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מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת וישב – חנוכה

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הרב ר' שמואל יוסף בן ר' שלום
שכנא גודפרינד זצוק"ל
ע"י אחד מבני המשפחה

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Chanukah: The Last Ray of Light After the Yamim Nora'im

The following *pasuk* appears at the end of the *Haftarah* of Parshas Vayeshev: אריה שאג מי לא ירא - "The lion is roaring; who does not tremble in fear?"

The *meforshim* teach us that the word Aryeh in this *pasuk* is an acronym for the days in the year that are filled with fear and trepidation: Aleph is for Elul, Reish is for Rosh Hashanah, Yud is for Yom Kippur, and Hey is for Hoshana Rabbah.

We all know that the days of Elul are designated for *teshuva* and self-reflection. On Rosh Hashanah, we focus on dedicating ourselves to the true King, *Hakaodsh Baruch Hu*, through committing to maintain our *teshuva* and remaining in our newfound state of elevation. On Yom Kippur, we *daven* and yearn for our new level of *ehrllichkeit* to be sealed and confirmed for the coming year. And of course, eleven days after we officially sealed our fates, the *chazzan* gets up by the *amud* and once again begins singing the familiar tune of the *Yamim Nora'im*; it's Hoshana Rabbah, a day we ask for a *gutte kvittel* - yet another chance to lock in our repentance.

But the Chasam Sofer teaches us that it isn't completely over after Hoshana Rabbah. There's still one last ray of light that extends itself all the way until... Chanukah.

A Time to Reflect on our Commitments

The following story can help illustrate this idea:

A newlywed Ponevezh yungerman once approached Rav Chatzkel Levinstein, the Ponevezher Mashgiach, and informed him that he was extremely displeased with his new wife. Rav Chatzkel was surprised; this yungerman was barely married for a half a year.

"What's the matter with your shalom bayis?" He inquired.

"I don't think my wife is very honest," the yungerman responded flatly. "When we were dating each other, we had agreed upon certain standards - that I would be learning night seder every night, Friday afternoons, Motzei Shabbos - I would be able to retain my hasmadah. But now, she began tweaking all of the agreements; she wants me to learn night seder at home, she's been asking me for help on Fridays... Our commitments are falling apart very quickly. She's just not being honest with me."

Rav Chatzkel thought for a moment. "Indeed, we must discuss this." Then he said, "Tell me some of the kabbalos you made during this past Ellul."

Unsure of where his Rebbe was headed with this, he began to recount some of his lofty, well-meaning kabbalos.

So Rav Chatzkel asked him, "Nu, are you keeping to these commitments?"

The yungerman quickly began offering excuses. "These were difficult kabbalos, Rebbe... I am trying as hard as I can..." He paused. "But I am definitely not doing them in totality yet."

Rav Chatzkel smiled. "Then I think you and your wife are a great Shidduch," he said. "You began to notice that some of your commitments were just too much for you - and so did she."

We should be viewing Chanukah as a reflection point, similar to what this *yungerman* was

being taught about by Rav Chatzkel. It's been a little over two months since the *Yamim Nora'im*-where are we holding? What has become of our commitments? Forget about reaching new *madreigos* for a second - are we at all the way we envisioned ourselves during *Ne'ilah*?

It's fascinating to note that the three *parshiyos* that we *lein* during the weeks of the *Yamim Nora'im* are Nitzavim, Vayelech, and Ha'azinu. There are 30 days in Elul - and it just so happens that there are 30 *pesukim* in Parshas Vayelech. There are 40 days from the beginning of Elul until Yom Kippur - and there are 40 *pesukim* in Nitzavim. There are another 12 days from Yom Kippur to Hoshana Rabbah (including Yom Kippur itself), and when that is combined with the 40 aforementioned days, you have 52 - the same as the number of *pesukim* in Parshas Ha'azinu.

Now, how many days are there from Elul until Chanukah? Astonishingly, the answer is 112 - exactly the same as the number of *pesukim* in Parshas Vayeshev, the Parsha that is always read right before Chanukah!

Knowing all of this, we should all be able to finally draw the connection between all of these facts - the fact that the last verse in the Haftarah of Parshas Vayeshev is the famous call of *אריה שאג מי לא ירא*; the lesson from the Chasam Sofer that Chanukah is, in a sense, the culmination of the *Yamim Nora'im*; the fact that the *pesukim*-count of these *parshiyos* all seem to line up with the times of *teshuva* that they are being read in - it all has an underlying message. It teaches us that Chanukah is the time to look back at our goals and aspirations from the holiest days of the year, and see how we've been faring. It's the time to realign ourselves with our commitments and to decide what we should realistically be doing at this point in order to truly achieve greatness.

Yosef's Accusations: Slight Changes can Lead to Disastrous Results

The Ohr Hachaim on Parshas Vayeshev asks a question about the following *pasuk*: It says, "ויוסף היה רועה את אחיו בצאן", literally meaning that Yosef was pasturing his brothers with the sheep. This *pasuk* seems to be somewhat misworded; it should say, "היה רועה הצאן עם אחיו", that he was pasturing the sheep along with his brothers.

From this *pasuk*, along with the following few *pesukim*, the Ohr Hachaim derives the three cases of *lashon hara* that Yosef spoke about his brothers.

1. Firstly, he says that the words really mean, "Yosef was pasturing with his brothers - and they were involved with the sheep," meaning that they were discussing the status of the livestock. This is alluding to the brothers' discussion of whether or not the sheep were prohibited as *אבר מן החי*. That was Yosef's first accusation of the brothers - that they were consuming food that was Halachically considered to be *אבר מן החי*.
2. Afterward, it says, "והוא נער את בני בלהה". This can't be taken literally; Yosef was no *נער*, he was already 17! So, the Ohr Hachaim learns that this is referring to the fact that when Yosef was *younger*, he used to gravitate towards the *bnei hashfachos*, because the *bnei Leah* used to tease and provoke them. This was the second case of *lashon hara*.
3. The third one is an extremely powerful message. Why weren't the brothers giving the *bnei hashfachos* proper respect? It was because they kept on referring to them as "children of maidservants". This showed that they believed that Bilha and Zilpah were not really *נשי אביו*, their father's wives, as Yosef had correctly viewed them. Rather, they believed that the *shfachos* were just slaves, which also meant that their relationship with Yaakov wasn't considered to be a real marriage, but rather like *mefutim* - coerced relationships; this would mean that they weren't prohibited under the *issur* of *ערויות*. Here is where Yosef got his third case against

the brothers: they were contemplating being *מזנה* with Bilha and Zilpah, being that they weren't actually married to the *shevtim's* father.

Now, if we closely examine the words of the Ohr Hachaim where he describes Yosef's last charge against the brothers, it seems as though the mere fact that they were changing the *shfachos'* status was already a breach in the prohibition of *גילוי עריות*. Even if they weren't actually contemplating sin, the fact that they were leaving the door open for a *heter* to be *מזנה* was already a sin in and of itself.

This is rather perplexing; these are the *שבטי י-ה* we're talking about! Surely they were nowhere near *znus* or anything of the like. So how can their poor choice of wording be used as an indication that they were intending to commit a capital sin?

The answer is an extremely fundamental point.

Lofty people don't allow even the slightest changes to take place in areas of *עבודת השם*. When we change anything we do, even unassuming, seemingly unimportant nuances - then we open the door for failure.

The Reform movement, which today defies many of the basic tenets of Yiddishkeit, all began with very slight changes. You know what the first thing they changed was? Not some of the Melech Shabbos. Not Hilchos Yichud or anything like that. They actually made one tiny amendment in the siddur: That when one is reciting Yekum Purkon, the tefillah that we say after krias hatorah on Shabbos, he only has to recite one of the two paragraphs - although the minhag was always to say both when davening b'tzibbur and only one when davening b'yechidus. Sounds like a minor detail, right? But it was the kickoff for the terrible Reform movement as we know it today.

When you make slight changes, anything can follow. And the truth is, this is one of the biggest *yesodos* of Chanukah.

Yehudis and Eliforni: the Effect of Slight Changes

There is an eye-opening Rama in Hilchos Chanukah that teaches us this very point.

Growing up, we all heard the story of Eliforni and Yehudis. Eliforni was one of the most powerful generals in Antiochus's army. He was a ferocious warrior; he could tear a person apart in a matter of seconds. Everyone was terrified of him.

Someone living in Lakewood recounted his memories of his brother, who was once in the United States Military. When this brother of his returned home following the Korean War, they quickly realized that he had to sleep in a locked room at night. He had trained so intensely while in the army to the point that his immediate reflexes could be lethal. He had learned to assume that any sudden interference in the middle of his sleep could be an attack from the enemy, and his swift reaction was to kill the attacker. This was becoming quite dangerous for his family, and they insisted on him locking his door at night to avoid anyone getting seriously hurt.

Now, Eliforni was the general over one of the most vicious forces on the planet at that time, and his reflexes were probably far more dangerous than that of a modern-day American soldier, who was trained during a period in which human life is regarded with far more caution. So we can only imagine how terrifying it must have been for Yehudis to approach him.

So, what did she do? She fed him a large amount of extremely salty feta cheese. This kind of cheese can *really* make someone thirsty. When he began asking for something to drink, she took out

a large bottle of wine. At first, he resisted - he was a general, and he needed to be totally alert at all times. But eventually, the thirst got to him, and with no water in sight, he began to succumb to the alluring wine. One cup led to another, and before he knew it, he was dead drunk. During his stupor, Yehudis removed his sword from its sheath and promptly beheaded him.

The Midrash Antiochus teaches that Eliforni drank more wine in that one sitting than he drank in his entire life. This doesn't mean that he drank gallons and gallons of wine; rather, the few bottles that he drank were far more than he ever did before - because he was a vigilant warrior, always totally alert and prepared for battle. But because he broke his own rule and began to drink - things got completely out of control, and led to his defeat.

So how do we commemorate this story? The Rama tells us of the *minhag* to eat מאכלי חלב - dairy foods on Chanukah, to remember Yehudis and the salty feta cheese. But this is strange - didn't Eliforni's demise come about primarily thanks to the wine? Maybe we should have a *minhag* to drink lots of wine on Chanukah?

The answer is obvious: when we make a small change in our boundaries, we can experience disastrous results. What killed Eliforni was his consumption of all that cheese; had he been more cautious with his *geder* of not drinking wine, then he would have made sure to not eat salty foods when there was no water around. He should have avoided any slight possibility of tempting himself to drink wine.

Staying Out of the Yetzer Hara's Grasp

In our lives, we can't wait for the test to come and then attempt to fight it head-on. Once we are already in the same room as the *yetzer hara*, then our safety is terribly compromised, and we have a high risk of being defeated. We have to put strong boundaries in place that keep us far away from the *nisayon* itself.

Remember the *shevatim* and their poor choice of words? This Rama is the key to understanding the Ohr Hachaim - the term '*bnei hashfachos*' was the *shevatim*'s salty cheese. Once they labeled their brothers as children of maidservants, they had opened the door for *znus* with Bilha and Zilpah, effectively placing themselves in the *nisayon*. They were now in the *yetzer hara*'s arena, and that itself is already to some degree considered a sin.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to preach about this all the time: "סחור סחור אמרינן לנזירא", we tell the *nazir* to go around the vineyard, and not to get anywhere near it; this is the only way to remain pure, devoid of all sin.

Imagine there's a heavy smoker who wants to totally quit his unhealthy habit, and he says, "I'm never going to smoke a cigarette again; but I will, however, keep a pack in my pocket at all times. This way, I can, you know, offer people cigarettes when they need one... Or perhaps just prop one in my mouth every now and then, just for the look..." This fellow is out of his mind. Of course, he will cave to his desire in a couple of days! He never eradicated the test!

*Let's say a person is mekabel to wake up earlier in the mornings to learn or say some Tehillim, or maybe even just to daven at an earlier minyan. This would be a beautiful accomplishment indeed, but if he continues to go to sleep at very late hours - then he is leaving himself no chance for growth! The only way to defeat the *nisayon* of sleeping in is by actually getting some more sleep!*

How about a fellow who loves schmoozing with his chavrusa? They just get along great, they view the world very similarly, and they just have so much to talk about. The solution is not to keep

saying, 'alright, we have to curb the schmoozing', and keep on failing again and again. The solution is to eliminate the nisayon and go get a new chavrusa!

This is why we daven “ואל תביאני לא ידי ניסיון”, we are beseeching of Hashem to help us stay out of the *yetzer hara's* realm, to be able to stay far away from his grasp; to help us maintain our boundaries.

Chanukah: Preparation for a Mitzvah

On Chanukah, we also learn the idea of *Hachana*, preparation for a Mitzvah. The actual lighting of the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash was actually כשר בור - the average Yid can perform this holy *avodah*, regardless of his lineage. But what about הטבת הנרות - the preparation of the candles? That had to be done specifically by a *kohen*. Why is this?

The *Chassidishe Rebbes* throughout the generations have used this as a lesson for the importance of the preparation for a *mitzvah*. Putting ourselves in the proper mindset before performing the action completely transcends the good deed itself. With the proper prep, the *mitzvah* is done with so much more meaning, so much more *kavanah*, granting us so much more *schar* in the World to Come. In fact, the Mesillas Yesharim discusses the importance of *hachana* at length in the chapters of the trait of *Tahara* - Purity.

Additionally, we can tie this factor of Chanukah in with our lesson of boundaries. The same way Chanukah teaches us how sacred our preparation is for good actions, so too we must understand the paramount importance of our preparation for avoiding *aveiros*. This seems to be one of the underlying themes of Chanukah - our *hachanos* are of supreme importance. When we mess around with our preparations, our *gedarim*, our distance from sin - then we fall into the *yetzer hara's* trap for bad actions, and our *mitzvos* suffer the consequences as well. We must be vigilant; we must be prepared.

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