

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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treating the Jews, about which you are so troubled, will actually cause much goodness for the Bnei Yisroel, because it will allow for the end of the *Galus* to arrive in very short time. The question is that in that *passuk*, which is even closer to Moshe's mistaken exclamation, the words of Hashem are prefaced by the clause *אֶל מִשְׁהָ* / *And Hashem said to Moshe*. The Name of *י-ק-ו-ק* which connotes Mercy is used, and the Torah refers to Hashem's speaking with an expression of *אמירה* which connotes softness. How is it that in the *passuk* immediately following Moshe's error there is no hint to any judgement, and in the next *passuk* there is?

It would seem to me that we can offer two different answers to this question.

Not Reacting Immediately

The first answer we can give is based on a concept that my father zt"l used to ingrain into us. When a person is angry or upset at another individual about any matter, he should not allow himself to feel his anger or act upon it immediately. So much needless damage is caused when people act out of pure anger, without allowing themselves enough time to consider whether there really was a wrongdoing or not, and if there was, what is the correct manner with which it should be dealt. By waiting on one's anger, there is time for the picture to change, whether through new facts coming to light, or even just by the individual bringing himself to look at the matter in a more merciful or favorable light.

The Dangers that Are Avoided by Delaying One's Reaction

My father would tell us this story which is related in early Seforim:

A man – Shimon – was struggling to support his family, and he was forced to leave his home to try to make some money. He left behind his wife and young son, hoping to return home as soon as possible. As it turned out, it was quite a few years before Shimon was finally able to return home. Upon his return to his town, he began inquiring about the state of his family that he had left behind. He was terribly distraught to hear that there were illicit activities taking place in his home. 'Each night,' he was told, 'there is a young man who is seen climbing in the window and sneaking out a few hours later.'

Shimon decided that he must see this for himself. That night, he hid himself across the street, and he watched the home. Sure enough, at around 11:00 he saw a young man sneaking through the window! Shimon was utterly furious. He was ready to go and kill the strange man right then and there. However, Shimon had a firm practice of 'sleeping' on his anger before acting upon it. He controlled himself from acting at that moment, and instead he found a place to sleep for the night. The next morning, he had calmed down enough to be able to see his long-forsaken wife and to reunite with her. After a few minutes, he broached the subject of the midnight intruder.

Shimon's wife looked at him with surprise. "That boy was our own son! He was captured by the church, and he manages to sneak away each night for a few hours, when I can teach him a little about Torah and Yiddishkeit. If he does not return to his captors afterward, there will be terrible consequences, and he is therefore compelled to sneak away after a few hours and return to the church."

Upon hearing this explanation Shimon lifted his eyes to Shamayim in great relief. He thanks Hashem for his practice which prevented him from murdering his own son.

Although this story is an extreme one, the lesson is clear. One should always stop and think before acting on his anger. One never knows what mistakes or damage can be caused when he allows himself to act at the initial moment of anger.

There was a boy in yeshiva, who had unfortunately stopped speaking to his father. He was convinced that his father hated him, and he was rebelling completely. The father, of course, was beside himself.

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He did not know where he had gone wrong, and the situation pained him to no end. Rav Matisyahu Salomon zt"l was involved in this story, and he asked the boy to explain why he felt the way he did.

The boy finally opened up, and he related an incident which occurred when he was six years old. He had been sitting at the breakfast table with his father, and he decided to get up to get some bread. On his way, he accidentally knocked over his bowl of cereal. Milk and cornflakes splashed all over the table and floor. The father saw this, and he completely exploded.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY CAN'T YOU BE MORE CAREFUL? THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THIS HAPPENED!"

The father's angry tirade continued unabated for a few long minutes. The boy just sat there squirming, unsure of what to do. He did not say anything out of his fear of his father's anger, but from then on, the scene remained etched in his mind. At that moment, he concluded that his father does not love him, and throughout his childhood, he did not change his opinion. Now, when he was old enough to act on his own, he decided to completely rebel.

What this father could have done is to calmly help his son wipe up the spill. Later that night, he could gently explain to his son that although it is fine to get bread to eat, one must still be careful. The son would hear the message and apologize. How much damage was caused by his reacting immediately!

This lesson applies to children, to parents, to a spouse, to a worker, a boss. We must apply this lesson of delaying our reactions to all our personal relationships.

Hashem Was Demonstrating this Lesson

Based on this concept, we can suggest an answer to our question on the *passuk*. Why did Hashem not speak harshly to Moshe immediately at the time of Moshe's wrongdoing? Perhaps Hashem was teaching us this lesson of waiting before reacting. Regarding HaKadosh Boruch Hu Himself, of course, the actual idea is of course not applicable. Hashem will never act rashly, whether immediately or at a later point. Everything that Hashem does is completely and infinitely calculated in every last respect. However, we can still understand that Hashem was teaching us through these *pessukim*. Although there was a *Din* against Moshe, Hashem refrained from speaking harshly right away. Instead, Hashem appeared with the Name of *Rachamim*, and He spoke softly. Only later did Hashem deliver a harsh reproach to Moshe for the inappropriate manner in which he spoke.

Punishing out of Ahavah – Not Anger

The second answer we can suggest is based on a *yesod* that Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l used to teach us. Rav Chaim would explain that punishments are never meant to be dealt to the recipient out of anger. The point of a punishment is to teach the wrongdoer about his mistake, and to bring about his improvement for the future. Rather than coming from anger or revenge, a punishment can be administered only when it stems purely from feeling of total *ahavah*.¹

¹ In a similar vein, Rav Chaim would quote Rav Yisroel Salanter who would say that a word of *mussar* must be preceded by words of praise to the recipient. In this way, the recipient will feel that he is valued and respected by the one delivering the *mussar*, and that there is merely a specific area that he must correct.

Everybody likes a compliment, no matter how insignificant it is. Conversely, no one likes being 'told off'. It hurts, and people will go to all lengths to avoid it. By the deliverer beginning with a compliment, the listener thereby becomes receptive to the words of mussar that follow it.

Needless to say, the compliment must be genuine. The speaker must find a way in which he truly sees a quality in the person, and he must bring himself to a real appreciation of the other person. By conveying this appreciation to the listener, he will cause the listener to be receptive to him.

Rav Chaim would demonstrate this point based on several instances in the Torah in which Hashem acted in this way.

- In Sedom, Chazal explain that reason the wife of Lot was killed when she turned back to look at Sedom, was because the *Shechinah* was in Sedom, and she was unable to bear the sight of the *Shechinah*. The question is, what was the *Shechinah* doing in Sedom at that time? After all, the people of Sedom were of the worst possible wickedness, deserving of complete destruction; how then, could they deserve to have a revelation of the *Shechinah* in their midst? The answer though is that whenever Hashem punishes, be it the worst of possible sinners, Hashem still only does so out of a measure of closeness to the one receiving the punishment. Even the wicked people of Sedom received that closeness of a revelation of the *Shechinah* at the time of their destruction.
- When Yaakov Avinu was sick, the *passuk* says that he bowed. Chazal explain that the *Shechinah* rests at the head of a sick person. Why is this so? Because at a time that a person is sick, there is a measure of judgement that is being exacted upon him. As explained, when there is a *Din* on a person, the *Shechinah* is there.
- When the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, Chazal tell us that the *Keruvim* were discovered to be embracing each other. The *mefarshim* ask that generally this is a sign that Klal Yisroel were behaving properly and that they therefore have a close relationship with Hashem. How could this display be appropriate at the time of the *Churban* when there was a terrible *Din* taking place? Clearly Klal Yisroel was not finding favor in Hashem's Eyes at the time; what could the embrace have been symbolizing? Here too, the answer is that Hashem would only bring about the terrible punishments of the *Churban* when He is 'feeling' a tremendous closeness with Klal Yisroel. Out of His great love for us, Hashem brings the punishments which are necessary for us r"l.

Based on this idea, we can explain why Hashem did not address Moshe using the Name of Elokim immediately after Moshe's failure. Rashi tells us that hinted in the *passuk* at the end of Parshas Shemos is the punishment for Moshe's erroneous words. עתה תראה אשר אעשה לפרעה, העשוי לפרעה תראה, ולא העשוי למלכי / 'Now you will see what I will do to Paroh' – but [you will] not [see] that which I will do to the kings of Seven Nations in Eretz Canaan! i.e. Hashem hinted to Moshe that as result of the words that he uttered, he would not be able to lead the Bnei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel.

Hashem punishes, as explained, not out of a sense of anger but out of love. Therefore, when Hashem informed Moshe about his punishment, He did not employ a harsh tone but a soft one, and He used the Name of י-ק-ו-ק which denotes Mercy. Only afterward in the *passuk* in our *parshah*, did Hashem speak harshly in order to rebuke Moshe and instruct him about his error.

In the End of the Passuk an Expression of Mercy is Used

Until here, we analyzed the *passuk* which precedes our *passuk*. Now, we will focus on the conclusion of the *passuk* of our discussion. Our *passuk* begins in a harsh tone – וידבר אלוקים אל משה – *Elokim' spoke [harshly] to Moshe*. As mentioned, this was a powerful combination of strictness that Hashem was displaying to Moshe as a punishment for his having questioned Hashem's Ways when he said למה הרעותה / "Why have You done bad for this nation?" And yet, this same *passuk* continues ויאמר אליו אני ה' / *And He said [gently] 'I am Hashem'*. This is a combination of two expressions of Mercy: the Name 'Hashem' with the term 'amirah'.

The Mention of 'Moshe' Caused the Change in Hashem's Manner

The Ohr Hachaim focuses on this sudden switchover in Hashem's expression. How did such a dramatic change come about? What happened in between the beginning of the *passuk* and the end of it to

precipitate this change? The Ohr Hachaim explains that this change was a result of the personage of 'Moshe' who is mentioned in between these two parts of the *passuk*.

Moshe had the tremendous *middos* of humility and of tolerance for others, and through this, he merited this changeover to Hashem's Mercy and Kindness, even at a time when he was fitting to have been treated harshly. As Chazal tell us למי נרשא עון למי שעובר על פשע על /*To whom is HaKadosh Boruch forgiving of his sins? To one who overlooks the misdeeds of others.* For this reason, the mere mention of the word Moshe was sufficient to cause a change in the tone of Hashem toward Moshe from harsh words of judgement to gentle words of pleasantness. True, Hashem was angry at Moshe for his having questioned Hashem's Ways. But Moshe himself dealt with people in such a completely humble and forgiving manner that he earned the same treatment from Hashem. It was appropriate for Hashem to speak harshly based on the circumstances; but to Moshe? Such a person always warrants soft treatment.

The Middos of Moshe

Let us examine some of Moshe's *Middos* as shown in the Torah. When Korach and his followers rebelled against Moshe, *Chazal* tell us (מועד קטן י"ה:) that each of them performed *kinuy* on his wife regarding Moshe. This means that each one warned his wife in front of two witnesses not go into seclusion with Moshe Rabbeinu – as if to suspect Moshe Rabbeinu of illicit behavior with his wife ch"v. After this *kinuy*, if it would ever happen that she would inadvertently find herself in seclusion with Moshe, she would be forbidden to her husband until she would drink the *Sotah* Waters, causing the Name of Hashem to be erased. Moshe could not risk this happening, and he therefore moved his tent outside the Camp to avoid this occurrence. If we contemplate the shame and disgrace these men caused Moshe Rabbeinu, it is mindboggling.

We would think that Moshe would immediately daven to Hashem to have all these men punished terribly. How could they treat their leader Moshe in this way, with all he has done for them? Moshe Rabbeinu involved in *issur Eishes Ish*?! What *chutzpah*! Moshe though, does not act this way. He sends for Dasan and Aviram to come discuss their issues with him. They refuse. They declare, "Even if Moshe will poke out our eyes, we will not go speak to him!" Still, Moshe does not give up. He gets up and goes to them. Perhaps then, they will agree to communicate and 'work out' the issues. Only when they still refuse, does Moshe finally concede that there is simply no one to talk to. Then, and only then, he davens to Hashem to destroy them.

Let us not forget that Dasan and Aviram were the ones who had provoked Moshe in Mitzrayim as well. It was they who rebuked Moshe for having interfered with Paroh and causing matters to become worse for the Bnei Yisroel. Moshe was so pained by their words, that he was roused to speaking inappropriately before Hashem and to say למה הרעותה – causing him to be prevented from entering Eretz Yisroel. Their defiant behavior continued through their time in the Midbar, until they finally joined Korach in all-out rebellion. And yet Moshe always looked to make peace, until it was clear that it was totally unfeasible.

At Mei Merivah

A similar occurrence took place at *Mei Merivah* when the Bnei Yisroel had provoked him to hit the rock, also causing Moshe to be unable to gain back his privilege of entering Eretz Yisroel. Yet Moshe did not bear a grudge against any of these people. As the Ohr Hachaim explains in *Parshas V'zos Habracha* not only did Moshe not harbor ill-feeling toward them, but quite the contrary. He felt and displayed only the most heartfelt, good feeling to them, and delivered the most powerful brachos to them.

Many people, even if they will forgive an offense that was perpetrated against them, they will still not be able to completely forget it. The incident will always remain etched in their minds and will subtly influence their feelings and actions toward the other party.

A husband or wife may remember certain incidents or situations, even many years later. The husband will always think to himself, "If my wife would have agreed to do such-and-such, we would

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be in a completely different place now." Even though he has long since stopped mentioning it, the feeling is still there.

The truth is, he may be 100 percent right. However, he must still move past it.

A 'Protection Plan'

The lesson we learn from our *passuk* that a person should not rely on his own *madreigah* to stand for him. Rather, a person needs to establish a system of 'protection' for himself.

One who drives a car must always have insurance. Even the best, most experienced driver should not risk driving without it.

The reason for this is that as careful as a person may be, there can still be slips; even the best driver can be distracted at times. One cannot only rely on his own prudence. Sometimes he will need to fall back upon another form of 'protection'.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu who was on the highest of levels of *tzidkus* was brought to slip out of his great distress over Klal Yisroel's suffering. What stood for him was the tremendous humility which he lived and practiced, and his *middah* of being able to overlook the wrongdoings of others.

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Emulating the Middos of Moshe

We must learn to emulate the ways of Moshe Rabbeinu and become people who are easy-going and forgiving. If we will learn to act with this tolerance and patience, and we will train ourselves to be able to overlook the faults and wrongdoings of others, we will be *zoche* for the same treatment upon us.

Before 1967, The Mirrer Yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel was located right near the Arab border in Yerushalayim. At one point during one of the wars, bombs were being thrown nearby the yeshiva, and the entire yeshiva along with the many of the neighbors had run to the bomb shelters. The buildings shook from the blasts, and everyone was terrified that any minute, the building in which they were hiding could be blown to smithereens. The bachurim were davening with tremendous intensity.

At one point, a shout was heard from within the shelter. "Ribono Shel Olam, ich bin ehm mochel, zeit unz mochel [Ribono Shel Olam, I forgive him, please forgive us as well]!"

This was the voice of a woman whose husband had abandoned her, leaving her an agunah, and forced to struggle to care for her children on her own. Right then, she had accepted upon herself to let go of her anger against her husband.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to mention this incident many times in his shmuessen.

"Do you think your Tehillim saved the yeshiva?," he would cry from the bimah. "It was that woman's middah of forgiveness and vatranus/[overlooking another's faults] that saved us!"

There was a frum man in Brooklyn who had been severely harmed by one of his competitors. He had gone to a beis Din and had received a heter to go to the goyishe courts and have this competitor put behind bars.

In the home of his neighbor, there was a mother who was terribly ill with the Machlah, r"l. Things had neared the end point, and the young children had been farmed out to other families, while this

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mother was in the ICU. The situation was extremely difficult and trying. This businessman who felt such a compassion for this family, made a decision.

"Ribono Shel Olam", he said, "I will let go of my tainos against my competitor. Please heal this mother."

The next week, the mother had completely recovered, and was home with her family.

It is clear, that in this story as well, this man's *mechilah* was what caused the *yeshuah* for the mother.

Certainly, it is not always easy.

We say to ourselves, "How can this person do such a thing to me?" "How can he say that?" "A yid can act like that? It is disgusting!"

And in truth, we may be right. How can he say/act like that? It is hard to let go of the anger. But if we are strong, if we succeed in diffusing our own anger and looking the other way, we can merit that Hashem will act that way toward us.

In Review

Let us Learn to control ourselves when we see something which angers us, and let us delay our reaction until we have time to settle down, and perhaps clarify the story. When we must punish and react to those around us, let us remember to do so out of love. And finally, let us learn to emulate the *middos* of Moshe Rabbeinu, and to let go of our anger and our bitterness against other people entirely.

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