

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

*Shmuessen from
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פרשת שמות

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פרשת שמות

וַתִּירֶאן הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵן מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחֲיֶינן אֶת-הַיְלָדִים: (שמות א' י"ז)

*The midwives feared Hashem and they did not do as the king of
Mitzraim spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live.*

The wording of the *possuk* seems repetitive. It says that the midwives didn't do what the king told them. If so, we know that they caused the boys to live. By repeating itself, it would seem as though the *possuk* is saying: not only did they not listen to the king, but additionally, they also caused the boys to live. What is the meaning of this?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that among the children who were born there were surely some sickly ones who would not have been able to live on their own. If the midwives would have allowed those babies to die, they could have presented them to Paroh. Paroh could then be convinced that his plan was being carried out, and they were actually killing the babies. In this way the midwives could be spared the wrath of Paroh, and at the same they would not have to worry about spilling innocent Jewish blood. They wouldn't be killing any babies, rather they would just be allowing these babies to die on their own.

However, they feared Hashem and they did not do this. Instead, they were *moser nefesh* to care for every single baby, and they did not let even one go. This is the meaning of the extra wording in the *possuk*. The midwives did not listen to the king, and they did not kill the babies. Additionally, they even helped the sick babies by nursing them to good health and causing them to live.

The *Possuk* continues: ויִטַּב אֲלֵיהֶם לְמִילֻדוֹת וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצְמוּ מֵאֵד, *And Hashem was good to the midwives – and the people increased and became very strong.* The Ohr Hachaim explains: In what way was Hashem good to the midwives? He made the people increase and become strong.

The midwives were delighted with each new baby that was born. They didn't view them as a cause for concern, and as a risk for their lives. Rather, they cherished each baby and were truly joyous with each opportunity to bring yet another baby into this world. In order to

increase their reward, Hashem caused the nation to increase. Due to the *mesiras nefesh* of the midwives to help the children, Hashem considered these children as their own. By increasing the number of children born, it was as though He was increasing the midwives' own children, thereby increasing their *zechusim*.

Yiras Shamayim and Gemillas Chesed

The Torah tells us that the underlying *middah* which drove the midwives to this level of *mesiras nefesh* was *yiras Elokim*. Later we find that they were rewarded for their excellence in *yiras Elokim*. ויהי כי יראו (פסוק כא) המילדות את האלקים ויעש להם בתים; *And it was because the midwives feared Hashem, [and] he made for them houses.*

However, there was another remarkable facet of their actions which the Torah omits. Not only were the midwives outstanding in their *yiras Shamayim*, but they also were exemplary *gomlei chasadim*. They went beyond the call of duty, and with joy and with love they risked their lives to care for each and every baby as if it was their own. If so, why does the Torah not praise them for their excellence in *gemillus chesed* in addition to their *yiras Shamayim*?

We see from here that excellence in *gemillus chesed* alone, even to the point of *mesiras nefesh*, is of no value. It is noteworthy only when it is a function of *yiras Shamayim*. Surely the midwives were paragons of *gemillus chesed*, but their praise for this is only in the context of *yiras Shamayim*.

Let us demonstrate with a *maschal*.

Yankel considered himself an upstanding, law-abiding citizen. He came to a full stop by all stop signs, and was careful to slow down when the light turned yellow. He always drove within the speed limit, never a mile above it. One time he was driving with a friend who became annoyed by this, and asked him to speed up a bit. Yankel angrily retorted: "absolutely not! Don't you realize that would be unsafe? Besides, it's against the law!"

Later that day, Yankel had a scheduled meeting with the owner of a restaurant. He and his wife were planning a nephew's sheva brachos, and his wife really wanted it to be in this particular restaurant. The owner had told him that he must be there by four o'clock or else he would give the reservation to someone else.

It was a busy day, and Yankel lost track of the time. He realized what time it was at ten minutes to four. Panicking, he grabbed his car keys and dashed out of his office. He got into his car and sped as fast as he could toward the restaurant. He barreled down side roads and even reached a speed of sixty miles per hour! At one point he even drove up the sidewalk! As he reached the restaurant at exactly four o'clock, he slowly calmed down. He was happy he made it, and he told himself it was worth the effort. He shuddered to think of his wife's reaction had he missed the meeting!

This is an example of a *baal middos* without *Yiras Shamayim*. Yankel's conviction to stay safe and to abide by the law, was self-serving. He didn't follow the law because he *had* to, rather because it made him feel good. It was therefore dependent on his whims. When circumstances demanded that he act unsafe and break the law, he did so without a second thought.

Gemillus Chesed without *yiras Shamayim* would bring similar results.

Moishe is a generous and gracious friend, always looking to help out. He is the one that stays after simchas to clean up, and he can always be counted on for the less-than-enjoyable chores. That is until you anger him. When that happens, everyone knows to stay away. He will bulldoze anyone in sight, in stark contrast to his previous acts of chesed.

What happened to Moishe? How could he display such generosity and kindness on the one hand, and at other times completely disregard the feelings of others? The answer is that Moishe does *chesed* because he *wants* to, not because he *has* to. Such *chesed* has no value.

Chesed needs to be done with the understanding that Hashem is watching. We need to feel an *ol*, a responsibility to do *chesed*. When it is done as a function of *yiras Shamayim*, then it can be called true *chesed*.

Avimelech, a Baal Chesed without Yiras Shamayim

Avimelech told Avraham Avinu: עמך תעשה עמדי (בראשית כא: כג); *Like the kindness I have done for you, do for me.* Which *chesed* did Avimelech do for Avraham? *Rashi* explains that it is reference to when he said (שם כ: טו) "הנה ארצי לפניך בטוב בעיניך שב (שם כ: טו)". *Behold my land is before you, settle where you see fit*". The Torah recognizes his generosity

as genuine *chesed*. Still, Avraham was afraid to tell Avimelech that Sarah was his wife. He said: רק אין יראת אלקים במקום הזה והרגונני על דבר אשתי; *There is no fear of Hashem in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.*"

Although Avimelech seemed to have a generous spirit, due to his lack of *yiras Shamayim* Avraham was still afraid of being killed. Avimelech's generosity was not a function of *yiras Shamayim*, rather it was dependent on his whims. Avraham therefore understood that if he would lay his eyes on Sarah, he would immediately drop his benevolent spirit. He would transform into a tyrant who would stop at nothing to fulfill his desires.

Paroh was also a Baal Chesed

We find another manifestation of this concept in this week's *parshah*.

In *Parshas Vayigash*, Paroh had told Yosef and the *Shevatim*: "וּאֲתַנְּה לָכֶם אֶת טוֹב אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאָכְלוּ אֶת חֶלֶב הָאָרֶץ (בראשית מה: יח); *I will give you the best of the land of Mitzraim, and you will eat the fat of the land.*" He displayed tremendous generosity and opened his land for them. This was an act no less openhanded than Avimelech's, which the Torah clearly refers to as *chesed*.

In this week's *parshah* however, Paroh suddenly sings a different tune. "וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף (א: ה); *and a new king arose on Mitzraim, who did not know of Yosef.*" Could Paroh really have forgotten Yosef? He owed his entire kingdom to Yosef! All the people of the land were his slaves, and all the money was his. This was all through the doing of Yosef. Whether we understand that it was the same Paroh whose decrees changed, or if we say that it was literally a new king, the question is still a strong one. Even a new king would know the history of his country. What is the meaning of אשר לא ידע את יוסף?

The answer is as we have said. The open-handedness and generosity of Paroh were all done for his own benefit. When he felt he could gain from having Yosef as a king, he did tremendous *chesed* with him. He invited his family to Mitzraim and gave them all they could ask for. Nevertheless, the moment he felt it was to his benefit to enslave them, he did so without a second thought. It was as if he never knew Yosef.

שיחות מוסר על התורה מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצוק"ל

פרשת שמות

"Oh, Yosef? We already paid him in full for what he gave us! I made him second to the king! Is that not enough? I can't be expected to continue paying him forever!"

Such is the ending of *gemillus chesed* without *yiras Shamayim*.

Avodas Hashem Needs to Be with a Sense of an עיל

The *gemara* (בבא מציעא כט:) tells us: "One who receives an inheritance, and he wants to lose it...Let him hire workers and not sit with them..." This *gemara* is not referring to someone who hired swindlers to work for him. Rather, the *gemara* is telling us about the nature of even upstanding, honest people. Without the pressure of knowing that their employer is watching, they are bound to develop a lax attitude.

"I came home so late last night from my sister's chasunah, I'm sure Mr. Friedman would understand if I come an hour late."

The same is true regarding *avodas Hashem*. It is imperative that we serve Hashem with the sense that He is watching. We need to sense an *ol*, a responsibility to carry out the will of Hashem. If we don't feel that way, we will inevitably slack off. We will serve Him at our own convenience.

The excellence of the midwives was not just that they were tremendous *gomlei chasadim*. If that were all, we would have no praise for them. We praise them for their *yiras Shamayim*. They did their *chesed* with the understanding that Hashem was watching. *Gemillus chesed* which is done as function of *yiras Shamayim* is lasting *chesed*. It is done under all circumstances without exception. That is true *chesed*.

Treading on Thin Ice

Imagine a person is walking across a frozen lake. When he reaches the halfway point, where from all sides it is quite some distance to the land, he hears the ice cracking underneath him. How frightened he would be! He would tread ever so carefully, afraid that at any moment the ice would give, and he would fall into the depths of a freezing cold lake! He might even get onto his stomach to slide across so as not to apply too much pressure to the ice. Though this is quite uncomfortable, and he would become wet and cold, it would surely be better than falling in!

I heard from R' Chaim Brim zt"l that this would describe how the Brisker Rav lived his life. He felt a deep sense of responsibility to fulfill his duties in *avodas Hashem*, and the thought of failing terrified him. It was as if he was treading on thin ice. "There is a *Ribono Shel Olam* Who is watching! He is totally in charge, and we will have to give him an accounting for everything we do! There is *Olam Haba*, and *schar v'onesh!*"

This is *yiras Shamayim*. It creates an *ol*, a sense of accountability, and this is what makes our *avodas Hashem* meaningful. Without *yirah* we could go from *mesirus nefesh* at one moment, to the opposite extreme only moments later.

A Chaburah

R' Chaim Shmulevitz would say: "A person can only be successful if he is a *muchrach*, if he is forced.' If his *avodah* is voluntary it is devalued.

Let us look at a bachur in Yeshiva who is slated to say a chaburah. Two hours before the chaburah he cannot be disturbed. His concentration is intense and he barely notices what is going on around him. Afterward he thinks to himself: 'if only I would be able to hold onto this level, and always learn with such concentration. I could become the Chazon Ish!'

The truth is he is right. He could become the Chazon Ish. If he would hold onto that sense of responsibility to understand and produce *chiddushei Torah*, he would reach great heights. The difference between him and the Chazon Ish is that the Chazon Ish truly felt that responsibility his whole life, whereas the bachur only feels it before his *chabura*. [Afterward he sponsors pizza for lunch!]

We need to feel an *ol* in all areas of *avodas Hashem*. In davening, in learning, in *hakaras hatov*, in *chinuch habanim*, in all areas that are important. If it is done because we have to, and with the understanding that Hashem is watching, we will be successful. If it is voluntary, and we only do it because we want to, we will get nowhere.

The Beans in a Gadol's Pocket

R' Elya Lopian told a story about an adam gadol he once observed. R' Elya noticed that while he was davening Shemoneh Esrei, he would regularly stick his hands into his pockets. When asked

about this peculiar act, he explained that there were beans in his pocket. After each bracha, if he felt he had proper kavanah when mentioning the name of Hashem, he would move one bean from the pocket and put it into a different pocket. After Shemoneh Esrei he would check if there were any beans left in the first pocket, indicating that he did not have proper kavanah. If he found any beans he would cry and do teshuva.

How do we understand this? Did this *gadol* really need to play these games with himself? The answer is that he served Hashem with an *ol*. He felt a true sense of responsibility to daven with kavanah. It was of utmost importance to him to ensure that he did not miss even a single bracha. Thus, he employed every feasible tactic to help him in that cause.

If we can follow in this way, and serve Hashem with *yirah*, with an *ol*, and with a sense of responsibility, then we can be sure to have *hatzlacha* in our *avodas Hashem*.

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