

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

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Shmuessen from
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פרשת ויקרא – הכנה לפסח

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לעילוי נשמת
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תנצב"ה

פרשת ויקרא – פסח

וְלֹא אֶתִי קָרָאתָ יַעֲקֹב כִּי יִגְעֶתָ בִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל (הפטרה פ' ויקרא – ישעיה מ"ג כ"ב)

רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הֵיזָה אוֹמֵר, כָּל שְׂלֵא אָמַר שְׁלֵשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ בַּפֶּסֶח, לֹא יֵצֵא יְדֵי חוֹבְתוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ
הֵן פֶּסֶח מִצְוָה וּמְרוֹר (הגדה של פסח)

A Lesson from This Week's Haftarah

At Beis Medrash Tiferes Shimon, we recently had the *z'chus* of hearing a *drasha* from the Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Yisroel Neuman, *Shlit"a*. I was tasked with introducing the Rosh Yeshiva, and I would like to share with you what I said. (*This shmuess was delivered in 5773.*)

The Haftarah of Parshas Vayikra begins with the words “עם זו יצרתי לי, תהילתי יספרו” – This people I fashioned for myself, so that they might declare my praise. Rashi explains that Hashem was declaring: “I have created the Jewish nation so that they would daven to Me and sing My praises!” But the pasuk continues: “ולא אותי קראת יעקב, כי יגעת בי ישראל” – But you did not call out to Me, Yaakov, for you grew weary of Me, Yisroel. The Navi in this verse is chastising Klal Yisroel for growing disinterested and uninvolved in their very purpose: reaching out to Hashem and lauding Him.

The Dubno Maggid's Explanation: That's Not My Religion!

The Dubno Maggid offers another *p'shat* into these words, and says the following *mashal* to describe it.

A man walks into a hotel and books a room for the night. The owner tells him to go upstairs to his room, and the porter will bring him his suitcase. A few minutes later, this man hears a knock at his door. He opens it and finds one of the hotel porters lugging a heavy suitcase behind him, sweating profusely from his arduous trek up the stairs. “That’s not my suitcase, sir. Please take it back downstairs and get me mine,” the man said.

“Are you serious?” the porter grumbled. “I can’t believe it! It was so hard for me to drag it up here! Can you at least check to make sure that it’s the wrong one?”

“There’s no need for me to check,” the man replied. “I see it all over your face. You seem to have hauled a very heavy suitcase up the stairs, but mine was very light; I barely had anything inside.”

Says the Dubno Maggid: “ולא אותי קראת יעקב”, it is not My Yiddishkeit that you have been keeping, dear Yidden – “כי יגעת בי ישראל”, for you look exhausted and completely spent, as though you have been spending your days in strenuous labor. My religion is one of tranquility and peacefulness, not over-exertion.

But this is a difficult *p'shat*. Isn't Yiddishkeit filled with יגיעה – effort? A Yid can't be *matzliach* in *Avodas Hashem* without investing some serious effort – whether it's in learning, *davening*, *chesed* or any other *mitzvah*! After all, the Gemara teaches: “לא יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמין”. How, then, can the Dubno Maggid say that Yiddishkeit doesn't give its constituents an exhausted appearance?

Is Yiddishkeit a Breeze – or Full of Exertion?

I offered an answer based on a Sfas Emes. The *pasuk* famously says: “לא בשמים היא” – The Torah is not an unattainable entity that resides high up in the heavens; it is within our reach. The Sfas Emes infers from these words, however, that attaining Torah is definitely not a simple feat. It’s not in the heavens, but it isn’t a piece of cake either; rather, if one wishes to become close with Hashem, he must work hard to get there. This inference seems to be very reasonable, but the Sfas Emes points out one problem: the *pasuk* then goes on to say, “כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד, בפיוך ובלבבך לעשותו” – *For this thing is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart to do it.* This second statement would seem to somewhat contradict the first one; does *Avodas Hashem* require toil and effort, or is it always sitting right in the palms of our hands?

The Sfas Emes answers that when a person does *mitzvos* while schlepping his feet and feeling burdened by them – then indeed, the *mitzvos* will become unpleasant and exhausting. The more a person views his Yiddishkeit as a difficult and strenuous lifestyle, the more washed out and fatigued he will feel and appear. However, if a person chooses to serve Hashem from a place of happiness and cherishes his *Avodah* – then slowly, the *mitzvos* will begin to become sweet and exhilarating. Even the intense exertion that one must employ while *horoving* over a blatt of Gemara will become sweeter than honey. Yes, it will be a lot of effort – but the person won’t walk away looking enervated. Actually, quite the contrary; he will look like he just had the time of his life. The Sfas Emes uses this explanation to reconcile the two aforementioned statements: the Torah does indeed require a lot of effort and exertion – but if you do it the right way, filled with appreciation and yearning, you will have a far easier and more pleasant journey accomplishing it.

The Paradox of יגיעה in Avodas Hashem

With this *pshat*, we can understand the Dubno Maggid’s *mashal*: if a person looks exhausted and drained, you can be sure that he is not following Hashem’s Torah the way it was intended. He views his Yiddishkeit as a burden rather than the greatest privilege of his life. He is walking around all day moaning in his head “ס’איז שווער צו זיין א איד”, rather than humming the sweet words of “ס’איז איד גוט צו זיין א איד”.

As a matter of fact, if you take a look at the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh on Parshas Balak, you will find a similar message. The *pasuk* in that *parsha* says: “לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל” – *He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and no perversity [alternatively: exertion] in Yisroel.* The Ohr Hachaim says that if we translate the word “עמל” as “exertion” in this verse, then we can learn an important lesson here: When a person exerts himself and toils greatly to understand Torah and serve Hashem, he will not end up appearing exhausted and drained, but rather full of energy and vitality.

Let’s say a person runs a business that has to ramp up production during the holiday seasons. During those seasons, this fellow can barely get a moment to breathe; he’s working around the clock from morning until he hits his pillow late at night. However, during the holidays he makes a fortune; he can’t even stop to count his earnings because of how fast it’s coming in. Now, he may be exerting himself to a great degree – but is he down and walking around with a frown on his face? No! He knows what a bracha the holidays are for him! The same goes for someone who properly appreciates what Avodas Hashem does for him.

I then concluded that if we want to witness how *geshmak* and exhilarating intense עמילות can become, we should look no further than the Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Yisroel Neuman *Shlit”a*.

Learning this Lesson from the Haggadah

We can also learn this lesson from the Haggadah. We always ask the following question on the Haggadah: Why does the order go מרור, מצה, פסח? If we were trying to list these things in the correct chronological order, then it should read פסח, מצה, מרור! Why? Because first came the bitterness of the slavery, which מרור symbolizes; then came the מצה, which the Yidden ate at the beginning of the *seider*; and finally came the קרבן פסח, which was eaten at *chatzos*! So why did the Ba'al Haggadah switch the order around?

The answer I like to give is that the Haggadah is depicting how things were in Mitzrayim. In Mitzrayim, when we were still submerged in the 49th level of *tumah*, the order used to be פסח, מצה, מרור. However, at the *Leil Ha'Seder*, we try to make our very own *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and enter a world of *ruchniyus* – and we hope to rearrange the order the way it should be: מרור, מצה, פסח. What do I mean? Allow me to explain.

The Order While We Were in Mitzrayim, and the Order We Aspire For

The קרבן פסח was a delicacy; it was a scrumptious roasted lamb. When a person looks at things from a *gashmiyus'dik* angle, they see physical pleasures as a delicious tray of lamb chops; however, as time goes on and they continue to indulge themselves on a frequent basis, delicacies become bland and unexciting. They begin to view their desires as plain old, dried out *Matzah*. Before long, it loses its status of *Matzah*, and it moves down the ladder to become as bitter as מרור. Indulgence looks exciting when we don't have access to it, but once we are given the keys and we begin to gratify ourselves repeatedly, we begin to see it for what it's worth: absolutely nothing. It's just a fleeting experience that comes and goes and leaves us empty. We see this all the time with wealthy people: during their youth, they had burning desires for all sorts of pleasures – but later on in life, after they struck it rich and spent a few years indulging themselves, they lost their appreciation for physical pleasures. It just becomes boring for them. Eventually, the extravagance begins to make them miserable. Nothing can please them anymore, and the food that they once craved just begins making them unhappy and nauseous.

It May be Difficult at First, But Soon it Will be Exhilarating

You can witness this on a small scale as well by just watching how some people behave by a lavish *chasunah*. They'll fill up their plates by the smorgasbord with all kinds of meats and *kugels*. Then they'll eat all three of the courses, including the entire *bilkeh*, the salads and the pickles. Finally, when the dessert display is brought out, they continue to indulge: two different types of ice cream, along with cookies and hot chocolate cake. (I sometimes wonder how people do this; it's like trying to fit all of the contents of a stretch limo into the trunk of a little station-wagon.) And then, when they try to go to bed for the night, they just can't fall asleep. They're vomiting, they're experiencing severe stomach aches and heartburn; they're a mess. Then they're trying alka seltzer, regular seltzer, and hot baths – a real headache. So, at first his mouth was watering at the sight of the smorgasbord (פסח), and halfway through the meal, his desire is somewhat subdued but still present (מצה), and finally, at home, he begins to suffer the consequences and regrets ever eating any of it (מרור).

But at the *Seder*, we try to transform ourselves into *ruchniyus'dik* people. We try to leave behind the Mitzrayim within us and begin viewing the world from a spiritual angle. When we accomplish this, then the correct order is מרור, מצה, פסח. In *ruchniyus*, beginnings are always difficult, as we just mentioned from the Sfas Emes – when we start out, it's exhausting, but soon enough we begin to love every second of it. As Chazal tell us (see Rashi in Parshas Yisro, 19,5): “כל התחלות קשות” – *All beginnings are difficult*. However, as time goes on, the 'bitterness' of the effort becomes more

like *Matzah* – more neutral. And in the end, the *Avodah* becomes a true delicacy – like roasted lamb. The “פסח” that we wish to obtain at the *Seder* is the enjoyment of serving Hashem with *simcha* and *dveykus*, unlike the “פסח” of Mitzrayim, which was perceived through a lens of 49 levels of *tumah*. In those days, the Yidden still craved ephemeral pleasures – but as they transformed themselves into the *Dor De’ah* in the *Midbar*, they turned the order around, and desired only eternal pleasure – *Avodas Hashem*.

Let’s say, for example, someone struggles with adhering to proper *sedarim* and *davening* in a timely manner. It’s hard to wake up early in the morning; it’s hard to give up on earning more money or relaxing on the couch just to go study some ancient books. But if the person decides to plunge into a solid *seider hayom* that includes strong *sedarim* and timely *tefillas*, then the transformation will begin. At first, it will be *marror*; missing all of those ‘chills’ with his buddies, having to wake up early for the 7:15 *shachris*, and so on. But eventually, it will become more doable – until the final step, where it becomes *geshmak* like a קרבן פסח.

The Avodah of Cleaning for Pesach

One of my Rebbeim, Rav Shalom Eisen *zt”l*, often quoted his Rebbe, Rav Zelig Reuven Bengis *zt”l*. He used to say that Rav Bengis had *Shas* on the palm of his hand. He would tell me, “Moshe Eliezer Rabinowitz, you know how to spell your name? Do you have to think twice before you write it down – or do you do it without thinking? Well – that’s how clear Rav Bengis was in *Shas*.”

Either way, I have a Haggadah at home called “מפלגת ראובן”, which has Rav Zelig Reuven Bengis’ Torah on the words of the Haggadah. In the beginning, he has a section where he discusses the *halachos* of *kashering* dishes for Pesach. He brings there the following Gemara in Pesachim:

“Ravina asked Rav Ashi: What do you do with your knives for Pesach? (Meaning – Ravina was inquiring how to *kasher* year-round knives that were going to be used on Pesach.) Rav Ashi answered: For myself – I fashion new ones for Pesach. So, Ravina asked: That is feasible for you, (being that he was very wealthy and could afford throwing away his old knives once a year,) but what about the rest of us? Rav Ashi answered: No, I didn’t mean I actually make new knives; rather, I meant that I *kasher* them to the point that they are *like* brand new knives.”

The Taz in Orach Chaim (Siman 451) asks regarding this discussion: What did Rav Ashi mean when he answered “For myself, I fashion new ones”? Is that the *halacha*, or was that just a personal stringency? And if it was indeed the halachic requirement, then why did Rav Ashi just say that he did it for himself, implying that nobody else had to do the same? The Taz answers that from here we see that there are different levels in one’s *achrayus* for cleaning for Pesach. There are higher *madreigos* and lower ones – and every Yid has to decide, based on his *minhagim* and his level of *Yiras Shomayim*, which *madreigah* he wishes to achieve.

In fact, there is a pamphlet from Rav Scheinberg *zt”l* that goes through the ‘letter of the law’ requirements for *bi’ur chometz*, and then subsequently lists the stringencies that are mostly based on *minhagim* rather than strict reading of the Shulchan Aruch. It just so happens that if one were to follow Rav Scheinberg’s description of basic *bi’ur chometz*, he would find that the entire process is quite simple and quick. However, if he were to follow the *chumros*, it can take him from Shushan Purim – and even that amount of time may be insufficient.

Different Levels of Cleaning

I think this Taz is earth-shattering. There may be easy ways to be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* – but it contains various different levels, and one can attain much reward by choosing to go up a level. I think that the litmus test should work something like this: If the person feels that the *shvitzing* and

the scrubbing is just too burdensome and tiring, then he should hold off from adding extra stringencies; he can be *yotzei* the *mitzvah* according to the Shulchan Aruch without driving himself crazy. But if he has a *cheshek* to do the *mitzvah* with zeal, and he desires to scrape away every last piece of *chometz* – then it's worthwhile for him to do the stringencies as well. They will definitely gain him lots of *s'char* in the Next World.

A certain Adam Gadol once saw his wife shvitzing away as she scrubbed the walls of her kitchen in order to get rid of any possible residue of chometz. It seemed like she was over-exerting herself a bit, so he said: "You know, you don't really need to scrub so hard. We're going to sell the little crumbs to a goy anyway."

His Rebbetzin looked up disbelievingly and said: "זעט אויס אז מייך טאשע האט מיר שוין לאנג פארקויפט – "צו א גוי גוי" – "It seems like my father has sold me to a goy quite a while ago."

The Four Levels of Kashering Correspond with the Four Levels of Kapparah

Says Rav Bengis: we can explain the Gemara based on the four methods of *kashering*.

- 1) Glass vessels require צונן – rinsing in cold water.
- 2) Dishes and pots that were used with hot liquids require הגעלה – *kashering* with boiling water.
- 3) Things that were used with fire require ליבון – *kashering* with fire, as in with a blow torch or the like.
- 4) Dishes that are made of earthenware, however, cannot be *kashered*; the only option is שבירה, to shatter them.

We also find four levels of atonement for *aveiros* on Yom Kippur:

- 1) For being *mevatel* a *mitzvas asei*, the atonement happens immediately once the person does *teshuvah* on the day of Yom Kippur.
- 2) For transgressing a *lav*, the fasting of the day – which the Gemara calls the "המימות" – brings a *kapparah*.
- 3) For a transgression that condemns a person to death at the hands of Beis Din or *kareis*, one must undergo *yissurim* – anguish.
- 4) Finally, if one committed the grave sin of *Chillul Hashem* – he does not get a *kapparah* until he dies.

Rav Bengis explains that the four levels of *kashering* correspond with the four levels of sin and atonement.

- 1) When a person fails to do a *mitzvas asei*, he is guilty of being cold about his *Avodas Hashem*. Had he been more energized and alive about his relationship with Hashem and his Yiddishkeit, he would never have allowed himself to miss a *zman krias shema* or any other positive commandment. Therefore, he needs to get rinsed off with cold water for being too צונן – cold.
- 2) When a person transgresses a *lav*, that means he was too hot-blooded to run after his desires rather than refrain from disobeying Hashem; he is guilty of hastily putting his *guf*

before his *neshama*. For this, he requires an atonement through the “המימות” of the fasting – also similar to הגעלה, or boiling water.

- 3) When a person does the next level of *issur* – this means the fire of desire has completely consumed him. For this, he needs burning *yissurim* that affect his entire body and mind – similar to ליבון.
- 4) For *Chillul Hashem*, however, nothing can suffice as a *kapparah* other than death itself – the “שבירה” of the person’s *guf*, the end of his existence in this world.

Perhaps this was the underlying lesson in the conversation between Ravina and Rav Ashi; Ravina wanted to know how Rav Ashi used the Pesach preparations to cleanse *himself*, not just his knives. Rav Ashi responded that he was brand new – implying that he was a big *tzaddik* who didn’t need to perfect himself prior to the Yom Tov of Pesach. But Ravina immediately answered: That makes sense for someone like *you* – meaning, not specifically the fact that he was wealthy, but rather the fact that he was a great *tzaddik*! But what about the average Yid? And to that, Rav Ashi responded that what he meant was that he made himself *like* new; he did *teshuvah* by eradicating the *chometz* that was within, making himself an entirely new person. Rav Ashi was saying that he worked on himself throughout the entire season of Pesach cleaning in order to rid himself of the *chometz* – the hot air, the imperfect *middos* – that were holding him back from reaching higher levels.

Applying this Yesod to Our Own Pesach Preparations

This is so important to internalize. When a person *shvitzes* away cleaning for Pesach, he has to think about how all the *kashering* he is doing is supposed to affect himself – rather than just his kitchen and pantry. The Ariza”l famously says that while we burn the *chometz* on Erev Pesach, we should be having *kavanah* to burn all of the impure tendencies and haughty feelings that we contain inside. This works beautifully with all that we’ve been discussing; our *avodah* during this period is to burn away, to *kasher* with הגעלה and ליבון, all of our impurities.

If you think about it, so much of our preparation for Pesach is associated with fire: we bake the *matzos* in the extreme heat of a fiery oven, which is not only a way burning away the possibility of it becoming *chometz*, but also symbolic of crushing any of our tendencies of allowing our *gaavah* to rise; we search for our *chometz* during the *Bedikah* with the fire of a candle; and we burn the *chometz* on Erev Pesach. Come to think of it, the קרבן פסח itself had to be צלי אש – roasted in fire! All of these fiery moments should remind us of the *kashering* process that we must utilize to purify ourselves, whether we require הגעלה or ליבון.

Rabosai, Nissan is the month of change! Pesach is the Yom Tov that provides us with the opportunity to free ourselves of our shackles that have been holding us back! Pesach is זמן חירותנו, *the Time of our Freedom*, and we know that the Mishna in Pirkei Avos says, אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק, בתורה – *There is no one that is truly free other than one who occupies himself with Torah study*. Now is our chance to rid ourselves of our *Yetzer Hara*, the שאור שבעיסה that is constantly trying to avert us from Torah study and *Avodas Hashem*. When we clean out the *chometz*, we have to think about cleaning ourselves. When we eat the *matzah*, we have to think about putting *anavah* into ourselves, thereby replacing our *gaavah*. When we try to envision ourselves exiting the bondage of Mitzrayim, we have to think about dismantling Pharaoh’s reign over our lives – but also, the *Yetzer Hara*’s reign over our lives!

A Chance to Rid Ourselves of the Yetzer Hara

When Bilam attempted to curse the Yidden, he wound up blessing them, and in the midst of his blessing he said: לו – א-ל מוציאו ממצרים, כתועפות ראם – *It is Hashem who brought him out of Mitzrayim, according to the power of his loftiness.* The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh asks the obvious question: why doesn't it say "מוציאו" – Hashem who **brought** him out of Mitzrayim, in the past tense, as opposed to "מוציאו" which is in the present tense?

The Ohr Hachaim answers that this *pasuk* is revealing to us the awesome nature of the Yom Tov of Pesach – that a person is capable of taking himself out of Mitzrayim in the present tense, each and every year! *Yetzias Mitzrayim* didn't only happen once; it can repeat itself every year, if only we try to tap into the tremendous opportunity Hashem presents us with every single year on Pesach! We must truly yearn to dispose of the *Yetzer Hara's* heavy yoke that rests on our shoulders, and choose to propel ourselves forward into the world of true freedom.

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