

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת מטות - מסעי

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Wishing all of
כלל ישראל
A happy, healthy summer!

פרשת מטות - מסעי

וּמְקִנָּה רַב הָיָה לְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְלְבְנֵי גָד עֲצוּם מְאֹד וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ יַעֲזֵר וְאֶת אֶרֶץ גִּלְעָד וְהִנֵּה
הַמְּקוֹם מְקוֹם מְקִנָּה: (במדבר ל"ב א')

There was abundant livestock to the children of Reuven and the children of Gad, and they saw the land of Yaazer and the land of Gilead, and behold the place was a place of livestock.

In this *parshah*, we learn of the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven who, acquired great wealth during the war that Bnei Yisroel waged with Midyan. As a result of this great wealth, they felt that they needed to live in a suitable location to take care of their wealth, and they therefore could not live in the mainland of Eretz Yisroel along with the rest of Klal Yisroel. Several lessons can be learned from this story, all of which are, in fact, related to one another.

The Danger of Wealth

The first point we see is where the great wealth the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven led them. The other side of the Yarden is not on the same level of *kedusha* as the rest of Eretz Yisroel, and therefore they would have a more difficult time reaching the levels of closeness to Hashem available to those living in Eretz Yisroel proper. Furthermore, they would be living in a location that was removed from the main body of Klal Yisroel, a factor that in itself posed a great risk of them forgetting their connection with Klal Yisroel. The Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were fully aware of these issues inherent in their move. In fact, as the *pessukim* in Sefer Yehoshua relate, they built a large *mizbeach* as a symbol to remind their succeeding generations of their connection to Klal Yisroel. Evidently, they understood quite well the dangers of living in an area which was away from Klal Yisroel, and yet they felt that due to their circumstances they had no choice. They believed that is what Hashem wanted from them based on the wealth they had been granted.

Chazal are highly critical of the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, referring to their decision as a *נהלה מבוהלת/a hasty inheritance*. Had they fully recognized the real, everlasting value of *ruchniyus*, they would not have exchanged it for a land with greener pasture. Their great wealth, however, blinded them into thinking that their responsibility was to care for that wealth with all their might.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to tell us how at the time that the Mirrer yeshiva was fleeing from the Nazis ym"s, every single bachur was able to escape b'chasdei Hashem. However, the yungerleit that owned houses were tragically unable to escape. They realized the gravity of the situation, and yet they just could not part from their houses so quickly. First, they tried to make sure everything in their house was in order, to whatever extent they were able. By the time they were ready to follow the rest of the yeshiva, it was unfortunately too late.

Rather than dreaming about a carefree life of great wealth, we should be aware of the great dangers that stand against our *ruchniyus* in such settings. Let us rather be content with what Hashem gave us, using it for *Avodas Hashem* with *simcha* and devotion. And if we are granted the gift of wealth, let us be so vigilant to remain focused on the true path of Torah and *Avodas Hashem*.

Ikar and Tafel - in Regard to Ruchniyus and Gashmiyus

This concept is expressed further in the conversation that the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven had with Moshe Rabbeinu regarding their proposed idea of remaining in the *Ever HaYarden*. They assured Moshe that they would lead the rest of Klal Yisroel in fighting the wars against the Canaanites, and only afterwards would they return to their family. 'Have no fear,' they promised. / *We will build fences for our flocks and cities for our children!*

Rashi explains that Moshe immediately perceived how they had mentioned their flocks of animals before their children. He corrected them. / *[First] build for yourselves cities for your children and [afterward, build] fences for your flocks!* Moshe told them, 'Your money is not your

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primary goal; it is rather your means to support your family and raise them on the *Derech HaTorah*. What is important is your children! עשו העיקר עיקר והטפל טפל /*Make what is ikar (primary) into ikar, and what is tafel (secondary) into tafel!*

When one eats a plate of food, it is imperative for him to be aware of which foods are his primary foods, and which ones are of secondary importance. If he does not have this information clear, he will wind up making incorrect brachos.

Similarly, there are so many issues in our lives which we make into an *ikar*, when they are so clearly a *tafel*. We then look back days, or years, later, and we wonder how we could have invested so much time and effort over such insignificant matters.

Chaim invests so much time and effort into the new addition he is putting on his house. The project takes many months, and during that time, he barely learns at all. His davening also suffers, because during davening, he is dreaming about the various details of the project. He spends very little time with his family during the period as well, because any spare time he has is totally devoted to the project.

*After the project is completed, Chaim looks back with a sinking feeling in his stomach. He asks himself if it really was worth it to give up so much of his *ruchniyus* and his connection with his family on account of this addition to his house. So, if some of the details would not have been done exactly according to his liking, down to the last particulars, would it be so terrible? He looks back and realizes that other things in life are more important than the crystal chandelier in his dining room.*

*Shloimy goes to a chasunah of a friend of his. At that chasunah, there are many people from whom Shloimy can gain so much, if he would just go over and have a conversation with them. There are *roshei yeshivos* and *rabbanim* with whom he can discuss questions of Torah and *hashkafah*. There are elderly *yidden* who struggled to retain their *Yiddishkeit* in their youth, and who can impart so much inspiration. However, Shloimy is involved with other things. In between the dancing, he busies himself tasting all the different drinks at the bar, and thoroughly enjoying the meal.*

*Reuven, Shimon, and Levi go together to attend a *Shalosh Seudos* in the shul of a *chashuve rebbe*. Reuven listens intently to the deep discourse of the *rebbe*, which includes intense *pilpul* along with inspirational *mussar*, all beautifully woven together into the *pessukim* of the *parshah*. Reuven walks away with much Torah knowledge, and a deepened understanding of *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* and Creation. Shimon absorbs himself heavily in the heartfelt *zemiros* that are sung. He focuses on the words of each song, and he tries to bring himself to the levels that are described in each *zemer*. He, too, walks away in a cloud of inspiration.*

*Levi is also heavily involved in the *Shalosh Seudos*. He, however, is focused on the different types of herrings and *shmaltz* that are served. He makes sure to sample every dish on the table, and he contemplates deeply about which tastes the best.*

In each of these examples, there was nothing done that was actually wrong.

One who has the ability may certainly add an addition to his house, and under the proper circumstances, it can even be the correct course of action.

One can enjoy the drinks and the meal at a *chasunah*. It is a *seudas mitzvah*, and it should be served and partaken of with due appreciation for its significance.

For *Seudas Shabbos* as well, it is a *mitzvah* for tasty dishes to be served and eaten.

The problem, however, is in what was made into the *ikar*, and what became the *tafel*. The *mitzvos* which involve one's physical aspects are meant to enhance one's *ruchniyus*, not vice versa. The addition to the house will enable him to have more space to serve Hashem properly. The food at a *chasunah* and at a *Shabbos Seudah* are there to lend importance to these events, thus helping people appreciate their

inherent significance in *ruchniyus*. If the whole purpose is the *ruchniyus*, how can one devote the majority of his focus, if not all of it, on the *gashmiyus*? In reality, the emphasis on the *gashmiyus* should be inasmuch as it aids to the *ruchniyus*, and no more than that. The focus must be on the *ruchniyus*.

Ikar and Tafel - in Regard to Areas of Ruchniyus

Until this point, we have discussed areas of *ikar* and *tafel* regarding *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*. In these instances, the *ikar* and *tafel* are clearly recognizable in theory; the difficulty is in putting them into practice. There is, however, a more subtle concept of *ikar* and *tafel*, where both sides are in *ruchniyus*. In these areas too, it is incumbent upon us to place the emphasis in the right place, as we shall explain bs"d.

To bring this concept forth, we will discuss two different *vertlach* of the Chofetz Chaim in our *parshah*, both concerning the war waged by the Bnei Yisroel against Midyan.

Torah and Tefillah Are our Weapon

When relating how the kings and officers of Midyan were killed, the *passuk* concludes ואת בלעם בן הרב / *And Bilam Ben Be'or they killed by the sword*. Why was it necessary for the *passuk* to specifically mention the manner in which Bilam was killed?

Rashi explains that the *passuk* is highlighting the *middah k'neged middah* that was used against Bilam when killing him. Bilam had tried to use Bnei Yisroel's own weaponry in his attempt to harm them. Klal Yisroel's strength lies in their mouths, through the Torah and *tefillah* that they utter, and Bilam, too, had tried to use his mouth to curse the Bnei Yisroel. As a payment for his trying to utilize a weapon that did not belong to him, the Bnei Yisroel used the sword – the weapon of the nations – against him.

The Chofetz Chaim points out the message that we are to derive from this. Our davening and learning do not merely assist us in our wars; they are rather our very weapon.

How much care a soldier devotes into his gun. Before mastering any other training, he learns how to keep his gun in shape. He knows that his source of protection lies in it, and he can never let anything take it away from him. He guards and cares for it with his very soul.

Similarly, the Chofetz Chaim tells us, we must guard our own 'weapon' with all our strength. As our Torah and *tefillah* are only effective when coming from pure mouths, we must therefore concentrate all our energies in using our mouths properly. We cannot sully our mouths with words of *loshon hara* and *machlokes* or other sins, because we are then destroying our very weapon *chas v'shalom*. We must therefore keep them in that perfectly pure state, so that we will have their power available and accessible when the need arises.

Scrubbing the Outside before Kashering the Inside

The second *vort* of the Chofetz Chaim is regarding the instructions the Jewish soldiers received upon their return from the war. The soldiers had taken many spoils from the war, including various utensils which had been used by the Midyanim in the preparation of their non-kosher food. Elozor HaKohen therefore taught them the various laws of kashering utensils. Each utensil must be placed in hot water or fire, etc., depending on the precise manner that it had been used with non-kosher food. Through the proper method of kashering, each utensil would be expunged of all non-kosher food-absorptions within it.

However, there is a prerequisite that is necessary before kashering. The *passuk* begins, אך את הזהב / *Only the gold and the silver*. What is being conveyed by the word אך/*only*? Rashi explains that the utensil must be completely 'bare' in order for it to be kashered. This means that prior to kashering, one must be careful to remove all particles of actual food content that remain on the utensil. As long as there is any actual food substance remaining on the surface, it is impossible to clean the absorptions within. Only after the food is removed, can the expunging process begin.

In our Characters

The Chofetz Chaim teaches us that there is a message here that relates to our characters. There are many areas in our *Avodas Hashem* in which we may apply our efforts and energies into accomplishing. However, we must not lose sight of our own character improvement as we work on other areas. Until we will improve our own character, any 'extras' that we may take upon ourselves will not be effective. Just as

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a utensil must first be cleared of all impurities which are comprised of substance, before any non-substances can be removed from within; so too, a person can begin to work on the deeper, subtler areas of his own *Avodah* only after he has first 'cleansed' himself of all basic, 'surface' issues. If a person will try to skip steps in his work of self-perfection, the result will be little or no growth.

A respected rosh yeshiva was being driven by a talmid at the conclusion of a fundraising trip he had made. As they were nearing the a toll-booth on the highway, there was a choice of which toll-lane to take. One could either choose the lane with the ticket-dispensing machine, or the – obviously slower – lane which was manned by a worker. This talmid chose the lane with the toll-worker. When questioned about this by the rosh yeshiva, the bachur excitedly related how he had heard that Rav Ahron Kotler had specifically taken the lane with the worker, in order to show respect to a human being over a machine.

The rosh yeshiva, however, was not impressed. "Take the quicker lane," he instructed.

"But why?" the bachur protested. "Is that story not true?"

The rosh yeshiva explained. "Rav Ahron was exceedingly careful in regard to his kovod for a fellow human being. He had worked very hard on the middah, and he had reached heights of near-perfection. It was therefore fitting for him to be stringent on even fine nuances in this area, because these nuances added to his elevated levels.

"Regarding myself," continued the rosh yeshiva, "I am aware that I have not yet achieved those levels. For me to try to work on these nuances will not accomplish anything for my character, because I have not reached that point. For me, taking that lane would simply be a waste of time!"

This story took place while I was a talmid in the Be'er Yaakov yeshiva, where Rav Shlomo Wolbe was the mashgiach:

It happened on one Monday morning after Krias HaTorah, that a large crowd of bachurim gathered around the bimah before hagbah. During hagbah, each bachur could be seen peering intently at the Sefer Torah as it was displayed in the air. Rav Wolbe noticed this interesting scene, and after davening he questioned one of the bachurim about it. The boy explained to Rav Wolbe that one of the bachurim had recently discovered in a sefer that concentrating on the osiyos of the Sefer Torah during hagbah is a segulah for Kedushas Einayim. That bachur had shared his 'find' with the rest of the yeshiva, and at the next instance of Krias HaTorah, they were excited for the opportunity to take advantage of this segulah. Rav Wolbe listened to the boy and did not say anything.

That Wednesday night, Rav Wolbe delivered his weekly shmues to the yeshiva. Boy, did he let us have it!

"That segulah," he exclaimed, "is meant for one who has worked upon himself completely in the area of Shemiras Einayim. He has reached great heights, and he is only missing that extra degree of added kedusha and protection against the yetzer hara. For him, it is a great segulah to peer intently at the letters of the Torah. Indeed, the kedusha of the Sefer Torah will wash out any remaining vestiges of tumah in his eyes. However, one who has not yet finished working on his own Shemiras Einayim should not be concentrating on the segulah of gazing at the Sefer Torah. He should concentrate instead on perfecting his own self-control in this regard!

"Any bachur who has perfected himself in this area," concluded Rav Wolbe, "can continue to fulfill this segulah. Otherwise, hagbah should be performed as normal!"

As could be expected, that Thursday morning, not one bachur walked up to the bimah before hagbah!

Rav Wolbe frowned upon bachurim having beards or even wearing a gartel during davening. He felt that these externals served to distract the focus from the actual davening.

One may perhaps have difficulty with these stories. After all, what is wrong with working on one's character, while also utilizing these *segulos* or extra *hiddurim* as an aid in one's appreciation for the davening? The answer is that it is true; as long as that is one's intent, then *gezunte hait*. Go ahead and perform the extras, while not losing sight of the *ikar*. However, all too often, the *tafel* gradually becomes the *ikar*. The change is imperceptible at first, even to the one fulfilling the *segulah*, but soon enough his focus turns more to the *tafel* than to the *ikar*. It is for this reason that Rav Wolbe was so against these practices of *chitzoniyus*. Rather than aiding the *pnimiyus*, they can serve instead to distract one from the *pnimiyus*.

Recognizing the Ikar and the Tafel

Now let us discuss these two different ideas from the Chofetz Chaim. He explained that our weaponry is our mouth – the Torah and *tefillah* that we utter. We must guard this weapon with all our strength, because it is our tool for survival in the world. He also explained that the effort of a person must first be on his external, open character faults, before he can begin to try to change his finer, internal aspects.

In truth, it would seem that both *vertlach* of the Chofetz Chaim complement each other. We must guard our weapon of our mouths – because that is such an important factor in our Yiddishkeit. That is where we must place our focus, rather than on fine nuances or deep *segulos*, which will not be of use at the beginning of character development.

This theme then, is a more subtle application of the concept of *ikar* and *tafel*. Both choices are matters of *ruchniyus*, and yet, it is still important to recognize what is the *ikar* and what is the *tafel*. We must then live our lives with that realization, and we must act in accordance with that knowledge.

One further story demonstrates the point we are making.

There was a certain tzaddik who was known for his tefillos that were answered virtually every time. Many people used to come seek his brachos and tefillos for all different sorts of yeshuos.

At one point, people were wondering what the secret of this tzaddik's power of tefillah was. After all, when they observed him davening, nothing about him seemed so different than an ordinary person. True, he concentrated, but seemingly not on any special level. His tefillos did not take especially long; nor did they observe him performing any segulos, or saying any extra Tehillim. What was his secret, they wanted to know?

The people approached the rav of the town in which this tzaddik lived, and they asked him this question. What was the secret of this tzaddik's tefillah? The rav responded by telling them the following mashal:

There was once an expert architect who had done much service for the king and the country. The king was appreciative of his hard work, and he wished to bestow a unique reward upon the man. The king called in the architect and brought him to a certain room in the palace. This room had been unused for many years and was in a state of disarray and neglect. The king told him as follows:

"You have done much for the kingdom, and I want to give you a special project as a reward for your efforts. Using your great mathematical knowledge and skills, I want you to calculate exactly how many silver coins can fit into this room. Not an estimate, but the precise number of coins. If you can figure it out, and your calculation proves correct, all the coins in the room will be yours. You will become a multi-trillionaire! You will be rich for the rest of your life! If, however, you do not calculate the correct number, the deal is off. I will simply pay you your standard wages as originally agreed upon."

The architect was excited about this unique challenge, and he energetically set about his task. First, he carefully measured the coin from all different angles, taking into account all the different shapes and letters on the coin. Afterward, the architect began to measure the room. He spent several days examining all the different parts of the room, with its various corners, windows, closets etc. He calculated and recalculated from all different directions and angles. Finally, after a week's time, he returned to the king.

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"Your majesty," he announced triumphantly, "I have figured out the answer! The room can hold exactly 21, 882 silver coins!"

The king was happy to put the man's words to the test, and he ordered the coins to be brought to the palace. A special run of the national coin mint was done, and when the coins were ready they were sent on several trains to the palace. The room was completely emptied out, and the work of loading the room began. Each coin was carefully packed in, in the neatest and most efficient possible manner. After a few days, they were nearing the end. The room was near full, and the coins were nearly finished. It looked like the architect's calculations would prove correct! The excitement was mounting for the grand finale of the test. Would the architect win the money or not?

They finished placing the coins in the room – and they were one coin too many! The workers tried to push in the last coin in all different directions and angles, and yet they tried for naught. There was no way the coin would fit.

The workers regretfully told the king that the architect was off by one coin. The king informed the architect that he would not get the reward.

"You tried hard," he conceded, "but our agreement was that you had to calculate the number exactly. One off is one off. I'm sorry, but you will not receive the reward."

The architect, however, was not fazed. He requested the king for one more chance to fit the coins in the room. The king obligingly granted his request, and the architect returned to the room.

"This room," he declared, "is filthy! It has not been in use in years, and there is dust and mold everywhere. This room must be cleaned and scrubbed thoroughly!"

The man's orders were carried out. The workers cleared all the coins from the room, and the room was cleaned and mopped until it sparkled. The coins were then placed into the room. This time, the coins fit perfectly!

And with that, the rav concluded his mashal. "It is true," he explained, "the tzaddik's davening is nothing out of the ordinary. The difference between his davening and that of other people's is in the manner in which he lives his whole life. This tzaddik's every action is performed in an elevated manner. He therefore does not have so many of the common causes which can prevent tefillos from being answered. When these pieces of 'dirt' are not present, a person's tefillos are received by Hashem with the greatest of joy. Hashem is most willing to grant the requests of such a person.

The people around this *tzaddik* were searching for that special 'trick' or *segulah* that he did. That, however, is *tafel*. The *tzaddik's* secret was that he performed the *ikar* in his life in the proper manner. He lived each moment as Hashem wanted him to live. That is more powerful than any *segulah*.

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