

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
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**פרשת במדבר
הכנה לשבועות**

Volume 5 Issue # 26

לעילוי נשמת אדמו"ר מזוועהיל
הרה"ק רבי שלמה בן הרה"ק רבי
מרדכי צוק"ל זיע"א
לכבוד היארציית כ"ו אייר

פרשת במדבר

וַיִּתְּיָלוּ עַל-מִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם (במדבר א' י"ח)

And they established their birth according to their families according to their fathers' household.

The Bnei Yisroel Prove their Yichus

In the beginning of the counting of the Bnei Yisroel, the *passuk* tells us *וַיִּתְּיָלוּ עַל מִשְׁפְּחֹתָם* / *They established their lineage according to their families*. As Rashi explains, this means that they verified their claim of their family identity by furnishing proof of their birth.

What was the reason that the Bnei Yisroel were required to go through this verification? The Medrash explain the circumstances leading up to this requirement:

As the Jewish people received the Torah at Har Sinai, the Nations of the World witnessed the might, the splendor, and the awesome heights the Jewish people reached as they merited to hear Hashem's voice. Envious of the great glory and honor bestowed upon the Jewish people, the Nations challenged: "What have they to deserve this closeness to Hashem more than any other nation?"

Hashem responded to this challenge by commanding the Jews to furnish documents of their lineage. Hashem was as if saying to the Nations, "See if you can verify your lineage the way My children are doing!"

Chazal are teaching us that through the Bnei Yisroel's verification of their *yichus*, the Nations' challenge is silenced. By the Nations' inability to establish from whom they descend, they lose any claim to demand the Torah for themselves.

Understanding the Requirement

The message of this Medrash would seem to require explanation. Certainly, it is a beautiful quality of the Jewish people that

the entire nation was able to point to their pure lineage. And indeed, it is shameful when other nations cannot. However, it still must be understood – Why is that a condition relevant for determining if one is worthy of receiving the Torah?

A stranger enters a shul and approaches the Rav. "Excuse me," he says, "Could you please show me where the Gemaras are?"

"Sure," the Rav responds, "I'll be happy to assist you! But first, I must ask of you, can you tell me who your parents are?"

"Rabbi," the flustered man replies, "All I asked was for you to give me a Gemara to learn from! What difference does it make who my parents are?"

As we can understand this Medrash in three different angles, as we shall explain:

1- Hakaras Hatov:

The first theme we can learn from the requirement of establishing one's parental descent, is the idea of *Hakaras Hatov*/gratitude. One who knows who his parents are displays that he possesses the *middah* of gratitude, and that he therefore deems it important to recognize the parents who have given him the gift of life and upbringing. In fact, the *Sefer HaChinuch* in his explanation of the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents, bases his explanation completely on the trait of gratitude. Conversely, one who is unable to name who his parents are signifies that he doesn't feel a measure of gratitude toward them, and that it is therefore unimportant for him to discover who they are.

An Essential Aspect of the Torah

Why is the trait of gratitude a requirement in order to receive the Torah? Because an essential and fundamental component of the Torah is gratitude toward Hashem for all the goodness and kindness He has bestowed. If one does not have the trait of gratitude ingrained within himself, Hashem does not wish to grant him the privilege of the Torah and the infinite goodness that accompanies it, because this person will not use all the goodness granted him as a tool to connect

to Hashem and have a relationship with Him. Instead, such a person will try to selfishly enjoy all the benefits contained in the Torah, while behaving completely ungratefully and acting solely for his own self-interests.

Honor for Parents is an Extension of Honor for Hashem

The correlation between gratitude towards one's parents and gratitude toward Hashem is not merely a reflection of the same traits in a person displayed in two different areas – although that in itself is an important point. Over here however, the connection is much deeper:

In the *Aseres Hadibros* we find that each of the two *luchos* contains a separate category of *mitzvos*. The first *luach* discusses *mitzvos* למקום אדם בין/ *between man and Hashem*, i.e. belief in Hashem, keeping Shabbos etc., while the second *luach* discusses *mitzvos* בין אדם לחבירו/ *between man and his fellow man*, i.e. not murdering, not stealing, etc. There is only one *mitzvah* which seems to be an exception to this rule. The *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents is on the first *luach*, that of between man and Hashem. Seemingly, the *mitzvah* would belong to the second category, that of between man and other people. Why was it inscribed on the first *luach*?

The answer given to this question is that honoring one's parents is an extension of the concept of honoring Hashem Himself. As the Gemara tells us, the parents of a person are considered 'partners' with HaKadosh Boruch Hu in the creation of the child.¹ A person must express gratitude to the source which bequeathed him life; a source, which as explained, is a unit comprised of three joint partners. By rejecting any component of that partnership, it is considered as if he is rejecting the entire unit.

¹ The parents are the source of the physical aspect of the person while Hashem infuses the neshama, the spirit of life, into the person. As it is only with the fusion of these two components together that a person can exist in this world, the parents are therefore considered actual partners with Hashem in the task of the person's creation.

We now have a deeper understanding of why honoring one's parents is such a fundamental prerequisite for receiving the Torah. Honoring, and having gratitude, toward parents is actually a way of honoring and showing gratitude toward Hashem Himself. Certainly, the Nations who lack this trait, as reflected by their being unable to even identify their own parents, are unworthy of accepting the Torah, of which gratitude to Hashem is such an integral component.

2- Kavod:

The second theme we can understand in identifying one's parents is the trait of dignity and self-respect:

The Gemara (גיטין י"ג) brings an opinion that if one accepts a *document of freedom* on behalf of a slave without the slave having expressly appointed him as his agent, the slave will not go free. Despite the *halachah* that one may act on another's behalf without his knowledge in matters pertaining to his benefit, becoming free is not considered a benefit. Why is this so? After all, he has seemingly acquired the most precious gift – his own freedom! Is that not certainly a benefit? The Gemara explains that a slave in fact perceives his acquisition of freedom not as a benefit but as a disadvantage. As a free man, he has more restrictions in how he can marry a Jewish woman, whereas as a slave, he is permitted to live with a maidservant, unrestrained by laws of modesty etc.

The Meshech Chochmah in Parshas Va'eira explains that this lowliness of character stems from the fact that a slave has no lineage – he is not considered as having any familial relationship to his father. Having no father causes him not to feel any ambition to live up to a family name. He will therefore act according to his base desires, without inhibition. Conversely, a person who does carry a family name, takes pride in that name and desires to bring honor to it. He would not wish to engage in shameful behavior, however pleasurable it may be, because he would be disgracing the family name of which he takes pride.

Klal Yisroel Possess the Regal Manner of ממלכת כהנים

How does this *middah* of *kavod* play a role in regard to receiving the Torah?

In the words that Hashem communicated to Bnei Yisroel as introduction to the giving of the Torah, Hashem informed them that they are to be a (שמות יט ו) / ממלכת כהנים / *a kingdom of officers* – a people of great honor and bearing. In the same way that a person seeks to bring honor to his family name, there is also a responsibility for Klal Yisroel to see to it that their character and actions will bring honor to Hashem and the Torah. If the Nations are unable to establish their lineage, this conveys that they lack this trait of pride in their name that they carry. If so, they are unfitting to receive the Torah.

3- Zechus Avos:

To arrive at the third theme that may be alluded to in the Jewish people's establishing their lineage, we would suggest bs"ד that perhaps the lineage referenced here is not only of each individual's personal father, but also the collective fathers of the Jewish people – the *Avos* and *Imahos*, and the *Shevatim*. The necessary concept for the Torah is זכות אבות / *merit of their forefathers*.

One of the conditions required in order to serve in Dovid Hamelech's army was pure yichus (קידושין ע"ו). The reason for this is that the Jewish army was run on a supernatural level; it did not win its wars due to physical strength and superior strategies, rather, based on the closeness to Hashem that the Jewish People held, and through the merit of its Torah and mitzvos. On top of this, they had their ancestors' merits upon which to rely, should their own merits not be strong enough.

Zechus Avos was necessary for *Kabbalas HaTorah* for a similar reason. The Jewish people's receiving of the Torah, certainly a great privilege, is also a great responsibility. Possessing the Torah entails being the chosen nation of Hashem, whom Hashem showers with love and blessing. To be in that position requires being worthy of that love – a requirement which will inevitably entail falling short at times, thereby possibly incurring the anger of Hashem and strict

punishment ch"v. This position, then, necessitates having some form of protection along with it. What will stand at the nation's side at a time of Heavenly displeasure r"l? For Klal Yisroel, there is *Zechus Avos* which will stand for them in their time of trouble. The Nations, however, possess no such lineage upon which they could rely. Consequently, they are found unworthy of receiving the Torah.

Resolving a difficulty in this Medrash

According to our current explanation, a difficulty in this Medrash can be resolved. The Medrash teaches us that the Nations are disqualified from receiving the Torah as a result of their inability to identify their lineage. The question is, we know that each nation was in fact given the choice to accept the Torah, whereupon each one refused based on their own characteristics and habits. If so, how can the Medrash say that Hashem disqualified the Nations? They were seemingly not disqualified at all, but rather offered an opportunity to accept the Torah!

Based on our explanation, perhaps we can resolve this contradiction. Originally, the nations did connect with their lineage and it was for that very reason that they refused the Torah. The children of Eisav pointed to their ancestral affinity to murder, the children of Yishmael to thievery, etc. They connected with their past and rejected the Torah's mitzvos. After the Bnei Yisroel received the Torah, however, the Nations perceived the great splendor and majesty of the Torah and they desired another chance. Their only recourse then was to try to disconnect themselves from their past, and from the middos they inherited. To this Hashem responded that the Torah can only be given to those who connect with their lineage, for reasons that we explained. They are thus disqualified on both ends, whether they will connect with their past or they will not. The Jewish people, however, do connect with their forefathers, and this only makes them so much worthier of receiving the Torah, through the pure and refined middos they inherited from their forefathers.

The Three Characteristics of Klal Yisroel

Let us bring the three concepts we discussed one step further
bs" d:

The Gemara (יבמות ע"ט) tells us that the Jews are recognized by three characteristics: **1) ביישנים** - They have the trait of shame, from doing what is wrong, and from presenting themselves in an unbecoming manner, **2) רהמנים** - They are merciful, and **3) גומלי חסדים** - They excel in performing chesed, kindness with their fellow men.

Corresponding to the Three Themes of Recognizing Yichus

Perhaps we can suggest that these three characteristics correspond to the three themes we have explained in regard to the concept of recognizing one's lineage - *Hakaras Hatov* to one's parents, *Kavod* for one's family name and for the Nation that one represents, and *Zechus Avos*:

- 1. בושה/Shame – כבוד/Dignity:** We previously mentioned the observation of the Meshech Chochmah that slaves lack the trait of shame because they have no family name to which they must live up. The *middah* of shame, then, is directly related to one having a strong connection with his family roots. A person belonging to a family desires to uphold the pride of his family name, and he will be ashamed to act in a manner which is contrary to it. This was the theme of *Kavod* - respect for one's family and heritage - as explained earlier.
- 2. זכות אבות/Mercy – רחמנות:** The *middah* of mercy is correlated to *Zechus Avos*. How so? This can be seen from the source given in the Gemara for the *middah* of mercy in Klal Yisroel:

The Gemara derives the characteristic of mercy in the Jewish people from the *passuk* (דברים י"ג י"ח) - *Hashem will give you mercy, and have mercy on you*. R' Chaim Shmulevitz z"l would ask on this source - The *passuk* only explicitly states that Hashem will be merciful. Where then do we see in this *passuk* that we, the Jewish people, have the *middah* of mercy?

R' Chaim z"l would explain that the way one acquires mercy is by having experienced mercy – from his parents, his teachers, etc. By Hashem being merciful upon us, we ourselves learn to become merciful. Therefore, by demonstrating from this *passuk* that Hashem acts with mercy toward Klal Yisroel, the Gemara is indeed providing a valid source for the existence of mercy in the nature of Klal Yisroel themselves.

This concept is illustrated in the following anecdote involving Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky z"l:

A certain couple was having trouble with their baby sleeping at night. The baby would cry continuously unless he was held, and this would happen repeatedly throughout the night. Upon consultation with their doctor, the couple was advised to put the baby in a room at the far end of the house where they would be unable to hear his cries. Once there, they were to let him cry without letup. After following this practice for a few nights, they were told, the baby would be healed.

Before acting upon the advice of the doctor, the parents chose to hear the opinion of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky z"l. He told them, "Halachically it may be permissible to follow the doctor's directive, but I would not advise it. Your baby will absorb the message that people need not pay attention to the cries of others. This will cause him to grow up to be callous and hard-hearted himself, r"l.

We must be merciful upon our children; through this they themselves learn the trait of mercy. Similarly, by Hashem being merciful upon us, we learn to become merciful.

We have thus established that the *middah* of *rachmanus* in Klal Yisroel stems from Hashem's mercy that He shows for us. Let us move one step further. Why, in fact, is Hashem merciful upon us? Out of His love for our forefathers! This leads us to the third theme we explained earlier – our connection with our lineage is important, because it is our link and access to their merits and the mercy Hashem bestows on our ancestors. Thus, our *middah* of *Rachmanus* is correlated to *Zechus Avos*, because it is through *Zechus Avos* that we are *zoche* to Hashem's mercy upon ourselves, and this in turn is what causes us to be merciful.

3. גומלי חסדים/Perform Chessed – הכרת הטוב/Gratitude: How are these two concepts correlated? R' Elya Lopian zt"l would explain that the specific terminology of **גומל חסד** used in reference to this *middah* means to **repay** kindness. This demonstrates to us that the first step a person should fulfill in regard to the *middah* of chessed is to repay kindness that was awarded to him. Rav Elya zt"l would explain this point in regard to the language of the tefillah טובים חסדים ותגמלנו חסדים טובים. We daven that Hashem should grant us kindnesses as payment; through our having merited and deserved the kindness.

Certainly then, a major application of this concept would be honoring one's parents as an expression of gratitude for all the kindnesses they performed for him. The *middah* of גומלי חסדים is thus correspondent to the first theme of gratitude that was explained earlier regarding the quality of recognizing one's parents.

In Preparation for *Kabbalas HaTorah*

As we step into the Yom Tov of Shavuot and *Kabbalas HaTorah*, let us absorb these lessons, which were a prerequisite for the Jews' receiving the Torah. Let us value our connection with all our great *Avos* and *Imahos*, by honoring them and emulating them their ways, and by expressing our gratitude and appreciation to our parents who raised and nurtured us.

Through this we should reach:

1. A ***madreigah of hakaras hatov*** to HaKadosh Boruch Hu, of which so much of the Torah is based on, and the ***middah of גמילת חסדים/repaying kindnesses***, the most basic and initial requirement of *chessed*.
2. A true **attitude of *Kavod*** and pride for Klal Yisroel, the Nation that possesses the Torah and the great legacy of the *Avos Hakedoshim*. Through this we will achieve bs"d the proper level of dignity and regality as befitting the ממלכת כהנים, and we will have the appropriate ***middah of בוששה/shame*** regarding acting improperly.

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3. We should be *zoche* to attain the **Zechus Avos** and the *Rachamim* befitting children of the *Avos Hakedoshim*, and we should acquire the **middah of רהמנים/mercifulness**, as we experience it from HaKadosh Boruch Hu.

Bez"H we should be *zoche* to have a true *Kabbalas HaTorah*.

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