

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת אחרי מות – קדושים

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לעילוי נשמת מורנו
הרב משה אליעזר בן הרב ישראל זצ"ל
לכבוד היארצייט ד' אייר

פרשת אחרי מות – קדושים

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַתְּם בָּהּ
לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ (ויקרא י"ח ב'-ג')

The end of Parshas Acharei Mos discusses the עריות/the various relatives whom we are forbidden to marry. Before listing these women, however, there are several *pessukim* with which the Torah introduces this topic.

The *pessukim* first begin by telling not to follow in the example of Mitzrayim and Canaan who were heavily steeped in these wicked behaviors. The wording of the *passuk* is לא כמעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה לא תעשו/תעשו, וכמעשה ארץ כנען אשר אני מביא אתכם שמה לא תעשו/תעשו. The Ohr Hachaim asks, why must the *passuk* identify the land of Mitzrayim as 'the land in which you lived'? Was there any another Mitzrayim to which they may have interpreted Hashem's words to be referring?! And similarly, in regard to Canaan, why must the *passuk* clarify that it is referring to the land 'to which I am bringing you' – was there any other Canaan to which it could have been referring?

After Viewing or Thinking of the Aveirah, It is Exceedingly Difficult to Withhold Oneself from It

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the *passuk* is not simply *identifying* Mitzrayim and Canaan, but the *passuk* is rather highlighting important factors in what would be the *nisayon* for Bnei Yisroel, as shall be explained:

The Ohr Hachaim tells us here that the *yetzer hara* for *tumah* is a stronger temptation than in other areas. In fact, as a general rule, the only way to combat this *yetzer hara* is through שמירת עינים/preventing one's eyes from gazing at improper images or viewing scenes which will lead him into temptation; and through שמירת המחשבה/distancing all thoughts of the *aveirah* from his mind. If a person will either allow his eyes to view improper scenes, or if he will allow his mind to dwell on such matters, he is bound to fall into the trap of the *yetzer hara* and descend farther and farther into the actual sins of *arayos*.

When a person sees improper billboards or magazine covers etc., they remain etched in his brain for a long time afterward. It is extremely difficult to wipe these images out of his mind.

Similarly, if a person was reading or thinking about improper things, it is hard to clear up his mind from them.

For this reason, the *yetzer hara* of *arayos* would be particularly difficult for the Bnei Yisroel at the time, because both the land of Mitzrayim 'which you lived in', and the land of Canaan 'to which I am bringing you', were steeped in immorality and *tumah*. The land of Mitzrayim which was in their memories from earlier years had caused their thoughts to become sullied with matters of *tumah*, and the land of Canaan with its variety of *tumah* would be in their direct line of vision as they entered Eretz Yisroel. Thus, both the thoughts and the eyes of Bnei Yisroel were already affected by *tumah*.

A person may be forced by his circumstances to travel through places with unclean images. He may be an אנוס/forced, but it still causes him great difficulty in maintaining his kedusha.

Hashem was instructing the Bnei Yisroel, 'Although your *nisayon* will be particularly difficult, you still can, and must, guard yourselves and not sin with *arayos*.'

A Yid Has the Power to Bring Himself Back to Kedusha Even After Seeing or Thinking of the Aveirah

How could this be possible, if their thoughts and minds were already negatively affected? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the *passuk* accounts for this problem by saying אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם/I am Hashem your G-d!, i.e. it is true that for a regular human being, it is indeed impossible to guard oneself after one's mind and eyes have been exposed to the *tumah*. However, you are My chosen Nation who are able to cleave to

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Me, and you can thus find within yourselves superhuman strength to be able to overcome the *yetzer hara*, even after having been exposed to the *tumah*.

Hashem is telling us that as members of Klal Yisroel, we have the power within ourselves to rise above the *tumah* to which we've been exposed, and to bring ourselves back to the levels of *kedusha*. It requires effort, but Hashem loves us, and He will grant us the *siyatta d'shmaya* as soon as we apply ourselves to the task.

An Even Higher Madreigah

In fact, not only are we able to rise above the difficulties despite being already exposed to the *tumah*, but through the effort that we exert in this area in rising above these challenges, we bring ourselves to an even higher level than we would have been able to reach without these difficulties. As Rav Yeruchom Levovitz points out, it was not a mere coincidence and unfortunate fact that Klal Yisroel were situated in Mitzrayim and Canaan, which Rashi tells were the worst places of *tumah* in the world. If they were placed in Mitzrayim and Canaan, it is because through living there and overcoming the resultant *nisyonos*, there is a benefit that they can achieve that cannot be reached anywhere else. The added *nisayon* can propel them to otherwise unscalable heights of closeness to Hashem. It was through that extra *zechus* that they were able to leave Mitzrayim and inherit Eretz Yisroel. (דעת תורה על סדר הפרשיות, ויקרא י"ח ג')

This certainly does not mean that we should willingly bring ourselves into these *nisyonos*. Quite the opposite is true. As the Ohr Hachaim is conveying to us, the condition to be able to overcome these hindrances is clear: We must be prepared to guard ourselves as much as possible from exposure to the *tumah*. If we will be lax about guarding our eyes and minds properly, and certainly if *chas v'shalom* we will willingly allow ourselves to be exposed to the *tumah*, we cannot expect to be given *siyatta d'shmaya*, and the effects can be disastrous r¹.

Nadav and Avihu Were Drawn after Kedusha Completely, Even to the Point of Death

The lesson that we can learn from here is an important one as we work to set the direction of the general course of our lives:

In the beginning of the *parshah*, the *passuk* references the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. The *passuk* uses the words (ט"ז א') /*When they drew near to Hashem and they died*. The Ohr Hachaim there explains that as they approached the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, they realized that their *neshamos* would depart from their bodies, and yet they were so drawn to the *Shechina* that they continued despite their knowledge of the outcome. The language that the Ohr Hachaim himself utilizes here, offers us a tiny glimpse into the infinite levels of *dveikus* reached by Nadav and Avihu, as well as into the *madreigah* of the Ohr Hachaim himself, who reached an understanding of these levels. The Ohr Hachaim writes הכתוב הפלאה חיבת הצדיקים שהגם שהיו מרגישים במיתתם, לא נמנעו מקרוב לדביקות נעימות עריבות ידידות חביבות חשיקות מתיקות עד רמז הכתוב /*The passuk hints to the extraordinary endearment of the tzaddikim [which they felt toward the Shechina], that although they sensed their imminent deaths, they still did not hold back from drawing near to the Attachment, of the Pleasantness, of the Appealingness, of the Friendship, of the Endearment, of the Longing, of the Sweetness [of the Shechina], until their souls departed from them.* What a breathtaking description of their elevated *madreigah*!

Being Drawn after Temptation to the Point of Death

From the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, we learn how much a person can be drawn into *ruchniyus*. Now let us look at how far a person can become drawn after the opposite form of behavior:

The Mishnah in Maseches Makkos tells us that Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon stated that had they been on the Sanhedrin, there would never have been a death sentence pronounced upon a sinner, because they would have raised doubts about the witnesses' testimony. They would question those testifying about one who allegedly sinned in *arayos*, 'Did you actually witness the *aveirah*?' Regarding a murder they would question the witnesses, 'Are you certain that the victim did not already have a deep wound in the exact spot where the sword stabbed him [thus rendering the victim a *treifah* and absolving the perpetrator]?'

Tosfos on this Gemara asks, this is understandable regarding the sins of *arayos* and murder, but what doubts may be raised regarding one who was *mechalel Shabbos* or served *avodah zarah*? Those acts are very straightforward and do not leave much room for doubt; if so, why would there not have been

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those types of sinners sentenced to death? Tosfos answers that the death sentence was never too common regarding other sins; it was primarily found for those who committed adultery or murder, and on these sinners Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon declared that they would not have sentenced them to death.

It would seem that the understanding of the reality Tosfos is advancing, is based on the fact that in order for a sinner to be sentenced to death he must 'accept' upon himself what he was warned by the witnesses, declaring, 'I am sinning with full intention of being sentenced to death for my sin!' Based on this *halacha* we can wonder how the death penalty was ever sentenced upon a sinner. Who in his right mind would ever willingly accept death upon himself? Better to sin and simply pretend not to hear or believe the witnesses, and thereby be absolved from the death penalty!

The answer to this question is that in fact, the primary recipients of the death penalty were sinners in the areas of *arayos* or murder. These sinners, in their intense desire for their pleasure, or in their intense anger, would knowingly bring themselves to the death penalty in their drive to commit the sin.

A person can become completely attached to his bad ways, and he will continue with them even when he knows that they are wrong and harmful to himself.

An addicted smoker knows that the habit is harmful to him and yet he just can't stop. He wants to stop but he is simply unable to.

Similarly, one gets locked into negative behaviors from which he cannot break free.

Choosing to Be Drawn after Kedusha Rather than Tumah

We now see how there are two possible directions which a person may follow in his life. People have the power to become completely drawn after *ruchniyus* as in the example of Nadav and Avihu, who followed the *Shechinah* even with knowledge of their own deaths, or they can *chas v'shalom* become drawn after sinful behaviors to the point of death.

Knowing the two choices available, is it not clear which choice should be the one to take? Even if we would assume that the pleasures of both paths are equal, why would we not choose to follow the path of *ruchniyus*, where we are fulfilling the will of Hashem and we merit *Olam Haba*? And this certainly holds true when we consider the fact that in reality, the pleasures of this world are hollow ones, leaving a person with a feeling of emptiness inside, whereas *ruchniyusdige* pleasures are wholesome and true, leaving a person with a feeling of contentment inside for years and years later? As these *pessukim* conclude, ושמרתם בהם / *And you should guard my chukim and my mishpatim which a person does them and lives through them.* The Ohr Hachaim explains that when a person serves Hashem out of *אהבה/love*, then aside for his reward in *Olam Haba*, he attains a truly meaningful and content life in this world.

Shielding our Minds and Eyes

However, as we learned earlier, there is an important condition we must follow if we wish to follow the paths of *ruchniyus*. We must be so careful,

1. not to allow our minds to dwell on matters of *tumah*, and
2. not to expose our eyes to them.

On the contrary, we must do everything in our power to shield our eyes and minds from these things, and then we will be granted *siyatta d'shmaya* to be drawn after the path of *ruchniyus* like a magnet. Without that prerequisite, the Ohr Hachaim is teaching us based on these *pessukim*, that it will be impossible for us to stop ourselves from falling into temptation.

Merely Being Near the Tumah is Itself a Pleasure – and a Sin

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would add another reason why it is so important to distance ourselves to any exposure to such temptations:

The Gemara (ב"ב נ"ז:) explains about the *passuk* (ישעיה ל"ג ט"ו) / *And [the tzaddik] closes his against seeing what's improper*, that it is referring to one who does not gaze at women while they are involved in the act of washing clothing in basins of water, who become slightly exposed in the process. Such a man is commended in this *passuk* as a *tzaddik*.

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The Gemara asks on this, to what scenario is the *drasha* referring? If this man is able to choose a different path entirely, and yet he does not do so, he is then considered a *rasha*, even as he closes his eyes! If, on the other hand, he is compelled to take that route because there is no other one available, what can he do? i.e. even if he inadvertently sees the woman, he cannot be held responsible. The Gemara concludes that the case is referring to one who is indeed compelled to take the route, and yet, he nevertheless strains himself to avoid gazing at the woman. Such a man is deserving of being called a *tzaddik*.

Reuven wants to buy a can of soda. He can either go to the vending machine situated in the store which sells fruits and vegetables, or he can go to the machine inside the store with all the goyishe magazines, the televisions blaring etc. Choosing the store with the forbidden images constitutes him a rasha, even if he withholds his eyes from gazing at the pictures.

If, however, Reuven needs a specific item which is only sold at that goyishe store, he is not held accountable for entering there. On the contrary, if he exerts himself with all his strength not to glance at those images, he is deemed a tzaddik.

What is meant by the statement that he is a *rasha* for merely taking that route? The Maharsha comments that merely walking there is an *aveirah*. Why is this so? Most baalei mussar understand that it is because he will be unable to withhold himself from slipping into the *aveirah*. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz would add on a deeper dimension. A person enjoys not only the sin of *arayos*, but even the very fact of being in proximity to the sin gives his mind some enjoyment. In his heart he desires to 'walk by' the *aveirah*, even though he knows he will not partake of it. By walking past the *aveirah* he is reminding himself of it and imagining it ever so slightly in his subconsciousness, and that is enjoyable for him. For this bringing himself into this situation, he is considered a *rasha*.

Dynamite and gasoline are both flammable, explosive substances. Dealing with either one of them requires extreme caution. However, there is a big difference between them. In regard to dynamite, care need only be taken that a flame should not be brought into direct contact with the dynamite; if this is done, there will be no explosion. In the example of gasoline however, this will not be enough, because the very fumes of gasoline are flammable. A flame may not even be brought near the gasoline.

Similarly, regarding the *aveiros* of *arayos*, merely being near the *aveirah* is itself pleasurable and is considered the actual *aveirah* of *arayos*. Certainly then, we must be so careful to distance ourselves as much as possible from all forms of this *tumah*.

Chukim and Mishpatim

Let us learn more lessons that the Torah is teaching us in the continuation of the *pessukim* here in the Torah: The *passuk* tells us *את משפטי תעשו ואת חקתי תשמרו* / *You should fulfill My mishpatim and guard My chukim*. Rashi explains that '*chukim*' / decrees refer to those *mitzvos* for which we do not know the reasons why we were commanded about them, and the *yetzer hara* and nations of the world can therefore taunt us, 'Why do you perform these strange practices?' The *passuk* therefore specifically warns us to stand strong against these hindrances – both from within and from without – and fulfill the *chukim* anyway. The *mishpatim* / laws refer to those *mitzvos* which are self-understood and would be fitting to be fulfilled even if the Torah had not commanded about them. We must certainly fulfill the *mishpatim* as commanded by Hashem, when a transgression would not just defy Hashem's will, but would also be going against the very nature with which a person was created.

The Ohr Hachaim asks, the *pessukim* here are discussing one topic – that of *arayos*. How then can the *passuk* refer to both *chukim* and *mishpatim*? What, in fact, are the prohibitions of *arayos*, *chukim* or *mishpatim*? Are they understandable to human minds, or are they a decree from Hashem which we must accept? If they are *chukim*, why does the *passuk* mention *mishpatim*; and if they are *mishpatim*, why does the *passuk* mention *chukim*?

The Mitzvah to Marry and Build a Family – Even at the Risk of Being Drawn into Temptation

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the *passuk* is not referring to the prohibitions of *arayos* in both of these words. As the Ramban explains, the *arayos* are actually considered *chukim*; we do not understand

what is inherently wrong with marrying one's close relatives. When the *passuk* mentions *mishpatim*, however, it is referring to a different *mitzvah* which is relevant to this topic:

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the *passuk* is anticipating a thought which may enter a person's mind regarding these prohibitions. Having understood the difficulty involved in guarding oneself from the *arayos*, a person may conclude that he is better off distancing himself from the entire matter. He will not marry and build a family, and instead, he will live alone for his entire life. Through this he will be placing himself far from temptation, and he can be assured that he will not stumble in the severe sins of *arayos*; whereas if he does enter the affair of marrying a woman, he is susceptible of being tempted into transgressing these most difficult but severe sins.

To counteract this reasoning the *passuk* tells us *את משפטי תעשו* / *You should fulfill My mishpatim*, i.e. you must fulfill even those *mitzvos* which involve marrying a woman and building a family, namely the *mitzvos* of פריה ורביה and of יבום. The *passuk* continues *וראת חקתי תשמרו* / *and you should guard My chukim*, i.e. even as you must bring yourselves into the realm of marriage as I have commanded, you must still guard yourselves against sinning with the *arayos*.

Striking the Proper Balance between One's Own Torah and Mitzvos vs Becoming Involved in Helping Others

This teaches us an important lesson: Generally speaking, there may be two paths from which a person can choose to follow in his Torah and *mitzvos*. He can seclude himself as much as possible in his own world, learning Torah and fulfilling his personal obligations in his *mitzvos*, but having little contact with others.

He does not try to accomplish within the yeshiva or community or even in his own family, rather he keeps his interactions with others to a minimum while he works on his own Torah and mitzvos.

Alternatively, a person can take the opposite approach and become very heavily involved in the affairs of those around him.

He tries to improve the lives and situations of others, and he tries to strengthen their ruchniyus as well. He may launch many projects in these areas, and he accomplishes much for the world around him.

Which of these approaches are superior? One may be inclined to assume that the first approach is the wiser and better one, because by following that path, he will keep himself far from *aveirah*. It is much easier to be vigilant and watchful over oneself when he is not focused on many other projects. Moreover, many sins stem from one's involvement with others; if he will keep to himself, he will thus be safe from sinning and being displeased in Hashem's Eyes.

This *passuk*, however, teaches us that this is not the case. It is true that a person can keep entirely to himself and thereby minimize his risk of stumbling into *aveirah*. However, by doing so, he is also minimizing his accomplishments. The *passuk* in Koheles (ז' כ') says *לא יעשה טוב ולא יעשה רע* / *There is no person who is righteous in the world, that will do [only] good and not sin*. If we read this *passuk* carefully we will notice that the *passuk* does not state that there is no righteous person in the world who does not sin. What the *passuk* does assert is that there is no righteous person who does good and does not sin.

A tzaddik should try to accomplish many things in the world. He should try to make peace when there is a machlokes; he should try to strengthen the Torah and mitzvos of those around him, and he should perform acts of chessed which come his way.

When he acts this way, there is more risk of sin, and indeed, he must be more careful on account of this added risk. As our *passuk* says, *את משפטי תעשו ואת חקתי תשמרו* / *You should fulfill My mishpatim and guard My chukim*. Fulfilling the *mishpatim*, the positive *mitzvos*, poses an extra requirement to guard the *chukim*, the negative commandments. And yet, the Torah requires us to strike this proper balance.

Certainly, it is much more difficult to remain completely free of sin when on this path, and the *passuk* in Koheles acknowledges this. A *tzaddik* who achieves positive accomplishments will at times stumble into sin. Hashem in His mercy gave us the gift of *teshuvah* for this reason, and we will use that gift when necessary. However, we should not refrain from the path of positive accomplishments out of our

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fear of stumbling. That is also not the path which Hashem desires. We must seek the guidance of *da'as Torah* to determine how we should conduct ourselves in each particular situation.

Behaving with Kedusha Leads One on the Path of All the Other Mitzvos

The Ohr Hachaim explains another *pshat* in the *passuk* as well. Neither the *chukim* nor the *mishpatim* mentioned in the *passuk* are referring to the *arayos* of this *parshah*; they are rather referring to all the *mitzvos* and *aveiros* of the Torah. The *passuk* is teaching us that through being careful and guarding oneself in the prohibitions of *arayos*, one will then find within himself the inclination to fulfill all the *mitzvos* of the Torah and refrain from all the *aveiros*. In the event, however, that one does not guard himself properly in the area of *arayos*, he will find himself having great difficulty in all areas of the Torah. Moreover, even when he does succeed in fulfilling the Torah, Hashem does not have interest in the person's action, as the *passuk* says (תהילים נ' ט"ז) *ולרשע אמר אלהים מה לך לספר חוקי* / *To the wicked one Hashem says, 'What purpose is there for you to discuss my chukim?'*

This chilling Ohr Hachaim is teaching us how crucial is the concept of *kedusha* for our *Avodas Hashem*. Without the proper *kedusha*, all of our *ruchniyus* is in danger *r"l*. When we do uphold our *kedusha*, on the other hand, the *passuk* continues *להלכת בהם* / *to go in them*. As the Ohr Hachaim explains, we will find ourselves as if being drawn by a chain toward the Torah and *mitzvos*.

It is so important then, that we maintain our levels of *kedusha* in our minds and in our actions. It is a key to our entire path in Torah and *mitzvos*. As we learned earlier, much of the *hatzlacha* in these areas revolves around distancing ourselves from any proximity to the *aveirah*, both in sight and in mind. As explained, if we put in our effort, Hashem will aid us in maintaining our *kedusha*, and even reacquiring it if we have slipped. By training ourselves to focus on *kedusha*, we will become drawn after it, and we will reach states of *ruchniyusdige* contentment to which the fleeting pleasures of *tumah* can never compare. Hashem should help us reach these *madreigos*.

לכבוד היארצייט של
מורינו הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצוק"ל
יתקיים בעזה"י דברי זכרון
ביום ראשון לפרשת אמור
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