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שיחות מוסר על התורה

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פרשת חקת - בלק

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זאת חקת התורה (במדבר י"ט ב')

This is the chok of the Torah

The Chok of the Entire Torah

The *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah* is introduced in the Torah with the words *זאת חקת התורה*/This is the *chok* of the Torah. This *passuk* is conveying to us that the *mitzvah* is a *chok*/a decree; it is beyond our understanding how the same waters can purify those who are impure, and yet cause those who engage in its *Avodah* to become *tamei*. However, the Ohr Hachaim focuses on the language of the *passuk*. Why does it say that this is the *chok of the Torah*, implying that this *chok* is relevant to the entire Torah? Seemingly, this is a single, self-standing *mitzvah*. True, it is a *chok*, but the *passuk* could still have just said 'This is the *chok* of *tumah* and *tahara*'; why does it refer to this *mitzvah* as the *chok* of the [entire] Torah?

The Ohr Hachaim gives two answers to this question:

The Korban Pesach was Brought in Mitzrayim without the Bnei Yisroel Becoming Tahor Beforehand

Firstly, the Ohr Hachaim explains that this *chok* specifically has relevance to the Torah in general. How is this so?

When Klal Yisroel received the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach* while they were in Mitzrayim, they received two accompanying *mitzvos*:

1. They were to withdraw and distance themselves from all forms of *avodah zarah*. This is as per the *halacha* that one who is currently a *מומר*/estranged from Hashem cannot bring a *korban*. Therefore, the Bnei Yisroel needed to remove themselves from *avodah zarah* so they should not be classified as *mumarim* and be disqualified from the *korban*.
2. They were to perform a *bris milah* on themselves. This, too, was in accordance with the *halacha* that an *ערל*/uncircumcised man may not bring a *korban*. In order to qualify for the *korban*, they needed to remove this impediment.

The Ohr Hachaim asks, there should really have been a third *mitzvah* associated with the *korban* as well: Why were they not instructed to purify themselves, as per the *halacha* that one who is *tamei* may not bring a *korban*? True, says the Ohr Hachaim, when the entire community is *tamei*, the *halacha* is *טומאה הותרה בצבור*/the *karbanos* may be brought in the state of *tumah*, and they were thus *halachically* permitted to bring the *Korban Pesach* in Mitzrayim. However, why did Hashem not command them to become *tahor*, while allowing them enough time beforehand to do so, thereby causing them to fulfill the *mitzvah* in the preferred manner?

Before Matan Torah the Bnei Yisroel were not Tamei Mais

The answer to this question is that while the Bnei Yisroel were in Mitzrayim, there was no need for them to purify themselves. This is because in Mitzrayim, they were not *tamei* to begin with. Why? Because the *halacha* is that although Jews become *tamei* when touching a dead body, non-Jews do not. Additionally, even the Bnei Yisroel themselves only acquired their status as the Jewish People when they received the Torah. Hence, in Mitzrayim they were still not susceptible to *tumah*, and they were thus able to bring the *korban* in a state of purity.

The same concept is reflected in another *halacha* of *tumah* as well. When a Jewish person dies, his body attains one of the most severe forms of *tumah*. Not only does the body transfer *tumah* to anyone or to any utensil with which it actually comes in contact, but far more than that. Any area

טומאת אהל – which is under the same roof as the body, becomes filled with the *tumah* of the body. Regarding a *goy*, the opinion of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai is that this *halacha* does not apply. Only actual contact with the body transmits *tumah*; being under the same *ohel* does not.

The Kedusha of Klal Yisroel Makes Them More Susceptible to Tumah

What is the understanding of this phenomenon? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the greater susceptibility of a *yid* to *tumah* is due to the greater *kedusha* inherent within him.

The Ohr Hachaim gives a *mashal* which illustrates this point:

There are two open barrels nearby each other. One of them contains honey, while the other contains waste products. The one containing honey will soon be filled with all sorts of creatures and bugs, causing the barrel to become utterly grotesque and repulsive. The one containing waste, while indeed attracting certain creatures, does not become nearly as disgusting as its counterpart.

Similarly, the tremendous *kedusha* of a *yid* attracts all sorts of forces of *tumah*, which attach themselves as soon as there is any possibility. A *goy*, on the other hand, does not attract the same amount of *tumah*, and his level and potential for *tumah* are thus limited.

Through this concept, the Ohr Hachaim answers the original question. Why is the *mitzvah* of *tumah* and *taharah* relevant to the entire Torah? Because it was only after the Bnei Yisroel's receiving of the Torah that the realities of *tumah* and *taharah* came into existence. 'This is the *chok* of the Torah' – that is, the *chok* which came into being through the receiving of the Torah.

The Yetzer hara Tries Specifically to Entice Klal Yisroel to Sin

This is a lesson which is important for our own lives. The concept of *tumah* is not limited to the actual halachic *tumah* which emanates from a dead body or other such sources of impurity; also included is the *tumah* of the *yetzer hara* and *aveirah*. We must realize that the *yetzer hara* specifically tries to tempt Klal Yisroel, precisely because of our elevated character. We therefore need to be ever watchful and vigilant that we do not get ensnared in the *yetzer hara*'s traps. What may appear to be an innocent idea – or device, can actually be a trap from the *yetzer hara*.

The Kedusha of Klal Yisroel Causes their Neshamos to be more Sensitive and Affected by Tumah

Not only does the *yetzer hara* attempt to trip us more due to the *kedusha* we possess, but we ourselves are actually more affected by the *yetzer hara*'s filth as well. Whereas *goyim* can watch anything they choose, act in as coarse of a manner as they wish, and yet still remain unaffected in their ability to function in their lives, a *yid* cannot function as a proper *eved Hashem* when he is exposed to the *tumah* of the *yetzer hara*. The *kedusha* of Klal Yisroel is understandably more sensitive to anything which is a contradiction to it.

The mashal given to illustrate this concept is the contrast between a coarse, cheap piece of material, and a finely knitted, elegant garment. When would happen if a small amount of grease would be rubbed onto these two pieces of cloth? On the cheap, coarse cloth, the grease would barely be noticed, if at all. On the fine, delicate material, the grease would create an unsightly splotch that would spoil the entire look of the garment. It could not be worn until it is cleaned.

Similarly, on the fine, pure *neschama* of a *yid*, even small impurities are 'visible' and spoil the *kedusha*.

Tumah Prevents a Yid from Cleaving to the Torah

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum z"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir Brooklyn, would point out that there is a fundamental difference between brilliant scholars of other studies, and *lehavdil*, *talmidei chachomim*. Those who are proficient in worldly subjects can become the greatest professors and lecturers etc.,

and yet, how they act in their home is completely irrelevant. They can perform the most despicable or lowly acts and it does not affect what they teach during their 'hours'. After all, what does one have to do with the other? They are experts in their subject matter and therefore they teach it; it has no bearing on whom they themselves are.

With regard to one who learns Torah, however, this is decidedly not the case. '*Ven ehr zet a movie,*' Rav Shmuel z"l would exclaim, '*utter kein blatt Gemara vaist ehr nisht!* (When he sees a movie, he cannot know one blatt of Gemara!) The *kedusha* of Torah cannot exist where there is *tumah*. Perhaps one may gain some abstract pieces of knowledge from the Torah, but he will have no connection to the *kedusha* of Torah, the *simcha* of Torah, or the connection to Hashem that one acquires through Torah. How careful we must be to guard our *kedusha* and not allow ourselves to be drawn after the *tumah* of the *yetzer hara*.

Understanding the Reasons for Mitzvos

The Ohr Hachaim gives a second explanation of the *passuk* as follows: In general, it is commendable and desirable for one to understand the reasoning behind the *mitzvos* that he performs. Through this, he can concentrate and focus on the meaning and the goal of the *mitzvah*, and his service to Hashem will be deepened. In fact, the Ohr Hachaim says that *mitzvos* which are fulfilled without any understanding, are comparable to a *guf* without a *neshama* – completely lifeless. It is thoroughly incumbent upon us to try to uncover the meaning and understanding of the *mitzvos* and perform them accordingly.

When one puts on his tzitzis, he should concentrate on the fact that the garment is reminding him that he is a servant of Hashem. When making kiddush on Shabbos and refraining from doing melacha, he should focus on the fact that he is proclaiming that the world was created by HaKadosh Boruch Hu. And when behaving with pleasant middos, he should remember that he is thereby emulating Hashem Himself, Who is infinitely good and kind.

Demonstrating that He Would Even Do Mitzvos Based on Hashem's Will Alone

However, although we are expected to fulfill *mitzvos* with understanding, there is still one drawback to performing *mitzvos* in this manner. One who understands the *mitzvos* which he performs has never demonstrated with full clarity that he is completely subordinate to the will of Hashem. After all, each *mitzvah* that he performs has a beautiful and deep reasoning behind it. Perhaps he is performing the *mitzvah* solely based on that reasoning, and indeed, he would never do so if he did not understand it. How will he demonstrate that he fulfills the will of Hashem because he understands the very concept that Hashem is His Creator, Who must be obeyed regardless of whether the command is understood or not?

For this reason, Hashem gave the *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah*. This *mitzvah* is inherently a *chok*. The reasoning which we are to have in mind for this *mitzvah* is precisely this fact that we do not know its reason, and that we are performing the *mitzvah* strictly out of our complete subordination to Hashem's decree.¹

¹ The Ohr Hachaim explains further that the words *וזאת חוקת התורה* / *This is the chok of the Torah*, are a command in itself, besides for the actual *mitzvah* of the *Parah* which was given in the next *passuk*. In the first *passuk*, Hashem was issuing an instruction about how the *mitzvah* should be performed. It should be done with the specific intention that it is a *chok*.

It should be noted, however, that although the Ohr Hachaim is stressing that the *mitzvah* should be performed without knowledge of any reasoning, this does not mean that the *mitzvah* has no other reasoning whatsoever. The Ohr Hachaim states clearly that there are deep reasons which were revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu, and possibly, to select *tzadikim* through the generations as well. However, for the vast majority of Klal Yisroel from whom the reasoning is completely

When we perform this *mitzvah* with this intent, says the Ohr Hachaim, we are demonstrating that the same holds true for the rest of the Torah as well. It becomes clear that even as we may know and understand the reasoning of the other *mitzvos*, this is merely meant to enhance their performance; the actual commandment we would fulfill regardless, because of the simple fact that it is Hashem's will.

Based on this idea, the Ohr Hachaim explains the phrase in the *passuk*. What is meant by the phrase "This is the *chok* of the Torah"? The *passuk* is conveying to us that through fulfilling this *chok*, it is considered as though he actually fulfilled the whole Torah. Why? Because he has demonstrated that he is completely submissive to Hashem's commands without needing any personal understanding of them. It follows that he would obey all of Hashem's words in any circumstance, and he is indeed credited as such.

Mitzvos Which Are Difficult to Fulfill

It would seem to me that this lesson can be applied not only to *mitzvos* which are difficult to understand, but also to *mitzvos* which are difficult to fulfill. This means that as we go through our *Avodas Hashem* on a constant basis, we eventually become accustomed to it. It soon requires little effort on our part, as we simply follow our well-established routine. The days just seem to flow by on their own without our having to give any thought to them.

Although a person will receive some credit for living in this manner, it is certainly not the desirable way of serving Hashem. Serving Hashem means subjugating oneself to Hashem's will even as it conflicts with his own.

Reuven is in the middle of learning through a seder when he notices a group of friends standing around shmoozing. He feels an intense urge to get up from the Gemara and join them for a while, but he holds himself back. He reminds himself of the great mitzvah of Talmud Torah and of the issur in interrupting it. He successfully battles his yetzer hara and continues learning with a geshmak, forcing himself to ignore that group.

In this case, Reuven served Hashem in the highest measure. He had his own desire to join the group of shmoozers, and yet, he forced himself to surrender to Hashem's will. He has demonstrated that he is indeed completely subservient to Hashem even when it conflicts with his own desire. Based on the Ohr Hachaim we can suggest that now, even at other times when his desire does not conflict with Hashem's will and he performs a *mitzvah* without difficulty, he will still receive reward as though it in fact was a struggle. This is because it can be assumed that he would have done the *mitzvah* regardless.² Thus, like the *Parah Adumah*, the *mitzvos* which are difficult demonstrate one's righteousness in regard to his fulfillment of the entire Torah.

Constant Growth in Avodas Hashem

We need to internalize the concept that the primary and most significant part of our *Avodas Hashem* is in those parts that we struggle. It is there that we demonstrate that we are servants, by subduing our own desire in favor of the will of Hashem. Those portions of our lives which seem to run on their own, demonstrate little about our attitude toward fulfilling Hashem's will.

It is so important for us to be constantly growing in our *Avodas Hashem*, adding areas which we have not yet mastered, and which will be a new struggle for us to surmount.

hidden, the *mitzvah* can still be performed with this express intention of fulfilling Hashem's *mitzvah* without knowing the reason.

² Rav Yisroel Salanter z"l says a similar idea regarding one who has overcome a struggle to the point that it is no longer difficult. He will still receive reward as though the *mitzvah* was difficult, since it was he himself who overcame that difficulty. (With this he explains the Gemara that states the *yetzer hara* appears to *tzaddikim* as a tall mountain. That refers to the beginning of their *Avodah* when it was difficult. They continue to receive reward as such, even after it becomes easier.)

- *One who has an easy time waking up for Shacharis can begin waking up 20 minutes earlier so that he can learn before davening.*
- *One can try to focus during parts of davening during which until now he has not been concentrating properly.*
- *One should search for a middah in Bein Adam l'Chaveiro which can use strengthening.*

There are many different areas upon which one can be working; what is important is that he should be in that state of growth.

The Danger of Remaining in One Madreigah

The following vort, which I heard from the Skverer Rebbe Shlita in the name of the Baal Shem Tov ז"ל, will serve to illustrate our point. The Gemara teaches us, *שכך אומנתו של יצר הרע היום אומר לו עשה כך ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך עד שאומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה והולך ועובד (שבת קה:)* / *Such is the practice of the yetzer hara – Today he says, 'Do such-and-such!'; the following day he says, 'Do such-and-such!'; until he finally says 'Go and serve avodah zara!'. [At that point,] the person indeed goes and serves the avodah zara.* – In other words, the yetzer hara does not try to cause an individual to fall into the worst aveiros immediately, because he knows that such an approach would not be successful. A person does not want to act against the will of Hashem, and if he would be confronted by the yetzer hara in such a direct manner, he would exert himself and struggle to resist the temptations. Instead, the yetzer hara uses a guerilla-warfare approach. He first tempts the person into what are seemingly small aveiros, those of which the person is fooled into thinking that there is no harm in such minor slips. After the person has stumbled, the yetzer hara is able to continue from there onto more severe aveiros. Using this sly tactic, the yetzer hara is able to pull a person into the depths of sin. To successfully combat the yetzer hara, one must not allow himself to be drawn into even minor failings.

That is the simple understanding of the Gemara. However, the Baal Shem Tov focused on the words *היום אומר לו עשה כך ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך* / *Today he says, 'Do such-and-such!'; the next day he says, 'Do such-and-such!'*. The words would seem to imply that the yetzer hara is enticing a person into the identical sin each day! If so, how does the person fall into avodah zara? Seemingly, the Gemara should have said *ולמחר אומר לו עשה עוד* / *And the following day the yetzer hara says, 'Do more!'* That would imply that the yetzer hara is indeed leading him further and further into sin each day. Why is the word *כך* used twice?

The Baal Shem Tov explained that the Gemara is teaching us this lesson. If a person is not constantly growing in his Avodas Hashem, he is in terrible danger. The words *עשה כך* / *Do such-and-such* do not even refer to acts of sin; they refer to a person's mitzvos. The yetzer hara tells a person, 'Today, serve Hashem in this way, and tomorrow, serve Hashem in the exact same manner. Do not add anything in your avodah!' If a person will heed the yetzer hara's advice, he will soon find himself at the very lowest point of sin. The only way to stay afloat is by constantly adding mitzvos and madreigos.

A Life of Growth is a Rich, Happy Life

We should not become discouraged or turned off from this lifelong task that we face. Each extra goal and project will serve to bring us even closer to Hashem, causing a better life both in this world and the Next. On the contrary, we rejoice at each new responsibility that we can shoulder.

When a builder is involved in a project, he rejoices when he is offered another project simultaneously. He does not want to be involved in only one project at a time; that would mean that business is not going well. He wants to be completely over his head in all his projects until it is impossible for him to do more. When he is faced with the choice of either needing to turn down a job or resorting to hiring another helper, he is overjoyed. He is making real parnassah.

Similarly, each extra madreigah brings tremendous dividend and profit from Hashem.

The average person is very content to remain where he is in his *avodah*. 'I have my *chavrusa* and my *shiur*; what do you want from me?'

A *ben-aliyah*, however, has the opposite attitude. He actively looks for new ways in which he can grow. Each morning, he wakes up and says, 'How will today be better than yesterday?' At night, he will then look back to see if he fulfilled his goal. If he did not, he will strengthen himself to reach it the next day. And if he did, he will look to grow even more.

By living in this manner, one is indeed demonstrating through each struggle that he really wants to observe the entire Torah. He will live a meaningful, productive, and accomplishing life, and indeed, he will be credited for the entire Torah.

In Review

Let us take to heart these lessons of the *Parah Adumah* which are relevant to the entire Torah.

- The *kedusha* of a *yid*, which stems from the Torah, renders him on a tremendously elevated level. Because of this, the *yetzer hara* tries to entice a *yid* with *tumah* in a manner far more than *goyim* are tested. In addition, the fine *neshama* of a *yid* is more sensitive to even minor stains of *tumah*. Let us live our lives with this awareness and see to maintain our *kedusha* on the highest levels.
- The fulfillment of *chukim* is the demonstration of our acceptance of the entire Torah. Similarly, those areas in which we struggle in our *avodah* are the demonstration that we are genuine *ovdei Hashem*. We must live our lives in a state of consistent growth, such that we are constantly struggling to reach new heights. Such a life reaps us infinite dividends both in *Olam Haze* and *Olam Haba*.

Bez"H we should learn these lessons and internalize them for our lives.

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