

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
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פרשת תולדות

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לעילוי נשמת מרן רה"י
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ומרן המשגיח
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לכבוד היארצייט ב' כסלו

פרשת תולדות

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אֲבִרְהֵם הוֹלִיד אֹת יִצְחָק:
(בראשית כ"ג א')

*And these are the generations of Yitzchok, son of Avrohom;
Avrohom fathered Yitzchok.*

רש"י: על ידי שכתב הכתוב יצחק בן אברהם, הוזקק לומר אברהם הוליד את יצחק, לפי שהיו ליצני הדור אומרים מאבימלך נתעברה שרה, שהרי כמה שנים שהתה עם אברהם ולא נתעברה הימנו, מה עשה הקב"ה, כר קלסתר פניו של יצחק דומה לאברהם, והעידו הכל אברהם הוליד את יצחק, וזהו שכתב כאן יצחק בן אברהם, שהרי עדות יש שאברהם הוליד את יצחק:

The Midah of Leitzanus

The Claim of the לייצני הדור/Scoffers of the Generation and Hashem's Refutation

This *parshah* begins with discussing the children of Yitzchok. However, before discussing them, the *passuk* interjects the words אברהם הוליד את יצחק /*Avrohom fathered Yitzchok*. How is this relevant to the discussion of Yitzchok's own children? Rashi explains that by the *passuk* referring to Yitzchok as בן אברהם /*'the son of Avrohom'*, the *passuk* hints to an incident that occurred regarding this lineage: The לייצני הדור /*scoffers of the generation* used to poke fun and claim that in reality Avrohom was not the father of Yitzchok; rather Avimelech was his true father. After all, Avrohom and Sarah had been married for so many years without children; what could have suddenly changed? Obviously, argued the cynics, the true father was Avimelech, resulting from the period that Sarah was kidnapped and taken to his palace. To refute the words of these *leitzanim*, Hashem caused Yitzchok's facial features to appear identical to Avrohom's, this demonstrating clearly that Avrohom had fathered Yitzchok. This is the meaning of the words אברהם הוליד את יצחק /*Avrohom fathered Yitzchok* – i.e. Hashem made it clear to all that Avrohom fathered Yitzchok.

A Seeming Contradiction

We can ask that there seems to be a contradiction in the manner in which HaKadosh Boruch Hu dealt with the words of the *leitzaanim*. In the incident in our discussion, Hashem took the threat of the *leitzaanim* very seriously, and their words prompted Hashem to make a special miracle to negate their words. Yet in Parshas Beraishis, there seems to be a different attitude toward the cynics:

Before Hashem created man, He uttered the words נעשה אדם (בראשית א' כ"ו) */Let us make a man*. Rashi explains that Hashem was as if asking the *malachim* for advice about the creation of man. By doing this, Hashem was setting an example for how a person should deal with those who are in a lower position than he is.

Rather than a leader bossing his way around, causing his subordinates to become resentful and spiteful, a person should instead make a point of asking his assistants for their opinion. If the leader has the proper honesty and humility, he may discover some very valid points raised by his assistants that he had not thought of on his own. Furthermore, even if he does not change his own opinion, his workers will at least feel content in the knowledge that their voice was heard and considered.

To teach this important lesson, Hashem Himself כביכול asked the opinion of the *malachim* before carrying out the significant task of the creation of man.

However, although Hashem was conveying this important lesson, there is also a substantial danger inherent in the use of the words נעשה אדם */Let us make man*. After all, this can lead one to the erroneous conclusion that the *malachim* also had a hand in man's creation, *chas v'shalom*. Rashi explains that in truth, one cannot really arrive at this conclusion, because the next *passuk* clearly uses the words ויברא אלוקים (שם פסוק כ"ז) */And He created*, implying that the task was carried out by Hashem alone. The only danger that remains is for people who do not truly seek the truth. For those people, says Rashi, Hashem is not concerned. Those who wish to err may err, but the lesson of asking advice from one's subordinates will not be sacrificed on account of the *leitzaanim*.

The Apparent Contradiction in Hashem's Manner of Dealing with the *Leitzanim*

The question is that the way Hashem dealt with the *leitzanim* in Yitzchok's case seems to be in a much more urgent manner. There too, one who wishes to know the truth could easily realize that the words of *leitzanus* had no logical basis. Firstly, is it conceivable that Hashem would indeed effect a great miracle of granting Sarah a child in her old age, all in order to create a *mamzer*? Moreover, with just a little research, anyone could readily discover that it was impossible for Avimelech to have defiled Sarah, because Hashem had plagued the entire palace of Avimelech, with a terrible, torturous stuffing of all their bodily openings. Avimelech was forced to beg Avrohom Avinu to daven on his behalf that the affliction should be removed. In addition to this, Avimelech had sent Sarah away from his home with expensive gifts of appeasement for having attempted to pain her – clearly not the way one would treat a woman whom he has defiled for his pleasure. Yet, notwithstanding all these clear negations of the words of the *leitzanim*, Hashem still did not simply dismiss their words as inconsequential, and as harming no one but the *leitzanim* themselves. Rather, Hashem brought about a miracle whose express purpose was to refute the words of the *leitzanim*. What is the reason for this difference in Hashem's manner of dealing with the *leitzanim*?

When Pertaining to the Future *Geulah*, Complete Clarity is Required

One answer that I heard to this question is, although in the original Creation Hashem did allow room for potential mistakes to be made by those who do not seek the truth, regarding the Future Redemption, that will not be the case. As we say in our davening **וכל יוכל *All human beings will call in Your Name***. At the time of the End of Days, every single being in the world without exception will need to recognize that Hashem is the Creator Who chose the Jewish People as His nation. As the *Avos* are an integral component of the Jewish Nation about whom the final Redemption and recognition will be based, Hashem could not allow for any room for vagueness or doubt regarding their identity and lineage. It must be absolutely apparent and clear that Yitzchok is the son of Avrohom Avinu, and the rightful forefather of Klal Yisroel, so that when the *Geulah* comes, it will be known that his descendants are the true

Nation of HaKadosh Boruch Hu, descending from Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov.

However, although there may be much truth in this answer, it would seem that it cannot be the only explanation for the change in Hashem's action. This is because after recounting the miracle of Yitzchok's face precisely resembling that of Avrohom, the Medrash (תנחומא אות ב' ואות ו') goes on to discuss a similar miracle which occurred for Kilav the son of Dovid Hamelech and Avigayil. Before Dovid married Avigayil, he waited the three months as prescribed by the *halacha*, in order to differentiate between children of Avigayil's previous husband Naval, and children of his own. Nevertheless, the *leitzanim* contended that the child within Avigayil was fathered by Naval. To refute their words, Hashem performed the same miracle, forming the features of the child, Kilav, to precisely resemble those of his true father, Dovid Hamelech. In this case, it cannot be explained that Hashem performed this miracle on account of the Future Redemption, because Kilav was not connected to the royal line that will eventually bring Moshiach. The question then returns: Why did Hashem perform the miracle in the instances of Yitzchok and Kilav, whereas regarding the Creation of Adam, Hashem left room for one who wishes to err?

Hashem Defends the Honor of His Servants More Than His Own

Perhaps we can offer a simple answer to this question. The Gemara teaches us that Hashem has the trait of modesty. One meaning of this is that Hashem will go to great lengths regarding preserving the honor of *tzaddikim*, whereas for His own honor, Hashem will at times 'overlook' a potential slight, if there is an important *cheshbon* for doing so. If so, this can be the explanation of Hashem's actions. Regarding the honor of Avrohom Avinu and Dovid Hamelech, Hashem will not leave any room for doubt. It must be clear who is the true father. Regarding Creation, however, Hashem left the opening for error, in order to impart the important lesson that one should take advice from those who are on a lower level than he is.

In our Own Lives

We must learn this lesson from Hashem's *hanhagah* regarding our own lives as well. Regarding our own personal image, we must learn to overlook what we perceive as slights to our honor. At the

same time, we must guard the honor of others, and we must certainly be so careful not to offend another person or cause any lessening of his dignity in any way.

The Root of *Leitzanus* – Not According an Idea its Proper Seriousness

What is at the root of this *midah* of *leitzanus*? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would explain that *leitzanus* does not necessarily mean that one makes humorous jokes. Rather, it is the *midah* of not treating an idea with the seriousness and respect which it deserves.

- *Avi is walking down a crowded, busy street, when he notices a thick wad of hundred-dollar-bills. Rather than bending down and picking up this small fortune, he just walks past it indifferently. Avi has made leitzanus out of a 'serious' amount of money.*
- *A person discovers a lump on his body that he never noticed before. He knows that he should check it out, but he is terrified of finding out about a serious illness r"l. He shrugs it off, rationalizing that it is most probably nothing. This person has treated his health with an attitude of leitzanus.*

Leitzanus In Regard to Ruchniyus

In particular with regard to *ruchniyus*, the *midah* of *leitzanus* is to completely dismiss all thoughts of truth and of self-growth without any rationalization. One just shrugs it off, usually with some joke or wisecrack, which has no basis in fact or logic. As many *seforim* say ליצנות אחת דוחה מאה תוכחות / *One cynical comment can push away a hundred messages of reproof.*

Chaim and Yankel are sitting near each other during a shmuess that the mashgiach is giving in yeshiva. Chaim is listening intently, trying hard to catch all the words of the shmuess, and he is taking the words of mussar to heart. There are already several areas in which he is considering changing his own conduct due to the words of the mashgiach.

Suddenly, Yankel leans over to Chaim and whispers, "Look at the mashgiach's tie. It is so tasteless, and it's a terrible match for his suit!"

Chaim cannot help but smile. All his his'orerus and resolutions disappear into oblivion as he too begins to examine the whether the mashgiach's taste in clothing is up to par.

In truth, Yankel's words of *leitzanus* were completely irrelevant to the words of the shmuess. Why should the worthless and meaningless topic of the mashgiach's taste in clothing affect the serious topic of *mussar* that he was discussing? And yet, the power of *leitzanus* brings Chaim to completely forget about the words of *mussar* that he was hearing, even without any logical reason to do so.

In the case of Avrohom and Sarah, the words of *leitzanus* were totally illogical, as demonstrated earlier. In the realm of fact and reason, it was abundantly clear that Hashem had performed a great miracle for his servant, Avrohom Avinu. Still, the force of *leitzanus* causes people not to focus on what is sensible or logical. They simply dismiss the truth with their light-headed words of cynicism, and their words take effect on all those who do not fortify themselves against it. People hear that Sarah's child was fathered by Avimelech, and immediately the idea takes hold. Any thoughts of *teshuvah* that may have been kindled as a result of the miracle that Hashem had wrought, can now conveniently disappear. After all, the child was not from Avrohom! – Could the claim of the cynics withstand any logical scrutiny? No thought is given to such bothersome questions.

Leitzanim in Every Generation

The Medrash Tanchuma in our *parshah* informs us that אין לך דור שאין בו ליצנין / *There is no generation that does not have cynics.*

There will always be those people who find some problem with any idea that is suggested by rabbanim, or in any area where there is some serious inspiration to be had. They will usually find some way to cast aspersions on the intentions of the ones who are leading the initiative, all in order to free themselves and others from having to go along with the plan.

What about the inherent truth of the words of the leaders, regardless of their intentions? What about the fact that even if

the words of the leitzanim were true – still, whatever personal motive that the leaders might have had, they are still a thousand times better than the lowly jokesters who have nothing better to do than find fault with others, rather than working on their own ruchniyus? Furthermore, with all the 'flak' that the leaders get, how could they possibly not be completely l'sheim shamayim?! And yet, all these highly compelling points are wholly overlooked by the leitzanim and their followers.

We must apply great effort over ourselves not to allow ourselves to get swept up in the words of the *leitzanim*. And certainly, how careful we must be not to be the ones who actually instigate the *leitzanus*, *chas v'shalom!* We must follow the words of *mussar* that our *rabbanim* tell us with complete submission and earnestness. We have to completely close our ears to the words of the scoffers, holding on to our own *chizuk* with all the strength that we can muster. If we apply our full effort, HaKadosh Boruch Hu will give us *siyatta d'shmaya* to succeed.

Positive Applications of Leitzanus

Even negative *middos* have positive applications, and *leitzanus*, too, is no exception. To begin with, the Gemara (מגילה כ"ה:) tells us that one should make *leitzanus* of *avodah zarah*. This means that when one hears ideas which are contrary to the spirit of the Torah or the *chachamim*, he should not hesitate to make light of them. He should not be influenced or ascribe importance to what seems as an impressive number of people who have joined the movement. He must dismiss these evil ideas with confidence, even poking fun at the wrongdoers who are leading the movement.

A group of baalei batim in a shul feel that the rav is too demanding on them. He is always speaking about coming on time to shul, not talking during davening, and about spending time each day learning – all of which are areas in which these baalei batim do not appreciate being told what to do. They are quite content with their present state of ruchniyus, and they feel no need to grow any further.

Each Shabbos after davening, this group gathers together in the back of the shul where they sit and knock the drasha of the

rav. By doing this, they remove all guilt that their conscience makes them feel. The group can get quite loud and rowdy at times, as each 'member' tries to outdo the rest in poking fun at the rav.

How should any serious-minded, respectable person relate to this group? He should avoid it like the plague, attaching no importance to it whatsoever. It makes no difference to him if this will cause him to join the rav in becoming the subject of the group's lowly humor. This man looks at the group with complete disdain and he realizes that his share is infinitely greater than theirs. He will even belittle the group to his children, so they too should understand that no good will come from the group's leitzanus sessions.

Leitzanus In Dealing with One's Hardships

Beside for *leitzanus* regarding negative ideas or behaviors, there can be other areas as well in which it pays to relate to the issues with 'belittlement'. When a person is going through various hardships in his life, it can feel at times as though there is no way he can continue. And indeed, it may be very difficult for him at that point. In such circumstances, the *midah* of *leitzanus* can have a very positive application.

Reuven struggles each month to pay his bills and expenses. At times, he has absolutely no idea how he will pay for the mortgage, tuition, heat and insurance – not to mention the usual household expenses. All this is coupled with issues that one of Reuven's children is having at school, while one of the older children still needs a shidduch. His problems weigh down on him, and Reuven feels that he cannot continue.

*How can Reuven pull through during his time of difficulty? Certainly, he needs to learn the *sugya* of *bitachon* thoroughly and apply his whole self into putting the concepts into practice. Alongside all of this, however, a healthy sense of humor is extremely beneficial. Reuven needs to be able to smile through his hardships, and – as difficult as it may be – to make light of them.*

"So we don't know how we will pay the bills? Our daughter needs a shidduch? Don't worry, we'll be Ok! Hashem will take care of us! We don't have to know how!"

When one maintains a hearty sense of humor – a *middah* of '*leitzanus*' – regarding one's issues, a person can carry his family through times of difficulty, while simultaneously very seriously davening to Hashem to send him a *yeshuah*. Surely in the *zechus* of his *bitachon* and his *tefillos*, he can hope to be *zoche* to a *yeshuah b'karov*.

In Review

- Let us remember that, like HaKadosh Boruch Hu who overlooked His honor in the creation of man, we must be prepared to overlook what we feel is a slight to our own honor – particularly when our feelings interfere with our own or another's ability to arrive at a real accomplishment. Regarding the dignity of another individual, however, let us strive protect it whenever we are capable, just as Hashem protected the honor of Avrohom Avinu and Dovid Hamelech by performing a miracle in the features of their children.
- Let us maintain a large distance from those who make *leitzanus* about positive ideas which will inspire us to grow in our *ruchniyus*. And we certainly must not be the ones who influence others with an attitude of *leitzanus*!
- Regarding ideas or groups which negate our *Avodas Hashem* and prevent any shteiging in *ruchniyus*, let us behave the opposite way – with a manner of complete *leitzanus*. We need no part of the evil attitude of those groups.
- Finally, let us train ourselves to deal with our hardships in stride and with a healthy sense of humor, while keeping a secure *bitachon* that Hashem will walk us through our difficulties and only do for us what is completely for our benefit.

Bez"H we should fulfill these concepts and live our lives according to the *Ratzon Hashem*.

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