

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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פרשת חיי שרה

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לעילוי נשמת
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פרשת חיי שרה

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה: (בראשית כ"ג א')

And the life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years; the years of the life of Sarah.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל עַבְדּוֹ זֶקֶן בֵּיתוֹ הַמְּשַׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ שִׁים נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי: וְאֲשַׁבְּעֶךָ
בְּה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנֵי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב
בְּקִרְבּוֹ: (כ"ד ב'-ג')

And Avrohom said to his servant, the elder of his household, who ruled over all that was his, 'Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will have you swear by Hashem the G-d of the heaven and G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanite of whom I live in its midst.'

Living with a Cheshbon

Eliezer the Great Disciple of Avrohom Avinu

In this *parshah*, we are provided with a lengthy encounter with Eliezer, the faithful servant of Avrohom. Much is learned from every word and action that Eliezer said and did, and we are given a picture of a truly elevated *tzaddik* whose wise and humble ways teach us a great deal for our own lives. Indeed, Chazal tell us that Eliezer was a prime talmid of Avrohom Avinu who learned to emulate the ways of his great master on a tremendous level. As the *passuk* says, Eliezer was מושל בכל אשר לו/He ruled over everything that belonged to Avrohom, to which Chazal explain that it means that he ruled over his *yetzer hara* in a manner comparable to Avrohom Avinu himself. Not only did Eliezer diligently learn the lessons of Avrohom Avinu as pertaining to himself, but he even transmitted the lessons to others. As Chazal tell us, he was (יומא כח:): *he drew from [the 'well' off] his master's Torah and gave it to others to drink* – he was a teacher in his own right of the great wisdom of his master. The level of Eliezer was an elevated one, one about which we can strive and hope to emulate to a minute degree in our *madreigos*.

The Cheshbon of Eliezer

How did Eliezer reach these great *madreigos*? Chazal address this question in the Medrash (בראשית רבה ס' ב'), and they describe Eliezer as a 'wise servant', applying about him the *passuk* in Mishlei (משלי י"ז ב') *A wise servant will rule*. What was the great **wisdom** of Eliezer? Did it lie in his ability to understand the deep *shiurim* of Avrohom Avinu? Or perhaps it was demonstrated in the way he dealt with the house of Besuel when he came to take Rivka as a wife for Yitzchok? Indeed, these were certainly manifestations of Eliezer's wisdom, but Chazal reveal to us that his wisdom originated from a life-altering decision that he had made many years earlier. The reference here is the very beginning of how Eliezer became Avrohom's servant.

Eliezer made an inner cheshbon. He said to himself, 'I know that as a descendant of Canaan, I am subject to the curse issued by Noach. All of Canaan's descendants will be slaves to others. If so, why must I wait to become captured by a Barbar or Kushi? As I will be enslaved regardless, it is better that it should be to the house of the great Avrohom rather than to a different master!' Eliezer thereupon voluntarily knocked on Avrohom's door, offering himself as a slave for life.

"But why are you giving up your freedom?" Avrohom may have protested. "Go back home and live as a free man!"

Eliezer, however, was insistent. "I have thought through this decision. I know that I am not destined to live as a free man. I therefore choose to become your slave!"

All the greatness that Eliezer achieved as he progressed through his life began with a simple *cheshbon* that he made himself in his youth. All his subsequent greatness was a product of that *cheshbon*.

Cheshbon in our Own Lives

The Lomzer mashgiach, Rav Moshe Rosenstein would point out that in truth, every one of us is constantly faced with similar choices. Each moment of our lives is in our own hands to transform into either precious diamonds, or worthless dirt and pebbles. We must make the *cheshbon* and determine what is truly worthwhile.

Reuven is getting irritated by his co-worker, or his chavrusa, or his wife. He feels a tremendous urge to deliver a sharp comment which will put the other individual in his/her place. He must now make a cheshbon. If he will verbalize the thought that is in his mind, he may feel some empty gratification for a few minutes, but that will be it. Afterward, he will feel only regret for his nasty comment. He will be forced to try to appease the recipient of his comment, in an attempt to repair the damage and hurt that he caused. In the long run, he gained nothing from that moment.

Alternatively, Reuven can exercise self-control over himself, and he can refrain from uttering the comment. It may be difficult at the time, but he will have preserved his relationship and prevented it from going downhill over something insignificant. Moreover, he will have acquired tremendous reward for himself in Olam Haba, while elevating himself in this world. He will achieve a closeness to Hashem as a result of that moment, for which nothing in this world is remotely comparable.

Yankel is in the midst of learning with his chavrusa, when he suddenly remembers a funny incident that occurred to him a few days earlier. He must now make a cheshbon. Will he interrupt his learning to tell his chavrusa the story? If he will do so, he will derive tremendous pleasure at the time from it, and the next twenty minutes or so will pass by in enjoyable conversation. Afterward, however, he will look back at the time with such disgust and regret. The time that should have been spent learning was put to complete waste, from which he has absolutely nothing.

If, however, Yankel will restrain himself, he will feel an enormous sense of accomplishment at the end of the seder. He forced himself to use his time and create diamonds of Torah. How extremely valuable these 'diamonds' are when they were produced through the difficulty of overcoming the yetzer hara.

Chaim works a hard, busy week, and he has Sunday as his day off. Chaim must make a cheshbon regarding how he will spend the bulk of his Sundays. Will he spend each Sunday playing sports, going on outings, and other recreational activities, or will he spend the majority of his day learning in the Beis Medrash with chavrusas? True, every person needs some form of a break, and Chaim can choose to be very 'machmir' in that area. Indeed, if he does so, he cannot be faulted. However, he will receive very minimal reward or shteiging for the time he spends playing.

However, if Chaim will spend his time in the Beis Medrash, he will be using his time to shteig as a talmid chacham and infinitely elevate his standing in Shamayim. Every moment that he spends learning is a mitzvah equal to all other mitzvos combined, and Chaim will accumulate a large, priceless fortune of Torah wealth out of these Sundays.

On a Motzei Shabbos in the winter, there are several consecutive hours in which both baalei batim and yungerleit are not bound to their normal weekly schedules. How will these hours be spent? Will they be wasted each week on some form of entertainment or recreation from which little is gained? Or, will there be a fixed seder of learning during that time, or a solid schedule in which one accomplishes deeds of tzedaka and chessed?

We must constantly evaluate our actions thoroughly and honestly. We must be aware that the *yetzer hara* will surely try to become involved in the decision-making process. The *yetzer hara* will tell us that it is extremely important to deliver the nasty comment and put the other person in his place. He will claim that it is important to distract ourselves from learning, and to spend all our off time in leisure activities. We must be on our guard against this and realize that the *yetzer hara* undoubtedly tried to dissuade Eliezer from becoming Avrohom's slave as well. The *yetzer hara* told him that although it was true that Canaan's descendants were fated to become slaves, he, Eliezer, would be the exception. He would manage to outwit Noach's curse and escape anyone who would try to capture him. Eliezer, though, used his *seichel* to dismiss the words of the *yetzer hara*. Eliezer told himself that if Noach issued a curse, that curse would certainly be fulfilled, and he, Eliezer, will only stand to lose therefore by not offering himself willingly to Avrohom. We, too, must be ready to challenge and refute the words of the *yetzer hara* by demonstrating to ourselves how worthwhile and profitable it is to follow the right path rather than that of the *yetzer hara*.

Making a Cheshbon Both Before the Nisayon and at the Time of the Nisayon

The *cheshbon* that we have been discussing is generally one that must be made prior to the onset of the *nisayon*. If we will not devote any thought into the proper course of behavior beforehand, it will be difficult or almost impossible to control ourselves from issuing the sharp comment to a spouse, or from shmoozing during the learning session. We must make the general *cheshbon* with ourselves prior to the *nisayon*, for us to be ready to apply it in practice at the time of the *nisayon*.

However, in addition to preparing ourselves before the *nisayon*, we must be further ready to stand strong at the time of the *nisayon*. Without both of these components, there cannot be success in consistently defeating the *yetzer hara*, as illustrated in the following *mashal*:

A boy from a respected family had somehow found 'the bottle' and became hooked on alcohol. He was getting drunk all too often, bringing disgrace to himself and his family. The boy's father was apprised of his son's behavior, and he called in his son to reproach him. The father discussed with his son all the problems that result from alcoholism both in the short-term as well as long-term, and the son agreed that for many reasons, it was indeed a terrible activity in which to engage. He seemingly absorbed the father's message.

A few days later, however, the son was again found lying in a bar, completely drunk. The father called over his son, obviously very surprised and disappointed. "I thought we went through so many reasons why drinking is wrong! What happened?!"

The son answered his father with a sheepish smile. "Totty, it is true that we discussed many ta'amim/reasons why it would be better for me not to drink; but the ta'am/taste of the alcohol is better than all of them!"

This boy in this *mashal* had made a proper *cheshbon* before the time of the *nisayon*, and he had reached the understanding of what is the proper behavior. However, he did not exercise control over himself at the time of the *nisayon*, to implement his *cheshbon* into practice. We need to act differently than this boy. We need to first make a genuine and honest *cheshbon* with ourselves, as the boy did, regarding how we will behave and how we will utilize the life HaKadosh Boruch Hu has given us, but we must also stand strong when the time comes to put the *cheshbon* into practice. This is accomplished by constantly reminding ourselves and reiterating our *cheshbon* so that we truly

believe it and internalize it. We will then have that inner strength to resist the *yetzer hara* at the time of temptation.

A Cheshbon of Maximizing our Time and Inner Desire for Torah and Mitzvos

Let us delve more deeply into just how much a person can accomplish and benefit through making a *cheshbon hanefesh*:

In the beginning of the *parshah*, the *passuk* lists the years of the life of Sarah Imeinu. After stating that she lived what was a total of 127 years, the *passuk* repeats שני חיי שרה / *the years of the life of Sarah*. The Ohr Hachaim discusses the message that is conveyed in this seemingly extra phrase. In one of his *p'shatim*, he explains that in reality, Sarah's life was cut short as a result of the *Akeidah*. As Rashi tells us, when she heard the story of how Yitzchok was going to be brought as a *korban*, the shock was so great for her that it caused her *neschama* to depart from her body, before Avrohom was even able to inform her that it did not actually take place. The Ohr Hachaim explains that actually, Sarah was destined to have lived more years, and her life was cut short as a result of this incident. Based on this fact, the *passuk* preempts a difficulty one may have. If Sarah's life was cut short, she would not be able to accomplish what she could have accomplished had she lived the full length of life assigned to her. If this occurred through what presumably was not a fault of hers, how is it fair that she should lose the benefit of those accomplishments? Had she lived the full length of her life, she could have acquired so more reward; how could this be taken from her? To answer this, the *passuk* tells us שני חיי שרה, these 127 years encapsulated her entire life's potential. This means that she is rewarded as though she had actually lived and accomplished during those years that were originally granted to her.

There is a great lesson that we can derive from this Ohr Hachaim. Sarah is given reward not just for the accomplishments that she actually achieved, but also for those that she would have achieved if she would have been allowed to live the years required for those accomplishments. This teaches us that a person is credited not only for what he actually accomplishes, but for what he would have accomplished if he was granted the proper tools to do so. This can be applied to many scenarios in our lives. Let us present an example which we discussed earlier, but which will now assume a deeper dimension:

Chaim is a working man, who puts in long hours at the business each day. Because of his busy schedule, he can only manage to get in an hour of learning at the end of each day. Only on Sundays when he is off from business, is he able to learn for more hours. Each Sunday, Chaim spends almost the whole day in the Beis Medrash.

When Chaim reaches the Heavenly Court, he is greatly surprised to see the malachim apportioning schar to him for learning a full day each day of the week. "But why do I deserve this?" he cannot help but question. "The only day that I ever learned such hours was Sunday! How can I be credited for more than that?"

The malachim will explain to him. "True, practically speaking, you only learned those hours on Sunday. However, by doing so, you demonstrated that Torah learning was the activity in which you truly desired to engage, and that it is what you would do whenever you have the ability. You were unable to during the week because you needed a parnassah, but for that you cannot be faulted. You are credited for having learned all those hours which you desired to be doing so, had you not been impeded by your circumstances."

What would happen, however, if Chaim would only spend a small portion of his Sundays learning? The rest of the day, he would spend relaxing, or taking care of various chores etc. These may be important things, but how much Torah is Chaim passing up? Not only will his learning on Sunday be lessened, but he will be giving up the schar of the entire week!

We must make a *cheshbon* with ourselves to determine if we are maximizing our time properly for Torah and *mitzvos*, for we must demonstrate through our actions that our true desire is to serve Hashem.

The Cheshbon of Avrohom Avinu

The importance of *cheshbon* is demonstrated through the actions of Eliezer's rebbe, Avrohom Avinu, as well. Before sending Eliezer on his mission, Avrohom required him to swear that he would not take a wife for Yitzchok from the girls of Canaan. Similarly, in last week's *parshah*, when the king of Sedom offered Avrohom the spoils of the war, Avrohom swore that he would not take a thread or a shoelace from him. Why was it necessary to swear in these instances? Was Eliezer not the trusted servant of Avrohom, who absorbed his teachings and way of life to perfection? Even if Eliezer desired that Yitzchok marry his own daughter, could he be suspected of transgressing Avrohom's instructions? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would similarly ask about the incident with the king of Sedom: If the object in question were gold, or some expensive diamonds, we could perhaps understand why Avrohom needed to swear that he would not take them for himself. After all, they are valuable and the temptation for them is great. However, Avrohom did not swear about expensive items, he swore about a shoelace! Why must he swear regarding this; surely it would be sufficient to merely state that he would not take them!

The answer to these questions is that Avrohom Avinu lived his life with a *cheshbon*. He understood the tremendous importance of the issues in question, and he reached the conclusion that he could not take the slightest risk in their regard. The possibility of taking any money at all from the king of Sedom would bring tremendous *chilul Hashem*. Likewise, the possibility that Yitzchok Avinu would marry a girl from Canaan would bring tremendous, irreversible harm to the Jewish Nation. To avoid these catastrophic results, Avrohom made the calculated decision that it was necessary to swear on these points, although the danger of these events actually occurring was negligible.

We, too, must take a lesson from Avrohom Avinu and his *talmid* Eliezer, and we need to go through our lives with constant and consistent calculations about what is important and what is not, and about whether we are living to those standards which we set for ourselves.

Cheshbon Elevates a Person to True Madregos

We will conclude with a beautiful *vort* that I heard, which demonstrates the centrality of *cheshbon* in our *Avodas Hashem*. The *passuk* in Parshas Chukas discusses the curse which Bilam and his father Be'or issued to Moav, which caused Moav to be defeated at the hands of Sichon. The *passuk* begins (במדבר כ"א כ"ז) על כן יאמרו המושלים בואו חשבון / *Therefore, the poets said 'Come, [city of] Cheshbon!*' The Gemara in *Masechas Bava Basra* (דף ע"ה:) learns a completely different meaning into these *pessukim*: המושלים אלו המושלים ביצרם, בואו חשבון בואו ונהשב חשבוננו של עולם, הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה. ושכר עבירה כנגד הפסדה. According to this *derash*, the word מושלים, does not mean *poets*, rather it means *rulers*. The *passuk* is saying: *Those who rule over their yetzer hara offer advice: 'Come, make a cheshbon! Calculate the momentary loss of a mitzvah compared to its ultimate gain, and calculate the momentary gain of an aveirah compared to its loss!'*

The question about this Gemara is as follows: True, there is important advice that the rulers over their *yetzer hara* teach us – we must live with *cheshbon*. Indeed, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* teaches us, if we disregard their advice, we are like a patient who decides that he knows more than his doctor.

Schmerel walks into the drugstore with his prescription in hand. His heartbeat was slow, and his doctor had prescribed medication to speed it up. As the pharmacist hands him his pills, Schmerel looks inside the bottle. He wrinkles his nose and hands the bottle back to the pharmacist. "I don't want these ones," he declares. "Please fill the container with that one over there."

The pharmacist tries to protest. "You can't have those; they will slow down your heart even more! You will die in one day if you take those!"

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Schmerel, though, is insistent. "I am tired of these big, red pills! Give me some of those small, yellow ones!"

Similarly, if we wish to succeed in our *Avodas Hashem*, it is incumbent upon us to follow the advice that is offered by the experts in the field. If they tell us that we must make a *cheshbon*, we would be as foolish as 'Schmerel' in the above *mashal*, if we will not heed their advice.

What is difficult to understand is, why did the Torah choose to impart this message to us within the curse of Bilam Harasha? Bilam epitomized the exact opposite of the *cheshbon* that is described – and *davka* in his words, the Torah hints to us the path to an elevated life?!

The answer to this question is that indeed, it is no coincidence that the Torah hinted this message to us within the words of Bilam the מושל/*poet*. The Torah is telling us – If you wish to transform from a מושל/*poet* such as Bilam, to a מושל/*a ruler* over the *yetzer hara*, how is this done? The answer is, בואו חשבון/*Come, make a cheshbon!* By beginning to live with *cheshbon*, one transforms his life from the lowest of levels to the most elevated 'ruler' over the *yetzer hara*, one who follows in the footsteps of Avrohom Avinu.

Bez"V we should begin to make the proper *cheshbon* in our lives and achieve great *madreigos* as a result.

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