

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
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*Shmuessen from
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פרשת מטות - מסעי

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Wishing all of
כלל ישראל
A happy, healthy
summer!

פרשת מטות - מסעי

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטְוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר...אִישׁ כִּי יִדָּר
נָדָר לֵה'...לֹא יַחֲלֶה דְבָרוֹ (במדבר ל': ב'-ג')

And Moshe spoke to the Leaders of the Shevatim of the Bnei Yisroel saying... "A man, when he makes a vow to Hashem...he shall not desecrate his word."

The *parshah* of *Nedarim* in the Torah is prefaced in an unusual manner. Unlike many other *parshiyos* which begin with Hashem instructing Moshe to command the *mitzvah* to the entire Bnei Yisroel, here, Moshe begins by first telling the *mitzvah* specifically to the *ראשי המטות/Leaders of the Shevatim*.

The *Nesi'im* are Given Precedence to Contrast the *Mitzvah of Chatzotzros* in which the *Eidah* Was Given Precedence

In the Ohr Hachaim's discussion of this peculiarity, he first cites the Sifri which contrasts the way this *mitzvah* was given to the way the *mitzvah* of *הצוצרות/Trumpets* was given. When Hashem commanded Moshe to make trumpets to be used in the *midbar* for the purpose of summoning either the Bnei Yisroel or the *Nesi'im* to him, the summoning of the Bnei Yisroel is mentioned first. As the *passuk* there says, וַתִּקְעוּ בָהֶן וַיִּוָּעְדוּ אֵלֶיךָ כָּל הָעֵדָה אֶל פֶּתַח / "And they [i.e. the Kohanim] will blow in them [i.e. both trumpets], and **the entire Congregation will assemble to you at the doorway of the Ohel Moed. And if they will blow one [of the trumpets], the *Nesi'im* will assemble to you – the Heads of the Thousands of Yisroel.**" This *passuk* alone, explains the Sifri, would cause one to erroneously assume that in all the *mitzvos* throughout the Torah, the *עדה/Congregation* was taught the *mitzvah* before the *Nesi'im*. To preclude this mistake, the Torah tells us explicitly here in the *mitzvah* of *Nedarim* that this was not the case; but in fact, the opposite was true. The *Nesi'im* were given precedence in being instructed about the *mitzvah*.

This explanation of the Sifri, however, seemingly requires further clarification. If the *Nesi'im* were indeed honored in all the *mitzvos* of the Torah by being given precedence in learning the *mitzvah*, why then did the Torah imply otherwise in the *mitzvah* of *Chatzotzros*, by mentioning the summoning of the Congregation before the summoning of the *Nesi'im*?

Furthermore, why was the *mitzvah* of *Nedarim* specifically chosen to teach us that in general the *Nesi'im* were given precedence in all the *mitzvos*?¹

Ahavah and Yirah

To explain these points, let us first review an important principle that is taught to us the *Sifrei Mussar* about our *Avodas Hashem*. There are two major components in our relationship to Hashem, both of which are explicit *mitzvos* in the Torah. There is a *mitzvah* of יראה/*to fear Hashem*, including both the simple fear of the judgement and punishment one will face if he falls short in his *Avodas Hashem*, as well as the wonder and awe one feels about Hashem's greatness. Then, in addition to *Yiras Hashem*, there is a *mitzvah* of אהבה/*to love Hashem*. One must feel a tremendous sense of gratitude to Hashem for all His extraordinary, wonderful kindnesses that surround the person's existence, and one must admire and try to appreciate the truth and the greatness of Hashem, as apparent in the Torah and in Creation.

Neither Can Exist without the Other

The *Sifrei Mussar* explain to us that neither of these aspects of *Avodas Hashem* are sustainable without the other. This concept can be found illustrated in the goings-on of everyday life:

When running a company, one cannot try to control it with pure fear. If the boss will constantly be threatening his workers and punishing them for their shortcomings, while showing no positivity and encouragement, he is headed for failure. It is only a matter of time before his practices will backfire, as his employees will begin quitting their jobs – or even worse, sabotaging the company. No one can go on forever while hearing only criticism.

On the other hand, one can also not succeed with only positivity. If a worker can constantly arrive late, each time only to be gently asked by the boss if he could please try to come earlier when it works for him, the company will disintegrate. There must be accountability on the part of the workers, and consequences for their shortcomings.

¹ In truth, this question is addressed by the Sifri, which explains the message of the *passuk* according to the halachic standpoint. The Sifri explains that the *passuk* here is hinting to the *halacha* that *Nedarim* may be annulled by a single judge who is a '*mumcheh*'/expert in the *halachos* of *Nedarim*, as symbolized by the *Nesi'im* who were *Talmidei Chachamim* of such stature. Our question is if there is also an understanding in the realm of Aggadah, in regard to a message for life that the *passuk* may be conveying based on the choice of these two *parshiyos*.

That is what keeps them in line and what keeps the company running smoothly.

The owner of the company needs to strike the proper balance between showing appreciation for his workers and treating them with respect on the one hand, while demonstrating his authority and demanding adherence on the other hand.

The same applies to a principal running a school. If the school runs on fear alone, the students will be secretly or openly defiant, not absorbing the lessons properly. Likewise, if the school runs on love alone, there will be nothing to prevent the students from acting completely out of line when it strikes their fancy.

There must be a balance between a feeling of love and care for the students, showing the students that the staff is truly interested in their growth and well-being, while at the same time maintaining strong rules with solid discipline.

Parents raising children must follow the same guidelines. If the only message that is conveyed to children is one of fear and of coercing them into acting properly, there can be terrible results r"l. The primary message and feeling must instead be one of tremendous love and care. These should be demonstrated in all different manners, including the providing of incentives and encouragement for good behavior, with acknowledgement and reward following it.

However, in order to raise their children into productive people who find favor in the Eyes of Hashem and of people, parents need to establish clear rules with a necessary measure of discipline. When there are no boundaries or accountability held up to the children, they can chas v'shalom become completely selfish and undisciplined, acting in whatever way they desire with no self-control. There must be a balance between the love of the parents along with firm rules of behavior.

Applying Ahavah to Hashem as Well as in our Approach to our Own Behavior

As illustrated from the ways of the world, the same two concepts apply in our own *Avodas Hashem*. We must serve Hashem out of a powerful feeling of love to Hashem and His Torah, and out of a tremendous desire to please Him. This Love should be so intense that we would be willing to give up our lives rather than renounce our beliefs. Indeed, one of the sources for

the *mitzvah* of giving one's life rather than transgress the Three Severe Sins is learned from the *mitzvah* of (סנהדרין ע"ד) אהבת ד'.

In addition to the *Ahavah* that we must feel for Hashem, it is important for us to use such emotions regarding ourselves as well. It is very difficult for most people to live lives in which all they do is self-criticize. We need to give ourselves positive feelings in our *Avodas Hashem* as well. As Rabbeinu Yonah writes (שערי עבודה), we must recognize our own *kochos* and potential so that we may know the *madreigos* for which we can strive. When we do accomplish, we should acknowledge it, so that we may get encouragement to continue.

Yiras Hashem – The Safeguard Against One Slackening off or Deviating

However, although it is important to serve Hashem out of a sense of love, it is not enough. This approach leaves open the danger that one will slacken off in his *Avodah*. After all, everyone goes through both periods of strength and of weakness. What, then, will prevent a person from rebelling completely against Hashem and the Torah, should the *yetzer hara* get the better of him? There must therefore be an established safeguard which will withhold a person from sin even at times when his drive and inspiration falter. This safeguard is יראת ד'.

Yirah means that a person may desire to follow his temptations, but he actively restrains himself based on his knowledge of the judgement that he will face for his actions. He thus controls himself with his *seichel* even when his body and his heart wish otherwise. A higher level of *Yirah* is when one acts not out of fear of punishment, but out of his awe over Hashem's greatness, and the realization that it would be a terrible misdeed to sin against the Creator of the Universe. Even with this understanding, though, the person still desires the act. He restrains himself out of his recognition of its wrongness. This is unlike *Ahavah*, in which a person feels a sense of genuine happiness to fulfill the Will of Hashem.

Both Yirah and Ahavah are Necessary

As explained in regard to *Ahavah*, *Yirah* applies not only to one's approach toward the actual Torah and *mitzvos*, but also to one's attitude toward his own self. A person cannot treat himself with only positivity and encouragement. He must also face himself and hold himself accountable when he steps out of line.

As further explained concerning *Ahavah*, *Yirah* is also not sufficient on its own. Hashem does not wish for us to serve Him begrudgingly, and out of a sense of compulsion. We must strive to elevate ourselves to a level of love for Hashem, such that our true inner desire becomes the fulfillment of His will.

The necessity for both of these angles in our *Avodas Hashem* is clearly spelled out in the words of Chazal. עשה מאהבה ועשה מיראה, עשה מאהבה שאם באת לבעט דע שאתה ירא ואין ירא באת לשנוא דע כי אתה אוהב ואין אוהב שונא. עשה מיראה שאם באת לבעט דע שאתה ירא ואין ירא (*Do for Hashem with love as well as fear. Act out of love, so that you will not serve out of hatred. Act out of fear so that you will not rebel.* Clearly, each element is necessary to fulfill a different point in our *Avodah*. Both are important, and one's *Avodah* must incorporate both concepts.

Nedarim and Chatzotzros Represent Ahavah and Yirah

Based on this idea, we can perhaps return to answer our original question. We asked: Why did the Torah give precedence to the *Eidah*/Congregation in regard to the summoning with the *Chatzotzros*, and why was the *mitzvah* of *Nedarim* specifically chosen to teach us that the *Nesi'im* were generally given precedence in learning the *mitzvos*?

We can now possibly suggest: The purpose of *Nedarim* is to help restrain oneself from indulging in various pleasures and temptations. To do so, one enacts extra measures of discipline and restriction over oneself through which he will be controlled and curtailed from fulfilling his whims. The *mitzvah* of *Nedarim*, then, represents the concept of *Yirah*. One wishes to sin, but he is withheld from doing so out of his fear of transgressing his *Neder*.

The *mitzvah* of *Chatzotzros*, in contrast, represents the idea of *Ahavah*. The musical blasts issued by the trumpets represent the raising of one's spirits through melody and joy.

Regarding Ahavah, it is the Chevrah Who Take Precedence

This, then is the message of the Torah. In regard to the *Avodah* of *Ahavah*, a *chevrah* is most important. A person's mind opens when he is among other people, as there is an atmosphere of ambience and friendship. Being with a *chevrah* brings one to a positive state, and he acts with a lightness and a joy that he does not feel when he is alone.

This idea is illustrated in the halacha that the Seudah Hamafsek before Tisha B'av may not be eaten in a group. As the moments before Tish B'av are a time of sadness, one should not eat in a way that would lift his spirits.

Conversely, on Purim we are specifically instructed to eat the Seudah as משפחה ומשפחה/in groups of families. Rashi explains that the full celebration of the Yom Tov emerges only in this manner.

To stress the importance of a *chevrah* in regard to *Ahavah*, the Torah gave precedence to the summoning of the *Eidah* over the summoning of the *Nesi'im*. True, in learning the *halachos*, *minhagim* and *hashkafah* of each

mitzvah, one must follow the guidance and leadership of the Leaders, but in the actual practice, one must join with the *chevrah* to achieve the optimal performance.

The tzibbur must come together with an achdus as they approach each mitzvah and task with Ahavah and zerizus.

It is so important that the members of a shul speak to each other pleasantly and with good feeling. By doing so, they provide support and encouragement to one another, allowing each individual to achieve and accomplish – both as individuals and with the Tzibbur.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to say that a yeshiva without a dining room is not a yeshiva. When bochurim eat together, there is so much opportunity for chessed and achdus. One can welcome a newcomer and ease his discomfort. One can bring a pitcher of water for the people at the table to drink. There are many such possibilities, which when used properly, can enhance the learning in the Bais Medrash.

Regarding Yirah, the Leaders Are the Most Important

All of this is true in regard to the *Avodah* of *Ahavah*. Concerning *Yirah*, however, the opposite holds true. It is not primarily the *chevrah* who bring each other to *Yirah*, but the Leaders. One must respect the leaders and follow their guidance completely, not veering from their direction and warnings in the slightest.

Concerning one's relationship with the leaders as well, the relationship is one of *Yirah*.

One must be sure to wish the Rav a Good Shabbos and speak to him respectfully.

The derashah should be listened to attentively, and with the intent of fulfilling the Rav's words of mussar and guidance.

One must be happy to assist the Rav in any way, and to follow his requests and instructions faithfully.

To convey this message, the Torah mentions the *Nesi'im* first regarding the *mitzvah* of *Nedarim*. As explained, the *mitzvah* of *Nedarim* connotes the idea of *Yirah*. In discussing *Yirah*, the Torah gives precedence and preferential treatment to the Leaders, because it is they who bring about the idea of *Yirah*.

The Torah is teaching us how we must act with *Yirah* toward our leaders, as well as use their guidance and instruction to strengthen our own *Yirah*.

Nedarim – Kabbalos

The Benefits of Nedarim Vs. the Dangers

Let us now focus directly on the topic of *Nedarim*. As explained, *Nedarim* are meant to be used as a safeguard against our slipping into lower levels of *ruchniyus*, as well as to spur us on to further heights, even as our desires and temptations threaten to bar us from achieving these goals. Through placing the severity of a *neder* on the act, we 'force' ourselves to refrain from giving in to our temptations.

As explained, the benefits of a *neder* are important and real. However, it is also important to realize that there is a grave danger inherent in *Nedarim*.

- One who makes a *neder* has just increased the amount of activities in the world which are forbidden to him, and thus increased his risk of himself transgressing a sin.
- Moreover, a *neder* is placed upon an activity which was heretofore permitted to him, and he is thus unaccustomed to refraining from it. This, of course, further serves to increase the risk of inadvertently violating the *neder*.
- To make matters even worse, the *Kli Yakar* informs us that the *yetzer hara* tries especially hard to cause a person to stumble in his *Nedarim*, using the argument that they are not as important as the prohibitions of the Torah.
- Add to all this the fact that if a person does transgress a *neder*, he may be held more accountable for his sin, coming as it did through his own negligence. After all, why make a promise or commitment that may not be kept? Thus, certain merciful treatment from *Shamayim* which might normally be extended toward him on account of the difficult *nisayon* that was presented to him, will be suspended in this instance where he was the one who brought himself into the *nisayon*.
- The punishments for transgressing a *neder* are themselves severe in their own right as well.

Clearly, making *Nedarim* places a person in great danger, and it would seem that it would not be worthwhile to involve oneself in such a risk. Indeed, we have been warned by our *Chachamim* throughout the generations, beginning with Shlomo Hamelech in Koheles, that one is better off avoiding *Nedarim* altogether.

The obvious question, however, now emerges. On the one hand, *Nedarim* is such an important factor in a person's *shteiging*, while at the same

time, a person is advised not to make *Nedarim*! If a person will indeed avoid the practice of making *Nedarim*, how will he ever access that shteiging that lies in them?

Treating Kabbalos with the Severity of Nedarim

Fortunately, the *Baalei Mussar* have provided us with a solution to this dilemma. True, a person should not place the halachic severity of *Nedarim* on his actions; on the contrary, when mentioning one's intention to begin a new practice, we are instructed to use the words *B'li Neder*. However, this does not prevent us from **relating to our own commitments as though they were *Nedarim***. We need to make *kabbalos* which will reinforce and further our shteiging, and we need to treat those *Kabbalos* with the severity of a genuine *Neder*.

Kabbalos Help a Person Turn his Moments of Inspiration into Real Shteiging

Making *kabbalos* in this manner is a key component in the shteiging of a person. One often feels a burst of inspiration from which he improves for a short time – but the inspiration soon wears off. One must retain the inspiration within himself by accepting a new commitment and sticking to it. This will serve to hold onto the inspiration even through the days of difficulty which are sure to come to the person.

Moishy accepts upon himself to come to Seder ten minutes early each day, during which time he will learn Mishnayos. For the first few days, he has a tremendous 'geshmak' in the seder, and he arrives at his seat with enthusiasm to learn his Mishnayos. After a few days, though, he begins to wish that he had not cut off from his 'free' time. He begins to feel discouraged, and he considers dropping his new commitment.

At this point is the true test. If Moishy allows his commitment to waver, he will gain precious little from those few days. If, however, he perseveres with his commitment, he will shteig tremendously. By exerting himself to overcome the difficulty, he is turning the shteiging into a part of himself, and he can reach new heights in his learning and in his hasmadah. It is so important for Moishy to make a real commitment and to honor it.

Treating our Kabbalos with Seriousness Will Help Us Avoid Actual Nedarim

As explained, it is vital for us to train ourselves to treat our *kabbalos* as though they possess the full severity of *Nedarim*. We will thus be accessing the great benefits that exist in *Nedarim*, while at the same time, avoiding the

risks inherent in actual *Nedarim*. If, however, we don't treat our *kabbalos* seriously, we will be wind up feeling compelled to accept genuine *Nedarim* on ourselves for the sake of our shteiging – a risk too great to undertake.

Making Kabbalos in the Proper Manner

Just as *Kabbalos* are important to one's shteiging, it is likewise important to make sure that one makes proper *kabbalos*. They must be small enough for the person to be able to keep them, and yet large enough to have a significant effect.

Reuven and Shimon both wish to make a kabbalah regarding their davening and learning in the morning.

Reuven wishes to greatly increase his learning time in the morning, as well as have more time at the beginning of davening to say Korbanos and Pesukei D'zimrah with kavanah. He decides that he will come to shul each morning at 4:30 am, allowing him to learn for a full two and a half hours, with ample time afterward for a slow, deliberate davening.

Although Reuven has good intentions, he is not making a wise kabbalah. Coming to shul at 4:30 is something which is unattainable for him. It will last maybe a day or two, and then he will be left with nothing but frustration.

Shimon also knows that he must improve his davening. He makes a kabbalah that from then on, he will always be in shul when the chazzan reaches Kedushah.

Shimon has made a kabbalah which is not significant or meaningful enough. It is obvious to all that a person must be in shul long before the chazzan reaches Kedushah.

An appropriate kabbalah would be for them to make sure to be on time for the very beginning of davening, and perhaps even some time earlier for some learning beforehand. This kabbalah requires them to strain themselves beyond what they are accustomed to doing, but it is still within the realm of their capabilities. Such a kabbalah, if adhered to faithfully, can bring true growth to a person.

Chaim and Yankel are both ready to accept a kabbalah in order to improve themselves in the area of חבירו עם חבירו.

Chaim decides that from then on, he will always mention at least 35 different names of cholim in every Shemoneh Esrai.

This kabbalah, although perhaps commendable for one who is capable of undertaking it, will likely be too intense for Chaim to maintain. It will be both time-consuming as well as difficult, causing Chaim's stamina to quickly falter.

Yankel undertakes that once a month, he will mention the name of one person in need, during his Shemoneh Esrai.

This kabbalah is too insignificant to make a sizeable difference in Yankel's overall attitude in caring for others.

A fitting kabbalah would be to mention one or two names at least once a day, or perhaps in every Shemoneh Esrai. Alternatively, each week they may pick the name of one person for whom they will daven for that entire week. These kabbalos will serve to awaken within themselves the middah of caring for others, while still being within the bounds of their capabilities.

It is important for each individual to become aware of what his own strengths and weaknesses are. He can then carefully choose which *kabbalos* will make a difference within himself, and yet are within his realm to achieve.

In Review:

Let us strive to incorporate both *Ahavah* and *Yirah* into our *Avodas Hashem*:

Ahavah:

- Serving Hashem with *Ahavah* includes serving Hashem with Love and enthusiasm, as well as providing ourselves with the positivity and encouragement to continue.
- As we learn from the *Chatzotzros*, let us incorporate the '*chevrah*' into our *Avodah* of *Ahavah*, by working together and uplifting one another, and by serving Hashem with the *achdus* of a *tzibbur*.

Yirah:

- The element of *yirah* entails the recognition that there are consequences for our actions. Our purpose in this world is to accomplish, and it is not one big land of roses and candy. Things

must be done, and there is accountability for it. A person holds himself accountable for his own actions as well.

- The *parshah* of *Nedarim* demonstrates to us that our Leaders play an important role in the component of *Yirah*. They guide and instruct us, and it is based on their leadership that we should conduct our lives.
- We must treat our Leaders with a sense of *Yirah* as well. This means displaying complete respect and humility toward them, and understanding that their words must be heeded.

Kabbalos:

- Finally, let us use the practice of making *kabbalos* – and treating them seriously – to give us the benefit of *Nedarim* without falling into the danger that actual *Nedarim* pose. Let us see that the *kabbalos* are small enough to be feasible, but significant enough to be meaningful.

With *siyata dishmaya*, we can reach these *madreigos*.

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