

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

פרשת שמיני
החודש

Volume 6 Issue # 25

לעילוי נשמת
הרב שלום מרדכי בן
הרב שלמה אביגור רבינוביץ זצ"ל
לכבוד היארצייט כ"ו אדר
תנצב"ה

פרשת שמני

יין וְשֵׁכָר אֵל תִּשֶׁת:

(ויקרא י' ט')

In Parshas Shemini, we are taught that the Kohanim were forbidden from performing any of the services in the Mishkan while they were under the influence of alcoholic beverages. (This *pasuk* is the source for the *minhag* to do *birches kohanim* by Shacharis on Simchas Torah - out of the concern that some of the Kohanim may be intoxicated by the time Mussaf comes.) The *pasuk* then continues: "ולהורות את בני ישראל" - "and to teach the children of Israel". From these words we learn that even a Rav that is not a Kohen may not issue a ruling while intoxicated.

Two Yerushalmi yungerleit were talking about this Halacha once before Pesach.

"Did you know? Rav Shmuel Salant is very careful to finish his Pesach Seder early, so that he can go to sleep for a bit and rid himself from the effects of the four cups of wine that he had drank that night. This way, should a question arise, he is able to issue a ruling without even being slightly intoxicated."

The other yungerman expressed that this seemed to be a bit of an exaggerated effort. "Let's be honest, how likely is it that he'll get a shaila on the Leil HaSeder? Plus, it's just four cups of wine... Would that really be included in the Halacha derived from "ולהורות את בני ישראל"?"

His friend smiled. "Just wait till you hear the story I had with him, and then you can try asking questions."

The yungerman related that when he was a newlywed, he went to spend his first Pesach with his in-laws, which was only a few weeks after his chasunah. At the Seder, shortly after the family began with Shulchan Orech, they were in for a shocking surprise. Right there, floating around in the fresh chosson's bowl of soup, was a kernel of wheat! The chosson almost fainted - and his brand new shviger almost had a heart-attack. His shver immediately thrust the bowl of soup into his hands and instructed him to run to Rav Shmuel Salant.

When he arrived, Rav Shmuel had already gotten up from his post Seder nap. Rav Shmuel took one look at the young chosson, whose

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

פרשת שמיני

face was whiter than snow, and quickly inquired what had happened. When the chosson pointed at the kernel in his bowl of soup, Rav Shmuel was silent for a brief moment. Then, he calmly removed the young man's new shtreimel, walked over to the street, and began tapping it lightly. Slowly but surely, a few more kernels fell out of the shtreimel onto the floor. He then returned the shtreimel, and told the yungerman that the rest of the soup at home was perfectly permitted for consumption.

During that period, there was a minhag in Yerushalayim to throw wheat kernels at a chosson by his 'aufruf'. Rav Shmuel was very quick to realize that the source of the wheat kernel was likely to be the shtreimel, rather than the soup pot, because the yungerman seemed like a fresh chosson at the time.

"If he wouldn't have gone to sleep - do you think he would have been so sharp? This could have been a big shaila that had the potential to spoil the entire family's Yom Tov, but because the Rav chose to always avoid being intoxicated, he was capable of answering the question with wisdom," the yungerman concluded.

How is this Hinted to in the Pasuk?

The Ba'al HaTurim points out that this message is really hidden in the words of the *pasuk*. The *pasuk* says: "ולהרות את בני ישראל את כל החוקים אשר" (דבר ה' אליהם ביד משה). The word ולהרות is the same *osiyos* as "ולתורה". The word ביד אליהם has the same numerical value as "זה הלכה". And finally, the words ביד משה have the numerical value of "היא המקרא". So, in conclusion, we have three things in this *pasuk*: הלכה, תורה, and מקרא.

It is most likely that the Ba'al HaTurim was trying to say that the Halacha that is derived from these *pesukim* - not *paskening* while under the influence of alcohol - stands true for all forms of Torah, not just Halacha. A Talmid Chacham must refrain from teaching *Drush* and *Lomdus* while intoxicated as well.

However, perhaps we can offer an additional explanation to these cryptic words of the Ba'al HaTurim.

Talking in a Refined Way

The Gemara in the beginning of Pesachim asks: why does the first *Mishna* in the *Masechta* start with the word 'light'? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to say 'the night of the fourteenth day'? (The *mishna* discusses the obligation to do *bedikas chometz* עשר לארבעה עשר, which literally means 'the light of the fourteenth day', but is actually referring to the nighttime on which

the fourteenth day begins.) The Gemara answers that the Tannaim wanted to start the *Masechta* with a *lashon nekiya* - a clean form of speech, rather than with words 'night' or 'dark', which would give off a negative connotation. The Gemara then proceeds with an entire discourse describing the importance of speaking with a *lashon nekiya*.

One of the anecdotes the Gemara relates is the following:

There were two disciples sitting before Rav. One said, "This Shiur was so difficult, it knocked us out like an exhausted 'davar acher' (a euphemism for a 'chazir')." The other disciple said, "The Shiur was so difficult, it knocked us out like an exhausted goat." From that point onward, Rav refused to talk with the first talmid, because he chose to use the comparison of a disgusting, impure animal, rather than a kosher one.

The next anecdote the Gemara relates goes as follows:

*Two disciples were sitting before Hillel. The first one, who was Rav Yochanan Ben Zakkai, said: "The grapes must be removed from the vineyard with utensils that are 'tahor' (pure), but the olives do not require 'tahor' utensils." The second disciple said: "The grapes must be removed from the vineyard with utensils that are 'tahor' (pure), but the olives can be removed with utensils that are 'tamei' (impure)." One of the people that were present said that because Rav Yochanan Ben Zakkai chose to avoid using the word 'tamei', he will merit to become a *moreh hora'ah* (one that issues halachic rulings) for the Jewish People. Indeed, a short time later, this prediction materialized.*

And here is the third anecdote:

*There were once two Kohanim discussing the share they received from the *Lechem Hapanim*. One proclaimed, "The piece I received was the size of an olive." The second one said, "The piece I received was the size of the tail of a lizard." The bystanders were surprised that this Kohen used a comparison of an impure animal, so they investigated his roots and discovered that he was actually disqualified from serving in the *Bais Hamikdash*.*

Tying this Gemara in with the Ba'al HaTurim

I found it interesting that the three stories that the Gemara recounts line up beautifully with the *remez* of the Ba'al HaTurim. The first story involved two disciples discussing the intricacies of the *lomdus* of the Torah concepts they were being taught, and the Gemara teaches that it was

improper to talk about Torah with a *lashon* that wasn't completely refined. This lines up with the first *remez*, ולתורה. The second story involved a discussion about a Halachic ruling. This lines up with the *remez* of אליהם - זה. הלכה. And the third involved Kohanim discussing an occurrence. The purpose of מקרא, or *pesukim*, is very often to recount occurrences. Perhaps this final anecdote lines up with the Ba'al HaTurim's final *remez*, היא המקרא, ביד משה -

With this in mind, maybe we can say that there is another lesson in this *pasuk*, which discusses the importance of answering *shailos*: a Talmid Chacham who issues guidance must maintain a *lashon nekiya*. The very mouth that expresses the words of Hashem to His people must be extremely clean.

A Ben Torah's Mouth

It is extremely important for a Ben Torah to keep his mouth pure. The Ohr Hachaim in Parshas Pinchos says that the mouth of a Ben Torah is like a *mizrak* - the vessel used in the Bais Hamikdash for receiving the blood of a *korban*. If this tool - which we use for *davening*, learning, delivering *shiurim* and saying *brachos* - is also used for *lashon hara*, inappropriate language, *chutzpah*, and talking during *tefillos*, then it is akin to vomiting into a holy *mizrak*. Of course, this would be an offense of the highest order; this is how you defile a holy vessel which is normally used for spraying blood on the corners of the *mizbe'ach*? It would be an utter disgrace to behave in such a manner! But, says the Ohr Hachaim: we are doing the same exact thing when we sully our holy, *torahdika* mouths with prohibited forms of speech.

Just as every skilled worker has his special utensils, so too, a Talmid Chacham's utensils are his mouth, his eyes, and his mind. We must take the utmost care to not defile these holy tools!

I was once standing in line at a Kapparos center on Erev Yom Kippur, when I happened to notice a Yid who was tasked with removing the feathers of the slaughtered chickens. At one point, he came across a chicken whose legs were tied too tightly together. This was making it difficult for him to remove all of the feathers. After trying to pry the wire off of the legs with his bare hands for a minute or two, he approached the Shochet.

"Can you cut this wire for a second with your chaliff (shechita knife)?" he asked innocently.

The Shochet looked like he was going to faint. His eyes opened widely, and he held the knife close to his chest, as though to protect it. His face said it all: aside from the fact that one must take extreme care to not allow the chaliff to get even slightly nicked or dented - this was a

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

פרשת שמיני

holy tool! This is a knife that is used specifically for rendering animals permissible for consumption! It can't be used for mundane chores!

Imagine a surgeon, who is about to perform open-heart surgery, is asked for his surgical knife - just for a second! - in order to cut the packing tape on a box. He would be appalled by the mere thought of asking such a question! We must recognize that our mouths are the same thing, and we must take great care to protect them from idle chatter - let alone forbidden forms of speech.

Protecting Our Eyes and Mouth in Preparation for Moshiach

We all say in our *tefillos*, three times a day: " ותחזינה עינינו בשׁוֹבֵךְ לְצִיּוֹן " - "May our eyes see Your return to Zion with mercy." How can we possibly hope for our eyes to witness the *shechina* returning to Yerushalayim when they have been sullied and marred by gazing at impure things on countless occasions? We must do *teshuvah* on these sins. One can never know exactly when Moshiach will come - but if we wait until he does, it will be too late to purify our eyes. We must take the time now to make *kabbalos* to never allow our eyes to stray where they shouldn't. The same goes for our mouths - how can the Levi'im amongst us hope to sing holy songs of praise to the Melech Malchei Hamelachim, when their mouths have prattled endlessly in the middle of *chazaras hashatz*? How will Kohanim be able to perform Birchas Kohanim, if their *mizrak*, their holy mouth, was tainted time and again by the use of unrefined words and conversations?

We must internalize the message of the Ohr Hachaim: our body is filled with holy vessels. We must treat them as such, and repent for the times that we forgot to give them the respect they deserved.

It is possible that this was the *remez* of the Ba'al HaTurim: the Talmidei Chachomim and Bnei Torah amongst us must, above all others, protect their speech - in learning, in *paskening*, and even just while in discussion. May we merit to purify our holy vessels and see the *Geulah Sheleima* speedily in our day.

פרשת החודש

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֲדָשִׁים

(שמות י"ב ב')

Parshas HaChodesh

The Ohr Hachaim describes Parshas HaChodesh with words of great excitement and anticipation. He discusses the tremendous amount of spirituality that is accessible during the great month of Nissan. Rav Chaim Brim *zt"l* used to get more excited prior to the arrival of Rosh Chodesh Nissan than to the arrival of the elevated months of Elul and Tishrei. Although the latter two months are filled with opportunities for attaining growth and closeness to Hashem, Nissan is all about the incomparable *ahavah* - the love that Hashem had for His children, Klal Yisroel, when he redeemed them from the clutches of the Egyptians. It was this great love that Gedolim throughout the generations anxiously waited for every single year, in the weeks leading up to Chodesh Nissan.

Nissan: A Time for Renewal, a Time for Yeshuos

Let us try to understand what this great excitement is really all about. The *pasuk* says of Nissan, "הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֲדָשִׁים, רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֲדָשֵׁי" - "הַשָּׁנָה הַזֶּה לָכֶם הַרְבֵּה חֲדָשִׁים" - this month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year." The *seforim* derive from these words, as well as from many other sources, that there is a tremendous force of *hischadshus* (renewal) in the world during this great month. Nissan is referred to in countless places as the Chodesh of Geulah - the month of salvation. Each Yid has the ability to be reborn through great love and yearning for Hashem during this auspicious period. It was the time that our nation was *zoche* to be liberated from our terrible bondage, in both *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* - and it is therefore an *eis ratzon* for us to be liberated from the struggles of our current *galus* as well.

Nissan is a month that the *paytan* describes (in the *yotzros* for Mussaf) as "יְשׁוּעוֹת בּוֹ מְקִיפּוֹת, הַחֹסִים בּוֹ מְתַקִּיפּוֹת" - "It is surrounded by salvation, and those who place their trust in him are strengthened". Usually, when a person does not rely on his own strength, but instead places himself in the shadow of another as a form of protection, it is a sign of weakness. But here, we are being told that by placing our complete trust in Hashem during this

month - by recognizing that deliverance from our anguish is only in His hands, not our own - we are actually getting strengthened.

It's All About Self-Control

On the tenth day of Nissan, there was a civil war going on in Egypt. The multitudes of firstborn men were outraged by Pharaoh's decision to continue denying the Yidden their request to leave the land. They were terrified that Moshe's predictions would materialize, just as his first nine did - and they had no interest in dying. A large battle ensued, and Egyptians were killing each other left and right. The Meshech Chochma points out that at that time, during the chaotic battle that was taking place all over the land, the Yidden must have felt an immense urge to just make a grand exodus, right then and there. Why should they stick around while Pharaoh and his military were so preoccupied with their own conflict? And yet - not a single Yid moved from his place. They all sat in place, waiting for Moshe Rabbeinu to instruct them to leave.

The Meshech Chochma says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu orchestrated this series of events in order to teach the Yidden discipline. He wanted Klal Yisroel to master the skill of obeying orders and rules; to suppress their own desires and follow the command of authority. Why? Because that is the core mission of Yiddishkeit - subduing the *zich* (the self) and subordinating oneself to the Ribono Shel Olam. If they wished to truly be the Chosen Nation, then they had to acquire this essential trait from the outset.

The Korban Pesach and Self-Control

The Yidden were taught the same lesson with the commandment of the Korban Pesach as well. These people were impoverished slaves for their entire lives; they were given the bare minimum to eat, just so that they would have enough energy to serve their masters. They were accustomed to meager rations and zero time for respite. But then, suddenly, they are being commanded by their new leader to eat a massive feast; each family must consume an entire sheep, roasted to perfection, along with *matzos* and *merorim*. Can you imagine what this must have felt like for them? We're talking about people that never attended a party in their life - not a *vort*, not a *Bar Mitzvah*, not a *chasunah*! It must have been profoundly exhilarating to suddenly be treated to a lavish feast, consisting of luxurious delicacies - not to mention the very fact that they were able to sit around a table and enjoy, instead of being whipped and beaten!

And yet, points out the Ohr Hachaim, they are instructed: “ועצם לא” - do not break a bone of the sacrifice. What’s the message here? Self-control. Subduing one’s desires. Yes, they were entitled to finally eat in peace, but it was precisely at that moment of freedom that Hashem wished to impress upon them this timeless skill: the ability to follow orders and suppress our own desires.

The Chazon Ish used to say that keeping the *mitzvos* teaches us restraint. If a person were to just keep the letter of the law, without any *chumros*, then he would become a master of self-control.

Imagine you walk into a pizza shop, and you order a couple of slices with all of your favorite toppings: mushrooms, fried onions, and extra cheese. Yum! You’re starving, and you just can’t wait to take a bite! But then, you go to wash your hands, and you just happen to notice that there is a large crack in the washing cup... The water appears to be dripping out of the crack - but you’re too busy to investigate. One, two, three - and you already washed your hands, mumbled a bracha and took a large bite.

That’s not the way it should be! As a Yid, you need to work on self-control! If the cup is cracked, and you can’t find another one, then ask them to wrap up the pizza ‘to go’ and head home!

Instant Gratification

Just by adhering to the basics of Halacha, a person learns self-control. This is no easy feat in our current generation; Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt”l* used to say that one of the biggest struggles in modern-day America (and he was saying this half a century ago) is that people always feel the need to fill their wants immediately. If you desire something, you drop everything and get your hands on it right away! We’re not living in a *shtet’l*, where we would have to make do with the few resources the little town had to offer; we’re living in a country that has every kind of store and restaurant within reach. And especially these days, when people can order almost anything without even leaving their homes - it’s almost impossible to not follow your heart’s desires on a moment’s notice. But this has to be our *avodah*; we have to recognize that Yiddishkeit is all about self-control. If you have a sudden craving for a specific type of food, or you desperately want a certain new product that just hit the market - take a deep breath. Think: “Do I really need this luxury right now?” Even if the desire is perfectly *muttar*, a person has to train himself to not always get his desires the split-second he decides that he wants them.

There's another reason why this is a big struggle for us in modern society. Let's say a person loves Coke, but he's diabetic, and consuming that amount of sugar would be detrimental to his health. Modern society says: no problem! We've developed a new invention just for people like you! It's called Diet Coke. This way, you can maintain the pleasure of drinking Coke, without sustaining adverse health effects. It's amazing, right? The problem with it is, society has limited our opportunities to control our desires. They have restricted the amount of times that a person has to simply say "no". There's always another way to experience the desired pleasure. This makes it harder for us as Yidden to suppress our desires the way we used to in previous generations.

Chinuch and Saying 'No'

You know, today there are many therapists and social workers that preach that parents should never use the word 'no'. Saying 'no' to a child is too negative, they say. "We can't be cruel to our children; we have to only say positive words of encouragement! Anything that sounds even slightly harsh only traumatizes the poor child and hurts him in the long run," they teach in their so-called 'parenting' seminars. I say, spare the child from having a miserable life, and don't listen to these people! A child must be taught how to accept a 'no'. Otherwise, they are crippled for their entire lives. When their employer fires them, they become depressed and they begin feeling extremely inadequate. When their spouse doesn't approve of something they do, and asks them to stop, they fly into a rage. Why? Because they were never taught self-control. They were never taught to curb their immediate wants when that's the right thing to do.

There was a Levaya in Brooklyn for the mother of Rav Fruchthandler - she had passed away at the age of 99. Shortly before she was niftar, her son came to be at her side in the hospital. She looked at him and said, "You look exhausted. Go home and get some rest."

"No, I can't go. I came here to care for you," he answered.

You know what she did? She gave him a smack! A 99 year old woman! "M'zugt nit 'nein' tzu a mammeh (we don't say 'no' to a mother)!" she told him.

But today, the child will be in a full-blown tantrum - lying on the floor, smashing dishes and kicking anyone that comes near him - and they'll tell you, "His feelings are very complex right now. He's going through a 'stage'. Don't tell him off; just give him positive words of encouragement and empowerment." And of course, they will never let you *potch* him. Oh no, that's

child abuse. "You're gonna give him all kinds of phobias and traumas," they'll tell all of these parents, who just drink in their words of wisdom and accept them wholeheartedly. Ridiculous! If you do that, you're impairing him for the rest of his life. You must discipline him. That's the only way he will end up a productive, functional human being - and a Yid that is capable of keeping the Torah properly.

Of course, too much scolding and smacking is bad for the child; but that's why we have a Torah, which teaches us to do it in moderation. You need a "שמאל דוהה וימין מקרבת" - you have to use soft words of encouragement, but strictness is absolutely necessary when it is called for.

Enjoyment Has its Own Time and Place

Yes, the Gemara in Chullin (109b) does say that for everything that the Torah prohibited, Hashem created a similar enjoyment that is actually *muttar*. But there is a big difference between that Gemara and modern-day society. For example, the Gemara says that for a person that wants to taste *Basar B'chalav*, there is the option of eating a *k'chal* - a cow's udder, which has a similar taste, provided that it is prepared properly. If a person wants to taste *chazir* - he can eat a *mocha de'shibutta*, the brain of a certain fish, which has a similar flavor. But these things aren't easily attainable; they require work and preparation. The Gemara is teaching us that Hashem wants us to enjoy what the world has to offer - but only in the proper time and setting. In today's world, however, we can get whatever we want instantly: every flavor, sugar-free or filled with sugar, caffeinated or decaf, *parve* or *milchigs* and so on - all readily available at a moment's notice! If you're out of town, and you're in the mood of a fresh, hot supper - there's always a takeout just a few minutes away.

I'm not saying that these things are all bad, and all the restaurant owners should close-up shop and find a different line of work; I'm just saying that the overall environment makes it much more difficult for us to control our instantaneous desires, and we must be wary of that. Each one of us has to implement a structure, for ourselves and for our families, that limits the flow of instant gratification to our doorstep. Just because you *can* order pizza every Motzei Shabbos, it doesn't mean that you *have* to. It would be far more healthy for your family if you train them to not have the need to get their hands on everything that's available on a whim.

Yeridah Letzorech Aliyah

The Gemara in Shabbos says that Rav Elazar Ben Arach once traveled to a city that was known for its many bathhouses and quality wines.

However, "אמשך בתרייהו" - he got schlepped into their culture. By the time he got back to the Yeshiva, and they gave him an *aliyah*, instead of reading "החרש היה לכם" - which we will be *leining* this week - he read, "החודש הזה לכם", which literally means: their hearts became deaf. The Rabbonim were all crying when they saw what a strong effect the *yeridah* had on him - that he couldn't remember how to read a basic *pasuk* in the Torah.

The Sfas Emes says that Rav Elazar's original intention was to have a *yeridah letzorech aliyah* - a downward movement for the purpose of going back up, even higher than before. Oftentimes, a *yeridah letzorech aliyah* can be a necessary step for continual growth; in fact, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to say that this is one of the primary purposes of *bein hazmanim* for *bachurim* and *kollel yungerleit*. After taking a short break from the full-day schedule of yeshiva life, they often return to their regular *sedarim* with more vigor and excitement. However, Rav Elazar was "אמשך בתרייהו" - he got too comfortable and familiar with the relaxed and enjoyable culture that was present in the city he was visiting.

Taking a break can be risky. If we aren't careful enough, we can get hooked on the new atmosphere we are living in, and have a very hard time climbing out. Instead of the temporary sojourn in the hotel being a *yeridah letzorech aliyah*, it can just remain a *yeridah*, where the person's spiritual growth meets a bitter end. It all comes back to what we were discussing before regarding the Gemara in Chullin; it's true that Hashem wants us to enjoy His beautiful world in every way possible, but there is a time and place for everything. If the unwinding and relaxing is being done in moderation, then it can be beneficial; but if it's done in order to obtain instant gratification - or excessively without proper boundaries and limits - then it can be a Yid's greatest downfall.

To subscribe to the weekly *shmuess* by email,
for audio recordings of the *shmuessen*,
Or for the new book *Lighting the Way*
Call / Text 848-299-7212
or email: ohrpneimoshe@gmail.com