

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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פרשת חיי שרה

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ר' מאיר בן ר' ישראל זצ"ל

פרשת חיי שרה

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע יָמִים

(בראשית כ"ג א')

Tzaddikim Live Up Their Days

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh comments on the words "וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה" as follows: The Ohr Hachaim comments on the words "וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה" as follows: *This teaches us that tzaddikim enliven their days.* He explains that by *resha'im*, their days give them life – but by *tzaddikim*, it goes the other way around.

A person who doesn't follow the Torah often waits for time to pass. He doesn't value the way he is spending his hours and days – so during the day, he's waiting for the night when he can relax on his couch; during the week, he's awaiting the weekend when he can get a break from his work; throughout the year, he's waiting for his summer vacation, desperately staring at the clock and the calendar, just hoping the time would move a little faster. If he were to look at the date at this time of year – he'd probably groan out loud about the fact that Chanukah's still a month away; it's just another indication of how much time has to pass until the long-awaited summer vacation.

But an *ehrlliche* Yid, on the other hand, is rather concerned about the passing of time. He has so much to learn, so many *mitzvos* and *chasadim* to attend to; the days are simply not long enough! Let's say he's working on learning the *parshah* thoroughly every week. There's Rashi, Ramban, Ohr Hachaim, Seforno, Kli Yakar – the week is simply too short for him to cover all the ground he's aiming for. Besides, he also wants to cover the four *chalakim* of Shulchan Aruch, as well as Shas. He wants to help raise money for the local *chesed* fund before their upcoming event. When this Yid looks at the calendar, he's stressed out about the fact that Chanukah's around the corner; he still needs to finish so much in order to keep to his *kabalos* from Yom Kippur! היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה!

And aside from that, there's the fact that an *ehrlliche* Yid lives in the moment. When a person appreciates the value of what he's doing – whether he's sitting behind a Gemara, or behind the cash register of the local supermarket – if he understands that he's doing what Hashem wants him to do, and he's sitting in the exact spot where he's supposed to be, then he can and should enjoy every moment! The next minute can't possibly be better than this one; he's involved in *kinyan Olam Habah* right now, so what could

possibly be better? There's really no good reason to stare at the clock or to gaze impatiently at the calendar when you're doing things right. However, when there's no real substance to a person's day and he just lives for the enjoyments of life, then all of the remaining moments – which are generally the bulk of the time – are just a nuisance, getting in the way of what life's really all worthwhile for. And that can drive a person crazy with impatience and an overall feeling of discontent. Sarah Imeinu livened up every hour and every minute because she regarded each one with eternal value.

Eliezer Chose Hishtadlus

Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, was as close to the *Tzaddik Hador* as a person could possibly be. He witnessed Avraham's journeys; he helped him fight the four kings; he escorted him to the *akeidah*; all in all, he was a firsthand witness to Avraham's greatness like no other, and he was surely on a very high *madreigah* himself. Eliezer was undoubtedly worthy of experiencing miracles in finding the right *shidduch* for Yitzchok – without needing to make a *siman*, then subsequently *hondling* with Lavan and Besu'el. It could have just happened with a snap of his fingers; Hashem could have escorted him straight to the correct home and have arranged for Rivkah's parents to just let her go without any complications. But the Ohr Hachaim explains that there's a very good reason for why the *shidduch* search ended up the way that it did: Eliezer didn't want to *daven* for open miracles, because he understood that that's not how a person is supposed to conduct himself. Our job is to do our *hishtadlus* and *daven* that Hashem give us *siyata dishmaya*; we're not meant to 'burden' Hashem with requests for things to be made easy for us through miraculous events. We are supposed to be comfortable with working through the *seder hatevah*, not searching to constantly bend it.

Let's give a *mashal* that should be a no-brainer for most people: If rockets are flying into Eretz Yisroel, should a person run into the bomb shelter – or should he remain rooted in his place and simply *daven* that Hashem should protect him? Of course, the answer is that he should go to the shelter at once! Yes, he must recognize that his protection is coming from Hashem even inside the shelter – but he's not supposed to be relying on miracles where there is an obvious path for basic *hishtadlus*.

A Person's Conduct Reveals Their True Nature

The Ohr Hachaim then continues: if the proper path for Eliezer to take is to follow *seder hatevah*, then when he knocks on the door of Besu'el's home and asks about his daughter – how can he trust Besu'el's response? Maybe he's lying, and this girl is actually a lowly maidservant! The answer is

that he made the *simanim* in order to determine whether the prospective *shidduch* had good *middos*. If she were to pass those tests, then it would not be necessary for Hashem to miraculously point out whether she is the right one or not; *middos tovos* are a solid proof that she is the right one, *al pi derech hatevah!*

This is an important message for us to internalize: a person's conduct is a natural form of solid proof about who he is and what his true colors are. When you see a person talking disrespectfully to an elderly person, or blowing his top when someone cuts him off in traffic – then you know a great deal about this person. He's not very close to the Ribono shel Olam, and he's got a lot to work on. Good *middos* are the best indicator of where a person is really holding in life.

Can a Shliach Appoint Another Shliach to be Mekadesh a Woman?

I would like to now move on to a more *lomdisher vort*. After Eliezer finishes recounting his entire story to Besu'el and Lavan, they replied, "מה" "יצא הדבר" – this is clearly a sign from Above, and we must proceed with the *shidduch*. The Meshech Chochma addresses this *pasuk* as follows (בדרך צחות):

The Gemara in Gittin teaches us that we learn from the word "ושילח" that a man doesn't have to physically give his wife a *get*; he's able to send it through a *shliach*. We are also taught that "ושלחה" teaches us that the wife can send a *shliach* to receive the *get* as well. And finally, "ושילח – ושלחה" combined teach us that the *shliach* himself can appoint yet another *shliach*. The Gemara also teaches us that the same laws apply when it comes to *kedushin*, and this is derived by making a *gezeira shava* between "ויצא" and "והיתה".

Now, there is a dispute amongst the *poskim* whether the *halacha* that the *shliach* can appoint a different *shliach* is applicable when it comes to *kedushin* as well. Many hold that the *gezeira shava* of "ויצא – והיתה" applies to all three aforementioned *halachos*. However, the Mordechai brings down the Kadosh MiRadosh that says no; this *halacha* is only applicable by divorce and not by marriage.

The Kadosh MiRadosh explains this distinction as follows: By *gittin*, the husband is allowed to divorce his wife *ba'al korchah* – by force, even if she is unwilling. (This is only true *min haTorah*; however, Rabbeinu Gershom made a *cherem* against giving a *get* by force.) By *kedushin*, on the other hand – one cannot be *mekadesh* a woman *ba'al korchah*, even *min haTorah*; she has to be willing to get married. Therefore, by *gittin*, the moment the *get* is handed over – the *shlichus* has been accomplished, because being that the woman cannot actually refuse the *get*, that means that all the *shliach* was obligated to do was hand it over. But by *kedushin*, the *shliach* has not completed his job unless he has heard from the woman that she accepts the

marriage; therefore, his *shlichus* cannot be simply handed over to an additional *shliach*.

The Meshech Chochma concludes that the story of Yitzchok and Rivka's marriage in our *parshah* is a *raya* to this opinion of the Kadosh MiRadosh. We find that Avraham sent Eliezer to be *mekadesh* a wife for Yitzchok. We must assume that Avraham only had the power to do so because Yitzchok expressly requested it of him; otherwise, he would not have been able to appoint a *shliach* in Yitzchok's name. So, it turns out that Yitzchok made his father a *shliach* for *kedushin*, and then Avraham went along and appointed Eliezer as a *shliach* – clearly using the law of one *shliach* being able to appoint another! Now, how do I know that Eliezer's job was to be *mekadesh* the woman – perhaps it was just to find her and lead her to Yitzchok? The answer is that after Eliezer gave her all the *matanos*, Lavan and his family asked that perhaps she should stay home for 12 months or so. Rashi references the Mishnah in Kesubos that says that after a girl becomes מאורסת, she is entitled to stay at home for 12 months in order to prepare herself for the wedding. From here we clearly see that Rashi understood that Eliezer's *matanos* to Rivka were a form of *kedushin* (because otherwise, she wouldn't be considered a מאורסת).

Well, this should be a proof against the Mordechai and the Kadosh MiRadosh; it's fairly obvious from this *parshah* that Yitzchok appointed a *shliach* who went ahead and appointed another *shliach* – and it was for *kedushin*! But the Meshech Chochma suggests that this is actually a *raya* to the Kadosh MiRadosh. How so? Well, earlier we mentioned the words of Lavan and Besu'el in response to Eliezer's request to take Rivka for his master's son: "מה' יצא הדבר" – this is clearly a sign from Above, and we must proceed with the *shidduch*. Perhaps we can learn from these words that although one needs to give consent for a *kedushin* to be *chal* – in this case, they were forced to do so, because of the clear *yad Hashem* that led Eliezer to meeting Rivka! They couldn't possibly reject the *shidduch*, because then they would effectively be fighting the words of Hashem. But if that's the case, then they essentially had the status of *ba'al korcho*; if so, then there was no problem of one *shliach* appointing another *shliach*, because although we're talking about *kedushin* – in this specific scenario, the miraculous events rendered them to be *ba'al korcho*. This may be a *raya* to the Kadosh MiRadosh's *lomdus* – that the only difference between *gittin* and *kedushin* regarding this law is the ability of the woman to reject the *shlichus*; if she is not able to say no, then one *shliach* can indeed appoint another *shliach*!

The Gemara asks on this Kadosh MiRadosh that the Gemara doesn't hint in any way that it differentiates between *gittin* and *kedushin*. It simply states the three aforementioned *halachos*, and then it says that these laws apply by *kedushin* as well. If you want to argue that the last law regarding one *shliach* appointing another *shliach* does not apply to *kedushin*, then you need some

sort of proof for that! The ב"ה remains by a *kashya* on this Kadosh MiRadosh. (This ב"ה can be found at the end of Siman 35 in Even Ha'ezer.) However, after I saw this Meshech Chochma, I realized that we now have an answer for the *kashya* of the ב"ה – our *parsha* is a great *mekor* for the Kadosh MiRadosh!

Lavan and Besu'el Couldn't Resist Being Resha'im

But there's something unbelievable to be learnt from this. Lavan and Besu'el clearly saw the *yad Hashem* in all of this; they stated very clearly that they couldn't say 'no' to the *shidduch*. They saw how the *shtar* that Avraham gave Eliezer had the same date as that very day he arrived – indicating that he had traveled the entire journey in just one day! That was nothing short of miraculous, and they knew it. And yet – they attempted to kill Eliezer! How could the very things that they saw with their own eyes not affect their behavior? We must realize how foolish it looks when we, too, see amazing these in our lives – and yet we refuse to change.

At the *Leil HaSeder*, when we spend hours upon hours recounting the evils of Pharaoh and the miracles that Hashem did to rescue us from his clutches – we make sure to point out that Lavan was even worse than Pharaoh. We say that "לבן ביקש לעקור את הכל" – while Pharaoh only decreed to kill the male babies, Lavan wished to extirpate each and every one of us. It seems like Lavan is pretty high up on the list of bad people in Klal Yisroel's history, if he managed to get such an honorable mention at the *Seder*. Well, how did he get so bad? Does the Torah provide us any hints to where this *rish'us* came from?

The Terrible Middah of Chutzpah

The answer, perhaps, is what Rashi points out during Eliezer's conversation with Lavan and Besu'el. The *pasuk* says, "ויען לבן ובתואל" – *Lavan and Besu'el answered*. Rashi comments: "רשע היה, וקפץ להשיב לפני אביו" – *He was a rasha, and he jumped to answer before his father*. We see here what a *mechutza'f* Lavan was. He jumped in to answer before his father – and this wasn't a mere conversation about current events! It was about marrying off his daughter! This was no place for Lavan to be sticking his nose in. This was a clear display of a tremendous lack of *derech eretz*.

When a person sees a clear *hashgacha* in something, he really should just lift up his hands and thank the Eibishter. But when a person is a *mechutza'f*, an *az panim* – he doesn't look up. He always thinks about himself first. Yes, he notices the *siyata dishmaya* – but the haughtiness overtakes him. He begins to point out what he did right, and how all of this was his smart thinking, and so on. *Chutzpah* and *kefirah* come from the same *shores*, the

same core issue: *gaavah*. The constant belief that we are the most important thing, the most vital cog in the machine.

Was There Something Good to Be Learnt from Lavan?

The *pasuk* introduces us to Lavan with the words "ושמו לבן", and his name was Lavan. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh points out that generally, we only find this *lashon* by *tzaddikim*, as in "ושמו בועז" and "ושמו אלימלך". By wicked people, however, the Torah usually introduces them the other way around, as in "נבל שמו", his name was Naval. So why does the Torah introduce Lavan as a *tzaddik*? The Ohr Hachaim further points out that based on the teachings of Chazal, it sounds like Lavan ran towards Eliezer in order to try and claim some of the precious gold and diamonds for himself. However, the *pasuk* says it the other way around: "וירץ לבן אל האיש" – Lavan ran towards the man, and only afterwards does the *pasuk* say, "ויהי כראות את הנזם והצמידים" – And it was, as Lavan saw the nose ring and the bracelets. According to Chazal, this should have been mentioned first, and only afterward the fact that he ran towards Eliezer!

To answer these questions, the Ohr Hachaim offers a novel approach. He suggests that the reason why Lavan initially charged out towards Eliezer was because he heard that a strange man had given his sister all sorts of gifts and had held a conversation with her. Despite the fact that Lavan had serious issues with his *middos* and definitely had a hard time with honesty, perhaps *tznius* was a line that he wasn't willing to cross. If someone had an idea for a *shidduch*, he should be approaching the family of the girl – not addressing the girl directly! It was for this reason that Lavan initially ran at Eliezer; he was ready to berate him for his improper behavior. Only after this preliminary feeling of jealousy did Lavan begin to think about stealing some of the riches. This is why the Torah recounts the story in this order, and this is also why Lavan was *zoche* to be introduced with the *lashon* that is generally reserved for *tzaddikim*. If he was about to an act of *kana'us* for the sanctity of his home, he deserved to be referred to as a *tzaddik* – even if, shortly thereafter, he went right back to stealing and being a *mechutzaf*.

How the Imahos Turned Out So Well

People often wonder about the fact that the *imahos* of Klal Yisroel grew up in such a depraved, wicked home. After all, aren't our mothers one of the most influential people in our lives? *Gedolim* like the Chasam Sofer, the Chofetz Chaim, the Chazon Ish – they used to give a lot of credit to their mothers. They used to say how much their mothers *tefillos* and tears had such an effect on their outcome. The Chofetz Chaim used to hold his mother's little Tehillim close to his heart, saying that the tear-soaked book was one of the

secrets to his *hatzlacha*. How could it be that the first *Yiddishe Mammehs* of our nation were raised in such terrible homes – Rivka in the house of Besu'el, and Rochel and Leah in the house of Lavan?

However, based on this Ohr Hachaim, perhaps we can suggest that although there was a lot of *rish'us* in their homes, the *imahos* did witness something very praiseworthy: there was no tolerance for a lack of *tznius* in their home. This strict rule was taken so seriously that Lavan charged towards a total stranger, ready to give him over the head, just in order to make the guidelines of the home crystal-clear. Maybe the daughters took this level of *kana'us*, this tremendous passion, and applied towards only good, choosing to overlook the rotten behaviors that were also present in their home. Lavan, who had the *middah* of *azus panim*, learned the *kana'us* from his father – but he also used it for his own, corrupt ways, rather than utilizing it strictly for good. His sister and daughters, on the other hand, had the *middah* of *anavah* and *tznius*, and they were therefore able to accept the positive angle of the *kana'us* while weeding out the negative parts.

This brings out another factor of what we were saying before: *chutzpah* and *azus* are such terrible attributes, that not only do they prevent a person from recognizing the *yad Hashem* – but they also cause us to be unable to benefit from our teachers and mentors. If one of our parents or Rebbe'im are flawed in some way, that doesn't necessarily mean that we must reject them entirely. If we have the proper dosage of balanced *middos* and a healthy level of humility, then we should be capable of accepting what's good and discarding the bad on our own.

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