

# אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת וירא

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לעילוי נשמת  
הרב משה אליעזר בן הרב ישראל  
רבינוביץ זצ"ל  
Dedicated by R' Zachariah  
Schechter

## פרשת וירא

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי (בראשית י"ח א')

*And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamrei*

רש"י: באלוני ממרא, הוא שנתן לו ענה על המילה, לפיכך נגלה אליו בחלקו

### The Special Zechus of Mamrei

After Avrohom Avinu's Bris Milah, Hashem appeared to him in ממרא/*The Plains of Mamrei*. Rashi explains that the *passuk* mentions the specific location of Hashem's appearance to indicate that the choice of location was a result of a *zechus* of Mamrei. When Avrohom was commanded to have a Bris Milah, he took counsel from his three friends, Aner, Eshkol and Mamrei. Aner and Eshkol had both advised Avrohom against performing the *mitzvah*, whereas Mamrei had encouraged Avrohom to proceed. As a reward for this, Mamrei merited the special privilege of his property being chosen as the location upon which Hashem appeared to Avrom.

#### Why Avrohom asked Advice

Before we discuss the actual *zechus* of Mamrei, let us first explain what it means that Avrohom asked advice regarding the *mitzvah* of Milah. Can it really be that Avrom had a doubt about fulfilling the command of Hashem? Avrohom had allowed himself to be thrown into a fiery furnace at the hands of Nimrod rather than accept the worship of any being other than Hashem Himself. When Hashem told him to slaughter his own son, he complied without hesitation. And now, regarding the *mitzvah* of Bris Milah, he needed to ask advice?! How could he have had any questions regarding Hashem's command?

Some *meforshim* explain that for Avrohom himself, there was certainly no doubt about whether he would perform the *mitzvah* or not. However, Avrohom understood that his mission in the world consisted not merely of personally serving Hashem, but also as asserting and educating the people of the world that there is a Creator. It was with this motive that he had consulted with his friends. He did not have a doubt about his eventual fulfillment of the command; he only asked his friends with the intention that he would thus be spreading the word about his *nisayon*. By allowing for his difficult test to be heard of and discussed, the awareness would spread that Avrohom lived his life in the service of an elevated Creator, and that it was the Creator of the World to whom Avrohom completely dedicated himself.

#### Fulfilling the Mitzvah of the Torah

Perhaps we can explain it in a different manner as well. Indeed, there was no question in Avrohom's mind that he would fulfill Hashem's command. The doubt that Avrohom harbored concerned merely the manner in which he was to view the *mitzvah*. Avrohom fulfilled all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, and he regarded any opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* of the Torah with an extra degree of seriousness and enthusiasm. This, then, was Avrohom's question. Was he to view Hashem's command for him to circumcise himself as a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of Bris Milah according to the *halachos* of the Torah; or was this a *mitzvah l'sha'ah*/a specific command that he was given personally, but which was not a reflection or precursor of the *mitzvah* that the Bnei Yisroel would receive in the Torah?

Avrohom posed this question to his three friends, and they each offered him an answer, as recounted in the Medrash.

Aner told Avrohom the following: "You have just engaged in an intense war against the four kings, and they are no doubt waiting for a chance to recover their losses. If they find out that you are in a vulnerable state, they will surely seize the opportunity to mount another attack against you. "Therefore, according to *halacha*, this is not the proper time for you to perform the *mitzvah*. You would have to wait instead for the danger to subside. If you will perform the *mitzvah* now, you must realize that it is a *mitzvah* that is specific to you; not the Bris Milah of the Torah."

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Eshkol answered Avrohom's query in a similar fashion. "Avrohom, you are an old man. At your age, there is certainly a risk that you will bleed to death as a result of the *mitzvah*. Consequently, according to the *halacha* of the Torah, you are exempt from the *mitzvah*, and even forbidden from doing so. Of course you should perform the Milah as Hashem commanded, but understand that you will be fulfilling your own personal command from Hashem; not the *halacha* of the Torah."

### **Avrohom Lived with an Elevated Level of Hashgacha**

When Avrohom approached Mamrei with his question, he answered differently than Aner and Eshkol, and he addressed the points of Aner and Eshkol directly. "Avrohom," he said, "do not think that you are comparable to a regular person. You were thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod, and Hashem brought you out unscathed. You just miraculously won the war against the four mighty kings. Obviously, you are on a different plane of existence than the average person. Hashem clearly has a special level of *hashgacha* that He bestows upon you, and therefore, it would not even be considered a miracle for you to perform the Milah and emerge from it healthy and unharmed. If you fulfill Hashem's command, you will be performing the *mitzvah* according to the exact dictates of the Torah!"

Mamrei's response was exactly what Avrohom Avinu was looking to hear. He was overjoyed at the opportunity to fulfill the exact *mitzvah* of the Torah, not in a miraculous manner which would not be a fulfillment of the Torah's obligation, but in a natural manner as the Torah prescribes. Mamrei had demonstrated to him that this was indeed the case.<sup>1</sup>

### **Connecting Ourselves to Hashem and the Torah**

This idea is relevant to our own lives. Although we do not live in the manner of Avrohom Avinu who lived with open miracles, we can still connect ourselves to Hashem and the Torah, and thereby merit to live on an elevated level of existence. Hashem has a special *hashgacha* for those who attach themselves to the Torah which is many times inexplicable from a natural standpoint. When we personally place ourselves under Hashem's Hands and guidance, we can rely upon Hashem's sustenance and *hashgacha*, without worrying just how we will be taken care of. We simply need to fulfill the will of Hashem and rely on Hashem for our needs; how they will come about is completely beside the point.

### **The Zechus of Mamrei**

Now let us return to the actual *zechus* that Mamrei secured for himself by providing Avrohom with the proper advice about the Bris Milah. Our question on this is, we can understand that the *zechus* of providing advice about the Milah was surely significant enough to merit that Hashem should appear to Avrohom in his property. However, what still needs to be explained is what *zechus* did Mamrei have that allowed him this very merit of providing such great advice?

To clarify our question further, we must realize that there is nothing in *ruchniyus* that is completely for free. When a person achieves a singularly great achievement in *ruchniyus*, it is oftentimes as a result of a smaller act that he had done previously, from which he merited to climb to even higher

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<sup>1</sup> Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would explain the incident of Nachshon Ben Aminadav at the Yam Suf in the same way. When Klal Yisroel were gathered at the Yam Suf, seemingly only one individual out of the entire Nation had the courage to jump into the Sea. The question on this is, how can it be? It was a Nation of *tzadikim*, descendants of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov and the *Shevatim*, who wad ingrained within themselves the ability to be *moiser nefesh*. Klal Yisroel demonstrated this great prowess throughout the generations as well. Could there really have been only one person at the time who was capable of this heroism?

The answer to this question is certainly there were many who could have been *moiser nefesh*. However, at that time, it was not *mesirus nefesh* that was sought. Hashem had instructed Moshe, (שמות י"ד ט"ו) דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו (*Speak to Bnei Yisroel and they should travel*). They were not to jump in the water with the intention of dying; they were rather to 'travel' and walk through the water, with full knowledge and confidence that Hashem would deliver them from the situation, and that there was nothing standing in their way.

To fulfill this directive is indeed a great feat. It is one thing to sacrifice oneself, but to see a raging sea in front of oneself and to fully comprehend with one's entire being that there is nothing standing in his way – that is truly a task that is reserved for a singularly unique *tzadik* whose *bitachon* in Hashem has surpassed the greatest levels.

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levels. Particularly when the accomplishment that was attained is one that will be reserved for a specific person, one must have a *zechus* that allows him to be the one to secure that position.

*When Rav Meir Shapiro was trying to open the Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, there was one wealthy philanthropist, a man by the name of Mr. Leberbaum, who donated an enormously large sum for the cause. It was largely due to his donation that the yeshiva was able to open its doors.*

*When the yeshiva was completed and able to be opened, Rav Meir Shapiro remarked, "More than I am envious of Mr. Leberbaum for the zechus that he had of donating the large sum toward the yeshiva, I am envious of that mitzvah that he did which gave him that zechus!"*

*Incidentally, after the Daf Yomi – the brainchild of Rav Meir Shapiro – took a foothold in Klal Yisroel, there were many gedolim who made a similar remark about Rav Shapiro. 'What great zechus did Rav Meir Shapiro possess, which enabled him to have the zechus of bringing the idea of Daf Yomi to Klal Yisroel?'*

Generally speaking, a large *zechus* is generated by some *mitzvah* involving self-sacrifice which preceded it. If Mamrei merited to be the one to provide Avrohom with the proper advice about the Milah, he must have earned the *zechus*. Where can we find some hint about how he earned it?

### **The Mizbeach of Avrohom**

Perhaps the answer to this can be found in a *passuk* in Parshas Lech Lecha. The *pesukim* there describe Avrohom's initial entry into Eretz Canaan. At that time, Avrohom was still a stranger in the land, and he wandered from place to place seeking a place where he would be able to settle down and continue his life's mission. The *passuk* there says (י"ג י"ה) /*And Avrom moved his tent and he came and dwelled in the plains of Mamrei that were in Chevron; and he built there a mizbeach for Hashem.* Avrom's building of a *mizbeach* signifies his carrying out his life's mission of spreading the awareness of HaKadosh Boruch Hu – the equivalent of him 'building his yeshiva'. The *passuk* informs us that Avrom proceeded with his mission at 'the plains of Mamrei.' Rashi comments that 'Mamrei' is not the name of the location, but the name of the individual person who owned those plains. Mamrei had thus graciously given the use of his own property to Avrom to be able to proceed with this task of building the *mizbeach*.

Perhaps we can venture to speculate that Mamrei was not the only person to whom Avrohom had turned when seeking to open his 'yeshiva'. Surely, he had approached his friends Aner and Eshkol with his plan as well. However, it is not such an easy thing for a person to give up his own personal property or money for a yeshiva. Although Aner and Eshkol greatly respected Avrom and appreciated his greatness, sacrificing from themselves in such a manner was still something that they were unable to do.

*Avrom approached Aner and said, "I am trying to open a yeshiva, maybe you can help me out?"*

*Aner began hemming and hawing. "Rabbi, your idea is a great one, and I approve wholeheartedly. But I just don't know if I can give you money right now. You see, I am in the midst of building a winter home in Florida, and a summer home in Canada. I'm also trying to buy an apartment in Eretz Yisroel so I can visit there every year. I would really love to help you, but as you can see, I'm all tied up right now. Why don't you come back in six months from now? Maybe then I'll have a better cash-flow!"*

*Avrom then approached Eshkol with his request. Eshkol also seemed uncomfortable with the prospect of giving a donation. "What's the matter?" Avrom asked. "Is it the cash-flow?"*

*Eshkol, though, had a different excuse. "No Rabbi, thank G-d my cash-flow is fine. But you see, I have to see where I should place my charity. After all, there are lots of different causes out there. I'm approached on behalf of many almanos and yesomim, and I have to decide if your cause is worthy of competing with them. Besides, there are other yeshivos to support as well. I heard that Shem and Ever have one, and maybe they deserve to be*

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*supported first. Why don't you come back to me in a few months' time? Hopefully then I'll have more clarity about whether I can support your yeshiva as well."*

*Avrom now approached Mamrei with his idea. Mamrei did not hesitate for an instant.*

*Without flinching, Mamrei replied, "Sure I can help you open your yeshiva!"*

*He then pointed to his own backyard. "Rabbi, you will build it right here in my property!"*

*Avrom protested. "But that's your own yard!"*

*Mamrei did not back down. "It is a great zechus to host your yeshiva. I will give up my backyard for this privilege!"<sup>2</sup>*

With this act of self-sacrifice in Mamrei's record, we can certainly understand how he was *zoche* to be the bearer of the appropriate advice for Avrohom Avinu regarding Milah. Moreover, the *mishnah* in Avos tells us (אבות ב' ז') *The more 'yeshiva', the more wisdom.* Where there is a *yeshiva*, that is a generator of wisdom and suitable counsel for one's queries. Mamrei had allowed for a 'yeshiva' in his property, benefitted from the special quality that a *yeshiva* generates. From there, Mamrei then merited to climb even higher, and host the Appearance of HaKadosh Boruch Hu to Avrohom Avinu!

### **Acquiring Extra Zechuyos**

What lesson can we derive from this chain of events generated by Mamrei's behavior? By Mamrei giving of his land for Avrohom's *Avodah*, he secured himself a *zechus*. Likewise, as each person lives through his own life, he can never know when he will need such a *zechus*.

*One who drives a car must always have insurance. Even the best, most experienced driver should not risk driving without it.*

*'But why?' he may argue. 'I drive so carefully! I never speed, and I stop completely at every stop sign. I even slow down as soon as I see the traffic light turn yellow! When there is any 'confrontation', I always let the other motorist come ahead of me, even when I clearly have the right of way. What can possibly go wrong?'*

*The answer is that while it is true that driving in such a manner is wise, and indeed, it causes a person to avoid much trouble and aggravation, it still does not preclude the need for insurance. As careful as a person may be, there can still be mishaps. The best driver can be distracted at times. The road may be slippery, and he will lose control. Perhaps another driver will act recklessly. One cannot only rely on his own prudence; sometimes he will need to fall back upon another form of 'protection'.*

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<sup>2</sup> The *middah* that we are conjecturing regarding the character of Mamrei represents a great level of generosity to the point of great self-sacrifice. Generally speaking, this generosity is accompanied by a quality of big-heartedness, in which a person does not feel threatened or imposed upon by the success of others.

*Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, rosh yeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, once related to me the following incident that occurred between him and Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, rosh yeshiva of the Mir in Yerushalayim:*

*Rav Ruderman had lived in Yerushalayim, and he was very close with Rav Lazer Yudel. At that point Rav Ruderman did not yet have a shtetlar and the two gedolim were discussing the situation.*

*"I have a great idea for you!" Rav Lazer Yudel exclaimed. "You can open a yeshiva in Yerushalayim!"*

*"But how will I do that?" Rav Ruderman wondered. "Is there is room for another yeshiva in Yerushalayim?"*

*"Sure there is!" was Rav Lazer Yudel's enthusiastic reply. He stood in front of his own Mir Yeshiva on Rechov Bais Yisroel, and he pointed across the street. "You can open your yeshiva right here, across the street from mine! I can help you get bachurim and raise money. Come, let's get started!"*

*Rav Lazer Yudel was completely above any feelings of selfishness or jealousy, and he was therefore completely not threatened by the 'competition' of another yeshiva nearby. He desired the success of others as much as his own, and he was only too happy to help another yid bring about kovod Shamayim alongside himself.*

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Similarly, although a person may try his best to live a proper life in which he fulfills the Torah and *mitzvos* to the best of his ability, he can still never be completely safe from slips. The *yetzer hara* is always on the alert, seeking to ensnare a person into a hidden trap. As the *passuk* says *כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה* (קהלת ד' כ') / *There is no person who is righteous in the world, that will do [only] good and not sin.* Even the greatest *tzadikim* slip at times, and they need *teshuvah* and *kapparah* for their sins. What can help a person in such a situation? When a person has an extra measure of favor in the Eyes of HaKadosh Boruch Hu, this will cause HaKadosh Boruch Hu to judge him favorably at this time. Although the sin will not be overlooked, Hashem will still treat him in a favorable manner. It will be recognized that the sin was not characteristic of the individual, but rather a departure from his usual righteous behavior.

*The following incident, which was related by a yid who once davened at our shul, will demonstrate this concept:*

*This yid was an askan who was close with the Kapishnitzer Rebbe. The Rebbe once called him up, asking him to come and help with a certain matter. When this askan reached the Rebbe's study, he found another yid there, who looked extremely distraught. The Rebbe explained that this man was a chassan, and he was due to be married in three days' time. The problem was that his kallah was from Australia, and as of yet, she had been unable to procure a visa to be able to enter America. She had been to the American embassy numerous times in the last few months, and each time she had been pushed off for one reason or another. She had tried to explain that she needed to be in America for her own wedding, and yet her pleas fell on deaf ears. Each time she went, there was another form she was missing, another signature she required. Now it was three days before the chasunah, and the couple was frantic with worry.*

*The Rebbe then asked the askan if he could help this couple. The askan promised that he would do his best to assist them.*

*Early the next morning, the askan was back at the Rebbe. Everything was clear, and there was a visa waiting for the woman at the embassy. What had happened? This askan had called the New York Senator, Mr. Jacob Javits. As soon as the senator heard the plight, he got to work. He placed a few phone calls to the right people, and in two hours, all the red tape had cleared.*

*What had caused this Mr. Javits to be so favorable to this askan?*

*While he was running for office, this askan had campaigned extensively on his behalf. When Mr. Javits eventually won the vote, he called up the askan.*

*"Tell me what you need," he said. "I am ready to repay you."*

*At that time, the askan had protested. "Heaven forbid! I don't need any favors!"*

*"So why were you campaigning so hard for me?"*

*"I truly felt that you are the right person for the job, both for the Jews in particular, and for the general population as a whole!"*

*Mr. Javits was moved by the askan's devotion. He gave him his personal number, and he gave him permission to call whenever he needed anything. The askan was able to use this connection to obtain much needed assistance both for the Jewish community as a whole, and for private individuals – as in the above incident.*

When one campaigns for an elected official, he has gotten himself a place on that official's 'good side'. He can then subsequently utilize this standing to achieve much benefits from that official. Similarly, when a person is on Hashem's 'good side', that *zechus* can stand for him in his time of need, both in time of trouble and in time of favor.

### **'Campaigning' for Hashem**

Aside from living in a proper manner, a person should therefore always be on the lookout for ways in which he can go beyond what may be 'expected' from him.

- *He can begin a seder a half an hour before Shacharis, though he will need to literally force himself out of bed until he becomes accustomed to the new schedule.*
- *At various times throughout the day, there can be a few minutes of 'dead' time, when he is in between his different responsibilities and engagements. If a person will use one of those times to learn one mishnah or say one kapitel Tehillim, he is gaining so much. As time goes by, those Mishnayos or kapitlach will accumulate, amassing the individual a fortune of zechus.*
- *He can undertake a new chessed initiative in which he must greatly extend himself on behalf of others, whether in a private setting or for an organization.*
- *A person can accept upon himself not only to give tzedaka when approached, but to go a step further. He will plan ahead, and he'll always have a few coins or dollar bills available for those times when he is approached.*
- *He can be mevater in a confrontation in which he was clearly in the right.*
- *One can undertake to constantly smile at the people around him, offering words of encouragement and chizuk. He can never know how far those words will affect.*

When a person strains himself for *Kovod Shamayim* beyond his normal capabilities – when he 'campaigns' for HaKadosh Boruch Hu – he has acquired a *zechus* for himself. He can never know how far this *zechus* will lead him. Perhaps it will stand for him when there is a judgement of *Shamayim* against him *chas v'shalom*. Or perhaps, as in Mamrei's case, this *zechus* will cause him to achieve great accomplishments, of which select few people are *zoche* to reach.

Bez"V we should all achieve many such *zechusim* in our lives, so we can be viewed favorably in *Shamayim*, and so that we can achieve great *madreigos*.

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