

אור פָּנָי מָשָׁה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
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*Shmuessen from
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פרשת יתרו

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לעילוי נשמהת
הרה"ג ר' ישראאל בן
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פרק יתרכז

וְאַתָּה תִּזְהַדֵּן מִבְּלַעַד הָעָם אֲנָשֵׁי חֵיל יְרָאֵי אֱלֹקִים אֲנָשֵׁי אֶתְמָת שְׂנָאֵי בְּצֻעַד
וְשְׁמַמְתָּן עַלְלָמָם שְׂרֵי אֱלֹפִים שְׂרֵי מְאֹות שְׂרֵי חַמְשִׁים וְשְׂרֵי עַשְׁרָת
(שמות י"ח כ"א)

Personalized Rabbanim

In this week's Parsha, Yisro advises Moshe Rabbeinu on how to deal with Klal Yisroel's high volume of Torah-related questions. He tells Moshe to institute a new system which would include different levels of Rabbanim who would be tasked with answering questions. Each group of ten people would have their own assigned Rav, while each group of fifty would have another Rav overseeing them, followed by a Rav guiding every group of hundred, and finally, a Rav guiding every group of a thousand.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman *zt"l* used to say that he would have loved to implement a similar system of *mashgichim* in his Yeshiva, Baranovich - but the Yeshiva simply couldn't afford it. He viewed Yisro's advice as a reminder that we each require our individualized spiritual leaders who are always accessible, and always there to direct us on the right path. One Rav for a hundred people is not enough, and neither is one *mashgiach*. We each need our personal leaders who are constantly pushing us higher up the ladder in our *avodah*.

Now, how about the Rabbanim themselves? Do they also require individual spiritual leaders? Well, Rashi answers this question for us. He says that there were 60,000 *shri'ot* in all. If all the *shrim* themselves didn't need their own higher-ups, then there should have been about 2,000 less *shrim*. Being that the final number is 60,000, we know that every single one of the 600,000 Yidden were included in the groups of ten, including the *chashuve rabbanim*.

It's interesting to note that the major league sports players all have coaches. I always used to wonder - why do they need a coach encouraging them and directing them? These people are making millions of dollars a year, and the better and more popular they become, the more they make; shouldn't their salary be enough of

a motivation for them to play their best? Surely the desire to bring home that kind of money should compel them to practice harder and come up with the best strategies to be the most watched and lionized team. Yet, they need a coach. Someone needs to be standing behind them, giving them chizuk.

Everybody needs constant *chizuk*. So many people reach the loftiest levels on Yom Kippur; when Ne'ilah comes around, they're real *tzaddikim*. But then, a half an hour into Motzei Yom Kippur, so many of these people are back to square one. They are once again on the same level that they were on a month before Rosh Hashana; they're back in the Poconos in the middle of August.

Constant Chizuk

Rav Shachna Zohn zt"l told me that the Chasam Sofer said that on a day that he didn't learn *mussar* with passion, he felt a *krirus* (coldness) in his *yiras shomayim*. The Chasam Sofer was a person who lived every second of his life with constant vigilance to maintain his *kedusha* - and still, he needed his daily *chizuk*.

The Chasam Sofer's gabbai used to bring him a cup of coffee and a danish every day. One morning, the gabbai was very hungry, and he decided to keep the coffee and danish for himself. "The Chasam Sofer is such a parush, he probably won't even notice that he didn't get it today," he reasoned. Well, sure enough, the Chasam Sofer did not seem to notice that the coffee and danish were never brought to him.

Late that night, the gabbai got a knock on his door. The Chasam Sofer was standing there, and he had a burning question: "Did you give me the cup of coffee and danish this morning?"

The gabbai was shocked. "No, I did not. But why is the Rav only asking me this now, 14 hours after the fact?"

"Because I did my cheshbon, and I noticed... I'm missing two brachos for today!" the Chasam Sofer exclaimed. "Baruch Hashem, now I know what I missed. I will go make up for them now..."

Did a person on that level of piety really require a daily dose of *chizuk*? Apparently, the answer is yes - even holy Yidden of the Chasam Sofer's stature need a *seder*, or a Rebbi, to keep propelling them upward.

The Ones Who Give *Chizuk* Also Need *Chizuk*

Giving *mussar* and *chizuk* is an easy feat when compared to being on the receiving end. Very often people preach *divrei mussar* all day, to large groups of people - but when it pertains to their own lives, they have a much harder time accepting their own *mussar* speeches.

There is a famous story about a certain Rav that was extremely wealthy. He owned large storehouses filled with costly merchandise, making him a millionaire - and at the same time, he was a prestigious talmid chacham and Rav of a city. A real case of חורף, וגדרה, במקומ אחד.

One day, unbeknownst to him, the Rav's storehouses went up in flames. All of his merchandise was destroyed, leaving him impoverished. The townspeople began discussing how to break the news to their Rav, and they quickly realized that nobody was ready to take the task of informing him of the unfortunate news - they were afraid that he would have a heart attack. Finally, one fellow spoke up. "I'll tell him," he offered.

The people asked him whether he wanted to take a doctor along, but he dismissed their fears. "Don't worry; I'll break the news to him in a way that he surely won't need a doctor," he reassured them.

This fellow went to the Rav's house. Upon entering, he collapsed on the floor and began weeping miserably. The Rav immediately offered him a seat and asked him what was wrong. "It's a nightmare," he began. "I had a massive stockpile of lumber, all stacked up and ready to be shipped overseas. But, this morning, there was a terrible storm at the port, and my entire supply was washed away in the sea. I'm broke! There's nothing left for me to support my family with!"

*The Rav tried calming the man down with words of *chizuk*. "Don't worry, Hashem has a plan. Everything he does is for the best. This is a test; you must strengthen yourself and have *bitachon* that it will all work out in the end."*

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After the Rav spent a few minutes being mechazek him, this fellow stood up and said calmly, "Everything the Rav is saying is true. Indeed, everything Hashem does is for the best. I have one small detail to add: I wasn't the one to lose everything - actually the Rav's storehouses burnt down to the ground this morning."

Upon hearing the terrible news, the Rav collapsed; it was a pity they didn't bring along a doctor!

It's easy to give *mussar* to someone else, but we must realize that even the biggest *baalei mussar* need someone to be there for them to help them through their struggles. We can be well versed in the words of the *sifrei kodesh*, but the *klal* is: *אדם קרוב הוא אצל עצמו*, a person is considered like a relative to himself. When we look at ourselves, we are biased by so many emotions, that oftentimes the best answer is to turn to our higher ups. When the *mishna* teaches us "רְבָעָשָׂה לְךָ רְבָעָשָׂה", "get yourself a teacher/Rebbe", it doesn't specify that this rule only applies to simpletons; rather, it applies to each and every Yid, no matter what level he has reached.

אחרית הימים

While we're on the topic of *chizuk*, let me share the following thought with you. During the season that young eighth graders are applying to Yeshivos, I can sometimes *farher* 60-70 boys, coming from 10 to 15 schools. You won't believe what I experience when I go through these seasons. These fresh *bachurim* really know their stuff; you can't catch them on a single Rashi. I try to confuse them - I *drei* here, I *drei* there - but it doesn't work for me. They're on the ball. And I find myself wondering - is this really happening in America? So many young boys are able to get so involved and attain such clarity in *sugyos* written 2,000 years ago, despite the numerous distractions lurking in the streets?

And then I find myself thinking about the Shuls. In most mainstream Shuls these days, there's a decently respectful level of decorum throughout the room. When you walk in for *davening* on Friday night, the majority of the people there are *shukkling* away, praising Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Of course, it is unfortunate that in some places there's some schmoozing here and there, but honestly - can we compare with what things looked like in this country just 50 years ago? I remember walking into average *frum* Shuls during *Kabbolas Shabbos* - it looked like a chicken market! Throngs of people were standing in the

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hallways, talking about their past week's business experiences - and those inside the Shul weren't much better! Today, we have a new generation that respects and cherishes *Yiddishkeit*, and it literally sprouted from the ashes of the Holocaust. We've been in *galus* for 2,000 years. We lost so many *Gedolim* to the Germans, we lost so many *Yeshivos* - Grodno, Lomza, Slabodka, Telz - we were a nation bereft of its greatness. And here we are today.

My parents, a"h, along with their twin daughters, were traveling from France to America by boat shortly after experiencing the Gehinnom of Siberia. During the trip, my father made friends with Rav Chaim Stein zt"l (the future Telzer Rosh Yeshiva). They would speak in learning and in halacha; they developed a close relationship.

Many years later, by my sister's aufruf, Rav Chaim related one of his powerful memories from that trip. He said that as the shores of the United States came into view, people were flocking to the deck, singing and dancing; salvation had finally come. But my father, R' Yisroel Rabinowitz zt"l, was crying profusely. Rav Chaim approached him and asked, "R' Yisroel, now you're crying? We finally made it to a place that doesn't believe in persecuting us. Now is a time to be b'simcha!"

"We arrived. Wonderful," my father responded. "Baruch Hashem, our bodies have been saved - but what about our neshamos? We all know what America stands for. Who will my two daughters marry? I can't imagine Bnei Torah. If Hashem blesses me with sons - how will I be mechanech them? One will become a lawyer, one a doctor... They won't have any shaiches to Torah in this climate. If my daughters marry Bnei Torah - then I will rejoice."

Rav Chaim had nothing to answer at the time. But then, standing there by my sister's Aufruf, he looked proudly at the chosson and began to cry. "Look at Yankel!" he exclaimed with joy, referring to my brother in law, Rav Yankel Katz, a chashuveh Telzer talmid. Rav Chaim finally had an answer for my father; an answer which he himself doubted would ever come to fruition.

Look around today, so many decades later - we have thousands and thousands of Bnei Torah in America.

My friend from Toronto, R' Isaac Reichman, told me that he remembers the shmuessen he used to hear from Rav Moshe Schwab

shortly after the war, when he was in Gateshead. Rav Schwab had one theme that he often repeated: "Don't worry. Torah will make a comeback. We will soon be back where we were. We're almost there..." R' Isaac told me - the *bachurim* used to laugh at this seemingly senseless hope. They viewed the Torah world as a coal that was still gleaming ever so slightly, but was on its way to being extinguished for good.

But now, look around - in Toronto, Montreal, France, Belgium - there's Torah study, there's *kashrus*, there's *mikvaos*. Look at America - from the East Coast all the way to California - cities filled with שומרי תורה ומצוות dot the map.

This is the *chizuk* that we all need to hear. We all need to recognize that we're headed for the *geulah sheleima*. The very fact that Hashem allowed us to rebuild to the extent that we did shows us that the good times are on the horizon. Amalek tried to wipe us off the face of the Earth, and he almost succeeded - but we made the greatest comeback in history. Those of us who need *chizuk* in their belief that Moshiach is on his way should look no further than this remarkable phenomenon.

The 50th Gate of Tumah

As we discussed in the past, the Ohr Hachaim in Parshas Shemos tells us that in the last stage of *galus*, Klal Yisroel will fall into the 50th gate of *tumah*, and we will only be saved through the *zechus* of the unparalleled Torah learning that will be taking place at that time. Well, many *Gedolim* have identified today's America as the final stage of *galus*. If that is the case, we may wonder: the Vilna Gaon teaches that the 50th gate of *kedusha* is the power of נגינה - but do we have any clue what exactly the 50th gate of *tumah* is? Are we truly experiencing it today?

Perhaps we can suggest that one of the most potent factors of the 50th gate of *tumah* is none other than the abundance of **לייצנות** that has permeated throughout Western society.

The Mesillas Yesharim compares **לייצנות** to a large shield glazed with oil. No matter what angle the arrows are shot from, no matter how sharp they are - they slide right off the shield. When a person is filled with **לייצנות**, the Torah's wisdom and *mussar* cannot penetrate him, no matter which method is utilized. Like Chazal teach us, **לייצנות אחת דוחה מאה תוכחות** - one slight expression of **לייצנות** can negate a hundred words of *mussar*. This terrible trait is absolutely allergic to seriousness and sincerity in *Avodas Hashem*.

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People don't realize, but this *middah* has infiltrated the streets decades ago - and now, sadly, it has begun to infiltrate our homes and our pockets. The short, seemingly harmless video clips that get sent around all day, which, all too often, have negative humor; the 'information' blogs, which are laced with *lashon hara* and mockery of others; the movies and radio shows, which systematically cause improper and twisted ideologies to invade our minds. The common theme between all of these things is that they slowly but surely cause our hearts to become callous to *ruchniyus*. They cause *ehrliche Yidden* to mock the necessity of being respectful to parents and elders. They teach their listeners and viewers to laugh at concepts that were once regarded by the entire world as sacred and untouchable.

The only way to maintain our *kedusha* in this last stage of *galus* is to stay away from the toxic mentality of *לייצנות* that the secular world preaches day-in and day-out. It doesn't help to say, "I'm just having a laugh, I'm not really internalizing the ideology." It doesn't work that way. *לייצנות* is poison; once it penetrates our way of thinking, it destroys our ability to take *kedusha* seriously. It is affecting the entire world; let's do what we can to be *mechazek* ourselves, so that it shouldn't attack us as well.

פה תאמיר לביית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל (שמות י"ט ג')

Different Methods of Relaying the Message

Rashi brings the Mechilta that explains that **אמירה** usually refers to **soft-spoken** words, which was how Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted Moshe Rabbeinu to speak to the women of Klal Yisroel, the "בֵּית יַעֲקֹב". However, the *pasuk* continues with the word "וְתַגִּיד"; Hashem wanted Moshe to speak **firmly** to the Bnei Yisroel - the men.

The Ohr Hachaim asks on this *pshat*: it seems from the *pasuk* that Hashem only gave Moshe Rabbeinu one specific message to relay to the people - how, then, could he have transmitted the information to the men and women in different manners? He wasn't given a men's version along with a separate women's version. On the contrary, the Mechilta reiterates

twice that Hashem wanted Moshe to speak these words precisely, and nothing else (See Rashi on the words "כִּי תֹאמֶר").

יראה and אהבה

The Ohr Hachaim begins his answer with an introduction. In *Yiddishkeit*, there are two fundamental approaches to *Avodas Hashem*: **יראה** - אהבה - serving Hashem out of love, and **יראה** - אהבה - serving Hashem out of fear and trepidation. These two methods have been discussed at length by the *sifrei mussar v'chasidus* for centuries. The primary focus of these conversations is very often about which of these two should be the preferred focus while serving Hashem. The Ohr Hachaim points out that although there are many teachings in Chazal that seem to indicate that the reward for אהבה far surpasses that of **יראה**, there are still cons that must be reckoned with when going down the path of אהבה. Namely, when a servant carries out the wishes of his master purely out of love, he is at risk of becoming familiarized and comfortable with his master's desires, to the degree that he becomes more lax in his performance. However, when he serves his master out of fear of retribution, he takes greater caution to never fail. On the other hand, if a person only worships Hashem with **יראה**, his *avodah* can be lacking in ardor and dedication to his Creator, causing him to minimize his reward.

Before we continue with the Ohr Hachaim's explanation, let us examine the following *pasuk* in Mishlei (13:24): "חוֹשֵׁךְ שָׁבְטוּ שָׁוֹנָא בָּנוּ" He who spares the rod, hates his child. Shlomo Hamelech seems to be saying that when one refrains from hitting his child, it is coming from hatred rather than love.

Let's take a woman who has waited 10 years to be blessed with children. Finally, she is graced with a sweet little boy. Now, the boy is three years old, and he is a rambunctious little one. His energy and wild nature keep getting him into trouble. Suppose, for instance, he is throwing a baseball in the living room, despite his parents' demands that he stop at once - and he ends up shattering an expensive vase. The mother knows she should give him a potch, but she just can't do it. She has poured countless tears to be blessed with her son. She would give her life for him in an instant. Simply put, she just loves him too much - she can't bring herself to act towards him with the slightest form of aggression.

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Now, one can argue that refraining from chastising the child will be detrimental to his growth - but to say that it is coming from hatred? This woman loves her child more than anything in the universe!

Let's ask another question. The *pasuk* (Bereishis, 29:30) says pretty clearly that Yaakov loved Leah: "וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם אַת רָחֵל מִלְאָה" - Yaakov "loved Rochel even more than he loved Leah," which means that he loved Leah as well. However, the very next *pasuk* says: "וַיַּרְא ה' כִּי שְׁנוֹאָה לְאָה'" - and Hashem saw that Leah was hated. This seems to be a contradiction; did Yaakov love Leah, or did he hate her?

The answer is that the Torah refers to the slightest lacking in אהבה as שנאה. When the Torah uses the word 'hate', it is just pointing out an insufficient amount of love, as was the case by Yaakov and Leah. So too, when this mother refrains from *potching* her child - she may think it is an abundance of love, but in reality, it is a deficiency in her love.

I was at the Levaya of a well-known Mechaneches. She had a daughter that had Polio - she was a cripple since she was born. By the hespedim, people were talking about the extreme love the woman had for this daughter. What was the example that was given? When her daughter was a little girl, she would cry to her mother every night, "Mommy, I can't get my pajamas on by myself! It's too hard!" But her mother paid no attention to her pleas. She would use this method whenever her daughter would try to avoid doing a task that was difficult for her due to her disability. But now, the daughter understands that she couldn't have had a more loving mother. It was her mother's 'rod' that prompted her to grow into the woman she became: a successful teacher, working alongside her mother in the same school.

Applying this Concept to Chinuch

Throughout my years in Chinuch, I have come across children that thought their parents hated them. I used to wonder - how can this be? These people are the most devoted and giving parents I have ever seen! Sometimes, students feel that the Rebbe hates them as well - even though the Rebbe is the least strict in the entire school! Where does this feeling come from?

I think the answer can be found in another *pasuk* in Mishlei: "כְּמַיִם פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים" - man's heart works like the reflection of the water, like a mirror image. If a person is treated with pure love, then he responds with

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pure love. Perhaps when a parent or teacher refrains from reprimanding a child the way they should - which, we established, comes from a lack of love - then the child senses the inadequacy, to the point that he believes he is disliked. It's a *chiddush* - but I believe it is the truth.

Because of his question, the Ohr Hachaim offers an alternative *pshat* to Rashi's: Hashem wasn't telling Moshe to give different messages to the men and the women; rather, he was being *meramez* to him a timeless lesson in teaching Torah: אהבה alone will not work, but neither will absolute יראה and the וаг'ז. This message stands true for a parent, a Rebbe, a *maggid shiur*, a principal; only the proper balance will yield good results. And it all starts with being strict when necessary, which is true love; a love which will be appreciated by the recipient, if not now, then definitely sometime in the future.

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