

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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פסח

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פסח

אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם, תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה אנכי ד' אלקיך אשר
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לכם.

(שבת דף פ"ה ע"ב)

Moshe said before Hashem, "Master of the World! This Torah that You are giving me - What is written in it?"

"I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim."

Moshe said to the malachim, "Did you go down to Mitzrayim? Were you enslaved to Paroh? Of what purpose would the Torah be for you?!"

Moshe Rabbeinu's Discussion with the Malachim

The Gemara (שבת פ"ה:) relates the story that occurred when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Shamayim to receive the Torah. If we analyze the story, we will discover an important point bs"d, which is relevant for the entire year, and which relates to Pesach.

When Moshe Rabbeinu came up to Shamayim to receive the Torah, the malachim protested to Hashem. "מה לילוד אשה בינינו תנה הודך על השמים. [Hashem,] place Your splendor in Shamayim!" i.e. The Torah belongs with the elevated malachim, rather than with lowly human beings; what right do they have to the Torah?

Hashem thereby informed Moshe that he would need to answer the questions of the malachim on his own.

Upon hearing this Moshe protested. "I am afraid they will burn me to a crisp with their breath!" Hashem told Moshe, "I will protect you. Hold onto the Heavenly Throne, and answer them!"

Moshe then turned to Hashem and said, "What is written in Your Torah?"

"I am Hashem Who took you out of Mitzrayim."

Moshe turned to the malachim and challenged them. "Were you enslaved in Mitzrayim?!"

The exchange continued. Moshe to Hashem: 'What else is written in the Torah?' – Hashem to Moshe: 'You shall not worship other gods.' – Moshe to the malachim: 'Do you reside among the Nations through which you will be tempted to serve their gods?'

'What else is written in it?' – 'Remember the Shabbos.' – 'Do you ever perform melachah from which you will rest on Shabbos?'

The exchange continued for several more rounds, as Moshe continuously demonstrated that the Torah was specifically intended for human beings who encounter the struggles and nisyonos of this world, rather than for the malachim who have no yetzer hara or physical needs. As the Gemara concludes, the malachim were impressed by Moshe's arguments, and they presented him gifts before he descended back to Earth.

Shibud Mitzrayim – a Punishment for Sins, or a Necessary Component of Receiving the Torah?

As related in the story, Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated how the Torah is relevant for human beings who are involved in the *nisyonos* of this world. The difficulty we may have concerns the first question that Moshe asked the *malachim*. All the other points that he asked them directly concerned the *mitzvos* of the Torah. The fulfillment of those *mitzvos* indeed requires the circumstances and struggles of this world, and it is therefore understandable that this would demonstrate how the Torah must be received by human beings. However, the first question concerned the experience which Klal Yisroel underwent in Mitzrayim. Why was that occurrence considered such an important prerequisite for the Torah?

To delve even more deeply into this question, let us recall that the Gemara recounts different opinions about which *aveirah* actually triggered the enslavement in Mitzrayim. The simple implication is that without these sins, the enslavement would not have occurred. Presumably then, the *malachim* who did not commit that sin, did not need the *Shibud* in Mitzrayim. One opinion in the Gemara, for instance, is that the cause of the enslavement in Mitzrayim was when Avrohom Avinu questioned the *nevuah* of Hashem during the *Bris Bein Habesarim*, by saying במה אדע כי אירשנה (*How will I know that I will inherit the Land of Canaan?*) As a punishment for these words, Hashem responded (שם פסוק י"ג) **ידוע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום** (*You will surely know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them.*) The *Shibud* in Mitzrayim, then, was decreed as a punishment for the words במה אדע. The *malachim* who never said those words did not deserve that punishment. Why would that preclude them from receiving the Torah?

From the exchange between Moshe and the *malachim*, however, it clearly emerges that the *Shibud* of Mitzrayim was not simply a punishment for certain sins, but was actually an vital and necessary prerequisite for the receiving of the Torah.¹ Moshe was telling the *malachim* that they are lacking in this essential requirement.

¹ How are we to understand the Gemara which attributes the *Galus Mitzrayim* to specific *aveiros*? Chazal address a similar point in the Medrash (תנחומא וישב אית ד'), where they reveal to us some of the hidden workings of HaKadosh Boruch Hu in the running of the world.

Chazal tell us that Adam Harishon comes to Hakadosh Baruch Hu with a complaint: "You tell me that I am the cause of death in the world [by having eaten from the *Eitz Hadaas*], yet, it is clear from the laws of the Torah itself that death was originally intended to be an integral component of the world, as the *passuk* says: *אדם כי ימות באוהל*!"

Chazal give a *mashal* reflecting this point:

A husband sits down to partake of a meal his wife has prepared for him. The husband takes one taste and throws his food away in disgust. "This food is terrible," he shouts, "I'm giving you a divorce!" He then pulls a fully written Get out of his pocket and hands it to her. The wife turns to him and says, "You can't fool me into thinking that this was the real cause of your divorcing me. How could you have known to have a Get written before even tasting the food?"

Adam is similarly saying to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that it is clear from the Torah that death was part of the original plan for the world — and in truth, he is right. Death is a powerful force in Fear of Sin. This is demonstrated by the fact that before the *Mabul* when people lived for hundreds of years before dying, they sunk to terribly low levels. Death was thus a necessary component of Creation, regardless of Adam's sin; his sin was merely an "excuse" to bring it into the world. Nonetheless, Hashem will not inflict any harm on a person unjustly; there must be some flaw or deviation to blame for it.

An employer has a worker who is causing terrible damage for the company. Customers are being turned off because of him, and it is not worthwhile to keep him. Nevertheless, the boss still cannot fire him without a clear reason. When, however, this worker will commit the most minor infraction, this will be grounds to fire him. If he would have been a committed, valuable worker, there is no question that the act would have been overlooked. But it can still serve as a basis for punishment if there is an otherwise overriding need.

In a similar manner, the Medrash tells us that although the *Galus Mitzrayim* appeared to have been a result of the jealousy that the brothers of Yosef harbored toward him, in reality the *Galus* was intended as a fulfillment of the *nevuah* of ידוע תדע. The guilt of the brothers was merely a pretext for HaKadosh Boruch Hu to set that decree in motion.

The Benefits of the Shibud

What we must now attempt to understand is why is it that the *Shibud* of Mitzrayim was such an indispensable component of Klal Yisroel receiving the Torah. It would seem bs"d that we can understand that there are two different qualities which Klal Yisroel acquired through their enslavement to Mitzrayim. Let us now focus upon each of these two ideas:

1. יסורים – Suffering

Chazal tell us that Torah is one of the three gifts which HaKadosh Boruch Hu granted to Klal Yisroel through suffering.² This is learned from the *passuk* אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרנו יה ומתורתך תלמדנו (תהילים צ"ד י"ב)/*Fortunate is the man upon whom Hashem brings suffering, and from Your Torah You will teach him*. What this means is that Torah can only be acquired be acquired through suffering. Chazal say further (רמב"ם הל' תלמוד תורה פ"ג הי"ב)/*The Torah that I learned under duress – that is what stood for me!*

Rav Sholom Eisen related to me that when he was a young bachur in yeshiva, there would be days that there was no food for breakfast in his poverty-stricken home. On those days, he would arrive at yeshiva in the morning while he was hungry. Rav Sholom used to attempt to hide his situation, but he could not get it past the eyes of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l. On any morning that he did not eat breakfast, Rav Shlomo Zalman would be able to figure it out in a few minutes. He would then try to somehow put together some food for the young bachur.

Rav Sholom once asked Rav Shlomo Zalman how it was that he was always able to determine when he had not eaten that morning. Rav Shlomo Zalman gave him a simple response: "Va'il du lernst tzu shtark! (Because you learn too well on those days!)"

The hunger that Rav Sholom was feeling forced him to put extra effort to be able to overcome it. He thus reached extra levels of intensity in his learning in those days. Rav Shlomo Zalman was able to perceive this, and of course, he would try to arrange for some food for the hungry boy.

Yissurim, then, are the ingredient which spurs a person to growth and advancement in his knowledge of Torah. With this knowledge that suffering is the necessary price for receiving the Torah, we can certainly understand that before the entire Klal Yisroel received the Torah on the national level, it would be necessary for the Nation to undergo a measure of *yissurim* on a large-scale, communal level. To fulfill this requirement, the long-lasting *Shibud* in Mitzrayim was indeed necessary and consequential. Moshe Rabbeinu rightfully told the *malachim* that they who do not experience *yissurim* cannot have a proper connection to the Torah.

The Necessity of Yissurim for Hatzlacha in Torah

This concept has implications for us as well, in a seemingly very chilling sense. Chazal are in effect telling us that we must be willing and ready to experience real suffering before we can reach a real acquisition in Torah.

This leaves most of us in a tough predicament. On the one hand, we fervently wish to achieve great heights in Torah. After all, we are aware that through it we are afforded the closest level of connection with Hashem, and we know as well, that the *mitzvah* of learning Torah is greater than all

In a similar fashion it is explained by *mefarshim* that even the *cheit* of Avrohom Avinu in uttering the words במה אדע was merely a pretext for HaKadosh Boruch Hu to carry out the original plan of *Galus Mitzrayim*, which was so necessary for Klal Yisroel as a precondition for *Kabbalas HaTorah*.

² The other two gifts are Eretz Yisroel and Olam Haba.

other *mitzvos*. We certainly desire to receive our own chelek in the holy Torah. Yet at the same time, most of us tremble at the thought of *yissurim*. True, there are *tzadikim* on great elevated *madreigos* who willingly bring *yissurim* upon themselves. However, the vast majority of people cannot bear the thought of willingly accepting suffering upon themselves. The question then is, is there any *eitzah* for us? Are these indeed the only two options in front of us, forcing us to decide between a life full of real suffering *chas v'shalom*, or a life devoid of true Torah *chas v'shalom*? Or is there a way that we can somehow satisfy both sides of the coin, reaching great levels in Torah without placing ourselves in *yissurim*?

Self-Control as a Legitimate Alternative to Yissurim

Fortunately, our great rebbeim have revealed to us that there is a way out of this predicament. One can achieve heights in Torah without necessarily needing to undergo real *yissurim*. How can this be done?

When I was in the Be'er Yaakov yeshiva, the rosh yeshiva Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro z"l used to say in the name of his rebbe, the Brisker Rav z"l, that there is an alternative fulfillment to the requirement of *yissurim*, which can accomplish the same goal that *yissurim* do. What is this alternative? The answer is self-control.

- *When the alarm clock rings in the morning, we are faced with a choice. We can either push the snooze button to allow ourselves an extra ten minutes of sleep, but at the expense of davening pesukei d'zimrah like a mentch. Or, we can force ourselves out of bed in order to arrive at Shacharis on time. By controlling ourselves, we are giving ourselves a measure of yissurim which are equally or more effective than yissurim that are sent from Shamayim r"l.*
- *When a person wishes to speak loshon hara or say a nasty word to his spouse/co-worker/chavrusa, he can 'forcibly' restrain himself from doing so. The nisayon to utter the hurtful word is great, and by holding strong, one is bringing yissurim upon himself.*

By living a life in which one makes an effort to control himself in each *nisayon* or situation that he encounters, one is providing himself with the necessary resources to be able to receive and acquire the Torah without requiring actual *yissurim*. It is certainly worthwhile then, to bring oneself to self-control, if only for this purpose of acquiring the Torah.

2. עבד ד' Becoming an

The second quality that we acquired through the enslavement in Mitzrayim was this very concept of being enslaved. As the *passuk* states clearly in Parshas Behar, *כי לי בני ישראל עבדים*, *To Me are the Bnei Yisroel servants; they are My servants whom I took out of the land of Mitzrayim*. When Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim, it was not with the intent of establishing us as free men, but rather to transfer the enslavement which we had toward Paroh into an enslavement toward Hashem. We certainly understand that in reality, this 'slavery' is the most complete form of freedom, because we are free to fulfill our ultimate purpose in the world, and to attain the greatest of reward for this. At the same time though, we must not delude ourselves into a feeling that we may act as we choose. This is not the case at all; we are rather absolutely subservient to HaKadosh Boruch Hu with our entire beings.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l used to constantly stress this point to us.

The Ramban in Parshas Yisro brings the mashal from Chazal about a group of people who were just beginning the structure of a country and a government. The people turned to a certain individual among them, who was gifted with leadership qualities as well as the understanding and wherewithal to enact a wise system of laws for a country.

"Make decrees for us!" they ask of this man.

The man, however, is not so quick to accede to their request. "Before I will enact a system of laws for you," he tells the people, "I need to hear from you that you accept my authority. First pledge your allegiance to me as your king, and then I will establish a kingship and a government."

Similarly, before we observe the *mitzvos* of the Torah, it is imperative that we fully and wholeheartedly accept upon ourselves complete subservience to Hashem as our King. Otherwise, we will end up keeping the *mitzvos* when they are comfortable and convenient for us, while rejecting them when they do not fit with our own desires or agendas. Such an attitude certainly does not reflect a true acceptance of servitude to Hashem and can hardly be granted any credit for fulfilling Hashem's will. After all, it is ultimately the person's own will which compels him to behave the way he is, as demonstrated by his refusal to follow the Torah when it goes against his own desires. Only by forcing oneself to accept the Torah's directive in all situations does a person show a true submission to the authority of Hashem and His Torah.

Following the Torah Even When the Rationale is Difficult to Comprehend

Included in this idea is following the directive of the Torah even when the circumstances may lead us to conclude that the prudent or wise course of action is in one direction, while the Torah commands us the opposite.

אסתר

My rebbe, Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock shlita would demonstrate this idea from the Megillas Esther:

When Esther was brought to Achashveirosh's palace, the passuk says ובכל יום ויום (אסתר ב' י"א) /מרדכי מתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים לדעת את שלום אסתר ומה יעשה בה (אסתר ב' י"א) Each day, Mordechai would walk in front of the Women's Courtyard, to learn of Esther's well-being and what would become of her. Rashi explains that Esther's being taken to be with Achashveirosh was a sign from Shamayim to Mordechai. He understood that it could not be that this tzadekes would be subject to the defilement were it not that this would bring a yeshuah for Klal Yisroel. He therefore walked near the palace each day to see how and in what way this salvation would come about.

Yet notwithstanding the fact Mordechai had understood this clear sign from Shamayim, the previous passuk tells us that he did something quite to the contrary. Esther/לא הגידה אסתר את עמה ואת מולדתה כי מרדכי צוה עליה אשר לא תגיד (שם פסוק י') would not disclose her people or her birthplace because Mordechai had commanded her that she should not tell. Rashi explains that Mordechai was trying to cause Achashveirosh to be deterred from choosing Esther as queen. Through her not discussing her origins, the implication would be that she is descended from an ignoble background – perhaps she is of a lowly family, or a daughter of criminals. Her real identity as a member of the royal family of Shaul Hamelech, on the other hand, would be a strong driving factor for Achashveirosh to choose her, as he would be delighted to be marrying a woman of royal background. Esther was therefore instructed not to divulge her ancestry under any circumstances, in order not to provide this added incentive for Achashveirosh to pick her, and instead have Achashveirosh assume she was from a lowly background and be discouraged from taking her.

The question is, how is the behavior of Mordechai in these two *pessukim* not contradictory? On the one hand, he realized that there must be a great reason why Esther is being taken to be defiled by Achashveirosh, and that a great *yeshuah* must be destined to result from it; and yet, at the same

time, he tried to deter and dissuade Achashveirosh from choosing Esther for his wife! If Esther would not be picked, what would become of the great *yeshuah*? How could Mordechai try to 'thwart' HaKadosh Boruch Hu's plans?

The answer, says HaRav Feigelstock, is that we were given the Torah by Hashem with a clear set of laws and instructions for how to act in any circumstance. That is what we are commanded, and that is what we must follow. The laws of the Torah dictate that if a Jewish woman is potentially going to be forced into becoming the wife of a non-Jewish king, all efforts must be made to save her from this fate. Even though Mordechai clearly understood that a *yeshuah* must ultimately be destined from the taking of Esther, he was still not absolved from his personal obligation to try to save her under the circumstances. If Hashem had plans to the contrary, Hashem would bring that plan to fruition regardless of all human beings' attempts to the contrary. As we know, this is indeed what happened. Achashveirosh persisted on keeping Esther as his queen despite her refusal to reveal herself. Hashem caused him to be so enthralled by her beauty that nothing else was strong enough to change his mind.

חזקיהו המלך

This idea is reflected as well in the story of Chizkiyahu Hamelech, (עֵיִן בְּרִכּוֹת י') who abstained from producing new generations because he foresaw that the rasha Menashe was destined to emerge from him. He received a message from Yeshaya that he should give over a will to his family members and household because he would shortly be losing his life both in this world and the Next, on account of his not fulfilling the mitzvah of פְּרִיָה וּרְבִיָּה.

"But why?" he had protested to Yeshaya. "I was only trying to stop a rasha from being born!"

Yeshaya Hanavi's response was unforgiving. "Why are you involving yourself in Hashem's affairs? You have your task of fulfilling the mitzvah. What will result is Hashem's business and is not for you to involve yourself!"

The Servant of Marsa Bas Baysus

Another instance we where can see a demonstration of this idea is in the story Marsa Bas Baysus. (גִּיטִין נ"ו) Marsa was a tremendously wealthy woman who lived in Yerushalayim during the terrible hunger that occurred at the time of the Churban. At that time, Marsa sent her servant to the market to buy flour. The servant returned to his mistress emptyhanded, with the following explanation:

"There was no fine flour to be found; only coarse flour was left."

Marsa then instructed the servant to buy coarse flour. However, when he arrived at the market, that too was sold out, and he again returned to his mistress emptyhanded. This time he reported that the coarse flour was gone, but there was still dark bread to be found on the market. Marsa duly instructed him to purchase the dark bread.

The same scenario again repeated itself, this time with barley flour, until as the story continues, Marsa was forced to venture to the market herself.

The question most people ask when learning this Gemara is, where was the intelligence of this servant? Why could he not understand on his own to purchase the next available type of grain? The answer, however, is that this question from a lack of a full understanding of the nature of a genuine servant. A true servant obeys his master without a thought of questioning any point about his master's instructions. He does exactly what he is told, not adding or subtracting.

Living with Obedience and Submission to those Older and Wiser than We are

We must live our lives with the mindset of absolute servants to HaKadosh Boruch Hu, obeying every single *halachah* and *middah* that the Torah teaches us without question. When we are in doubt, we must seek reliable guidance from *daas Torah*, and we must then follow it precisely.

This can be a difficult *nisayon*, particularly in our generation in America, where the general mindset and training is to question and challenge everyone and everything.

In years gone by, children relied upon their parents' direction and guidance for much of their decisions in their youth. Notably included in this approach was the sphere of shidduchim. Children understood that their parents were wiser than they, and that they had their best interests in mind. How much hatzlacha and siyatta d'shmaya resulted from this attitude!

Nowadays, unfortunately, far too much of the decision process in many areas is left to the children, even at very young ages. Oftentimes, this can lead to disastrous results r"l.

Let us ingrain in ourselves and our children that it is Hashem's will that we must follow, even when it is beyond our grasp. Let us also realize that our own understanding is never perfect, and that we should defer to the guidance of others who are more knowledgeable than we are.

Following the Dictates of One's Seichel

Although we are emphasizing that one must follow the advice and the *chachamim* to the tee, it must still be accompanied by one's *seichel*. At times, one's common sense must dictate how he will apply the directive and advice of the Torah and *chachamim*. In certain instances, one may even conclude that the specific circumstance warrants that he should not follow the instruction he was given.

- *When No'omi sent Rus to the enter the granary of Boaz in the night, No'omi's instructions were הגרן וירדת עליך ושמט שמלותיך /You should wash and anoint yourself, and you should don your clothing, and descend to the threshing floor. The passuk then relates how Rus responded that she would do exactly as she was told. Yet when Rus performed the act, she deviated slightly from her instructions. The passuk says ותרד הגרן ותעש ככל אשר צוהה חמותה /And she went down to the threshing floor, and she did everything that her mother in-law instructed her. As Rashi points out, first she went down to the threshing floor, and only then did she do what her mother in-law instructed. This teaches us that although No'omi instructed Rus to dress in her finery before entering the threshing floor, Rus calculated that doing so would arouse suspicion upon herself that she is a זונה. She therefore first went to the threshing house, and then donned her clothing.*
- *When Haman wrote the evil decree against the Jews, Mordechai instructed Esther to appear before Achashveirosh and plead on behalf of the Jewish People. After reaching a clear understanding of Mordechai's instructions, Esther heeded his words. She invited Achashveirosh to attend a party together with Haman, the plan clearly being that she would plead for the Jewish People at the party, exactly as Mordechai had directed. And yet at the party, Esther did not mention the situation of the Jews, but instead simply invited Achashveirosh to a second party! She had obviously made a decision that the time was not yet ripe to bring Haman's downfall. The next day, after Haman's fall had already begun, Esther indeed took action and pleaded with Achashveirosh to annul the decree of Haman.*

In both these stories from Tanach, we find the follower acting with her own *seichel* based on the circumstances, even as she was obediently carrying out the directive of one who was greater than

she. W, too, must know when to use our own *seichel* simultaneously with our complete *hisbatlus*/self-negation to the Torah and the *Chachamim*.

Relying on the Judgement of the Listener

Before saying this shmuess for the first time, I consulted with my rebbe, Harav Yitzchok Feigelstock shlita. "Perhaps," I wondered, "I should not give over this portion of the shmuess. After all, individuals may learn from here that we need not listen to the Torah completely!"

Rav Feigelstock's answer was clear. "No, you must not omit this part of the shmuess. It is important to realize that we must follow our *seichel* as well."

"And what about the concern that people will become confused as to when we must heed our guidance and when not?"

"The answer is to this is clear. We must use our *seichel*!"

Rav Feigelstock was saying that in truth, it is not a clearly defined line between when we must follow the Torah and *Chachamim*, and when we must understand that the circumstances require adaptation. This question, too, is one in which we must use our *seichel* to answer, and if necessary, seek guidance in the matter.

In Conclusion

Let us remember both of these important ideas that we are taught through our having been enslaved to Paroh.

Firstly, let us recognize the pivotal role that *yissurim* play in the level of our overall *hatzlacha* and connection to Torah. Let us therefore train ourselves not to seek the easy way out in *Avodas Hashem*, but rather to force ourselves to control ourselves, thus fulfilling the requirement of *yissurim* in a positive, gainful manner.

Secondly, let us remember that just as we were completely enslaved to Paroh while we were in Mitzrayim, we are likewise absolute servants of Hashem, Who redeemed us from Paroh's bondage into His own. Let us live our lives with this realization and let us bear this in mind when faced with life's choices. Certainly, there are difficult *nisyonos* and challenges throughout our lives, both major and minor. Our response to these challenges and choices will be directly dependent on the manner in which we view our role as members of Klal Yisroel. If Torah and *mitzvos* are merely 'nice' positive things for us to perform, they will almost certainly fall by the wayside when the circumstances bring difficulties along with them. When we remember that it is not our choice, but that we simply must follow the Torah commands as a slave obeys his master, then we can have *siyatta d'shmaya* in overcoming these *nisyonos*.

Bez"H we should achieve these *madreigos*, and we should see גאולה וישועה.

תג כשר ושמח!

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