

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
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*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

פרשת כי תצא

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לעילוי נשמת ראש ישיבת ריווערדייל
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פרשת כי תצא

וְלָקְחוּ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהוּא אֶת הָאִישׁ וְיִסְרוּ אֹתוֹ: וְעָנְשׂוּ אֹתוֹ מֵאָה
כֶּסֶף וְנָתְנוּ לְאָבִי הַנְּעָרָה כִּי הוֹצִיא שֵׁם רָע עַל בְּתוּלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְלוֹ תִהְיֶה לְאִשָּׁה לֹא יוּכַל לְשַׁלְּחָהּ כָּל יְמָיו: (דברים כ"ב, י"ח ו"ט)

And the elders of that city should take the man and whip him; and they should penalize him one hundred coins of silver and they should give it to the father of the girl, because he spread a bad name over a maiden of Yisroel; and she will be to him for a wife; he may not banish her all his days.

The *parshah* discusses the *halachos* of a man who was *Motzie Shem Ra* on his wife, and of the consequences he must suffer. When we analyze the *halachah* that the Torah established for the man and the woman of this story, we will see an important lesson that the Torah teaches us here. First, let us clearly understand the story and its *halachah*:

The Story of the *Motzie Shem Ra*¹

Motzie Shem Ra refers to a man who, soon after marrying a woman, decided that she is not what he had in mind. She no longer found favor in his eyes, and he wished to be free of this marriage as soon as he could. He would have been ready to simply terminate the marriage with divorce, were it not for a major obstacle standing in his way: At the time of marriage, he obligated himself in the *kesubah* – the considerable sum of 50 *shekel*/200 *zuz*, should he choose to divorce her. This man now finds himself in a difficult predicament – he must either remain married to this woman or pay her the forbidding sum of money.

¹ EDITOR'S NOTE: As we begin to discuss Rav Moshe's *shmuess* on the sensitive topic of *shidduchim*, we wish to emphasize that it is by no means our intention to target any specific individual or group of people *chas v'shalom*. Our sole intention is to impart Rav Moshe's lessons and ideas as he took them from the *parshah* and applied them to life's situations.

This man cannot bear the thought of either of the two options, and he begins looking to terminate this nuisance of a marriage through other means. He finally comes up with a cunning idea which will solve all his problems. He hires two witnesses to testify falsely that the woman had illicit relations with another man after she was already married. She will then be forbidden to remain married to her husband, and she will further be given the death penalty for her 'sin'. To top matters off, she will be held responsible for the termination of the marriage, and the husband will be exempt from paying her *kesubah*.

The man carried through with his perverse plan, and he was thrilled. He gave no thought to the fact that an innocent woman is being wrongly killed. What mattered was that he was rid of his wife, and he was exempt from his *kesubah*!

Fortunately for the woman, the plot was discovered before the death sentence was carried out. The witnesses were proven to have been in a completely different location at the time of the 'sin' than they claimed, and their devious plot was thrown on their own heads. They were killed in her stead, and the husband's intentions as well are completely foiled. As a penalty for the severe sin of *Motzie Shem Ra* – besmirching the good name of a Jewish woman, he must now pay her 100 shekel – double the amount of her *kesubah*. Moreover, he gets the punishment of *malkus*/lashes for his evil crime.

The above penalties deal with payment of the woman's *kesubah*, and of independent punishment for the man himself. What about his plans for terminating his marriage? Will he succeed in that end? The answer is no; the Torah took this into account as well. The *halachah* is that this man is now forbidden to divorce this woman - instead, he is required to remain with her forever. All the man's evil plans are thus effectively spoiled.

How the Woman Would Agree to Remain Married to this Man

The obvious question on this *halachah* is on the requirement to keep her as a wife. Indeed, the monetary penalty and the punishment of lashes are very understandable, but as far as the requirement to remain married to her – which woman wants to remain married to a husband who attempted to murder her?!

Now, to be sure, the woman is not required to remain married to him. If she chooses, she can 'pass up' on this 'privilege', and then the

halachah will not apply. However, the primary intent of the Torah is clear. This woman is assumed – and perhaps advised – to choose to remain with this man – who happens to have attempted to have her murdered. What is the understanding of this *halachah*? How is a woman in her right mind supposed to pick to live a life with such a man?

As he sits with her, he says "How was your day, honey?"

She responds with a snort. "Honey? Ha! Sure, when I'm six feet underground!"

Learning to Utilize the Available Opportunities

It would seem to me that the answer to this question lies in changing our own perspectives on life's situations. In fact, the Torah here is actually teaching us great lessons and guidelines for how we should go through our lives.

Let us contemplate the situation of this woman. Her name was besmirched, and her innocence was only proven by the testimony of a second pair of witnesses. True, the *halachah* is that the second pair of witnesses is believed over the first pair², but at the same time, the doubt lingers in the minds of many people. Perhaps the truth was that the second pair lied. In contrast to the current version of the version of the story that the first pair of witnesses was hired by the husband to cause the woman's death, maybe it was actually the woman who had hired the second pair to save herself. Who could really know?

Based on the above description of the situation, we realize that the woman's prospects for finding another *shidduch* are quite low. Indeed, her good name was defamed, and restoring her previous reputation will be difficult. In the eyes of many, she will always have a questionable status – for, after all, perhaps the testimony against her was true.

² The second pair testifies not about the actual testimony in question, but about the whereabouts of the first pair of witnesses during the time in which the story of their testimony occurred. Therefore, the second pair is considered to be testifying about the first pair of witnesses themselves – a subject over which the first pair has no power of testimony (רמב"ן).

The Torah therefore advises the woman: 'Remain married to your husband. Rest assured, he will face consequences for his actions; he will be penalized monetarily as well as chastened through his *malkus*. Afterward, though, he will be a husband for you. – Is he your first choice? Certainly not. However, don't lose out on the opportunity that you have available to you because it's not perfect. Remain with him, and you will have a husband – better than becoming a spinster for the rest of your life!'

The Torah is teaching us that to succeed in life, one must learn how to be practical, and to make do with the options available. The available options would not always be our first choice if it were up to us – because we are not the ones writing the script. However, instead of falling into a pit of resentment and frustration, we should do the best we can under the circumstances to make our situation as advantageous as possible. As we shall learn, we oftentimes grow from the situation in ways far beyond what we would achieve under our own preferred conditions.

When Seeking a Shidduch

The lesson was taught to us in the Torah specifically concerning the subject of marriage – and indeed, how much there is to learn in this area.

As is well-known, many young people in our times unfortunately have a difficult time in finding a *shidduch*. Sadly, the reason may often be because of their insistence on being particular about every last detail about the prospective *shidduch*.

'He only smiles at a certain type of jokes. – Definitely not for me!'

'How can we even think of looking into this girl? She did not go to such-and-such seminary!'

It is true that the situation of these young men and women who cannot find a *shidduch* is a difficult one, and they deserve our sympathy and understanding. However, it is also important for us all to realize the importance of accepting the choices and possibilities with which Hashem presents us, and to make our decisions

accordingly.³ We must trust that Hashem loves us and has our best interests in mind, and we must therefore learn to utilize the opportunities that are presented to us.

My own parents could not have been more different from each other in their natures or backgrounds.

My father was a short, stubby yeshiva bachur from Lomza – a masmid who knew only how to sit and learn. He barely learned English or adapted to the American customs. For his whole life, he lived as though he was in the Lomza yeshiva – following their daily schedule and knowing of nothing else.

My mother was a tall and athletic woman, who headed the dance class while in public school in Russia. She was outgoing person and full of personality. She was far more sophisticated and worldly than my father and a full head taller.

When seeing the two individuals, it was almost impossible to conceive how they could be married to each other. And yet, they were put together in Samarkand after the war, at a time when the options were limited, and the need was great. Many such shidduchim were made at the time, as everyone recognized the need to rebuild the Jewish nation. There was no room for being particular; every surviving Jew was a precious asset with whom a fresh, new life could be begun.

My parents were zoche to a beautiful marriage, because they learned to make it work.

³ [ed.] While Rav Moshe referred to a specific cause involved in the difficulty in shidduchim, it is also abundantly clear that we can never make generalizations in this sort of subject – and specifically in such a sensitive area. Each case must be dealt with individually, as there can be multiple and varied issues involved, which deserve our sympathy and understanding rather than our criticism. We certainly should not voice words of criticism about a specific individual, whether directly or indirectly, before we are intimately familiar with the specific case at hand.

Rav Moshe's intention was to provide general words of guidance which can then be applied when appropriate on a case-by-case basis, with sensitivity and understanding.

My in-laws' marriage began in a similar fashion. My father-in-law had been in the Russian army, when he asked his commanding officer for a short leave to say hello to his brother who was in a nearby town Kuybishev. As my father in-law was an obedient soldier, the officer trusted him and granted his request. My father in-law reached the home of Reb Binyomin Zaydman, the father in-law of his brother and where his brother was staying. The askan Reb Mordechai Dubin was at their home at the time, and told my father in-law, "You absolutely cannot go back! They are putting you in the front lines – a sure death sentence. Either the Germans will kill you, and if not, the Russian antisemites will kill you with 'friendly fire'. You must stay!"

Seeing the truth in Rav Dubin's words, my father in-law threw his soldier's outfit in the fire as directed, while planning on remaining in hiding within the Zaydman home until the danger passed. It was then, however, that Rav Dubin came to him with an ultimatum.

"R' Sholom, you know there are older girls living in this home. It will not be proper for you to remain here. You have a choice; either you marry one of them, or you find another place to stay!"

My father in-law asked if he could have some time to meet the girl.

"Okay, a half-hour!"

They met, and the shidduch was finalized. The chasunah was made in their home, and thus began a beautiful, long-lasting marriage.⁴

When there is a will and determination to make the marriage work, it can succeed despite many differences which will inevitably surface. How different from the system of nowadays, in which the

⁴ Another daughter of Reb Binyomin Zaydman married the Russian Tzadik, Rav Yitzchok Zilber, whose life story is told in the book *To Remain a Jew*.

young pair meets numerous times, 'trying each other out' in all different venues and settings.

When individuals cannot come to terms with anything that falls short from every last detail on their list, they are unfortunately paving the way for unhappiness¹. The focus must rather be on the important things, if they share the same values and goals. With this mindset, coupled with a strong, healthy dose of positive *middos*, they can make the marriage can work bs²d.

As stated earlier, this lesson applies not only to *shidduchim*, but to all areas in our lives.

When looking for a house, a chavrusa, a job, or any other new venture, we must not distract ourselves with our dreams and desires that we wish would be there. Instead, we must focus on what is available and make a wise decision accordingly.

How Can the Woman Survive Married to Such a Man?

We have thus far shown that the woman in the incident of the *Motzie Shem Ra* is advised to face her reality and remain married to her husband. The question, though, remains: How can she live in such a marriage? Can she ever respect or have a relationship with a person who committed such a despicable crime against her?

The answer to this question is that indeed, if that is how she will live in her marriage, it will have no chance of success.

If, on their way to a chasunah together, she says to him, "You're probably planning on getting into an accident and leaving me dead on the road, right?" – she will never have a good marriage.

Allowing her Husband to Grow Past his Mistake

For her to have a relationship, she must allow her husband to move past his misdeed, and she must move past it as well. She will need to work on her *middos* to the point that she can remove her feelings of anger and resentment and accept her husband the way he is now.

Oftentimes a husband or wife remembers certain incidents or situations, even many years later.

The husband may always be thinking to himself, "If my wife would have allowed me back then to take such-and-such a position/job, we would be in a completely different place now. Why did she have to stubbornly cling to her pride and say that that the job was beneath my dignity?"

The wife thinks to herself, "If my husband would have grabbed the opportunity which came up to move our family to a larger house, things would be so much better for us now! Instead, he chose to be overly cautious, and look where his caution led us!"

Even though s/he has long since stopped mentioning it, the feeling is still there. And the truth is, there may be a situation in which s/he may possibly be 100 percent right. However, they must still learn to move past it.

The Marriage Can Become Better through the Efforts Applied in Upholding it

The truth is that if the wife will work past her anger, not only can she hope to restore her marriage, but she can make it even better than before. It will not be easy, but will rather require much swallowing on her part. She will need a firm determination to grow and achieve in her marriage, while training herself to overlook her ego and anger. However, if she allows herself to undergo the long haul, then the relationship built with her husband will become deep and meaningful – as a direct result of the work they put into it.

In the various mesivtos in which I have had positions, there have always been two different categories of bachurim – those who were 'low maintenance' and those who were 'high maintenance'. The first group consisted of the 'good' boys – the metzuyanim and others who took their responsibilities and their ruchniyus seriously. The second group were those who were prone to misbehavior, who could never seem to get it right. These were the boys who were almost thrown out of yeshiva – perhaps several times – until their father, uncle, grandmother and neighbor all called and begged the yeshiva to give them another chance. Their stay in yeshiva was a struggle from beginning to end, for all parties involved.

Ironically, however, the greatest relationships that I have formed are with the weaker boys. Despite the trouble they caused – and on the contrary, because of all the effort that was put into them – the connection between them and the rebbeim becomes deep and meaningful.

Greater Efforts Yield Superior and Deeper Results

This is the second lesson the Torah is teaching us. There are situations in a person's life in which things work easily for him – when without much work or effort, the desired result is there. We will obviously always wish for things to work this way, and when they do, we must be thankful to Hashem for it. However, let us also realize that when there is work involved, the result is vastly more meaningful, and is for more likely to remain and last.

There are points in one's learning when the sugya comes easily. One has a clear grasp of the different shitos, and he understands the different questions raised by the mefarshim with ease. The learner is able to add his own chiddushim as well, and he leaves the sugya with a great satisfaction.

In other sugyos, it is difficult for a person to arrive even at the simple understanding of the Gemara and Rashi. Every subsequent part of the sugya is a challenge, and when, after much effort, he decides to move on to the next sugya, he feels that he may not even have scratched the surface of the true pshat.

*Which of these two sugyos will remain with the person for a longer time afterwards? The surprising answer may be that the second sugya, which demanded much effort, will remain. True, the individual may not have reached a full understanding this time around, but the seeds are still planted for the next time. As Chazal tell us *לי היא שעמדה באף שלימדתי שלמדתי*/The Torah wisdom which I acquired through periods of difficulty is what stood for me.*

In Conclusion:

Let us internalize this twofold lesson from this mitzvah of *Motzie Shem Ra*:

Firstly, we must learn to face the situation in front of us and make the best of it. When we learn to overlook the particulars that we may have desired, and instead, use for our own benefit the opportunities available to us, we can be surprised at how much we can thrive under our present circumstances. This applies to *shidduchim* as discussed, or to any other situation which a person faces.

Secondly, let us not become 'turned off' by a situation which requires effort to achieve the results. On the contrary, let us realize that the effort required will only generate far superior results, which bs"d will be lasting and meaningful.

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