

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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*Shmuessen from
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פרשת יתרו

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לעילוי נשמת
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פרשת יתרו

וְאַתָּה תִּחְזָה מִכָּל הָעָם אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִּל יִרְאִי אֱלֹקִים אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת
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וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֹת: (שמות י"ח כ"א)
וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשֵׁי חַיִּל מִכָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל (פסוק כ"ה)

The Parshah of Yisro's Advice

The *parshah* of *Mattan Torah* is preceded in the Torah by the story of Yisro advising Moshe about how to properly manage the judging of Klal Yisroel. The Ohr Hachaim discusses why it is that Yisro was given the special distinction of his advice becoming a complete, separate *parshah* in the Torah, a distinction so honorable that Yisro is given the title יתרו as a result. True, says the Ohr Hachaim, Yisro himself did the great deed of showing honor to Moshe Rabbeinu, the servant of Hashem, and for that he merited to be honored by Hashem. Still, though, there are many ways for a person to be honored. If Hashem added a *parshah* in Torah as a fulfillment of his reward, there must be a lesson that is being taught to us as well. What lesson is Hashem teaching us?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that there is indeed a message that the Torah is conveying to us with the *parshah* of Yisro's advice, a message which, in fact, belongs specifically where it is in the Torah, as a prelude to the story of *Mattan Torah*. Before learning the answer of the Ohr Hachaim, let us first analyze the actual story of Yisro's advice.

Yisro's Counsel

What did Yisro tell Moshe? He explained that a small system which may be perfectly effective for a small group of people, will be inadequate when one is dealing on a larger scale.

When a person opens a small grocery, he can work with a small informal system of bookkeeping. As a customer approaches the front of the store for checkout, the grocer will pull his pencil from behind his ear and add up the figures on the paper bag

that he will use for the customer's groceries. He has a box of index cards to record each customer's accounts, and another box to store his inventory records. The grocer manages the entire store, with just one worker to help him unload the deliveries onto the shelves.

With time, the grocer becomes successful and begins to expand the business. As his business grows from a grocery to a supermarket, he will have to use a more efficient form of ringing up the customers. He will need a computerized system which will scan each item in milliseconds. The customer accounts as well as his inventory are stored on the computer. He needs to hire different teams of workers to manage the cash registers, oversee deliveries stocks, and to deal with the customers.

Soon the business expands more, and this once-grocer finds himself the owner of a national chain of supermarkets. Now, he will need to find separate presidents and managers for each store, as he assumes the new tasks that accompany the running of a chain of multiple businesses.

Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu was judging Klal Yisroel completely alone. This was a system that could work for a small group – perhaps consisting of a hundred people or so. However, to judge a massive congregation of 600,000 men of the age of twenty and over, together with all the women and children, required a massive operation of distribution and delegation of responsibilities. Yisro showed how a new system is required, consisting of larger tasks and smaller ones. Yisro also reasoned that there would also be different calibers of judges, with each judge given a task corresponding to his level.

Incidentally, it is fascinating and revealing when we learn of the number of judges that were appointed. Rashi tells us that there were a whopping 78,600 judges that were appointed. Who was doing the job before they took over? Moshe Rabbeinu himself!

When an employee leaves a company, the owner needs to hire a replacement. At times, the worker was a hard, dedicated worker, and the owner realizes that he will need to hire two workers as a replacement for the one who left. If he must hire

three workers, that demonstrates that the first worker was obviously a truly dedicated employee, who genuinely desired to use all of his strengths for the good of the company. What if five workers are needed? Or ten? Such scenarios are almost impossible to conceive.

In Moshe Rabbeinu's case, 76,800 judges were needed to jointly assume the responsibilities that Moshe had been doing singlehandedly! These numbers provide us a small glimpse into the superhuman efforts that Moshe extended on behalf of Klal Yisroel, combined with the miraculous *siyatta d'shmaya* that he received in return.

The Appointment of the Judges According to their Righteousness

How exactly did Yisro suggest that the tasks be delegated? Which system of division and organization determined which judges were deemed appropriate for the various levels? The Ohr Hachaim explains that in Yisro's words of advice, he mentioned two separate groupings of four: There were four different ranks of judges that were to be appointed – the highest level were the judges of every 1,000 people, next were the judges of 100, next the judges of 50, and finally, the lowest level were the judges of 10. He also mentioned four *madreigos* of righteousness in the character of the judges, as we shall discuss. Yisro was suggesting that the highest positions would be apportioned to the judges with the highest level of character, and the rest of the positions would likewise be apportioned according to the descending levels of the judges.

The Four Levels of Righteousness

Let us study the four levels of character mentioned by Yisro, as explained by the Ohr Hachaim.

1. אנשי חיל – Men of Great Accomplishment

The Ohr Hachaim explains that this refers to overall completeness in all areas of one's *Avodas Hashem*. A *שר אלף/a judge over a thousand* is considered a real leader in Klal Yisroel, to whom people look for guidance and as a major teacher and role model. As such, this individual must have near-complete perfection in his

middos toward other people, in his self-control, and in his *madreigah* of *ruchniyus*.

2. יראי אלוקים – Fearing Hashem

A *judge of a hundred* is a smaller scale leader. He does not have to possess the same credentials as the more encompassing leader, because it is understood that he is not the highest level to whom one can turn for guidance. To view the highest level of perfection, one would turn the judge of a thousand. However, even the judge of a hundred needed a suitable degree of fear of Hashem.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that what is referred to here is not *יראת הרוממות* / *fear of the exaltedness of Hashem*. The Name *אלוקים* is used here, referring to Hashem's attribute of judgement. One who only fears Hashem out of a degree of understanding His greatness can still fall into a trap. The person may feel that Hashem in His great mercy, will forgive him if he errs. He will not have the proper level of fear and concern about committing a sin.

Many people have an image in their minds of Hashem as an elderly man in the shul who has a bag of lollipops which he hands out to the kinderlach. For this child he has a red one, for this child a green one, all with complete good-naturedness and friendliness. There is no need for any worry or caution about how one behaves, because Hashem acts only with love.

Truly great people recognize that this is not the case. They realize that their every single action is accounted for, and that if they deviate, there will be a judgement against them. True, there is a path of *teshuvah*, but it is not meant to be relied upon before committing the deed. Great people live their lives with a genuine fear of the consequences of their actions, and the punishment they will receive if they *chas v'shalom* transgress Hashem's will, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The Yiras Shamayim and Yiras Cheit of the Brisker Rav z"l was absolute. His every single step and move that he took was precisely measured and calculated according to the dictates of halacha. In fact, the saying in Yerushalayim was that the Brisker Rav would not do an aveirah, not merely because of the fact that it was an aveirah, but more than that. He would not

do an aveirah because there was no mitzvah to do it! – The point was that the Brisker Rav would perform any action only after determining that it was exactly what the Torah demanded from him at that moment.

- *The coat closet in the Brisker Rav's home did not have a bar with hangers on it. Instead, there were hooks that ran across the length of the walls of the closet. Why was this so? Because the Rav was afraid that he would inadvertently run into issues of Borer on Shabbos, as he pushed aside some coats in search of the one that he needed. He therefore had hooks installed, such that no coat would be in the way of another one!*
- *There was a certain gateway in his home, about which he could not come to a conclusion regarding whether it required a mezuzah or not. What he did do? He had the gateway taken down, to avoid the shailah!*

3. אנשי אמת – Men of Truth

For שרי חמישים /judges over fifty people, even a smaller level of righteousness was required. They could perhaps occasionally fall into sin, because they did not yet reach that level where they are so meticulous about their every action out of concern that it was improper. However, they still possessed a certain trait which is so necessary when judging over disputes between people. They had a fierce love for truth – and of course, the degree of honesty that necessarily accompanies this love. One who has a love of truth will exert himself to his utmost in order to discover the true *halacha* in the case over which he is presiding. He will not let any external factors influence or cloud his drive to reach the absolute truth.

4. שונאי בצע – Despisers of Crookery

The שרי עשרות /judges over ten people needed to possess only one simple quality to render them on the necessary level of righteousness for the position. They had to despise money that was gained through any dishonest or fraudulent practices. These judges did not merely refrain from actually engaging in such activities, while still feeling a desire for it in their hearts; rather, they raised

order of judges. The יראי אלוקים would judge a thousand, the אנושי חיל a hundred, etc. What actually happened in the end? The *passuk* tells us *ויבחר משה אנשי חיל מכל ישראל* / *And Moshe chose men of great accomplishment from all of Yisroel*. Chas V'shalom to think, says the Ohr Hachaim, that Moshe found only this *middah* of אנושי חיל, but not the remaining three. Certainly, there existed in Klal Yisroel enough men who possessed the different *middos* that Yisro enumerated. Rather, the *middos* were cumulative; each higher *middah* encompassed within it the *middos* that were below it. If the *passuk* says that Moshe chose אנושי חיל for all the levels of judges, it means that all 78,600 judges were on the highest caliber of *tzidkus* that Yisro spoke about! Yisro had vastly underestimated the great levels that so many individual yidden had reached.²

² The Kotzker Rebbe z"l raised an obvious question on this understanding of the story. If all the chosen judges were on the standard of the שרי אלפים, how could many of them have been required to become judges of a lower position? How would they have agreed to be given positions that were not in accordance with their degree of righteousness?

Dudi is opening a store, and he has three people available to work for him. Luzzi has a great knack for understanding a situation with all its nuances. He is great at running and handling large scale operations. Menachem has a studious head, and he is great with computers. Pedro knows how to mop a floor until it sparkles. Dudi will obviously have no difficulty in apportioning the different jobs in the store. Luzzi will be the manager, Menachem will be the bookkeeper, and Pedro will be the janitor.

What about, though, if Dudi has three workers who are all capable of being the manager? He will not be able to ask any of the to become the janitor, or even the bookkeeper. A person who is talented and smart enough to run the store would never agree to mop the floors or become the bookkeeper.

How then, asks the Kotzker, did many of the judges agree to become of a position lower than the שרי אלפים?

And the answer, says the Kotzker, is that one of the *middos* described is אנושי אמת / *men of truth*. A major component of what would stop a person from accepting a position that is below his capability is his dignity. He may claim that he feels that he will not be using his capabilities etc., but in many instances, it is merely a coverup for his hurt sense of pride. After all, to be a judge for ten people requires in reality the same knowledge as a judge for a thousand people. The difference lies in the degree of glamor that accompanies the position. Men of truth do not care for such honor, and they are perfectly content to accept a lower position if they know that that that is what Hashem wants from them.

What we learn from this story is the tremendously elevated that Klal Yisroel, the children of the *Avos Hakedoshim*, can and do reach when they apply the proper *Avodah*. We must be aware of the potential that exists within us, and we must exert and apply ourselves to live up to this potential.

The Superior Character of Klal Yisroel

This concept is demonstrated further in the *parshah* as well. The Ohr Hachaim discusses the message which HaKadosh Boruch Hu gave to Klal Yisroel as a prelude to *Mattan Torah*. Hashem said והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים *You will be a treasure for Me from amongst all the nations*. The Ohr Hachaim explains that this refers to the very nature of Klal Yisroel. As opposed to the Nations of the World whose very nature is to pursue evil, we, Klal Yisroel have the roots planted within us by the *Avos* and *Imahos*. Our innermost desire is to serve Hashem, and that desire expresses itself in the drive that we see in so many yidden to *shteig* in their Torah and *Avodas Hashem*.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that this is the explanation for the famous exchange that occurred prior to *Mattan Torah* between HaKadosh Boruch Hu and each of the nations.

Hashem first approached each nation and offered them the chance to accept the Torah. Each nation immediately inquired about what was written in it, to determine if it was suitable for them. Hashem responded to each nation by informing it of the commandment which worst suited to their various natures.

To the children of Yishmael, Hashem communicated the prohibition against thievery. They responded that their forefather Yishmael was a world-class thief, and they were not prepared to deviate from his lifestyle.

When the children of Eisav inquired about the contents of the Torah, Hashem informed them of the prohibition of murder. They responded in a manner similar to the children of Yishmael, by arguing that their forefather Eisav was a competent and proficient murderer by his very nature and therefore the Torah was not for them.

To the children of Amon and Moav, Hashem told about the prohibition against adultery. They replied that their entire

existence came through adultery, and they were not prepared to surrender their lifestyle for the Torah.

Hashem finally approached the Jewish People who said Na'aseh V'nishma. At that point, Hashem consecrated them as His chosen Nation forever onwards.

The question that the Ohr Hachaim asks is, how was the nations' reasons a valid response to Hashem's offer? True, their forefathers had evil and negative traits, but that is not a reason to refuse the Torah. On the contrary, let them accept the Torah and learn from it to improve their collective characters!

The Ohr Hachaim answers with the concept that we mentioned. It is not merely that the forefathers of these nations had acquired bad habits which remained to be eradicated. It was far worse than that. The founders of each nation had ingrained the negative *middah* into the very character and essence of their nation. As the Nation of Eisav had argued, even Yitzchok had acknowledged this point when he had blessed Eisav. Eisav was told by Yitzchok that he would live by the sword. As such, he was certainly not suited for the elevated character that the Torah requires of the Nation that accepts it. Only Klal Yisroel with their beautiful, elevated *middos* were worthy off the *ruchniyus* and *kedushah* that the Torah brings with it.

The Message

Let us now return to the original question that we asked from the Ohr Hachaim. Why did the Torah devote a full *parshah* to the advice of Yisro? The Ohr Hachaim answers that the Torah is precluding an erroneous notion that we may harbor about the choosing of Klal Yisroel. It is well known that the Jewish People is blessed with many wonderful talents and skills. Perhaps it is on account of these talents and capabilities that Hashem chose us. We may reason that Hashem desired a wise nation as His own, and he therefore chose us on account of our wisdom.

To rule out this idea, the account of *Mattan Torah* is preceded by the incident of the expert advice given regarding the establishment of the Shoftim. From whom did this expert advice originate? It was from someone who was not born into the nation of Klal Yisroel. We clearly see, then, that talent exists outside Klal Yisroel. If Hashem was

looking for wise men, there were plenty of wise scholars in the Nations. True, Klal Yisroel possesses a vast degree of wisdom, but that is not the reason for their being chosen, but rather as a result of it. Hashem grants wisdom to His Nation who learns His Torah. What caused Klal Yisroel to be chosen was the qualities of righteousness and the *middos tovos* that we inherited from the *Avos* and *Imahos*.

In Conclusion

We must recognize the great potential that exists within us by virtue of our great *yichus*. We are the *segulah*/treasure of Hakadosh Boruch Hu based upon the positive *middos* that are instilled within us as our birthright. So many people of our Nation reach greatness, as was demonstrated to Yisro. We must realize that those 78,600 individuals did not turn themselves into אנשי היל in order to be suitable for the position of a שופט. The reverse was true – they had elevated themselves to the point of אנשי היל on their own, and they were chosen as judges because of it. We, too, must endeavor to become אנשי היל, and the other levels that Yisro described. It is our obligation to cultivate the *kochos* that we have, and to become the great people that we can be. We must all strive to become people who are worthy of the title עם סגולה, and to *shteig* further and further in all the areas of greatness by which Klal Yisroel are described in the Torah.

Bez"V we should reach heights of greatness and perfection in Torah and *Avodah*, and we should be a *nachas ruach* to HaKadosh Boruch Hu.

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