tough on the bachur - he felt that his reaction was too insensitive to his talmid's pain.

Rav Aharon lived his life totally cognizant of the reality we are discussing. Another person would have assumed that the Rebbetzin was being absent minded, but Rav Aharon understood that the mishandling of the cup was just the *shaliach* - the real story here was Hashem coming to reprimand him for his previous encounter with the *bachur*. (As a side point, we also see from here that Rav Aharon truly understood the concept of *אשתו כגופו*. If a person's wife is *chalilah* experiencing pain, this doesn't have to mean that Hashem is reproaching her; it can also be a wake-up call for her husband.)

The Ba'al HaTanya writes at length that if a person is constantly attacking or aggravating you, it is only a sign that you have to do *teshuva* on your own misdeeds. He explains that no matter how terribly immoral and blameworthy the attacker's behavior is, it is nonetheless a call for your repentance, because every form of pain that Hashem causes us is an intentional call for our growth.

A bachur in Baranovich once related a story that he heard: a wagon driver was in the middle of riding his horse and buggy in a nearby town, when suddenly, right in front of the town Shul, his horse died. Utterly shocked by this abrupt misfortune, the wagon driver ran into the Shul, darted straight up to the Aron Kodesh and shouted to the heavens in front of the entire congregation, "Ich vel dir geben a boks!" ("I'm gonna punch you!")

The bachur who was telling the story concluded, "Had I been there, I would have beaten him to a pulp. Is that how a person talks to the Aibishter? Especially in front of an entire Shul!"

The Mashgiach of Baranovich, Rav Yisroel Yaakov Lupchansky, quickly interjected: "You would have beaten him, but I would have kissed him."

Noticing the surprised look on the faces of the gathered bachurim, Rav Yisroel Yaakov explained: "This man is a simple, unlearned wagon driver. I would have expected someone like him to blame the horse's death on a number of different people; the seller - he must have sold him a sick horse, or himself - he must have not fed the horse properly, or perhaps the city - the cobblestone streets weren't smoothed out properly, making it tiring for a horse to work in the area. But he managed to recognize that misfortune comes from above - and for that understanding alone, he deserves to be praised."

וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁיִם לִפְנֵיהֶם

(שמות כ"א א')

Consistency In Our Avodah

The Ohr Hachaim points out that the Torah has to be כסדר - a person must be consistent with his *avodah*. The same focus has to be on his mind constantly, as the *pasuk* says: לִפְנֵיהֶם, before them, not sometimes in the forefront of his mind and other times on the back-burner.

Sometimes, people get laser-focused on one *mitzvah*, to the point that they just can't fathom how other people are not supercharged about this *inyan* as well - but then, six months later, they themselves move on to something else. You can find a fellow that is extremely *makpid* on his *tefillin* being perfectly *mehudar*, and he goes around talking about it and making a whole scene - but then, just a little while later, he's busy with *shiluach hakan*, and *tefillin* just seem to have lost a large degree of their importance. This is not the Torah way; a person must discover where his biggest struggles are, and

make them his primary focus, until he perfects himself in those areas. When he's ready to move on to new *inyanim* in his *avodah*, then he should merely shift his focus slightly, but never allow his previous accomplishments to get weakened. The *avodah* has to be לפניהם - constantly and consistently.

The Importance of Keeping to a Schedule

There's another point to be taken from this Ohr Hachaim. When a person wants to successfully attain spiritual growth, he must appreciate the importance of maintaining a consistent daily schedule.

Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen *shlit"a* told me that his grandfather, Rav Avigdor Miller *zt"l*, was extremely meticulous about his schedule. He said that Rav Shlomo Wolbe *zt"l* once came to visit his grandfather, and they ended up talking in Torah for an hour. Weeks later, Rav Avigdor Miller told his grandson that he was still working on retrieving what he lost in that one hour that Rav Wolbe had visited him.

Rav Simcha Bunim once asked his grandfather, "Zaide, what would happen with your schedule if you knew it was your last day?"

"Well, it depends what time of day it is," Rav Miller responded.

"Suppose it's 2:00 p.m.," Rav Simcha Bunim inquired.

"Well, that would be the time I take my afternoon nap. So, I would have to go take my nap."

On your last day, it's time for a nap? The answer is, yes. A schedule is a schedule.

Rav Elyashiv used to daven in the same *minyan* for *shacharis* all year round - a certain 6:50 a.m. *minyan*, which he discovered started every single day at the same time, no matter how long *shacharis* would take on that specific calendar day. Although by doing this, he was forgoing davening *shemoneh esrei k'vasikin* for most of the year - it was still worthwhile for him, because he wanted to strictly adhere to his schedule on a daily basis.

Lessons We Can Take From The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva zt"l

This past week I was asked to speak by the Yahrtzeit of Rav Yehuda Zev Segal zt"l, the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva. I called four of his *talmidim* and asked them to share just one defining trait that their Rosh Yeshiva possessed. It turned out that each one of them had a different answer. The first one told me that his *avodas hatefillah* was unparalleled; when he davened, it looked like he was really talking to someone who was standing right there in front of him. Another told me that he never ceased to talk about the great importance of learning *mussar*. Yet another *talmid* told me that his ability to be נושא בעול עם (feeling for his fellow) was להפליא. He once saw him eating his morning porridge (which, by the way, was his scheduled breakfast every single day), when a person walked in and informed him of an unfortunate experience that someone in the community was going through. He said that the Rosh Yeshiva was simply incapable of finishing his porridge after hearing the news. He was completely distraught over his fellow Yid's anguish.

The fourth *talmid* told me that the most striking behavior of the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva was his incredibly strict adherence to his *seder hayom*. He had an exact schedule for what *minyan* he davened by, what food he ate - and at exactly what time, and of course, he had an intense schedule for his *limudim*. Each day was a carbon copy of the day before, yet his *avodah* was consistently full of enthusiasm. He didn't just get excited for a specific *mitzvah* or initiative from time to time, as many people do; he maintained his focus on the same *sedarim* every single day, resulting in a wholesome upward process of growth.

Two Techniques for Connecting with Hashem

There is another point we can learn from the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva zt"l. During the period of the *Mussar* movement spearheaded by Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l, there were two major techniques for connecting with the Ribono Shel Olam that were being debated by the *Gedolim* of the time. Rav Yisroel Salanter was promoting the idea that the best way to foster a deeper connection with Hashem is through having a *seder kavua* for learning *mussar*, and that time should be spent studying classic *sifrei mussar* with a tune that brings a person to

his'orerus. However, other *Gedolim* opined that there is another, possibly even more important technique that should be employed in order to bring about growth in *Avodas Hashem*. They believed that a person must make it a primary focus to pinpoint the numerous moments throughout the day that are assigned for connecting with Hashem - and actually concentrate on them. These moments include every time we make a *bracha* on food or drink; every time we say *asher yatzar*; every time we put on *tefillin*, and so on.

Although the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva was a massive proponent of learning *mussar* with fervor, he was literally a living example of the second technique as well. Every time he said a *bracha*, he seemed overwhelmed with thankfulness to the Ribono Shel Olam. When he recited *krias shema*, he looked like he was in the middle of being *mekabel* the Torah by Har Sinai. I remember how Rav Elya Roth *zt"l* used to stop every time he walked through a doorway, place his hand on the *mezuzah* and concentrate on how Hashem is always watching over him, and how he must always be devoted to serving Him. These actions serve as a full-fledged *mussar seder* when done properly.

The reason this method is so effective is obvious: when the *Yetzer Hara* presents a person with a challenge, it is exceedingly difficult to overcome the temptation when the person is all alone in the battle. If it's just his strength as a person against the most powerful force of all time - the evil inclination, then he's very likely to fail. But if, over the course of the day, he constantly connects with the Borei Olam - three times a day during davening, every time he *bentsches* and so on - then he feels Hashem's presence throughout the day, enabling him to prevail against the *Yetzer Hara*. The more a person feels Hashem, concentrates on His goodness, and internalizes his desire to do His will, the better his prospects will be for growing and beating his *nisyonos*.

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