

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

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Shmuessen from
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פרשת תזריע – מצורע

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לעילוי נשמת
הרב מנחם מנדל רבינוביץ בן הרב ישראל זצ"ל
לכבוד היארצייט כ"ז ניסן

ולעילוי נשמת מורנו
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פרשת תזריע - מצורע

וְהוּבָא אֶל אֹהֶרֶן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים (ויקרא י"ג ב')

The Kohein's Role

Rashi says that we learn from the words "וְהוּבָא אֶל אֹהֶרֶן הַכֹּהֵן" that there is a גזירת הכתוב that the entire process of נגעים – both becoming *tamei* and becoming *tahor* – must be carried out through a *kohein*. The Yid will only become *tamei* once the *kohein* pronounces him so, and he will likewise only be purified when the *kohein* says so as well. This requires some thought: why should the טומאה וטהרה be dependent on the utterances of a *kohein*? If the person has a נגע on his body, that should be enough of a sign that he requires *Teshuvah*, and he should automatically be rendered *tamei*. So too, once the נגע disappears, that should be a clear indication that the proper *tikkun* has been achieved, and he should immediately become *tahor*!

Suppose a person has an issue with his car – it won't stop when he steps on the brakes. He knows very clearly that the issue is the brakes; it's evident in the fact that the car just won't stop! Would we say that this can only be considered 'brake failure' after he takes it to a mechanic, and it is officially pronounced as such? Why shouldn't the driver's own common sense suffice to acknowledge the obvious issue?

The Malachim that Accompany Us on Friday Night

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains this phenomenon by comparing it to the two *Malachim* that escort a Yid into his home each Friday night. These two *Malachim* – one representing the *bracha* and one representing the *klalah, r"l* – observe the scene that is awaiting them inside the Yid's home. If they see a beautifully set table, cheerful and glowing faces, delicious aromas emanating from the kitchen – all in all, a peaceful family prepared to gracefully accept the Shabbos into their home – then the good *Malach* says: "May this scene repeat itself next Shabbos," to which the bad *Malach* automatically replies, whether he likes it or not: "Amen." However, if they are greeted by the opposite scene – the table is not ready for a *seudah*, the husband and wife are at odds with each other, the children are not yet adorned in their fresh Shabbos clothes – then the bad *Malach* grants them the above "blessing", to which the good *Malach* reluctantly answers: "Amen."

It appears that the Ohr Hachaim considered the *kohein's* role in the נגע צרעת process similar to the role of the *Malachim* on Friday night. Even if all of the factors are in place, and it is the person himself that has caused the issue – it still requires a declaration from an elevated source. In order to understand this comparison, we have to explore the phenomenon of the *Malachim* in greater depth.

The Role of the Malachim With Regard to All Creations

Chazal tell us that each creation in the world – from the colossal blue whale to the tiniest blade of grass – has its own *Malach* that stands by it and infuses it with the spiritual energy that it needs to grow and function properly. Now, the only real difference between all of the creations and mankind is that man is the only one that can control his actions by his own volition; he is the only one that has real *bechirah*. Every other living being lives entirely subordinate to their instinctive nature.

I remember when the scientists were first considering the possibility of life existing on Mars. It was a big hype; everyone was talking about it, and many people were terrified about what may

be discovered at the end of all of the scientists' probes and analyses. However, the great Baal Machshava and prolific writer, Rav Aryeh Kaplan zt"l, was totally unconcerned about what discoveries might be made. He reasoned that although there may be life on another planet, and these life forms may indeed walk on two feet and seem similar to humans – they certainly would not be Baalei Bechirah. Hashem has only created one being that possesses that distinct capability – and that is none other than Adam, mankind.

Even when it appears that animals have some sort of appreciation for *kedusha* and closeness to the Ribono Shel Olam, this is also included in their natural instinct. The fact that they sing *shira*; the fact that they can sometimes express an emotion, as we find by Bilaam's donkey; the fact that the donkey of Rav Pinchas Ben Ya'ir was on a far loftier level than the average animal; these were all factored into the animal's original טבע. An animal can't possibly reach the level of authentic *bechirah*.

Chazal tell us that the אשה השונמית was able to discern that Elisha was an *Adam Gadol* because she never spotted any flies around him. It would appear from here that the flies were able to detect the *kedusha* surrounding Elisha. But even here, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to say that although one can be מקנא the flies for having the uncanny ability to detect holiness, the truth of the matter is that they were only capable of doing so because it was programmed into their genetic makeup. For a human being to reach the *madreigah* of being able to sense *kedusha*, he would have to work diligently towards this goal for years. In other words, what the flies possessed wasn't a *madreigah*; rather, it was a gift. A man would only be able to achieve this through exercising his *koach ha'bechirah* impeccably for decades. In fact, Rav Aryeh Levine zt"l chose his son-in-law, Rav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitch zt"l, after a brief encounter with him; he was able to 'see' the level of *kedusha* that the young man was on.

Being that animals and plants don't have *bechirah*, they don't require accompaniment from two *Malachim*; one is sufficient. Their *Malach* or שר hovers over them and commands their bodies to function and follow its instincts. Human beings, on the other hand, are always accompanied by two *Malachim*: the one that represents the צד of the good and the one that represents the צד of the bad. These two *Malachim* are constantly infusing us with *kochos* – but it is up to us to decide which one is the more dominant contributor. When we choose to follow our *Yetzer Tov*, then we automatically get energy from the צד הטוב – and vice versa. This is the explanation behind the *Malachim* that accompany us each Friday night – they give *koach* to our actions to continue on their path. And the same is true with the *kohein* by the *parsha* of נגע צרעת.

Being a Bocher

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky zt"l once shared with me the following thought: The nature of a horse is to follow the other horses around him. When his buddies are taking a certain path, he just goes along; he doesn't think twice about the decision. A person, however, is not a horse; he shouldn't just follow everybody else blindly. It is true that very often, the *frum* society around us is doing the right thing and we ought to follow them; however, the fact that we are doing the same things as them should not be *because* they are all doing it. Rather, it should be because we put thought into the matter and we concluded that it is proper and correct to be following them. Otherwise, we're just like the horses.

My father used to repeat the following insight from the Lomza Mashgiach, Rav Moshe Rosenstein zt"l: It is difficult to understand the *heiligh mamehs*, Rochel and Leah. These two women were raised in the home of Lavan – and I'm sure we can all imagine what that house must have looked like. Lavan wasn't a person that had any interest in *ruchniyus*; all he cared about was amassing as much wealth as possible. He surely used his money to acquire all kinds of luxuries and pleasures. Well, Rashi tells us that when all of the townspeople were talking about how Lavan's two daughters

will presumably be wed to Rivka's two sons – the assumption was that the older girl would marry the older boy, and the two younger ones would marry each other. Rashi then says that Leah wept bitterly about this for many years. It appears from here that both sisters very much wanted to marry Yaakov rather than Esav. But the question is – why? Yaakov was nothing like what they were used to! They came from a home of *gashmiyus* – and Esav was known to be the one who lived that kind of lifestyle. Surely he would be the better pick for the daughters of Lavan – and yet, they both seem to have desired the younger brother?

Let's say there's a girl in shidduchim who comes from an extremely luxurious home. For her entire life, she was swimming in jewelry, she was driven around in luxury cars, she had personal violin lessons and gym classes and on-demand makeup appointments – she had all the lavishness she could have possibly hoped for! Now, do you think the shadchanim will try to redt her to the major masmid from Beis Medrash Govoha who knows nothing other than his blatt Gemara? This young man plans on living his entire life like a פרוש, within the walls of the Beis Medrash. He will no doubt have to be on government programs, he won't be able to afford lengthy grocery bills, he'll live in a small apartment – the cheapest he can find – and he'll probably drive a car that works most of the time, besides for when it's going uphill... The wealthy girl won't want to live a life like that! The idea of having to work full time – squeezing in a night job as well if possible – and living without full-time maids and unlimited credit cards? She'll balk at the mention of this bachur's name!

Not only did Leah not want to marry Esav – she was crying her eyelids to a pulp over the very thought of marrying him! How many girls are there around today that cry through the night on a regular basis to be *zoche* to marry a *Ben Torah*? I don't know of any such girl! And yet, the one that was raised by Lavan was so desperate to marry Yaakov?

The answer is that even when children are given all of the nice things in life, they are able to see straight through it by just looking at their parents. Children aren't dumb; they can sense their parents' level of happiness and fulfillment. When a child grows up with a father that has all of the indulgences he can think of at his fingertips – they won't necessarily see a happy man. They'll be too busy trying to understand why he always seems so irritable and empty despite all of his luxuries. The fact is that when a person cares only about *gashmiyus*, they are never truly satisfied. They're always looking for something more, another way to gratify their *guf*. The children feel that, and they want something else. They want a life where their husband is filled with authentic joy every night before he goes to sleep, relishing the wonderful day that he lived. They want a life that includes children who will perpetuate their parents' legacy after they pass on, rather than the kind of offspring who hungrily await their parents' demise so that they will inherit their hefty bank accounts.

My mother grew up in Poltava, Ukraine, which was under Stalin's communist rule at the time. She wasn't exposed to any serious Torah learning during her youth; her brothers didn't attend Yeshiva, because there was no such thing under Stalin's rule. There was no such thing as a 'frum' Bais Yaakov under the USSR either; everyone had to attend communist-run public schools that taught all sorts of treifeh ideologies. Well, my mother did very well in school; she graduated with top marks and served as the valedictorian. She was successful in gymnastics, in mathematics, you name it – but she still chose another path for herself. She decided to marry a Polish Yeshiva bachur who was a tremendous masmid. Her parents made it clear to her beforehand that this bachur intended to spend his days learning Torah; all of the household responsibilities would fall onto her shoulders. But she didn't skip a beat; she grabbed the opportunity.

Throughout their marriage, my mother never let my father do anything other than learn. She never even asked him to babysit for her at night; she didn't want him to miss a moment of his shteiging in Torah. It was a truly remarkable phenomenon; it was difficult to understand where

she got the strength and the wherewithal to live such a life so flawlessly, never thinking twice about the burden she had to carry.

But you know what? She had foresight. She knew what life was really all about, despite the world around her beckoning towards the other path. Had she followed the tides surrounding her, she would have married a successful young man, who had also gone through and aced the communist education system. She would have had many pairs of shoes, a personal trainer, a walk-in closet lined with an endless selection of clothes – but that's all. Instead, she was blessed with a masmid of a husband, and had the zechus of raising a large family of ehrliche Yidden. Not too long ago, she went to JFK Airport to fly to Eretz Yisroel, and there were over 200 people there to wish her goodbye; 200 of her very own offspring. Clearly, she chose real life, as opposed to what the world had to offer her when she was a young and successful student in Ukraine.

Everything in This World is a Mixture of Good and Bad

There's another *nekudah* that we learn from the *Malachim* on Friday night. There's nothing in this world that is כולו רע. There is always a צד הטוב along with the צד הרע, and it's our job to seize the moment and choose the good, thereby endowing ourselves with *koach* from the good *Malach* rather than his counterpart. Since the עץ הדעת of the חטא, this world is just one big ערבובייה of good and bad – and we have to choose to focus on the צד הטוב.

Judging Others Favorably: Focusing on the צד הטוב

The same goes for the *inyan* of being לכף זכות our fellow Yidden. In a basic scenario, where you see another Yid doing something which can be interpreted in two ways, it's usually fairly simple to judge him favorably; just assume that option 'טוב' is the true explanation of what you witnessed. However, what are you supposed to do if you are certain that the action was indeed a sin? Are you supposed to fool yourself?

If you see a frum Yid getting into a car on Shabbos, you can usually safely assume that there was a matter of pikuach nefesh involved. But what if you are this fellow's wife, and you're fairly certain that there was no life-threatening situation taking place as he casually strolled out the door and entered his car?

The question gets even stronger. The Gemara tells us that when one judges others favorably, then Hashem will in turn judge him favorably as well. The problem is – how can Hashem 'judge' someone favorably? He knows exactly what took place! He is the true יודע מחשבות! Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz answers that indeed, Hashem will not choose to 'believe' something that is not true about the person's actions. Rather, instead of focusing on the negative aspect of the action – He'll focus on the positive. Every action has a צד הרע and a צד הטוב – it's all about choosing which is the primary focus. The same goes for us: when we see someone else doing something wrong, we have to focus on the good side of what they are doing, no matter how infinitesimal it may be.

Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev was once passing a bar late at night, along with some other chassidim who were accompanying him. Through the bar's open door, the Rebbe and his students were able to see some Yidden singing loudly and rather off-key. Clearly helplessly drunk, the men were tossing their mugs across the room and shouting utter nonsense that can be heard throughout the quiet village streets. Knowing that his Rebbe was famous for always seeing the good in others, one of the chassidim turned to his teacher and asked, "Rebbe, how can we possibly be לכף זכות these empty Jews? They're visibly wasting their time on this world with frivolity and idle behavior – especially late at night, when they should be sleeping to gather strength for their Avodas Hashem tomorrow!"

The student may have thought that he had finally found a scenario where his master would be stumped – but not Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, the ‘Great Defender of Yisroel’ (סנגורן של (ישראל). The Rebbe smiled and said, “You must understand: one day, these Yidden will very likely be חוזר בתשובה. The ‘Pintele Yid’ inside them will surely eventually recognize that life is not all about drinking and being merry in the middle of the night. And when that time comes, they will want to ‘chap arein’ as much Torah learning and Tefillah as possible, to make up for all of their lost time; in fact, they will likely stay up until the wee hours of the morning, reciting Tikkun Chatzos, saying Tehillim and covering Masechtos in Shas! But it’s not easy to stay up late at night. So right now, in the midst of their drunken stupor, these holy Yidden are at least becoming accustomed to remaining awake late at night. They may not know it yet, but they are actively preparing themselves for their great recovery and return to Hashem.”

In this story, we can clearly see that the Berditchever זת"ל was not employing the classic method of being לכה זכות. He wasn't saying that the Yidden in the bar weren't doing anything wrong; rather, he was choosing to focus on the צד הטוב of what was taking place, as Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz elucidated for us. No matter how slim, there are positive angles to every action – and by choosing to focus on them, we are not only providing the good *Malachim* with energy that they will then pass on, but we are also giving a tremendous רוה to the Ribono Shel Olam, and we will one day reap the benefits from those positive thoughts.

This lesson is very *nogea* to all of us. We sometimes see a Yid in a very low *matzav* – for example, a teenager that went off the *Derech*. It's easy to look down at such a person – but do we want Hashem to focus on our shortcomings as well? Perhaps we should strive to focus on the glimmer of light that the child still possesses. We can never know if perhaps this stage in his life will ultimately lead to deep healing and a return that will make him greater than before. That's not called justifying his actions; it's just choosing to believe in his good side. It's choosing to hope for his awakening rather than focusing on his downfall.

Bad Tendencies Don't Disappear On Their Own

There is one more thought I would like to add about the *parsha* of צרעת. We see from the *pesukim* that if a person has a portion of רע inside him, it won't just go away on its own. He needs to actively go ahead and initiate a cleansing process. Otherwise, the נגע will remain on his body forever.

We sometimes think that a bad *Middah* that we possess will eventually go away on its own. One can think to himself: “When I get older, I surely won't lose my temper the way I do now. I won't have the same *koach*, I'll be more calm and settled... things will just fall into place.” But this is not the case. Sometimes, even elderly people have some pretty rotten *Middos*. If a fellow was stubborn his entire life, and he wasn't able to *fargin* others any happiness – then he'll be doing the same thing in the old age home.

I was recently getting off an airplane, and I saw an elderly Jew getting on line to leave the plane as well. I couldn't help but notice that he had left a sefer on his seat. I tapped him on the shoulder and said: “Reb Yid, I think you forgot your sefer.” The fellow turned around and replied: “Nah, I didn't really want it. Some guy gave it to me in the airport and gave me a whole speech about what a choshuve sefer it is. I had no choice, so I took it – but I didn't enjoy it at all. I'm not taking it off the plane with me.”

I was shocked at his response. “But – the crew is going to clean up after we exit the plane! They'll surely throw it in the garbage!”

“So what?” was his blank response. “It's not my problem; the guy in the airport shouldn't have forced me to take it. It's his achrayus.”

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I couldn't believe my ears. Lemaysa, I took the sefer along with me, and I actually ended up enjoying it tremendously.

I know we just spoke about being זכות לכהן, but let's take the story at face value for a minute. Can you imagine an old man, possibly in his eighties, being so indifferent towards the *kedusha* of a *sefer*? Trust me, this callousness didn't start when he was 79. He has been this way for many years, and he chose to never extirpate the inappropriate mindset from within himself. Rabosai, if we don't initiate change, if we don't strive for perfection – then parts of us will remain rotten. This is why we must do a *cheshbon hanefesh* on a regular basis; we must detect the evil inside us and choose to eradicate it before it consumes us.

May we all be *zoche* to take these lessons from the *Parsha* and make positive changes in our lives.

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