

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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פרשת לך לך

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נתנדב לזכות
אחינו בני ישראל הנתונים בצרה
ובשביה

פרשת לך לך

וה' אָמַר אֶל אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרֶד לוֹט מֵעֵמּוֹ, שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שָׂם
צִפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְקִדְמָה וְיָמָה:
(בראשית י"ג י"ד)

How the Presence of Lot Affected Avram

The *parshah* tells us that there was a dispute between the shepherds of Avram and those of Lot. Avram tells Lot that he doesn't want to fight with him; in other words, if the *machlokes* between the shepherds persists, then it is likely to spread and involve their masters as well. And so, Lot chose to go to Sedom.

The *pasuk* then says: וה' אָמַר אֶל אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הַפָּרֶד לוֹט מֵעֵמּוֹ – *And Hashem told Avram after Lot had parted from him*. The Ohr Hachaim points out that really, the *pasuk* should have said these words the other way around – *After Lot left, Hashem spoke with Avram* – but instead, the *pasuk* first says that Hashem began to speak prior to discussing Lot's departure. He explains that this was because Hashem was "יושב ומצפה" – eagerly awaiting the moment that the *rasha* would leave Avram's side, so that He would be able to speak with him once again; Hashem had stopped communicating with Avram ever since Lot began to go sour.

Let's think about this for a moment. Avraham Avinu gave up the most valuable asset in the world – *nevuah*, the ability to talk with Hakadosh Baruch Hu – because Lot was with him. So, Avram was losing out on his connection with Hashem; Hashem was כביכול waiting eagerly for Lot to leave – and yet, Avram didn't attempt to push Lot away. Only when a dispute erupted between the shepherds did he suggest that Lot go on his own way.

Suppose a Yid has a sister whose child is getting married in a Conservative synagogue. He is now faced with a challenging dilemma: on the one hand, he knows it's highly inappropriate for a *frum* Yid to step foot into a Conservative sanctuary, but on the other hand – he doesn't want to hurt his sister's feelings and cause a rift in the family! These kinds of *shailos* need to be asked to the upper echelons of the Torah world; they're not something that the average fellow in Shul can *pasken*. But one thing we can definitely learn from Avram: he went at great lengths to avoid distancing himself from his nephew.

Avram Doesn't Need to Turn Around

The *pasuk* then continues: שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שָׂם – *Lift up your eyes and look from where you are: northward, southward, eastward and westward*. Why was it necessary for Hashem to specify "from where you are"? The Ohr Hachaim says that from here we see that Hashem made a great miracle occur at that moment: Avram was able to see in all four directions without having to move from the spot he was standing in. Hakadosh Baruch Hu took the whole Eretz Yisroel and revolved it around Avram so that he was able to view the entire land without even budging¹.

I still remember how Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l used to react to this Ohr Hachaim. He would gaze around the room, and then turn around to look at the wall behind him. He would then ask: "און אויב" "And if he would have needed to turn around – so what?" In other words, why was this big miracle necessary? Was it too much to ask of Avram to turn around and take in the beautiful view of Eretz Yisroel in a natural way?

¹ וז"ל וראה מן המקום. טעם שהוצרך לומר מן המקום אשר אתה שם, כאן עשה לו נס עצום שיוכל לראות מצפון לדרום וממערב למזרח ממקום אחד מבלי שיוצרך לסובב, עכ"ל.

Doing Hashem's Will B'shleimus

Rav Chaim answered with an eye-opening *yesod*. There are a lot of people who do the right thing sometimes. There are also a lot of people who do the right thing most of the time. But there's nothing like someone who always does it right. When somebody never skips an opportunity at doing Hashem's will, and always makes sure to be where he's supposed to be and do what he's supposed to do – no matter what, no matter when – then he not only *did* what he was expected to, but rather, he achieved *shleimus* in the *inyan*. By having the whole land revolve around Avram, Hashem was teaching him how to do things *b'shleimus* – precisely how Hashem said it, from the place where he was standing.

We all know about the grand praise of Aharon Hakohen in Parshas Beha'aloscha – the *pasuk* says, "ויעש כן אהרן", and Rashi brings the Chazal that add "להגיד שבחו של אהרן שלא שינה" – this is coming to teach us Aharon's praise, that he didn't alter any of the commandments and he carried them out perfectly. The *meforshim* all ask why this was considered a noteworthy praise of Aharon Hakohen; after all, Hashem expressly commanded him to do the *avodah*, so why would he change anything? There are many *tirutzim*, but I want to focus on the one given by Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt"l: the praise of Aharon was that he never missed the opportunity of doing *hatovas haneiros*. A different *kohen* could have done it, but Aharon wouldn't hear of it; he wanted to do the *mitzvah* in a manner of total *shleimus*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz taught us how to learn this Ohr Hachaim. "*Min hamakom asher atah omed shom – bli lesovev*," *From the exact place where you are standing – without turning around*. Says Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz: a person can simply do what Hashem wants him to do, but he can also do it in a manner of *shleimus* – total perfection. By not turning around, and simply moving forward on this new journey without looking back for an instant – Avraham was accomplishing Hashem's will in its entirety, in a manner of complete *shleimus*.

Becoming Satiated with Plain Bread

The same is true when it comes to dedicating our lives to Torah learning to the best of our ability. When we devote ourselves to Torah *b'shleimus*, it has effects of cosmic proportions on every aspect of our lives.

The *pasuk* in Parshas Bechukosai tells us that if we will choose to go in Hashem's ways, ואכלתם, *and you will eat your bread to satiety*. Rashi comments that this *pasuk* can't be read literally, because bread naturally satiates a person; otherwise, what is the special blessing being given in this verse? Rather, the *pasuk* is telling us that even if a person would eat just a small amount of bread, it will fill him as though he had eaten plenty. The Ohr Hachaim offers an alternative explanation: as a general rule, people don't usually feel very satisfied after eating bread on its own without any condiments – or, in the Ohr Hachaim's words, "*shuman*" (*fat*). By giving Klal Yisroel this *bracha*, Hashem was guaranteeing them that bread alone would satiate them, and they would not need to add anything to their meal.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asked on this *pshat* of the Ohr Hachaim: what's the major blessing of not needing to spread some butter on your bread? Is that really such an inconvenience for a person that getting rid of its necessity is worthy of being listed as a grand reward for keeping the Torah?

I would like to answer Rav Chaim's question as follows. The Mishna in the sixth *perek* of Pirkei Avos says: ואם, *and you will eat your bread to satiety*. Rashi comments that this *pasuk* can't be read literally, because bread naturally satiates a person; otherwise, what is the special blessing being given in this verse? Rather, the *pasuk* is telling us that even if a person would eat just a small amount of bread, it will fill him as though he had eaten plenty. The Ohr Hachaim offers an alternative explanation: as a general rule, people don't usually feel very satisfied after eating bread on its own without any condiments – or, in the Ohr Hachaim's words, "*shuman*" (*fat*). By giving Klal Yisroel this *bracha*, Hashem was guaranteeing them that bread alone would satiate them, and they would not need to add anything to their meal.

I heard on this *Mishna* a great story from Rav Chaim Brim Zt"l:

There was once a bachur in Ponevezh who was planning on leaving the yeshiva to go study in a university. Rav Chaim Brim tried dissuading the bachur from leaving the heilige yeshiva

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environment – but to no avail. Eventually, he convinced him to come along with him to see the Chazon Ish.

The Chazon Ish began by asking the bachur about the last line in the aforementioned Mishna: "Tell me, why does the Mishna say "אם אתה עושה כן" - if you will do so? Is there any other option for a person other than living the life described in the Mishna?" The Chazon Ish then continued: "There's an underlying message in the words of this Mishna. If a person would want to argue on these words of Chazal, it would be quite easy: you call this 'fortunate in this world'? An enjoyable life in this world is definitely not achieved in those deprived circumstances! If one wishes to enjoy this world, he must indulge in whatever the world has to offer – not simply eat a measly piece of bread three times a day! Well, therefore the Mishna concludes: אם אתה עושה כן, if you do so. In other words – Chazal weren't interested in debating with us about what is considered an enjoyable life in this world; we would surely win that argument based on our past experiences! Rather, they were asking us to 'do so', to test it out for ourselves! Then we would surely agree that the only true life is one that is all about extreme dedication to Torah!"

Fortunate For You in This World

One of my Rebbeim in the Mirrer Yeshiva, Rav Elya Yurkanski zt"l, was very ill towards the end of his life. My fellow *talmidim* and I used to frequently visit him during that period. I remember how he used to exclaim: "Ah, the best *parnassah* is being a Rebbe!" Had he chosen to join the workforce for a living, he would have retired when he reached his senior years – and when he got old and weak, hardly anyone would come to visit. But as a Rebbe, he always had *talmidim* coming by to ask how he was doing.

You can witness Chazal's promise about an enjoyable life in this world wherever you turn. I was recently at my grandson's a Bar Mitzvah, and I couldn't believe my eyes: the young boys seated around the table were *hondling* in learning! And when their Rebbe walked in, they ran over to him to involve him in the conversation, eager to find out who had the right *pshat* in Tosafos! Can you imagine? Thirteen-year-old boys! When I was that age, I remember what a friend's Bar Mitzvah looked like – we were busy throwing salt and pepper at each other! You even see it when you watch them by recess. Whether they're playing volleyball, basketball, or just schmoozing in the yard – they all look so content. They aren't walking around with their noses down like so many of the secular world's teenagers, *lehavdil*. This is because of the big changes that the *frum* society has gone through over the past few decades; we have made Torah and its study the primary focus of our – and our children's – lives. It has elevated all of us; a truly visible *אשריך בעולם הזה*.

Now, getting back to our discussion: how can the Mishna tell us to eat just bread with salt – doesn't the Ohr Hachaim clearly state that there's no such thing as getting satiated by eating bread without any accompanying spread? Well, here's where I want to say my *chiddush*: the Ohr Hachaim was coming to say *pshat* in this Mishna! You know how a person can subsist on just bread and still have enough energy to dedicate his day to Torah? By keeping the ways of the Torah, a person receives the blessing of becoming satisfied even by merely eating plain, salty bread!

How Did Lot Fail So Miserably?

Let's move on to understanding Lot's enrollment in Avraham Avinu's yeshiva. I think everyone would agree that Avraham Avinu's yeshiva was the best one in the world. I mean, one can argue that it must not be the best one, because he took everyone in – but you can argue that *lemaysa* he threw out Yishma'el, so maybe it was a top yeshiva. But all joking aside – imagine being in a yeshiva run by Avraham Avinu? The *chinuch* there must have been fantastic! And yet – we see that Avram took Lot as a *talmid*. He took him along on his journey; perhaps he even considered him his prized student.

They tell over that an am ha'aretz once came to Rav Akiva Eiger and brought along his teenage son. He asked the Rav if he could take care of his son and make sure he grows in Torah. Rav Akiva Eiger agreed and took the boy in.

What was this *am ha'aretz's* logic? He must have figured that although he didn't have the skills or knowledge to raise his son properly – with Rav Akiva Eiger, he would surely turn out alright. There's no greater or more secure method of *chinuch* than having your son grow up in the house of the *Gadol Hador*!

Let me just finish that story, because it really brings out the *gadlus* of Rav Akiva Eiger:

A short while later, Rav Akiva Eiger wrote a letter to this Yid, informing him that he had arranged chavrusos and living quarters for his son; he was doing great! The problem was, this fellow couldn't read. So he took the letter to his Rav and asked him to read it to him.

*When the Rav began to read the letter, he chuckled. The Yid asked him what he found humorous about the letter, but he shrugged him off. But the *am ha'aretz* demanded an explanation. Noticing that he wasn't going to give in, the Rav explained: "Rav Akiva Eiger addressed you as 'Maran haga'on hamefursam.' I just find it a bit interesting that he referred to you that way."*

About a year later, this Yid went back to see his son and meet with Rav Akiva Eiger. He put the old letter down on the table in front of the gadol and asked: "I don't understand: why did the Rav make fun of me?"

Rav Akiva Eiger was surprised. "I don't know what you're referring to," he replied. When the Yid explained that he thought the Rav was making fun of him by calling him "haga'on hamefursam" when he was clearly an illiterate boor, the tzaddik immediately went to the other room and fetched a stack of letters that were addressed to him. "Look," he said, "they all give me the same title as I gave you. I don't find it insulting; I just always assumed that's the way people write these days, so I address others the same way as well!"

So, getting back to our discussion: with a Rebbe like Avram, how could Lot possibly go wrong? Rashi says that he proclaimed, "I don't need Avram or his G-d!" How did Lot wind up being such a failure of a student?

The Name of the Game is Middos

I think it's a great question – but the answer is even better: in order to be a good *talmid*, you have to have good *middos*. Rabosai, the name of the game is *middos*!

How do I know that Lot didn't have good *middos*? Look no further than the story with the shepherds. How did Lot allow his shepherds to lead their sheep into other people's fields? Besides the fact that it was *gezel* – it was spreading a terrible name for Avram! Here was this *tzaddik* that was becoming known as the trailblazer for rejecting *Avodah Zarah* and believing in one Creator – and you're being indifferent to the fact that your *bashmutzing* his name? And here's another *raya*: why did Lot go straight to Sedom? Once you're leaving Avram – can't you pick a more decent place to go? It was no secret that the people of Sedom were the epitome of evil and they despised good *middos*! It appears from here that Lot was mocking Avram; he displayed a total lack of *hakoras hatov* for all that he had given and taught him and chose to dump all of the good *middos* he had been accustomed to seeing by going straight to the lowest of the low.

I would like to end with a great *marshal* from the Chofetz Chaim:

A balabus wants to sell his wares in the market, so he hires a wagon driver to take all the merchandise to the big city. But he has strong words of warning for the driver: "This merchandise is worth more money than you make in five years. Be extremely careful with it! You hear?" The wagon driver nods obediently and begins his journey.

The beginning of the trip goes very smoothly – until the wagon driver gets a little too comfortable with his control of the situation. "I have these horses in the palm of my hand," he thinks to himself. "They follow whichever way I tug the reins instantaneously; ah, with such good horses – and such a professional driver – it's probably safe for me to doze off for a few minutes. They follow the road instinctively; they won't turn unless my reins tell them to."

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A few moments later, the wagon passed by a sprawling field of fresh grass – and the horses couldn't help grabbing a few bites. Sure enough, one thing led to another – and the whole wagon rolled over into a ditch off the road, causing the costly packages to crash to the ground, shattering into little pieces. When the balabus heard about what happened, he accosted the driver and yelled: "How did you let this happen? Did I not warn you to be extremely careful with my merchandise? I'm ruined!"

The driver shrugged his shoulders. "These horses are always straight as an arrow... I was sure I could dose off for a few minutes!"

"What?" the owner cried out disbelievingly. "You relied on the horses? Are you out of your mind?"

Says the Chofetz Chaim: animals are completely controlled by their instincts; their physical nature is the only factor that governs them. *Malachim* are the complete opposite: they always follow *saichel*; nature doesn't play a role. However, a person has both: he is both the horse and the driver. The 'horse' is the nature, and the 'driver' is the *saichel*. Therefore, our mission is rather straightforward: allow the nature to go on the correct path, and keep the *saichel* in a state of constant vigilance. If we let our minds wander for even a short period of time – the horses may wander off the road. Trusting the nature without recognizing that the mind is the driver is utter foolishness.

The same is true for what we discussed regarding *middos*. If the *middos* are in disrepair – then nothing can keep us on a straight path, not even learning *b'hasmadah* in the best yeshiva under the best Rebbe. The only way to reap the benefits of being surrounded by great Rebbeim and Bnei Torah is by first working on our *middos* and doing our best to perfect them to the highest degree possible.

I once met a 75-year-old who I learned a great deal from. This fellow didn't speak any English; only Russian and some broken Yiddish. He had just one daughter, who was an *almanah* for many years, and one grandson. He himself had *yener machla* and was going for chemotherapy. He had no one to bring him to his appointments, he barely had anyone looking after him other than his daughter, he had very few sources of *nachas*, he never even went to yeshiva, but he was so, so happy. Whenever I saw him, I was astounded by his *simchas hachaim*. He was always thanking Hashem for everything he had given him, always smiling to everyone who walked by; I felt like a worm compared to him. Look how much I have in my life relative to what this poor Yid has – and yet, I'm not dancing in the streets!

Becoming like this Yid starts and ends with *middos tovos*. Let's all strive to be people who love and cherish every moment of the life that Hashem has granted us, and constantly thank Him and sing His praises with a broad smile on our face. And let's do it *b'shleimus* like Avraham Avinu – no matter when, no matter where.

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