

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת שלח

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וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר עָלוּ עִמּוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוֹכַל לָעֲלוֹת אֶל-הָעָם כִּי-חַזֵּק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ (במדבר י"ג ל"א)

And the men who went up together with him said "We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us!"

The Sins of Klal Yisroel in the Midbar

When we learn these *parshiyos* which recount the *chata'im* of the Bnei Yisroel in the *midbar*, it is extremely difficult for us to comprehend how they could have fallen into these sins. We are learning about the *Dor Deah* – the generation which witnessed the miracles of the 10 *makkos* in Mitzrayim and *Krias Yam Suf*, and who heard Hashem's Voice at *Har Sinai*. Their entire state of life was on a supernatural level with the three constant miracles of the *Mann*, the Well of Miriam and the *Ananei HaKovod*/the Clouds of Glory. How could such people fail in what seems to be sins of such a low level?

- In *Parshas Behaloscha*, we learned of their complaining about the *mann* that Hashem provided for them. How could they fall to the level of disregarding the great gift and heavenly treasure that they had, and demanding in its place some lowly physical foods? To complain that their condition in Mitzrayim was superior to what they were experiencing now? In Mitzrayim, they were beaten, they were murdered, and they were downtrodden slaves with no rights of existence. Now in the *midbar*, they had their every need accounted for, in a supernatural fashion as a gift from Hashem. How is it that they could commit such a lowly sin of wishing for their conditions in Mitzrayim?
- In this week's *parshah* of *Shelach*, we learn about the *Meraglim* who gave the bad report about Eretz Yisroel, and of the Bnei Yisroel who accepted their words. The *passuk* tells us that they claimed חזק הוא ממנו / *The nation is too strong for us*. As Rashi tells us, their true intent was to insinuate that the nation is too strong for Hashem Himself, *chas v'shalom*. They reasoned that although Hashem was able to defeat Mitzrayim, He would not be able to defeat these giants, *chas v'shalom*.

How was it possible for this sin to occur? The Bnei Yisroel had so clearly witnessed the greatness of Hashem without any room for doubt about it, and now they should think that Hashem would not have the power to destroy the mighty nations in Canaan?

Such a notion is so ludicrous. Hashem defeated the Mitzrim in a completely miraculous manner. As the Ohr Hachaim and other *mefarshim* explain, through the 10 *makkos* Hashem demonstrated that He is in control of every aspect of the world.

An investor commissions for a massive office building to be built. He is involved in every step of the process, ensuring that it is built correctly and professionally. When it is finally completed, he takes great pride in its state-of-the-art offices and conference rooms, and in its perfection and professionalism in every detail. He proudly shows all its rooms to potential renters and buyers.

In short time, many of the rooms are taken by renters and buyers. The owner proudly walks around, inspecting each office and room. He is very interested in how each person is using the room that he took. Soon he reaches one room where

the space is not being utilized in the way he imagined. He peeks his head in and begins to criticize the renter.

The renter looks at him blandly and says, "Excuse me, you do not belong here. I am sorry, but I am not interested in your opinion as to how I should use this room."

"What do you mean?" the owner protests. "I commissioned this entire building! I was involved in every step of the process since its inception! And you have the nerve to tell me that I cannot give my opinion about how you use it?"

The renter regards him with a mixture of pity and impatience. "True," he says, "you built a beautiful building and we appreciate that. Now, however, it is not in your control anymore. The way I use the room is not your business!"

Many people in the world believed that this was a representation of the manner in which Hashem created the world. He created it, they thought, and abandoned it afterwards. They believed that Hashem no longer controlled the world. It was against this backdrop that the 10 *makkos* came and demonstrated that this was not the case. Hashem showed His control and involvement in every aspect of creation. The mighty Egyptians were completely helpless in the face of the supernatural plagues that befell them.

The Bnei Yisroel witnessed all this firsthand. It was completely clear that Hashem was the force behind the entire world and that no one could oppose Him. And suddenly, the Jewish People should think that those giants in Canaan were just too powerful for Him, *chas v'shalom*? Hashem could destroy the Canaanim with a tiny mosquito, as He did to Titus Harasha! How could this happen that they should lose their *Emunah* in such a drastic fashion?

- In Parshas Koach, we learn of Korach's rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. Here again, we must ask how this was possible to happen. Korach was a *פקח*/an intelligent person. He was from the family of Kehos, the most elevated family of Shevet Levi, chosen by Hashem to carry the *keilim* of the *Mishkan*. Of this elevated family, Korach was from the select few that were picked to carry the *Aron* itself. Korach was from the cream of the cream of the crop. He should start grumbling that Moshe was taking all the honor for himself, and that he was just looking to be in charge?! This is the behavior that would be expected from a lowly person, one who has no mission or goal in his life, and who spends his time criticizing others rather than trying to achieve anything on his own. But Korach, the *tzaddik*? How could he stoop to this level?

הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם/Jealousy, physical desire, and pursuit of honor remove a person from the world.

The first point we may consider regarding these incidents is that in these three *parshiyos*, we have a direct demonstration of the *mishnah* in *Avos* הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם (אבות ד' כ"א)/*Jealousy, physical desire, and pursuit of honor remove a person from the world*. The *mishnah* teaches us that the three traits listed bear the particular potential of causing a person's complete downfall in this world, and in fact, these three traits were behind the sins which we are discussing.

- In *Parshas Behaloscha*, the trait of תאוה/desire was at play, as the people desired all the different physical foods they felt they were lacking.
- In *Parshas Shelach*, the trait of כבוד/honor was at play. As the *Zohar* teaches us, what was really behind the evil report of the *Meraglim* was their concern that when the Bnei

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Yisroel would reach Eretz Yisroel, they, the *Meraglim*, would lose their positions of leadership. To prevent this from occurring, they resolved to try to stop the entire nation from entering Eretz Canaan.

- And finally in *Parshas Korach*, it was the trait of *קנאה/jealousy* which caused Korach to stage his uprising. As Chazal teach us, the root of his anger was his jealousy over the appointment of Elitzafan Ben Uziel as the *Nasi* for Bnei Kehas.

Indeed, these three *middos* truly caused their victims to leave the world. In all three instances – the Complainers, the *Meraglim*, and Korach – the sinners and their followers were brought to their deaths in supernatural manners.

However, it would seem that even after viewing these *parshiyos* in light of the aforementioned *mishnah*, the question still remains: True, these *middos* cause a person to leave this world, but how? How does it happen that these great men could find themselves in what is seemingly the depths of sin?

Choosing Between the Paths of Avodas Hashem or Aveirah

To arrive at the answer to this question, we must realize the nature of the *yetzer hara* with which we are faced in the world, and the nature of our stay in this world in general. In *Parshas Toldos*, when Yitzchok Avinu was grappling with the question of the identity of the person standing in front of him, whether it was Yaakov or Eisav; he uttered those famous words *הקול קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו* (*The voice is the voice of Yaakov, while the hands are the hands of Eisav.*) The *sefarim* tell us that aside from referring to the actual specific people, Yaakov and Eisav, these words symbolize all the ideas and concepts that Yaakov and Eisav represented.

There are two paths in the world from which a person can choose. He can involve himself in Torah and *ruchniyus*, in *chessed* and davening. In this path, he is using his *seichel* to satisfy the desire of the *neschama* to come closer and closer to Hashem. This path is symbolized by the voice of Yaakov; representing all manners of the *seichel* as expressed through the voice, and which are performed in righteousness, as personified in Yaakov Avinu. Alternatively, a person can follow the physical, animalistic side of himself, constantly seeking to gratify his earthly desires. Such a person will live a life of sin, because he will not be able to contain himself when his desire clashes with the will of Hashem. This path is symbolized by the hands of Eisav; representing all physical endeavors as done with hands, coupled with the wickedness of Eisav Harasha.

The 'Hands' of the Yetzer Hara

Let us dwell more on the 'hands' of Eisav. More than simply the instrument used to perform physical endeavors, the hands also represent the particular power inherent in the *yetzer hara*. The *mishnah* in *Avos* teaches us (*אבות ב' א'*) *Consider three things and you will not come to the hands of sin.* What is meant by the hands of sin? Do sins have a body, with hands and feet?

The Vilna Gaon z"l explains that once a person has fallen into sin, it is as if the sin is holding him in an iron grip. Once he has reached that point, it is impossible for him to wrest himself free from its grasp through Fear of Hashem alone. Only fear of man will be able to stop him.¹

¹ ז"ל הספר חסדי אליהו (לקט פירושי הגר"א על מסכת אבות) פרק ב' משנה א', - הסתכל בג' דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עבירה, הסתכל היינו התבוננות, אם תתבונן מה למעלה ממך אי אתה בא לידי עבירה, אף כי אדם יכול ליכשל בעבירה אף בהתבוננות על דרכיו כמו שנאמר כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא, אבל לידי עבירה אינו נופל, כי התבונן בג' דברים אלו, מה למעלה ממך עין רואה ואזן שומעת וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבים. (מפי השמועה).
הסתכל בג' דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עבירה, לפני שהאדם מתחיל בעבירה יש עוד תקנה להתגבר על יצרו מחמת יראת שמים שיש בו ולהתרחק מן העבירה, אבל כשהאדם כבר נמצא בשעת עשיית העבירה כשאש התאוה כבר נדלקת ובווערת, אז לא יועיל מורא שמים שיש בו רק מורא בשר ודם. (מפי השמועה). עכ"ל הספר חסדי אליהו.

A man decides he will rob an item off a store shelf. Before he reaches the store, he can still have a change of heart and decide against his original plan. Once he is in the store, however, it is too late. His temptation has taken hold of him and he will be unable to turn back. If, however, he senses the manager approaching ready to catch him in mid-act, he certainly will control himself. His fear of being caught overpowers his temptation to steal.

Distancing Oneself from the Aveirah

This teaches us that it is not sufficient to merely try to increase one's Fear of Hashem and thereby avoid the actual sin. The only way it is possible for one to avoid sin is by distancing himself from the sin. He must remove himself from any form of connection to it so that he will not have any potential of stumbling.

An addicted smoker is trying to quit smoking. He decides that even though he will not smoke, he will at least keep his pack of cigarettes in his shirt pocket. This way, he reasons, he will be able to have that security with him, and it will be easier for him to refrain from the urge to actually smoke.

Obviously, this man is terribly mistaken. His new commitment will last exactly until the next time he has a temptation. The only way for him to actually overcome his habit is by throwing all his cigarettes into the garbage immediately. The next time he is tempted, he will reach into his pocket and he will not find any cigarettes. In desperation, he will run to his cabinet where he used to keep his spare packs, and he will find no cigarettes there either. He will consider going to the nearest store to buy more, but he is unable to leave his home at the moment. By the time he is able to leave, the urge will have passed.

If the man will follow this strategy, there is hope that he can successfully overcome his habit. How? By removing the potential for himself to stumble, before he falls into the temptation.

As the saying goes, 'A drunkard gets drunk on his first shot.' As soon as he opens the door to his craving, he will be unable to control himself. If he wishes to stay clean, he must keep away from alcohol entirely.

Similarly, we must remove ourselves from any factors which can lead us into sin. If we will allow ourselves to come near the temptation, we have already delivered ourselves into the hands of the yetzer hara.

- *Chazal (שבת י"ג) teach us that a nazir is not permitted to enter a vineyard. Although he is not planning on transgressing the aveirah of eating grapes, Chazal forbade him from even leading himself into temptation.*
- *Shimon resolves to work especially hard on not speaking lashon hara. He learns the halachos thoroughly, and he learns the mussar about the topic as well. He works on himself until he is convinced that he has finally overcome his yetzer hara on the aveirah. He would never speak lashon hara, even about his worst enemy.*

One day, he notices a group of his friends sitting around, shmoozing. Shimon takes one look and from the whole appearance of the group, it is clear they are up to no good. There is leitzanus, lashon hara, rechilus, etc. Shimon is curious about the subject of their discussion.

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He says to himself, "I won't join in their lashon hara; I just want to find out whom they are talking about. I'm strong; I won't fall into the trap of lashon hara!"

Shimon joins their group, and before he realizes it, he is speaking lashon hara in a manner even worse than the rest of them were. Afterwards, he is so upset with himself. "I worked so hard on the inyan of lashon hara, how could I have fallen in?"

- *Reuven is in an office where there is a TV playing. He does not wish to see improper images, and he is careful not to look at the screen. After a few minutes, he decides that he just wants to see what the show is about. He won't watch the show; he'll just take a quick look.*

Reuven ends up glued to the TV screen, unable to remove himself from there.

In each of the above examples, the mistake of entering into the temptation was made. A *nazir* will only be able to control his urge for wine if he avoids the vineyard altogether. For Shimon to guard himself from *loshon hara*, he must completely avoid the group. Reuven must control the urge to look at the screen even once. Once each one has given in to that urge, he has surrendered himself into the hands of the *yetzer hara*.

Our Accountability for Bringing Ourselves Near the Aveirah

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l used to stress this idea to us constantly. When a person commits an *aveirah*, he would say, he is not responsible for the actual stumbling. By the time he is in the place of the sin, he no longer has control. What he is responsible for is his allowing himself into the place of temptation.² If he would guard himself at the point before he is in the temptation, he would still be capable of overcoming the test, and he is accountable for not doing this.

Rav Chaim would give a mashal of the אדני השדה which is discussed in the mishnah (כלאים ה' ה'). This was a ferocious creature which was attached to the ground by its own umbilical cord. For its entire lifetime, the creature could never move further than the length of the cord. Any other being – person or animal – who would enter into the radius of the cord, was ripped up by this creature. There was no attempting to fight this creature; the battle was lost before it began. The creature would unfailingly devour anyone in its proximity.

There was only one way of remaining safe from this dangerous monster. One could take care not to enter the radius of the cord. By avoiding entering the creature's domain, one was one-hundred percent secure from any harm. [The method of killing this creature was by shooting arrows at the umbilical cord. When an arrow would

² I once asked Rav Chaim z"l about this point: As we know, there are various punishments for different *aveiros* in the Torah. Some sins are punishable by *malkos*/lashes, others by the death penalty, others by *kareis*, etc. I questioned – If the penalty would be for the actual sin, we can understand that the choice of punishment is dependable upon the sin's severity. If, however, our responsibility is limited only to our not distancing ourselves from the sin, why do we find differences in the punishments for various sins? Seemingly, the fault is identical in each case: One did not distance himself. If so, the punishment should be the same as well!

Rav Chaim responded as follows: "Does one not need to be more careful of a moving train than of a moving bicycle?!"

In other words, it is true that the responsibility is for bringing oneself in the proximity of the sin. However, that concept itself is more serious and apparent in regard to a more severe sin. Based on the sin's severity, it behooves a person to treat it that way in his mind, and thus take more precautions in avoiding it. For not doing so, a person deserves a bigger punishment than for not being cautious regarding a less severe sin.

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reach its mark, the creature would emit an ear-piercing shriek, after which it would collapse to death.]

Similarly, one must avoid entering an *aveirah's* domain. By doing so, he is protecting himself from stumbling. Once he allows himself into its vicinity, he is opening the door for trouble, and he will quite likely fall into the actual sin.

Greatness is Keeping Distant from the Sin

Now let us return to the subject of the three *parshiyos* of *Behaloscha*, *Shelach*, and *Korach*. We questioned, how is it possible that the great men in these *parshiyos* should fall into such levels of sin? Shouldn't their high *madreigos* have prevented them from falling into these sins?

We can now attempt to understand these incidents. True, there were great men involved in these stories. However, what really makes a great man? Is it the fact that he is able to consistently control himself in the face of great temptation? The answer is NO; that is not where greatness lies! Greatness is the practice of consistently avoiding situations of temptation! It follows then, that even great men are wholly not immune or invulnerable to the *yetzer hara*. If they will allow themselves to be drawn after the *yetzer hara* even on a small scale, they have opened the door for themselves to be swept right back into the depths of sin.

This does not mean that a *tzaddik* cannot enjoy or see any measure of success or accomplishment in his battle with the *yetzer hara*. There is certainly a concept of one who has overcome certain *nisyonos* and who has thereupon moved on to higher *nisyonos*. At that point, he is no longer tempted by those same things that used to be struggles for him. However, the essence of this success is that he no longer enters into those sins at all. If he does allow himself to be pulled into them, that is when he is in danger of falling to the very bottom of the barrel.

Indeed, how low even the biggest *tzaddikim* can fall! Those people who heard Hashem's Voice at Har Sinai and ate the Heavenly *mann*, allowed themselves to enter the realm of *taivah*; and before they knew it, they began fantasizing about the physical pleasure of a few foods of which they could not partake. The *Meraglim* started to worry about their positions; and they ended up scheming to cause the entire Klal Yisroel to remain in the *midbar*, all so they should not lose their positions. And the great Korach wound up grumbling to Moshe that 'You're just a bigshot who wants to be in charge!'

How careful we must be to constantly be watchful of ourselves and not allow ourselves to be confronted by temptation. Let us strengthen our resolve to resist that urge to approach the temptation, and bs" d we should be *zoche* to overcome our different *nisyonos*.

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