

# אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה  
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר  
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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*Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe  
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## פרשת ויחי

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לעילוי נשמת  
ידידנו היקר ר' אברהם נחמן שבתי  
בן ר' ישראל אליהו סוננזון ז"ל

## פרשת ויחי

ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים (בראשית מ"ז כ"ח)

ויגד ליעקב ויאמר הנה בנך יוסף בא אליך ויתחזק ישראל  
וישב על המטה (בראשית מ"ח ב')

### Yaakov and Yisroel: Which One is Used in Which Context?

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh in the beginning of Parshas Vayechi has a lengthy discourse discussing the reasons behind the Torah's constant shifting between the name Yaakov and the name Yisroel. He explains that the name Yisroel is usually used at times of a higher *madreigah*, whereas the name Yaakov usually appears at times of a lower level. For instance, on Shabbos Kodesh, the *Shechinah* is close to us on the level of 'Yisroel' – but the moment Shabbos leaves and we lose our *neshama yeseira*, we go back down to the level of 'Yaakov'. (This is one of the reasons we sing the *zemer* of *Al Tira Avdi Yaakov*, starting with every letter of the Aleph Bais, at the *Seudas Melava Malka*.) The Ohr Hachaim makes it clear, however, that these *madreigos* don't reflect on the level of Yaakov Avinu's perfection; he was always on the highest level of *Avodas Hashem*. Rather, they depend on the degree of happiness that Yaakov was on at that specific moment. When a person is *b'simcha*, he is on a higher level of connection with the *Shechinah*.

### The Power of Being in a State of Happiness

*Let's say a person stays up till late at night preparing himself for a job interview. When he comes to the interview the next morning, he may get all the answers right, but still get rejected. Why? Because in his tired state, he wasn't his natural self; he was cranky, unfocused, and lacking that spring in his step. Sometimes, it's more worthwhile to be fully present and connected with your true self, even if you'll get some of the answers wrong. Happiness can go a long way.*

A person's body actually feels weaker when he is unhappy. Conversely, when he is in a state of joy, he feels empowered and energized. The Gemara quotes in a few places the words of a Tanna that said: "When I am in a state of *בדיחותא* (humor, joyfulness), then I am like Ben Azai in the

markets of Teverya!" Meaning, when he was in a state of happiness, he was confident that he could answer any question that would be presented to him.

### **Shifting Ourselves into a State of Happiness**

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz points out that in the beginning of this week's *parshah*, we see 'Yaakov' switch to 'Yisroel' within a single *pasuk*. It says: *Yaakov was told: "Behold – your son Yosef has come to you," so Yisroel exerted himself and sat up on the bed.* How was Yaakov able to switch his state of mind in an instant? Rav Chaim explains that indeed, shifting into a mode of total happiness requires a real "ויתחזק" – an exertion, a true *chizuk*.

*I once read a story about a Chassidishe Rebbe whose grandson was very ill. The chassidim and the parents kept seeking his advice about how to treat the child, but in his state of desperation, he simply could not come up with the proper counsel. Finally, one of the chassidim had an idea. He approached the Rebbe and said: "Rebbe, your grandson is doing a lot better! We just need to know how to proceed with the medication in order to hasten his full recovery." And suddenly, the Rebbe was able to provide the correct suggestions. The Rebbe later related that his state of happiness upon hearing the good news returned his spirit to him.*

### **Living Up Someone Else's Day**

There is another important lesson to take out of this *yesod*. If people are so energized when they are happy, then we can now properly appreciate how integral it is to brighten another person's day! When you tell someone a good word, you give them a smile, you compliment their new glasses, or whatever it may be – you might be strengthening them for the entire day! Who knows if that person's *seder* will be a different story after your smile, or if their day at the office will be far more successful because of your compliment? Giving another person recognition of any sort can lift their spirits astronomically. Sometimes you can go to Shul in the morning, and you see the same faces that you see every morning – but you just keep on walking, failing to pay them any attention or to even bother noticing that they exist. Why not give them a warm "good morning"? Why not mention how you were inspired by how timely this fellow is, or by how passionately that person *davens*? A compliment like that could be his bread and butter for the next week! It doesn't hurt – so why not give it a try?

So it turns out that we have two different lessons to take from this Ohr Hachaim – one that pertains to others, and one that pertains to ourselves. If a person is on an entirely different plane while he is *b'simcha*, then it is definitely incumbent upon each and every one of us to do our best to always be content and joyful. And so too, if we have an opportunity to raise someone else's spirits by simply adding some happiness to their day – then we must do so to the best of our ability.

### **Happiness Comes from Focusing on the Positive**

Being in a constant state of happiness is a big *avodah*. It all starts with focusing on all of the good things in our lives, rather than being so fixated on the one or two irksome ones. If a person trains himself to always focus on the good and be thankful for it, then he will be a much more pleasant person – and he will be far more likely to avoid despair when a real difficulty comes his way.

*A man was once walking in Yerushalayim when he saw another Yid walking on the other side of the street, visibly perturbed by something. He crossed the street and asked him: "Reb Yid, why the long face? Is there anything I could do to help?"*

*"Look, I'm in a difficult matzav. My son's Shabbos aufruf is tomorrow, and the cleaners didn't get to cleaning my bekisha in time. Now I don't have a clean bekisha for Shabbos, and my entire extended family will be there... it's going to be bizonos for me," the fellow groaned, almost in tears.*

*"Hmm, that sounds like a heavy load indeed. Although I would trade mine with you any day," said the first man. "You see, you're concerned about the practicalities of your upcoming aufruf... my son, on the other hand, is an 'alteh bachur' who has been in shidduchim for years on end."*

If we learn to focus on the multitudes of blessings in our lives, we won't be prone to becoming totally miserable when a small detail isn't working out for us.

### **The Danger of Being in a State of Dissatisfaction**

On the same token, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to warn his *talmidim* to never be 'down' or crestfallen. When a person is down, Rav Chaim would say, he is compromising all of his barriers and *madreigos* significantly. He thinks that everything is terrible anyway, so it probably

wouldn't hurt to stoop a drop lower for a few minutes. He begins to complain to Hashem and act like an ingrate for all the good that he has. A state of sadness and dissatisfaction is just a very dark and dangerous place to be in.

*Imagine you see a person walking in the street, and he suddenly trips and falls to the floor. You expect to see him stand back up on his feet, but he just continues to lay there on the ground. You approach him and say: "Sir, can I offer you a hand?" and he simply responds: "Nah, what's the rush to get back up? I was standing, and now I'm lying on the floor in the middle of a busy street. There's no reason to rush back to the standing position."*

### **Making Hakadosh Baruch Hu 'Happy'**

The Gemara in Taanis tells us that of all the people in the *shuk*, הני הבא – these *badchanim* are going to merit Olam Habah. The *Rishonim* explain that these were people that used to cheer up others when they were down and bring people back together when they had a dispute. The Maharsha asks over there: why were they called "*bnei*" Olam Habah, which implies that they would be getting more than just a portion in the World to Come – but rather they would be like *bnei bayis* in Olam Habah? He answers that when a person is in a state of pain and sadness, Hashem is כביכול in 'pain' as well, as the *pasuk* says: "עמו אנכי בצרה" – *I am with him in his troubles*. When a Yid livens up his friend's spirits and brings him to a state of joy, then it is considered as though he was *misameach* the Ribono Shel Olam, and a deed of that magnitude deserves tremendous reward.

*I repeated this Maharsha in one of my first Ohr Hachaim shiurim in Mattersdorf about 35 years ago. Rav Mendel Weinbach zt"l was sitting and learning in the corner of the shul, and he overheard what I had said. After the shiur, he came over to me and said that a certain Gadol (I don't remember who) used to turn to Hashem after he would finish learning and exclaim, "Ribono Shel Olam, mach zich freilach! Please make yourself happy!" Somebody once approached him and asked: "Is it respectful to speak with Hashem that way?" and he answered him: "When the Yidden are in pain, so is the Eibishter, בביכול. I am asking that Hashem should make His kinderlach happy, thereby making Himself happy."*

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## יְהוּדָה אֵתָהּ יוֹדוּךָ אֶתִידָה (בראשית מ"ט ח')

### Why Yehuda Received the מלוכה

When Yaakov Avinu was addressing his sons prior to his departure from this world, he singled Yehuda out by presenting him with an unparalleled gift: the eternal kingdom of Klal Yisroel. What did Yehuda do to deserve this supreme position?

The *meforshim* tell us that one of the main reasons Yehuda received the מלוכה was his conduct in the Tamar episode.

When Yehuda was informed that his daughter-in-law had become pregnant through זנות, he immediately spoke with zeal and קנאות. After all, she was considered like a daughter-in-law of a king; it was totally unbecoming of her to act in such a lowly manner. She clearly deserved the punishment of שריפה - which he quickly condemned her to.

But then came the famous message from Tamar: "הכר נא למי החותמת" - try to recognize these items that I was given..." And Yehuda suddenly understood what had really unfolded before his very eyes. Without skipping a beat, he exclaimed: "צדקה ממני."

Rav Chaim Brim used to say that in that moment, it would have been much easier for Yehuda to die than to admit what had truly occurred, in front of his family and followers who so respected him. It's an incredibly difficult thing to say ממני, it was from me, I am the guilty one in this story.

The Brisker Rav taught that Tamar sent two separate messengers to Yehuda. One told him, "לאיש אשר אלה לו אנוכי הרה", I was impregnated by the man who owns the following items." Then, another messenger came and said, "הכר נא למי החותמת והפתילים האלה"... This way, only Yehuda was able to put the two statements together, thereby avoiding him any shame. In fact, Chazal learn from Tamar the famous maxim, "מוטב שיפיל את עצמו לתוך כבשן האש ואל ילבין" - "פני חבירו ברבים" - a person should rather jump into a fiery oven than embarrass his friend in public.

Now, Yehuda was faced with a decision: he could send Tamar to death - although she was pregnant, the Gemara teaches that we still carry out the death penalty, because of the Halacha of "עובר ירך אמו" - or he could admit his part in the story and spare her. After all, Tamar did a great job covering for him, as the Brisker Rav learns in the pesukim. He could've easily gotten away with killing her.

But honestly, would Yehuda ever do something like that? How would he be able to live with himself after committing such an evil act? He was the responsible one for this sin, going ahead and killing Tamar and her unborn twins would have been an atrocity.

And yet, Yaakov Avinu lauds Yehuda for this story. "יהודה אתה ידוך", for your courage, for your capacity to be מודה על האמת - you deserve royalty.<sup>1</sup> The great kings of Klal Yisroel will have your blood running through their veins. But why? Did Yehuda really have a choice in the matter? Would a Tzaddik like him really contemplate murder?

### **The Importance of Middas Ha'emes**

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirrer Mashgiach, reveals the following, highly relevant explanation:

Yehuda really had another choice. He could have found another way to get Tamar off the hook. He could have argued that there were no witnesses present at the time of the transgression, or that perhaps somebody was מאנס her, so she wasn't responsible for the sin. Basically, he could have spared Tamar's life without besmirching his own name.

Furthermore, the Midrash says in the name of Rav Yochanan that at the time of the incident, Yehuda wasn't in a state of doing an עבירה whatsoever. Rather, "בא מלאך הממונה על התאווה והטיתו", - the angel responsible for lust came and 'pushed' Yehuda into the act. Yehuda could have used this as an excuse: "It might have been me, but I was coerced to perform the act by a higher power."

But Yehuda wouldn't go for the back route. He was straight as an arrow, and got right to the point. "צדקה ממני" - it was my fault. I promised to give her my son שילה as a husband, and I didn't follow through with my word.

Rav Yeruchem explains that this came from Yehuda's impeccable Middas Ha'emes. If his actions weren't 100% the way they should have been, then he would own up to it. He wouldn't start trying to wiggle his way out, pointing fingers and creating coverup stories. Even though he had a way to avoid his shame, as we mentioned before, he wouldn't listen to the temptation - what's true is true, and Yehuda was strong enough to admit it.

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<sup>1</sup> See Targum Onkelos who explains that the passuk refers to the incident where Yehuda was מודה.

It was this strength that delivered the מלוכה into Yehuda's hands. Yaakov Avinu realized that the ability to refrain from giving *terutzim* and excuses for everything and just being honest to oneself is a true *middah* of leadership and *gadlus*.

This point of giving excuses really affects our daily lives on a constant basis. When we have the slightest justification in our heads to convince ourselves that the thing we are doing isn't really wrong, then we pounce on the opportunity and allow ourselves to do it.

*Do I really have to be honest with my taxes? I don't really owe the government anything. They're just using my hard earned money for some lazy people who can't pull themselves together to make a living!*

*Do I really have to be honest with my hours at work? I know my manager insisted many times that they pay by the hour and not by getting the work done, but honestly, I'm a huge asset for this company... I always get everything done right anyway.*

*Sounds like good logic - and the second we start falling for it, we easily deceive ourselves, and deviate from the correct path.*

If we would focus on really being honest with ourselves, then our day would be a different day: we would concentrate more by davening; we would be more respectful to our spouses; we would be more straightforward with our chinuch; and the list goes on and on.

You want to know how far excuses can take us? Look at how Lavan reacted to Yaakov's complaint when he awoke in the morning to discover that he had been given Leah instead of Rochel. Yaakov was shocked; he had made it so clear - ברחל בתך הקטנה - Yet Lavan answered so shamelessly: לא כן - יעשה במקומנו לתת הצעירה לפני הבכירה - We don't do such terrible things! We don't embarrass the older sister by marrying off the younger one before her! Lavan's excuses took him so far that he was able to defend himself with conviction, even though everyone knew he was lying through his teeth. And the fact is, we do this all the time; we delude ourselves to the point that we can actually argue our cases in front of the Supreme Court, even though deep down, we know that we are wrong.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to say, fooling people is a terrible thing but there's something far worse than that - fooling yourself. This is the key to living a life of Emes. We all know, חיותמו של הקב"ה אמת, it is very difficult to attain, but it is the foundation of Jewish life.



### Middas Ha'emes for Yourself, עין טובה for Others

The *pasuk* says, "הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב ושמעו אל ישראל אביכם". The Gemara in Pesachim 56 teaches that when Yaakov gathered his sons to reveal the קץ, he said, "Avraham had a good son, Yitzchok, and an evil son, Yishmael. My father, Yitzchok, had a good son - me - and an evil one, Esav, as well. I fear that perhaps there are evil ones amongst you; I wished to reveal the קץ, but the *shechina* has left me!" To this, the *shevatim* swiftly responded "שמע ישראל" - hear our father, Yisroel - "השם אלוהינו השם אחד" - we only believe in one Hashem; we have no interest in *avodah zara*. They cried this out in unison in order to dispel their father's concern. And Yaakov answered with joy, "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד"; praised is the holy name of the Ribbono Shel Olam who blessed me with children that are all *ehrllich*.

The Gemara inquired about this: When we say *krias shema* every day, should we say it the way Yaakov did, and recite שם ברוך after the first *pasuk*, or should we do it like Moshe Rabbeinu, who went straight to ואהבה? (In the Torah, when Moshe teaches Klal Yisroel the *parsha* of *shema*, he doesn't say שם ברוך.) The Gemara concludes that we say שם ברוך quietly, in order to not detract from Yaakov Avinu or Moshe Rabbeinu, thereby somewhat accomplishing both methods.

Rav Moshe Feinstein זת"ל explained that these various methods of saying *krias shema* each have their individual scenario where they are exclusively relevant. When there is a joint עול מלכות שמים including numerous Yidden, then the correct method is crying שם ברוך out loud. When we are testifying on Klal Yisroel's behalf, when we are notifying the world that our nation is conducting itself properly - then we must scream this holy verse. And, indeed, that is exactly what happened by Yaakov and his sons - and that is also what happened every year in the Beis Hamikdash, when the Kohen Gadol would say Hashem's name out loud - the Yidden all exclaimed in unison, "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד".

Therefore, unfortunately, we can't use this method on a regular basis: there are many Yidden out there who are not doing the right thing. Klal Yisroel as a whole is not conducting itself 100% the way it's supposed to. On Yom Kippur, however, we can assume that most of the nation is being מרהרר בתשובה, and we can therefore shout שם ברוך out loud.

But what's this idea that the *chachomim* presented of saying שם ברוך in an undertone?

Says Rav Moshe: every individual member of Klal Yisroel has an obligation to have an עין טובה on his brothers. We must attempt, as hard as we can, to envision each and every Yid in a positive light. This is why we whisper

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ברוך שם; we are dreaming, hoping - even believing - that our siblings, *Acheinu Bnei Yisroel*, are all trying their best to sanctify Hashem's name in this world.

Let's try to tie this together with the previous point we discussed. We are all naturally equipped with the uncanny ability to defend ourselves and create excuses to explain away all of our questionable behavior. Now, why can't we do the same with regard to others? With ourselves, we must utilize the *Middas Ha'emes*; we must only access the truth that lies deep within. But when it comes to our friends, we have no idea what the truth really is. With them, we are capable of creating a positive outlook without ever defecting from our *avodah* of *Emes*.

There is one form of this method that people use effortlessly all the time, without even realizing it: when the matter at hand involves their child. People easily create explanations and excuses for their children; it's very difficult to accept faults in our own offspring. People always convince themselves that their children are fantastic, no matter what they do.

*Once, I was in Yeshiva, and an elderly woman walked in. I asked her, "Who are you looking for?" and she answered, "My einikel." I proceeded to ask which boy she was referring to, and she said, "Look for the most handsome student in the entire Yeshiva. That's my einikel."*

If we are able to use *terutzim* for our children, then we should definitely at least try to do so for others. May the *zechus* of being זכות לכהf others empower us and help us come to the day that we will all be able to exclaim in unison, in the Beis Hamikdosh Hashlishi, "ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד".

### **Middah K'neged Middah: Getting Hashem's Message**

Perhaps we can include another dimension into this shmooz: The *Ribbono Shel Olam* very often punishes people in the form of *middah k'neged middah*. If we look at this concept deeply, we will discover that its primary purpose is closely related to our *avodah* on *Middas Ha'emes*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to give shmoozen about the *inyan* of *middah k'neged middah*. His major focus used to be that Hashem's primary intention with this method is that the person should "get the hint". The *Ribbono shel Olam* is full of kindness, and he is constantly trying to aid us in our paths of *teshuva* and *Avodas Hashem*.

One of his proofs for this idea comes from the details that the Torah reveals to us while depicting Yosef's life story. The *meforshim* teach us that

Yosef's afflictions were *middah k'neged middah* for the *lashon hara* he had spoken about his brothers:

1. He said that they were mistreating the sons of Bilha and Zilpah by referring to them as "children of slaves". As a result, Yosef was sold as a slave.
2. He said that they were involved with *arayos*. As a result, Hashem tested him with a tremendous *nisayon*: the encounter with *אשת פוטיפר*.
3. He accused them of eating meat that was *אבר מן החי*, which means the animals had not undergone proper *שחיטה* prior to consumption. As a result, the brothers used the blood of a goat to sully Yosef's *כתונת פסים*.

Why did the Torah have to say "וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים" - that they *shechted* the goat? Wasn't the whole point just that they dipped the garment in blood? Answers Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz: Hashem wanted that Yosef should see that they were *shechting* the goat, and not just killing it, so that he would recognize that the pain he was experiencing was *middah k'neged middah* for having accused them of not *shechting* their animals.

We see from here that the main purpose of the method of *middah k'neged middah* is to engender reflection on one's previous behavior, thereby leading to *teshuva*. For this to happen, it is probable that Hashem would afflict the person in a way that it would be clear to him exactly which action requires *teshuva*.

In that shmooz, Rav Chaim also relates a story about this point:

*A prominent Rosh Yeshiva did research on a certain bachur, and concluded that he was befitting for his daughter. When the Rosh Yeshiva and his wife went to meet this prospective shidduch, they immediately noticed that he had a bad limp. After the meeting, the Rosh Yeshiva's wife hastily notified him that she was calling off the shidduch.*

*"But he is such a wonderful bachur! He has sterling middos, he's a big yirei shomayim and a top tier talmid chacham!" The Rosh Yeshiva reasoned.*

*But his Rebbetzin wouldn't hear of it. Her daughter deserved the best; limps were not part of her list of requirements. She insisted that they say no to the shidduch, and so it was.*

*Sometime later, this Rebbetzin was drinking a cup of tea. The tea spilled, and somehow this caused her to trip and fall. Her fall resulted in a permanent limp.*

*For years, the woman insisted that she tripped because of the tea; the flavor was too strong, and this caused her to gag and trip. But everybody else got the message. Hashem made the middah k'neged middah pretty apparent, but unfortunately, the Rosh Yeshiva's wife chose to miss the boat.*

Perhaps now that we discussed the importance of working on our Middas Ha'emes we will be more prone to recognizing Hashem's messages in our lives. Unfortunately, many of us have the tendency to connect occurrences in our lives with natural and inconsequential causes, even when the true explanation is glaring right at us. If we would be able to just let go of the illusory world around us and concentrate on ourselves and our *tafkid*, then we wouldn't have such a hard time believing that Hashem handcrafted our *tzaros* just to wake us up. The very fact that we are not perfectly honest with ourselves and our mission in life causes us to miss these great opportunities to make amends.

If we could just step back for a moment, try and draw the connection, and say, "Maybe I was wrong, maybe I could've done that differently" - in other words, if we could really be honest with ourselves - then perhaps we would be able to receive Hashem's messages the right way, and actually use them to aid us in our paths to perfection.

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