

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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פרשת בשלח

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לעילוי נשמת
דינה בת עישה חיה ע"ה מנצור
לכבוד היארצייט ט' שבט

פרשת בשלה

וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פְּרַעַה אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים (שמות י"ג י"ז)

ויהי – an Expression of Pain

The *parshah* begins with the words ויהי בשלה פרעה את העם ולא נחם אלהים דרך ארץ פלשתים / *And it was when Paroh sent out the nation, Hashem did not lead them by way of the land of the Pelishtim*. In a previous shmuess [now printed in the beautiful new book "Lighting the Way"], we discussed the question of the Ohr Hachaim on the term ויהי, which normally connotes an expression of pain. Seemingly this *passuk* is discussing a joyous topic – Paroh sending them from Mitzrayim. Why does the *passuk* use an expression of pain?

The Pain of HaKadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel Which Resulted from Paroh Sending Them Out

In the above shmuess, we discussed the Ohr Hachaim's explanation that the *passuk* is hinting to the pain of Paroh and the Mitzrim at the Yam Suf.¹ As Chazal tell us, during the time the Mitzrim were drowning, Hashem silenced the *malachim* from singing *Shira*, saying, מעשי ידי טובעים בים ואתם אומרים שירה, (מגילה י:)/ *My creations are drowning in the sea, and yet you say Shira?! This teaches us the concept that even the destruction of the Mitzrim causes HaKadosh Baruch Hu 'pain'. As we will explain, this passuk mentions a cause for that situation of pain, and therefore the expression ויהי which connotes pain is used.*

The Ohr Hachaim explains that in truth, after the experiences of the ten *Makkos*, culminating with *Makkas Bechoros* and with Paroh's subsequent chasing of the Bnei Yisroel out of Mitzrayim in fear for his life, he never would have had the foolishness of chasing after them just six days later. What gave him the idea to pursue them was the fact that Hashem specifically required his consent in the Bnei Yisroel leaving. That requirement made it seem to Paroh as though he was a player in this situation. After all, they did not simply leave because Hashem took them out; they left because he, Paroh had sent them out! 'If so,' Paroh felt, 'I am in control over here. Hashem couldn't do this without me! Well, in that case, I am now reconsidering the decision!'

This is the reason for the use of the term ויהי in this *passuk*. What caused the eventual destruction of Paroh and the Mitzrim, causing HaKadosh Boruch Hu pain? – Paroh sending out the nation. Because he was the one who had issued the command that they leave, he felt that he had authority to reconsider, and he therefore chased them, causing his own downfall.

We explained then that this teaches us that a person should realize that he is not the one running the world. When a person realizes that Hashem is running the world and he is merely a player in Hashem's Hands, it is much easier for him to arrive at the proper decisions and actions.

Why HaKadosh Boruch Hu Required Paroh to Agree to their Leaving

In this shmuess, we will discuss the obvious question that arises from the *passuk*, and specifically in light of the Ohr Hachaim's explanation. Why, in fact, did Hashem only take the Bnei Yisroel out after

¹ The Ohr Hachaim explains further that the *passuk* is hinting as well to the pain of the Bnei Yisroel at the time that the Mitzrim chased after them. Although the story ended in a miraculous *yeshuah*, there still was a period of tremendous distress and worry before their salvation, as they were being chased by the Mitzrim. As explained, the fact that Paroh decided to pursue the Bnei Yisroel was on account of his 'sending the Nation' rather than HaKadosh Boruch Hu doing so without his consent. Therefore, the word ויהי is employed, denoting the pain of the Bnei Yisroel which resulted from בשלה פרעה את העם.

Paroh himself gave his consent? Why could He not simply bring them out against Paroh's will? According to the Ohr Hachaim, the question becomes stronger. There was pain that was had as a result of Paroh giving his agreement; if so, why not just do without it?

The Sefer Parshas Derachim (written by Rav Yehuda Rosanes the mechaber of Mishneh Lamelech) in derush 5 discusses this question, and he offers a *pshat* which is based on a *halacha* regarding the freeing of slaves. In Parshas Re'eh (דברים ט"ו י"ד), the Torah teaches us the *mitzvah* of העניקה. This means that one who frees a slave may not simply send him away with nothing in his hand, rather he must send him with certain gifts to take with him. As Rashi there (שם פסוק ט"ו) explains, that *mitzvah* is a remembrance for the spoils that we received as we left our slavery in Mitzrayim. The implication of Rashi is that the spoils that Klal Yisroel received were themselves a fulfillment of the *halacha* of העניקה.

Based on this idea, the *Parshas Derachim* explains why it was important for Paroh to give his consent to the Bnei Yisroel leaving Mitzrayim. The *halacha* is that a slave who escapes from his master is not entitled to העניקה. Accordingly, if the Bnei Yisroel would have escaped without Paroh's consent, they too would not have been able to take the riches of Mitzrayim with them. This would mean that the promise to Avrohom Avinu that the Bnei Yisroel would leave Mitzrayim ברכוש גדול/*with great wealth* would never have been fulfilled. Hashem therefore required of Paroh to actually send out the Bnei Yisroel, thus rendering them full-fledged 'freed slaves', rather than slaves who escaped. In this way, the promise of great riches was able to be fulfilled.

The Explanation of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz – A Lesson in Derech Eretz

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to answer the question with an entirely different approach. He would explain that the fact that Hashem waited until Paroh allowed the Jews to leave, teaches us an important lesson in *Derech Eretz*:

The Bnei Yisroel had come in to Mitzrayim 210 years earlier with Paroh's permission. They had requested of Paroh to be able to stay in Mitzrayim, and Paroh had welcomed them with open arms. He situated them in Goshen, the very best location for them, and he had made sure that their needs were taken care of. *Derech Eretz* therefore demanded that they receive his consent before they would leave. Just as they had come into Mitzrayim with permission, so would they leave with permission.

The Proper Manner to Take Leave of One's Host

The Torah here is teaching us this lesson of *Derech Eretz* for our own lives. It is not proper to take leave of one's host without informing him.

A meshulach comes to your house armed with letters of ishurim from various rabbanim and organizations. He asks you if he can stay in your house for a few days while he collects money, and you graciously agree. You prepare the guest room in the basement for him, and you give him the combination to the side door so that he can come and go as he pleases. You give him permission to take anything he needs from your home. The meshulach is there for a few days, until suddenly one morning, you discover that he has simply packed his bags and left town.

You would feel so disappointed and hurt. Here, you had gone so out of your way for him, and he doesn't have the simple decency to let you know that he is ready to leave? He should approach you and say, "Thank you for your hospitality; I am finished my business, and I am ready to return home."

Noach Leaving the Teivah

Rav Chaim would demonstrate this same lesson from the actions of Noach in the Teivah after the Mabul had concluded. Noach and his children had been confined in the cramped Teivah together with all the animals in the world, for almost a year. It was likely not easy for them to live in those quarters, and certainly not with their herculean responsibilities of caring for all the animals. As the year passed, we can

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imagine that the stench inside the Teivah surely did not get better, but the opposite. And yet, even after Noach had seen from the roof of the Teivah that the ground had dried completely, he still did not leave the Teivah. Only after he received a clear, direct command from Hashem to leave the Teivah, did he leave.

The Medrash (תנחומא פרשת נח אות ה') explains Noach's behavior. כיון שנחו המים היה צריך נח לצאת מן התבה. „After the water had subsided, Noach ought to have left the Teivah. Why did he not? He said, 'With HaKadosh Boruch Hu's permission I entered; so too I will only leave by His permission!' Noach practiced this same lesson that we are taught by the Bnei Yisroel. One who is in the care or domain of another must ask permission before taking leave.

Bachurim in Yeshiva

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz used to apply this lesson to us, the bachurim in the yeshiva. 'When a bachur comes to yeshiva,' he would say, 'he comes with a letter of recommendation from his previous rosh yeshiva, and he respectfully asks to be accepted. When a bachur leaves yeshiva, he does not have the same need to ask permission. After all, he is leaving anyway; what can happen to him?

'But that,' Rav Chaim would exclaim, 'is incorrect! You are in a yeshiva that is run by a hanhallah, and that demands a Derech Eretz!'

Rav Chaim would add that even if a bachur does not have any particular relationship with the rosh yeshiva, that does not absolve him of the obligation to properly take his leave. Whatever the situation may be, one must behave with Derech Eretz.

When I was a bachur in Lakewood yeshiva, I heard a very similar point expressed by the mashgiach, Rav Nosson Wachtfogel zt"l. This took place when a bachur in yeshiva got married and was having a Sheva Brachos in yeshiva. At the Sheva Brachos, Rav Nosson spoke, and he remarked the following about the chassan:

"When a bachur first comes to yeshiva, he is fully aware that his acceptance into the yeshiva is largely dependent on the impression that he will make upon the hanhallah. It is therefore very important to him that he make a good impression. He behaves with the utmost courtesy and respect. Even after he is accepted, he is still so careful to follow the rules of the yeshiva not wishing to land himself in trouble. He cautiously asks permission before he does any activity that is even slightly out of the norm.

"What happens after the bachur is in the yeshiva for a few months? He starts to feel comfortable in the yeshiva, until soon, he acts as though he is a balabos! He begins to take matters into his own hands, he moves furniture, he removes locks etc.

"In reality, Derech Eretz demands that a bachur behave with the same hachna'ah and respect during his entire time in yeshiva. The fact that he is comfortable does not make him a bai'lim!

"Our chassan," Rav Nosson concluded, "recognized this point, and he has always acted as though it is his first week in yeshiva!"

Derech Eretz in All Areas

The concept of *Derech Eretz* is obviously not limited to bachurim leaving yeshiva. In all areas of our lives, there is a proper, metchliche manner of behaving, with pleasantness and respect, and there is the opposite form of behavior. Rav Chaim used to ingrain into us, his *talmidim*, how important it is to behave with positive *middos*. All the Torah that we would learn must be accompanied, and preceded, by positive *middos*. Otherwise, our Torah and *mitzvos* have extremely little value, if any at all.

There are people in the world for whom everyone around them must constantly 'put up' with them. They are not sensitive to the needs of anyone but themselves. They may push ahead in line, open a window in freezing weather, make noise in a time or place that is irritating to others, come late to appointments, etc. In their minds, they are the center of their world.

There are other people who live in the opposite manner. Rather than they themselves being put up with, they always put up with others. They are keenly aware of the needs and sensitivities of those around them, and they take pains to act accordingly. When there is a question of who is first, they will gladly allow the other person the first place in line. They speak kindly and respectfully to each person with whom they come in contact. They are so careful not to act in a way that would seem as though they are encroaching upon the rights of others.

Rav Chaim taught us, the bachurim in Mirrer Yeshiva, to always be from the second group of people. Anyone who behaves otherwise cannot claim to be a true talmid of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz.

Even When the Other Party Does Not Behave Properly

Let us return to the topic of Paroh allowing the Bnei Yisroel's leaving Mitzrayim, and let us try to understand the idea more deeply. As explained, it is *Derech Eretz* to request permission before taking leave of one's host, and therefore, it was necessary for the Bnei Yisroel to receive Paroh's consent before leaving Mitzrayim. However, there would seemingly still be questions that could be raised about the concept in this specific instance. After all, what about the fact that during the time that they had stayed in Mitzrayim, they had been utterly mistreated, tortured, and murdered, by Paroh and the Mitzrim? Did that not provide the Bnei Yisroel with a valid justification to simply abandon their place of torture?

The answer, says Rav Chaim, is no. How the other party behaves has no bearing on how a yid, or in this case the entire Klal Yisroel, behaves. דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה – Having proper *middos* and *Derech Eretz* is an absolute prerequisite for Torah, and Klal Yisroel must behave in this fashion in all situations, even when the other party hardly deserves such decent treatment.

Even in the Face of Compelling Cheshbonos to the Contrary

We have established that one must behave with *Derech Eretz* even if the other party did not behave likewise. What about, though, the fact that this obtaining permission from Paroh is what caused Paroh to be able to chase them, as we explained from the Ohr Hachaim? Must we behave with *Derech Eretz* even when there is so much harm at stake? No matter. Rav Chaim would teach us that no *cheshbon* is able to override the *inyan of Derech Eretz*. Even if a person had all the *cheshbonos* in the world why he must perform a certain deed, if it would not be in consonance with *Derech Eretz*, it could not be done. [Reliable guidance from daas Torah should be sought for each individual situation to determine the correct way to act.]

In Megillas Rus, we learn of how Rus came to Boaz with a request that he fulfill the inyan of yibum and marry her. Boaz certainly sensed this in his Ruach Hakodesh that his was not a simple union that would take place, as Rus was destined to bear the royal line of David Hamelech all the way until Mashiach. Still, Boaz did not immediately accede to Rus' request and seize his chance to take this sought-after position. His reaction was to first fall back – for there was someone else who was in front of him on the line. Tov was an uncle of the late husband, and legally he had precedence over Boaz, a cousin. Only after Tov refused, was Boaz ready to take this monumental privilege.

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This wasn't easy for Boaz. He knew that what was at stake here was of immeasurable value, worth infinitely more than all the money in the world. Indeed, Chazal tell us that it was a difficult trial, to the point that Boaz was compelled to swear to his Yetzer Hara that he would not succumb.

As R' Chaim Shmulevitz would say, 'How many heteirim could Boaz have found to immediately jump in without giving Tov a turn?' – After all, Boaz had helped Rus, giving her and Naomi large portions of grain, and warning his workers not to taunt her and bother her. He could have felt that this chessed entitled him to the mitzvah. Moreover, Rus was asking him specifically to perform the mitzva. He could think to himself, 'If Tov wants to perform the yibum, let him step forward! If he does not come, he forfeits his turn!' Aside from all this, he was the leader of the generation, the Shofet, and it would be so fitting for the elevated line of Dovid Hamelech to have him as the founder.

All these cheshbonos could have seemed like clear justifications for Boaz. However, he had ingrained within himself the trait of Derech Eretz, not to cut in line. No cheshbonos could make him change his Derech Eretz.

Rav Moshe Rosenstein zt"l, the Lomzer Mashgiach, once came to speak Rav Yeruchom Levovitz zt"l. As they were beginning to converse, Rav Yeruchom noticed that Rav Moshe's taxi was still waiting outside to take Rav Moshe to his next stop.

Rav Yeruchom stopped the conversation abruptly. He asked Rav Moshe, "Did you make up with the taxi driver that you will be spending time inside before continuing with him?"

"But it's just for a few minutes, and we're discussing such an important matter!"

Rav Yeruchom was firm. "We cannot continue talking until you either send the taxi away, or you make up with him that you will pay him for his time waiting!"

In our example earlier of a bachur asking reshus before leaving yeshiva, this can cause him hardship at times. For instance, a bachur learning in Eretz Yisroel may feel that he needs to leave back home to America somewhat earlier than the official conclusion of the zman. He feels, perhaps rightfully so, that if he will ask the hanhallah, it is quite likely that he will not be granted permission. In his own mind, though, the need is important. He also realizes that he can entirely 'get away with it' if he would simply leave quietly, the hanhallah being none the wiser. Rav Chaim taught us, however, that this is not a reason to forgo one's Derech Eretz. If it means having to stay in yeshiva for longer, then so be it.

I personally had such a story in my own life. I was learning in the Kollel in Toronto, and I was set to leave for Eretz Yisroel the next zman. I felt that I needed a certain amount of time to be able to settle myself in Eretz Yisroel, and I wanted to leave the zman in Toronto before Rosh Chodesh Nissan. The Rosh Kollel, however, did not agree with me. He felt that my leaving early would cause a rifyon in the Kollel, and that it was proper for me to stay.

Based on my training from Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, I forced myself to remain until the end. It was indeed harder for me to get settled in Eretz Yisroel in time, yet I still do not regret that I acted the way I was supposed to. I understand that the hardships were a nisayon for me to see if I would forsake the Derech Eretz that I was taught by my great rebbe, and I am thankful to Hashem for helping me pass the nisayon.

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Around 30-40 years ago, there was a religious school that was to be opened outside Yerushalayim, in which secular studies would be taught. The gedolim of the time were very upset about this venture. Although the school was intended for children of weaker backgrounds, the gedolim felt that there was a strong risk that Yerushalmi children would be attracted to the school, causing their own level of chinuch to be undermined.

It so happened that the man who opened the school was a student of a certain American rosh yeshiva. It was understood that if the gravity of the matter could be impressed upon this rosh yeshiva, he would have the power to influence the man to halt the plans. An opportune time arose for this rosh yeshiva to be apprised of the situation, when he happened to visit Eretz Yisroel during this period.

Rav Elazar Shach zt"l, the leader of the Torah world, immediately made plans to travel from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim in order to speak to this rosh yeshiva. He arrived in Yerushalayim with his gabbai, and immediately made his way to the house in which the rosh yeshiva was staying. When he arrived, he was welcomed with open arms. The rebbitzen brought tea and cake, and they sat down in the apartment.

"To what do I owe this tremendous honor?" the rosh yeshiva asked warmly.

"Ich hub gekumen bazuchen (I came to visit)!"

They shmoozed for a few minutes, until the rosh yeshiva asked again what Rav Shach's purpose was in visiting. Again, Rav Shach waved off the question, saying that he had happened to be in the neighborhood, and he just stopped by to visit. This occurred several times more, until finally after around half an hour, Rav Shach got up to leave. The rosh yeshiva could not figure out why Rav Shach had come.

On the way back to Bnei Brak, Rav Shach's gabbai could not contain himself.

"I don't understand," he burst out. "You took four hours of your time and energy to make the trip to Yerushalayim, all in order to speak with this rosh yeshiva. Why did you not discuss the issue of the school?"

"I couldn't" Rav Shach explained, "because the rosh yeshiva's rebbitzen was in the room. It is not Derech Eretz to reproach a man in the presence of his wife. I was waiting for her to leave, but she stayed for the entire visit. I was therefore unable to discuss the matter for which I had come."

The gabbai was still disturbed. "Why couldn't you just ask the rebbitzen to step out for a few minutes?"

"What?!" Rav Shach exclaimed, "I should come to their house and throw her out? Absolutely not!"

"Ok, so why couldn't you ask the rosh yeshiva to step out with you?"

Rav Shach summarily rejected this suggestion as well. "In front of his wife, I should ask him to leave to discuss a matter privately with him?! That is not Derech Eretz either. Out of the question!"

Rav Shach was never able to speak to this rosh yeshiva subsequently, and the matter remained unresolved.

It made no difference to Rav Shach that he had an important agenda, one for which he had made a special trip to Yerushalayim specifically for its purpose. No matter that the

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issue was of utmost importance for the future of the Torahdige yidden in Yerushalayim. He still felt that he could not break the rules of Derech Eretz.

What about all those Yerushalmi children who may be led astray? Is this issue not so important for the future of Klal Yisroel? Apparently, Rav Shach understood that it gave him no heter to break the rules of Derech Eretz. Just as he would not have allowed himself to be mechalel Shabbos for the cause, so too would he not forgo his middos. As far as Klal Yisroel, there is a Ribbono Shel Olam who is responsible. Rav Shach's task was to fulfill Ratzon Hashem, and he understood that it was not correct for him to proceed with his plans.

Let us strive to internalize the lesson of *Derech Eretz* that this *parshah* teaches us, both in the specific area of asking *reshus* when necessary, and in a general sense regarding all aspects of behavior. Bez"V we should achieve great heights in this area, and through this we should find favor in the Eyes of Hashem, and in the eyes of all people around us.

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