

# אור פני משה

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

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*Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe  
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

**פרשת בהר - בחקותי**

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לעילוי נשמת מו"ר הרה"ג הרב  
משה אליעזר בן הרב ישראל זצ"ל  
נתנדב ע"י מעריצו הרב יעקב ניסן פרידמאן

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

פרשת בהר - בחקותי

## פרשת בהר - בחקותי

וַיְדַבֵּר ד' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לְאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרָתָם  
אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תִבְאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ  
שְׁבַת לָהּ: (ויקרא כ"ה ב')

אִז תִּרְצֶה הָאָרֶץ אֶת-שְׁבַתְתֶּיךָ (שם כ"ו ל"ד)

### How to View One Who Cannot Withstand the Challenges of *Shemithah*

In *Parshas Behar*, we see the tremendous *nisayon* of *Shemithah* and the great *bitachon* of those who withstood the challenge. The Medrash goes so far as to compare these individuals to actual *malachim*/angels.

What happens if a person did not withstand the trial? The thought of abandoning his fields proved too daunting for this individual and he just could not gather the strength to do so. Or perhaps, he could not bring himself to open his fields and orchards completely for all who wished to partake of the fruits and wild growths therein.

*Yoni had first watched as the local townspeople cleaned out his orange trees, followed by his grapes, and the pomegranates. Soon the apricots grow, and they are taken as well. It is almost time for the peaches, and he realizes in a panic that they too will be gone.*

*At this point, Yoni has had enough. He held out until now, but it is just too much. He puts a strong fence around his trees, with a large sign that reads, 'BEWARE OF DOG'.*

How do we view such a person?

Presumably, one would think that we should view this person with a mindset of understanding and tolerance. After all, we should be sympathetic of the fact that the *nisayon* was tremendously difficult; he was simply not able to handle it! True, it was required of him, and he should have done so, but if he couldn't, can he be held so accountable? It was difficult, and he couldn't do it! Have some *rachmanus*!

### Failure to Observe *Shemithah* Brings the Punishment of *Galus*

When we read the *pessukim* of *Parshas Bechukosai*, however, a completely different picture emerges. After many *pessukim* of *tochacha*, the

Torah concludes *אז תרצה הארץ את שבתותיה* / *Then the Land will be appeased about its Shabbosos*. As Rashi explains, the *galus* from Eretz Yisroel is partially due to their not having observed the laws of *Shemita* and *Yovel*. Through this, the Land 'takes back' those years of rest which were taken from it. The mishnah in this week's *perek* of Avos (ה' ט') states as well that for the sin of not observing *Shemita*, the punishment is exile. Quite a drastic punishment indeed!

Apparently, the Torah firmly expects of a person that he should withstand the *nisayon*. Obviously then, he is capable of doing so if he tried, because the Torah would not judge a person unfairly. He could have passed the test, and he did not. He is therefore deserving of the terrible punishments in the *parshah*.

### **Greatness When Keeping the Laws and Wickedness When Failing**

The obvious question is, is this not a contradiction? When a person overcomes the *nisayon*, he is given the utmost praise, and he is compared to a *malach*. It would seemingly follow that if he could not overcome it, he did not reach the level of an angel; he is merely an ordinary human being. And yet, when he does not pass the test, he is regarded as a wicked sinner, warranting the most horrible punishments. How can he deserve such retribution for not having been able to be an angel – a level which is beyond the natural tendencies of a person?

Before reaching the answer to this question, let us first demonstrate how we find this same concept in other places in the Torah:

### **The Greatness of Yosef Hatzaddik**

When Yosef was a servant in the house of Potiphar, his mistress was determined to seduce him into sinning with her. Each day, she subjected him to trials of temptation of the highest order. She changed her clothing twice daily, such that in the evenings, she was always wearing different clothing than she wore that morning. She badgered him without letup. Yosef had no power to escape from her or fight her off in any way, and he was forced to bear all of this in complete submissiveness. Nevertheless, with all but superhuman courage and strength, Yosef resisted her temptations completely, totally ignoring all of her different tactics that she utilized to ensnare him.

All this lasted for a full year, until that day came when there was no one else in the house. On that day, the wife of Potiphar decided that that was it; she was not taking no for an answer. She subjected Yosef to such

unbearable pressure that according to one opinion, he was actually ready to give in to the temptation. He was saved through a vision of his father's image which he saw in the window. This strengthened him for this final struggle with her.

When he came into the house at that time, his mistress grabbed him to bring him to sinning with her, and he was only able free himself of her grasp by leaving his clothing in her hands and fleeing. Again, this took superhuman courage, all by a seventeen-year-old boy, alone as a slave in a strange land.

The strength of Yosef through that year is mindboggling, and indeed, he is given the title of Yosef Hatzaddik. He is held for all future generations as the prototype of one who resists temptation, and he is considered the embodiment of the *Sefirah* of *Yesod* in this world. His courage and strength in overcoming his *nisayon* are seemingly given due recognition of true greatness.

### **Yosef Failing Would Result in his Banishment from Klal Yisroel**

What would have occurred had Yosef not overcome his *nisayon*? Had he been unable to withstand the unbearable ordeals and torments to which his mistress had subjected him, and had he finally succumbed to the pressure, where would it have landed him?

The answer to this question can be inferred from the vision Yosef had of his father, Yaakov Avinu, during those few moments of that incident when he was on the verge of surrendering to his mistress.

*Yaakov Avinu said to him, "Yosef! Your brothers are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the Choshen worn by the Kohen Gadol! Is it your wish that your name should be blotted out from amongst them, and you will instead be referred to as ריועה/זונה/the companion of immoral women?!"*

*Upon hearing these ominous words, Yosef was able to take control of himself and resist temptation this final time [as described above].*

Evidently, had Yosef succumbed to the temptation, he would have been completely disconnected from Klal Yisroel – 'thrown out of the yeshiva'.

*'But Rebbe, what could I do? It was so hard for me to control myself! I really tried hard!'*

*"I don't care. You fell through, and for that, you are being thrown out!"*

Is it not a harsh sentence for Yosef, who had tried so valiantly to withstand the temptation? If he couldn't make it in that last, final test, he has to lose his whole standing as a member of Klal Yisroel? True, he wouldn't achieve the recognition for having actually overcome the challenge, but why must he be meted such a harsh punishment?

### **The Greatness of One Who Succeeds in *Ruchniyus* and the Lowliness of One Who Does Not**

Another instance of this phenomenon can be found in the Medrash in Parshas Tazria. Chazal focus on the fact that mankind was the last entity in Creation; every other item and creature were created before him. On this, the Medrash explains that this has a dual message, which depends on the person's own conduct in his lifetime.

*If a person 'merits', i.e. he lived a lifetime of serving Hashem, he is told, 'The entire Creation was placed as a preparation for you!'*

*If he did not 'merit', however, and he did not pass the tests that he was given, he is told, 'You are so lowly, that even the tiny, pesky mosquito was created before you!'*

Here again we may question; the one who did not merit, fell just so short of the one who merited. He tried, but he couldn't get it. Must he be dealt with so harshly?

### **The Greatness of Klal Yisroel for Accepting the Torah and the Lowliness of the Nations for Refusing**

In yet another example, let us review the story that occurred before Klal Yisroel was given the Torah. Hashem approached each nation and offered them the Torah.

*Each nation inquired about what was written in it, and Hashem immediately responded by informing each one of the commandment which worst suited their various natures. To Yishmael, Hashem communicated the prohibition against adultery; to Eisav, the prohibition of murder. Each one immediately decided that the Torah was not for them. To the Jewish People who said Na'aseh V'nishma, Hashem immediately showered blessings and gifts, and consecrated them as His chosen Nation forever onwards.*

Again, the question is – Na'aseh V'nishma is a tremendously high *madreigah*, as evidenced by the great rewards that Klal Yisroel received for having uttered those words. Based on this understanding, the Nations of the World, then, do not seem to have acted so wickedly by not saying *Na'aseh*

*V'nishma*. They simply had not reached that high *madreigah*. If so, why were they immediately dismissed by Hashem without even being given a chance? The very first prohibition Hashem told them was the one which would be the hardest one for them to accept. Obviously they were turned off. If Hashem would have first told them all the 'enjoyable' *mitzvos*, e.g. Shabbos, Yom Tov, and only then told them of the hard one, maybe the *goyim* would have given it a shot. Why was this not done for them?

### **When a Person Succeeds, It is Greatness; At the Same Time, He is Expected to Succeed**

The answer to all of these questions is that indeed, both sides of the coin are true. It is a paradox, a contradiction.

When a person succeeds in overcoming his challenge, he is given all the credit in the world for what it. What he did is deemed true greatness, and he will fully be recognized for it.

*There will be a banquet held completely in his honor, and he will be seated at the head seat on the dais. He will not even need to invite his friends and ask them for donations. All the honor is handed to him on a silver platter.*

And yet, when he falls short, he is given the harshest measure of punishment. He is shamed and despised for his failure to live up to the challenge.

Why is this so? Because a person is expected to achieve greatness in this world. True, it is great and awesome, but a person's job is to reach that very greatness and awesomeness.

*A fire is burning in a seven-story building, and there are people trapped inside. The fire department is called, and when they arrive, the situation is desperate indeed. Already, flames can be seen jumping out of the windows.*

*The firemen quickly set up their ladder and rush inside the windows to rescue the people inside. Boruch Hashem, they manage to rescue everyone who was trapped inside, in the nick of time. The rescuers are given a hero's welcome, and a celebratory parade is held in their honor. They are praised to the sky.*

*What would happen if a fireman who was about to enter the building, suddenly lost his courage?*

*"I can't go in," he says. "The flames are just too big and threatening!"*

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פרשת בהר - בחקותי

*This fireman would be regarded by all with complete contempt and scorn.*

*"You are a fireman," people would say to him. "Why couldn't you do your job? If you do not have the courage to face the flames, find a different job! Sell silver, or houses, or become a carpenter! If you want to be a fireman, you must act the part!"*

In this scenario, the firemen are indeed respected and held in esteem when they perform a heroic rescue, because indeed, the rescue was an act of bravery and heroism. At the same time, they have already accepted upon themselves previously the responsibility of acting in that fashion. When they do not do so, they are not living up to their own responsibility of acting in a great manner.

Both sides then, are correct. They are acting with true greatness. However, they also have a responsibility to act that way.

In a similar manner, we are expected to achieve greatness in our *Avodas Hashem*. This can be attributed, on one hand, to our own acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai, similar to the fireman who has accepted upon himself the job of fireman. In a different light, it can even be considered a responsibility that is thrust upon us against our will. As the mishnah in last week's *perek* of Avos teaches us (אבות ד' ח"י כרחק אתה נולד ועל כרחק אתה חי / *Against your will you are born, and against your will you live*). A person is not given a choice about his being placed upon this world. He is simply placed there with a mission given to him. However, even as the task may be thrust on him, the reality remains that HaKadosh Boruch Hu expects all of us to serve Him and act in a manner of greatness.

Hence, the paradox emerges, as described earlier. When one achieves, he is given credit and praised for having achieved greatness. And yet, when he fails, he is accountable for not fulfilling his assigned task of achieving that very greatness.

### **Our Choices Are Between True Greatness or Complete Lowliness and Wickedness**

In our lives, the choice that stands before us in each and every *nisayon* is not one of choosing between greatness or mediocrity. It is a choice of either the highest greatness or terrible evil.

As the Lomzer Mashgiach, Rav Moshe Rosenstein ז"ל writes (ספר אהבה מישרים סימן י"א), a person is granted the most valuable of possessions – life itself. Life is so important to people, as evidenced by the fact that a person (who is emotionally healthy) will give up everything he has for his life.

*A person finds out that he has a terrible disease r"l. The only way for him to be cured is by going to a certain doctor in South Africa who has patented a complex operation that can remove this disease. This doctor charges a literal fortune of money for his work, and there is no insurance that will cover it.*

*This person will do whatever he must to save his life. He will sell all of his possessions, including his house if he must, bringing himself to a life of living in the streets, all in order to receive the treatment. After all, what are his possessions worth in comparison to his life?*

If life is indeed so precious, argues Rav Rosenstein z"l, how can we waste it?! Each moment of our lives is in our hands, to either transform it into precious diamonds, or turn into dirt and pebbles. Surely, we should not squander the most precious commodity that we have by following our desires and our *yetzer hara*. Just as we would give everything we have on behalf of our lives, so must we utilize all the strength that we have to bring this life of ours to its true value. We must see to battle our *yetzer hara* and our temptations, and to fulfill the Torah and *mitzvos* in the best possible manner.

### **Recognizing the Foolishness in Giving in to our Desires - Even Just This One Time**

There is a story which we recount from time to time in order to demonstrate a certain lesson. Now, we will add on to that lesson, as relevant to our theme:

*This incident was related to me by a friend of mine, who was in Camp Agudah-Toronto one summer when this story occurred:*

*A bear had parked itself near the camp for a few days, and it did not seem like it had any intention of leaving. An exterminator was called to trap the bear. He set up a trap with a piece of meat inside, and a surveillance camera running overhead. He then left the trap overnight.*

*The next morning, the piece of meat was gone, and the bear was not in the trap. The exterminator was extremely disturbed about this. Together with the whole camp, they watched the events on video. They saw how the bear had stepped on the door to the trap and had realized then that if it would walk inside, the door would latch shut behind it. Not wishing to be trapped inside, the bear kept one hind leg on the door while it carefully reached inside and grabbed the meat. It then ate the meat right then and there, while still standing on the*



*door. Afterwards, it walked out of the trap back to its freedom. The bear seemed mighty pleased with its ingenuity in escaping the trap.*

*The exterminator announced that the following night, they would set a better trap. An hour later, he returned with the exact same type of trap, only this time, with a much longer compartment inside.*

*As he was setting the trap, a counselor said to him, "Aren't you just wasting your time? This bear obviously knows the trick!"*

*"Don't worry," was the response, "We'll get him!"*

*Sure enough, the next morning, the bear was trapped, trying with all its might to break free, to no avail. The campers again crowded around to watch this interesting performance. They viewed how the bear had stepped on the door and saw the meat; only, this time the meat was too far. The only way it could reach the meat was by stepping off the door. For a few moments, the bear was obviously deliberating about what to do. Finally, the bear chose to step off the door in the direction of the meat. This, of course, caused the door to latch shut behind it, locking it in.*

*First, the bear enjoyed the meat. However, immediately when it was finished, it began desperately trying to escape, hammering and shaking the trap for hours on end, to no avail.*

*As the campers finished seeing the video, they all cried in a chorus, "Stupid bear! It went after the meat, knowing that it was trapping itself!"*

The lesson which we normally draw from this story is that as stupid as the bear seemed; very often, we ourselves act with the same 'stupidity'. We know of the happiness and satisfaction that results from having self-control, and the emptiness that results from giving in to our desires; and yet, we give in time after time.

Now, however, let us add to this lesson, according to our present theme:

*What would we say if the bear made the following cheshbon?*

*"I realize that choosing to take the meat will result in my becoming trapped, and that is obviously not the smart or rational course of action. So next time, I will definitely choose to leave the trap, rather than take the meat. This time, though, I really, really want a taste of that meat, and I just cannot hold myself back. So, I'll give in just this time, and afterward, I'll always choose the option of exiting trap!"*

*Silly bear! Sorry, but there is no second chance! After the trap is shut, you are going to be made into a living room rug! It's now or never!*

We all realize, of course, that this bear's *cheshbon* sounds exactly like all of us.

- *I am really going to change – next time! Today, I am just too tired to wake up on time for Shacharis. After this, I will always wake up!*
- *I know that I must stop shmoozing through seder. Next week, it's going to be a full week of learning, without a single word of batalah. I just can't start now, on Wednesday; it would never work in the middle of the week. Let me just enjoy my last shmoozing sessions, and next week – it's down to business!*

Where is the problem in these statements? Firstly, as we explain many times, we can assume that the change will not take place next week either. Unless it is NOW, it will not happen.

We can also explain though, that in truth, the logic is faulty at its core. Every moment of life is a precious entity which must be utilized too its full capacity. Even if the person would change for next time, this time will never come back! Like the bear that will not get a second chance, he, too, will never get a second chance on this moment. He has turned that moment of his life into dirt and pebbles.

When we are placed into a *nisayon*, we must grab the moment, and turn that *nisayon* into a catalyst for greatness, rather than the opposite *chas v'shalom*.

### **The Brachos for Toiling in Torah, and the Opposite Ch"v**

This concept is reflected in the first *pessukim* of the *brachos* and *klalos* in our *parshah* as well. The *brachos* begin תלכו בחוקותי / *If you will go in My chukim*. As Rashi explains, this means שתהיו עמלים בתורה / *That you should toil in Torah*. From a person toiling in Torah, all the great *madreigos* of Torah and *mitzvos* follow after it.

*He has placed himself on the train leading in the right direction.  
However far he may be from his goal, eventually, he will reach his it.*

By doing so, he merits all the wonderful *brachos* which are enumerated in the *parshah*, both in infinite closeness to Hashem, and complete happiness in worldly affairs.

After concluding the *brachos* conferred on those who follow Hashem's word, the *pessukim* then describe the terrible punishments and

misfortunes which are destined for those who disobey r"l. How do those *pessukim* begin? Presumably, they would discuss one chooses to forsake the Torah way of life, either partially or completely. However, in fact, they begin altogether less drastically. *ואם לא תשמעו לי*. Rashi explains that this consists of nothing more than not applying oneself with full diligence and effort to *limud haTorah*. As Rashi chillingly teaches us, from this one wrongdoing follows an avalanche of negative behavior, including stopping to perform *mitzvos*, preventing others from doing so, until finally denying the existence of HaKadosh Boruch Hu, *chas v'shalom*.

*This person has placed himself on the train heading in the wrong direction. Now, he is still close to home, but in short time, he is further than he can imagine.*

Here again, we see this concept. In what seems like a small, innocuous test – will one concentrate fully on his *limud haTorah* or not – lies the most far-reaching ramifications. It is a choice of either the best and greatest levels possible, or of the worst.

### **We Can Rise Up After Our Mistakes**

Before concluding this shmuess, there is one point which we must make abundantly clear. The idea we are presenting is not meant to insinuate that failure in any *nisayon* renders a person completely evil, and that after one has failed, there is no more hope for him. As we all know, that is certainly not the case. Everyone in the world fails at times, and for this reason, Hashem created the entity of *teshuvah*. As the *passuk* tells us *אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב* / *There is no person who is righteous in the world, that will do [only] good and not sin*. When we do fail, Hashem awaits our return to Him with open arms. We can certainly return to the path of greatness, and oftentimes, we will be able to achieve levels of greatness that were impossible until that point.

What we are saying is that we should understand how to view the choices we have in front of us. The choice between achieving greatness or not doing so is a severe one, because not achieving greatness is terrible. Certainly, achieving this greatness requires a lifetime of toiling and struggling – and failing many times as well. However, with the overall understanding of what is at stake, we will do our utmost to avoid failure, by putting in the highest effort possible; and when we do fail, we will quickly correct our failings, in order to return to the path of greatness once again.

### Living with this Great Lesson

Let us take this lesson to heart and live our lives with this realization. We have the ability to achieve the utmost greatness, and if we succeed, we will receive infinite reward and spiritual pleasure. However, at the same time, we are **expected** to achieve this greatness. If we do not ch"v, we are held accountable to the fullest measure.

Bez"H, we should begin to live lives of greatness, and indeed begin to be *zoche* to all the *brachos* that result from it, both in this world and in the Next World.

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