

אור פני משה

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

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פרשת כי תשא

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

פרשת כי תשא

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וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נָא מִצְאֵתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיהָ ה', יִלְךְ נָא ה' בְּקִרְבָּנוּ כִּי עַם קָשֶׁה עֲרָף הוּא (שמות ל"ד ט')

And he said, "If I have please found favor in Your Eyes, let Hashem please go within our midst, for it is a stiff-necked nation!"

Emulating Hashem's Middos

In the story of the *Cheit Ha'Eigel*, the Torah teaches us tremendous lessons for our lives. Let us analyze the story as seen in the pessukim, and from there, we will be able to learn the *nekudos* that are applicable to our lives.

The Devastating Consequences of the Cheit Ha'Eigel

After Klal Yisroel committed the *Cheit Ha'Eigel*, all truly seemed lost for Klal Yisroel. They had committed a terrible atrocity – making a form of an animal in a manner that resembled *avodah zarah*, not even 40 days after the unparalleled revelation of Hashem during *Matan Torah*. Moreover, they had the tremendous *chutzpah* to utter the words אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל / "This is your god, who took you out of Mitzrayim." Hashem was so angry about their action that He told Moshe that the 'deal' was over. Hashem desired no connection to a nation who could do such an act. הִנֵּיחָה לִי / "Leave Me be," Hashem told Moshe. "I am destroying them, and I will begin a new nation from you!"

Moshe understood that his job at that time was not to 'leave Hashem be'. He begged Hashem with all his strength to annul the decree of destruction. "Please," Moshe began, "this nation has sinned greatly by making a god of gold. But You, Hashem, remember the *zechus* of the *Avos*, and forgive the nation!"

Moshe was successful in his *tefillah*, and Hashem forgave the nation. However, it was not a forgiveness of goodwill and love, but rather a somber forgiveness, with notes of lingering grudge and bitterness. "Tell the nation that I have forgiven them. However, although they are forgiven, but the relationship is no longer. My *Shechinah* will not join with them as was originally in the plan. Instead, I'll send them a *malach* to lead them into Eretz Yisroel. Go now to Eretz Yisroel with the *malach* in front of you."

Hashem's Forgiveness

Moshe Rabbeinu, of course, would not be satisfied with such an arrangement. He continued to plead with Hashem to restore the relationship that originally existed between Hashem and the Bnei Yisroel. Ultimately, Moshe's *tefillos* combined with the *teshuvah* of Klal Yisroel, reached their goal. Hashem revealed to Moshe the 13 Attributes of Mercy, and Hashem indeed restored the original state that existed. Once again, there would be a *Mishkan*, and the *Shechinah* would dwell in their midst.

From the words of the Ohr Hachaim in the parshah, we perceive even a deeper understanding of the dimension of the complete forgiveness that the Bnei Yisroel ultimately attained. As explained in detail in the footnote,¹ the Ohr Hachaim demonstrates how Hashem

¹ The Ohr Hachaim focuses on a seeming contradiction in the *pesukim*:

When Hashem originally informed Moshe that He would not be keeping His *Shechinah* in their midst, Hashem added some words of appeasement. "אמור אל בני ישראל אתם עם קשה עורף" / "Tell the Bnei Yisroel that **you are an a stiff-necked people**. Even just an instant of having My *Shechinah* within your midst is terribly risky for you, because the slightest deviation will cause you to be destroyed. Because of your stiff-necked nature, in which you will easily fall into sin, it is more advantageous for you to have a *malach* travel with you, rather than the actual *Shechinah*."

When Moshe davened to have the *Shechinah* remain with them, he used the very same logic as a reason that they should have the *Shechinah* amongst them! "ועתה ילך נא אדני בקרבנו כי עם קשה עורף הוא" / "And now, let Hashem travel among us, **because it is a stiff-necked people**." How can the same reasoning be used both as an argument against their having the *Shechinah*, as well as an argument in favor of it?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that this second passuk is actually saying the opposite message of what it seems to be saying superficially. Moshe was not davening for more of a revelation of Hashem's Presence, but for less. This is evidenced by the fact that when we focus on this passuk of Moshe's request, we will see that he did not ask that the Name of יקוק should travel with them, representing the full measure of Mercy. Rather, Moshe davened that the Name of א-ד-נ-י, representing a certain measure of justice should go with them.

Moshe, then, was not asking that the full, open revelation of Hashem, in all His goodness and mercy, should accompany them, but rather that a lesser revelation should come with them. In this more hidden revelation, there would be an element of *Din*. Why was Moshe asking for this? Because they are an **עם קשה עורף / a stiff-necked people** – who will quickly come to abuse any level of closeness to Hashem that is granted them. Moshe understood that for the welfare of the Nation, it was necessary for a limited revelation of Hashem to be in place, in order that the *Middah* of *Din* associated with this would keep the Bnei Yisroel in check.

eventually acceded to lead the Bnei Yisroel with such great *Rachamim*, to the point that Moshe felt that it would be too much for the Bnei Yisroel. To prevent a situation where the Bnei Yisroel would feel a certain level of freedom to act as they wished without the proper measures of restraint and *Yiras Shamayim*, Moshe felt compelled to ask Hashem to temper the *Rachamim* with a measure of *Din*.

The All-Encompassing Nature of HaKadosh Boruch Hu's Forgiveness

What progression emerges from the sequence of events in the *parshah*? First, HaKadosh Boruch is 'prepared' to unleash His full *Middah* of Fury at Bnei Yisroel. In slow increments, Hashem begins to accede to Moshe's demands, first allowing them to enter Eretz Yisroel immediately with the guidance of a *malach*, and afterward agreeing to lead the Nation directly. The final result is that Hashem is willing to go so far for Bnei Yisroel, until Moshe is compelled to daven to Hashem saying that it is too much. How much Hashem allowed Himself to be appeased by Moshe Rabbeinu and Klal Yisroel! Such frightful anger, and then such loving and willing forgiveness.

To attempt to arrive at a greater understanding of the enormous *chessed* of Hashem in this story, let us present the following *machal*:

Suppose you are walking one day, when you spot a bachur, Shimon, wandering in the streets. You are fully aware of Shimon's story. He comes from a troubled home, and he was never able to make it in his school years. He was always being thrown out of class, causing a constant tension between himself and his teachers. As he grew into his teenage years, he never did well in any yeshiva. No one wanted to be his chavrusa, and he soon began getting himself into trouble there as well. He was thrown out of several yeshivos, until he was left without any place who would take him. He now wandered the streets aimlessly, accomplishing nothing in his life.

You see this boy one day as he is hanging around in the streets, and your heart goes out to him. You begin speaking with him, inquiring about the details of his situation. You then beckon to Shimon.

"Come with me," you say. "I am going to help you."

From there on in, you do everything you can on behalf of Shimon. You bring him to a Mesivta in which you feel he can succeed with the proper chizuk, and you plead with the hanhallah to accept

him. You then speak to a few of the better bachurim in the yeshivah, and you ask them to befriend this boy and encourage him. You find him proper chavrusas, who will influence him to focus on his learning. You constantly inquire after him, making sure that he is on a path of improvement. Soon enough, Shimon begins blossoming. He is transformed into a serious boy, and with time, he is considered a fine bachur.

Your help does not end there. When the time comes for Shimon to get married, you take an active involvement in his shidduchim. It is not so easy to find a shidduch for a boy with such a background, but with toil and perseverance, you land him a beautiful shidduch. You do not limit your help to the social and practical areas, but you extend it to the financial aspect as well. You undertake all the expenses of the chasunah, and you find him a suitable place to live. You continue to assist him, seeing to it that he has the proper parnassah. You eventually bring him into your business, and after a time you grant him the position of CEO in your own company.

Sometime after these last developments occur, you happen to overhear a phone conversation that Shimon is having. As you listen, your heart almost stops beating. You realize that Shimon is on the phone with the president of the company that is your long-time competitor. Shimon is now divulging all your own company's secrets, one by one, to the competitor. It sounds as though Shimon is involved in a conspiracy with the competitor to destroy your company.

You walk over to Shimon in a state of crazed fury. In a shaking voice, you hiss at him, "After all that I've done for you, this is how you repay me? I took you out from the depths of despair, from the bottom of a deep pit. I brought you to such hatzlacha. I sacrificed so much of myself for you. I really desired your achievements, and I gave my heart, soul, and checkbook, for it. I do not ask for your thanks, but to go and destroy me?! How can you do this? Where is some level of appreciation?"

You conclude your message to Shimon. "WRINGING YOUR NECK OFF WOULD NOT EVEN BE ENOUGH FOR ME. I CAN NEVER BE FINISHED WITH MY ANGER TOWARD YOU. AS OF NOW, YOU JUST GET OUT OF MY LIFE – COMPLETELY. MOVE TO ANOTHER CITY, AND SEE TO IT THAT WE NEVER, EVER, AGAIN CROSS PATHS. GOODBYE!"

Hashem's Kindness to Klal Yisroel

The above *mashal* is but a miniscule attempt at capturing the level of the wrongdoing that Klal Yisroel had done during the *Cheit Ha'Eigel*. Klal Yisroel had been a people at the brink of destruction. They were utterly trapped and imprisoned in a foreign country, enslaved to their hosts for over a century. They faced horrible tortures and cruelties at the hands of their masters, with no one who would stand up in their aid. They were gradually drifting away from their traditions from the *Avos*, as they began imitating the ways of *Avodah Zarah* that they observed in Mitzrayim. The situation could not have been bleaker for them.

Into this situation, Hashem stepped in, and completely lifted up the Bnei Yisroel. Hashem exacted a complete revenge on the Mitzrim, and Hashem began the process of raising the yidden to their glorious heights. Hashem nourished them in a miraculous manner, and they felt Hashem's constant Presence. At Har Sinai, the 'marriage' of Klal Yisroel began, with the eventual *Mishkan* a completion of the process. Hashem had literally lifted the Bnei Yisroel out of a deep abyss into the very *Shamayim*.

How did Bnei Yisroel repay Hashem's utter, infinite *chesed*? By making an *Eigel*, which at the very least, bore some form of resemblance to *Avodah Zarah*! They betrayed Hashem for another god! The lower ones among them even had the *chutzpah* to declare that this image had taken them out of Mitzrayim! We can almost sense the justice of Hashem's *Middah* of terrible rage against them. This was not simply a slackening in their *Avodas Hashem* and in the quality of their *mitzvos*. This was a downright betrayal. Surely, Hashem would be ready to take terrible measures *r"l*. Even should there be Mercy granted to them, certainly the relationship would be gone. How could Hashem go back to choosing and desiring the Nation that had behaved in this manner?

How does this story conclude? Not simply with Hashem agreeing not to punish the Bnei Yisroel, but with far more than that. Hashem was so agreeable to the Bnei Yisroel, to the point that Moshe Rabbeinu felt compelled to protest that it was too far. Hashem allowed Himself to be totally, completely appeased and mollified, until the relationship was as strong as it was originally.

Learning from Hashem's Middah

The lesson for us is clear. We are meant to train ourselves to emulate the *middos* of Hashem to whatever extent we are capable. Usually, this means to us that we must be ready to forgive those who have wronged us. However, as we have demonstrated from the *parshah*, the

obligation extends far more than that. We must be willing to completely drop and abandon all feelings of negativity and resentment, and begin anew as best of friends.

We do not refer here to a scenario in which the guilty party has not acknowledged his wrongdoing. In such a situation, it is very difficult for the wronged party to simply ignore and overlook the wrongdoing, and indeed, we cannot say that he is obligated to do so.² However, when the guilty party does acknowledge his guilt, that is the time when forgiveness and even friendship are demanded of us.

Reuven has wronged Shimon in a significant manner, and there has been a heated machlokes between them for some time. Reuven refuses to have any connection to Shimon, and he has even switched shuls on this account.

After some time, Shimon begins to regret his deed, and he decides that he will attempt to make amends. He makes his way to Reuven's home, and he knocks on the door. When Reuven answers, Shimon apologizes sincerely and begs Reuven's forgiveness.

"Please can we begin anew," he says. "I know I have wronged you, and I regret it. Let us be friends again."

Reuven regards Shimon with a look of irritation and disgust. "Do you suppose that we will ever be friends again? Sorry, but think again. Next time you can think twice before doing something like that to me!"

This behavior is what the Torah teaches us to be inherently wrong. We must learn from HaKadosh Boruch that when the offending party acknowledges his guilt, it is then time to move past the feelings of anger. We must be willing to overlook and swallow all our previous feelings of resentment, and to begin a new period of reconciliation and friendship. True, it is difficult to wipe away our negativity, but that is where *middos of bein adam l'chaveiro* obligate us.

Even when it seems to us that the *avlah* that was done was enormous, and that it is completely unforgivable, we must still bring ourselves to forgiveness.

² There is a *midas chassidus* to act this way and forgive immediately, based on the recognition that whatever happens to a person in this world is decreed by Hashem, and that the other individual was merely a pawn in Hashem's hands.

'How can I ever forgive that man? He singlehandedly ruined my business/yeshivah/shtellar/shidduch?!'

'After everything I've done for Mr. Greenstein, this is what he says about me? Where is his decency?!'

We need to remember that whatever was done to us will not come to the level of offense that we perpetrated against HaKadosh Boruch. Indeed, Hashem was at the point of *chas v'shalom* destroying [the enemies of] Klal Yisroel. And yet, when a *teshuvah* was done and forgiveness was asked, Hashem 'allowed' Himself to be gradually swayed and appealed to the point that Moshe had to daven that things were going too far. We, too, must learn to be able move past our deep anger and restore our friendship to the one who wronged us.

ה' ה' – The Double Mention of the Name of *Rachamim*

Let us now focus on the "ג' מדות הרחמים" which Hashem revealed to Moshe. The first two *middos* ה' ה', refer to Hashem's *Middah* of Mercy which is necessary for, and stems from, Hashem's preservation of the entire Creation. Why was this Name said twice? Chazal explain that the second mention of the שם refers to Hashem's Mercy after a person has sinned, whereas the first one refers to Hashem's Mercy that is granted before the sin has been committed. Why is there a need for mercy before the sin has occurred? The Ohr Hachaim offers two explanations for this, from both of which we can learn lessons for our lives:

1. Mercy Even When One is Lacking in Positive *Zechuyos*

The Ohr Hachaim first explains the necessity of this *Rachamim* with the idea that even when a person has not sinned or has cleansed his sins with *teshuvah*, it still not enough. Besides for needing a slate clean of aveiros at the time that one faces his ultimate judgement, a person also requires actual positive merits to stand him through in his trial. The first *Middah* of Mercy is therefore designated for those who do not possess the necessary merits to tide them through their judgement.³

³ For an understanding of this idea that the Ohr Hachaim is telling us, let us present a *maschal* which will portray a person's life in the world.

Avi is in a summer camp in the mountains, when he receives a phone call from his mother informing him that she has sent him a box of homemade cookies. Such a package is quite valuable for a boy in a sleep-away camp, and Avi is only too happy to receive his delivery. However, there is one problem: The

deliverer of the package has left them in an obscure section of the mountains. Although it is only an hour drive away, it will still be extremely difficult to get there. The roads leading to there are largely unpaved and are bumpy and dangerous. A normal vehicle would not even be able to handle driving on those roads. Avi really wants to get the package, but to do so, he must find a way of reaching the house where it is located.

One of Avi's chaverim hears of his dilemma, and he mentions to him that he knows of a truck driver who happens to have near the camp, and may be able to take him. Avi approaches this person, and to his delight, the truck-driver informs him that the next day he was headed to that very town! Avi asks him if he can join him, and he cheerfully agrees.

"Sure, you can come with me," he says amiably, "I'll drive you right where you need. There's no charge; I'll be glad to have some company!"

Avi can't believe his good fortune. The next morning, he davens Shacharis early so he can be ready to leave on time. He doesn't have time for a real breakfast, so he quickly eats a bite of cake and rushes out to be at the designated place where the driver will pick him up. He didn't have time to pack up a lunch, but he has a few cookies and crackers in a bag.

Sure enough, at 7:45 the driver arrives in his truck and Avi leaves with him on their trip. After they had begun driving, the driver informs Avi that he has a few stops to make on the way, but they should be at that town very soon. Avi assures him that it is no problem; he is so thankful to him for taking him along in the first place.

Well, as the driver begins his rounds, an exciting realization soon dawns upon him. He has someone with him in the car who can sit in the driver's seat while he makes his deliveries! No need to find a parking lot or pay for a parking meter; he can double-park.... After all, he has a dummy in the driver's seat! The driver takes full advantage of this rare luxury and tries to fit in as many stops as possible. A delivery here, a pick-up here, etc.

Three hours go by in this manner, and Avi begins to get a little uncomfortable. He clears his throat and mumbles a question about his package that he needs to pick up. "Don't worry," the driver assures him emphatically, "I just have a couple more stops, and we'll be at the place in no time at all!"

A few more hours go by, the driver all the while assuring Avi that they would reach the destination after just a few stops. Avi is getting really hungry, having only the few crackers he had taken with him. He had not been planning on being out a whole day. Shkiah comes and goes, and Avi is forced to daven Minchah without a minyan. At this point, Avi is getting really upset. It was already 8:30 in the evening.

"OK, NUUU, what's with my package?" he demands, "Let's go already!" They leave the stop they were in, and the driver promises Avi that now they are

really heading straight to the package. Just then, the driver receives a call from his wife that there is an emergency, and he needs to come home. He is forced to drive Avi back to the camp without ever having brought Avi to his package. They finally reach Avi's camp at 10:00 that night. Avi is tired, hungry, and completely spent.

As he is dropping Avi off, the driver apologizes to him, and offers to take him again in a few days when he will be returning to that area. Avi, however, is completely fed up. "Do you think I will ever go back with you?" he angrily yells. "I am done with you! I don't ever want to see your truck again!"

The driver tries to protest. "But what's the problem? Did I mistreat you? Did I hurt you? You are completely unharmed. So why are you that upset?"

Avi responds in a rage. "I'll tell you exactly the problem. No, you didn't hurt me or mistreat me. But what you did was even worse. You used me for an entire day, making me a complete shmatta. This was not my usual element where I am accustomed to being; I would much rather have been somewhere else. However, I agreed to come along because I had a goal in mind: to get my package! And yet, you use me a whole day, and in the end, I NEVER GOT MY PACKAGE!"

This lengthy *mashal* is the story of the *neshama's* journey to this world. Hashem gives the *neshama* a specific mission to achieve in this world, for which it will receive a great reward in *Olam Haba*. The *neshama* desires to complete its mission, but it has no method of going about in this world. The *neshama* is then provided with a *guf* which it can utilize to be able to exist in this world and accomplish the tasks it was instructed. The *guf* however, quickly learns to utilize the *neshama* for its own ends. The *neshama* provides it with life, and the *guf* takes full advantage of its life to have as much pleasure and enjoyment as it possibly can.

Every so often, the *neshama* of the person demands that the person should begin accomplishing the mission; reaching heights of perfection in Torah and *mitzvos*, and *tikkun hamiddos*. The *guf* always has another excuse.

"Right now, before I go to yeshiva, I'm still a child. But when I get to Mesivta, boy, will I be a *masmid*!"

He reaches Mesivta but he still cannot bring himself to buckle down and begin learning seriously. "Wait until I reach Bais Medrash," he reassures himself. "Then I'll really change!"

Bais Medrash comes, and he postpones his growth for when he reaches Eretz Yisroel. When he is in Eretz Yisroel, he decides that there are too many exciting trips to take etc. but when he returns home he'll change. Then it is when he gets married. Then it is when he settles down with his *parnassah*. Then when he retires. Then he wants to move to Eretz Yisroel.....

A person will always promise himself that he will change – just not right then.

We, too, must learn to appreciate the sincerity of another individual who requests our friendship and goodwill. We should not have an attitude in which we always need to see actual advantages of befriending another person, and of what the other party is doing for us. Rather, if an individual sincerely offers respect and friendship, we must learn to accept his offer.

2. Hashem Does Not Rescind the Decree of Goodness

The Ohr Hachaim offers a second explanation for the double mention of the Name of Hashem. There are times when it is decreed upon an individual that he will enjoy a certain amount of good fortune in accordance with his proper behavior. What happens, though, if before he receives all his decreed-upon reward, he follows his *yetzer hara*, becoming a full-fledged *rasha*? Does he still reap the benefits of his earlier period of righteousness? The answer, says the Ohr Hachaim, is yes. This is what is hinted at in the Mercy of HaKadosh Boruch both before and after a person sins. The *passuk* is teaching us that the Mercy of Hashem remains after the sin exactly as it was originally.

'First, I need to decide which masechta to learn.' 'I have to see if it is kedai to learn with Tosfos or just with Rashi.' 'Maybe I should try a different perek instead of this one.' 'I think I need to switch chavrusas – then it will really start working out!'

A person can spend years of his life wasted on these decisions, without ever finally buckling down to serious learning.

The person's *neshama* leaves this world at the end of his life completely disgusted with the *guf*. "But what was so bad?" the person tries telling himself. "Was I *mechalel Shabbos*? Did I murder, or commit other terrible *aveiros*? No. So what's the problem?"

And the *neshama* answers him. "No, you didn't commit terrible *aveiros*. But you used me! I never wanted to come to the world, but I agreed for one reason only: so that I could accomplish my mission. You, *guf*, promised to help me. And how did you spend your life? By using it for your own pleasures. You always promised that that you would deliver the goods, AND YOU NEVER CAME THROUGH!"

When we reach Olam Haba, it is so important for us to have real accomplishments with us. True, we must refrain from sinning through which we actually damage our *neshama chas v'shalom*, but we must also reach real achievements as well, in order to accomplish the goals for which our *neshama* was sent into this world.

The Ohr Hachaim explains further that it may be for this reason that we see certain people experiencing tremendous goodness, even when it is clear that their behaviors have taken a sharp turn for the worse. Once Hashem has decreed goodness upon a person, the *Middas Harachamim* may stand for him and allow him to benefit from it even after he no longer deserves it.

We, as well, must keep our commitments to our fellow Jews, which are oftentimes binding even when they have since begun behaving negatively.

In Conclusion

We are obligated to follow in Hashem's ways of Mercy towards the people in our lives. Moreover, as the Gemara tells us, by doing so we secure for ourselves the activation of these Middos from Hashem toward us.

- Let us therefore remember that as terribly as another individual may have harmed us, it is still not comparable to the way Klal Yisroel behaved toward HaKadosh Boruch Hu at the time of the *Eigel*. Yet we see that Hashem was so agreeable to forgive and move on with love and goodwill, once the proper *teshuvah* and regret were displayed. We, too, must allow ourselves to move on when sincerely approached by the other party.
- When we see a sincere desire for friendship, let us not be so exacting over whether the other individual has 'given' anything to us, just as Hashem has Mercy on an individual who does *teshuvah* from his *aveiros*, even when the necessary positive *mitzvos* are not in place. If a person genuinely desires our friendship, let us reciprocate graciously.
- And when we have committed to granting a favor to another person, let us not be so quick to renege on our commitment based on the behavior of the other side. Oftentimes, the proper course of action is to carry through with our own commitments irrespective of the behavior of the recipient, just as Hashem's *Middah* of Mercy dictates that He will bestow the goodness that was decreed upon an individual, even after the person has taken a turn for the worse.

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