

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe
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פרשת שלח

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

פרשת שלח

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וַיִּלְנוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אֶהָרֹן כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כָּל הָעֵדָה לֹא מִתְּנוּ
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אוֹ בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לֹא מִתְּנוּ: (במדבר י"ד ב')

וַיַּעֲפְלוּ לַעֲלוֹת אֶל רֹאשׁ הַהָר הַהוּא (שם מ"ד)

The Contradictory Actions of the Yidden

The actions of the Bnei Yisrael in this Parshah seem strange and outright contradictory. At first, they complained that it would be too dangerous to go to Eretz Yisrael because the giants who lived there would kill them and take their wives and children captive. They would rather die here in the Midbar. To this Hashem responded, 'So be it. All of you will die right here in the Midbar.' Upon hearing this, there were *yidden* who had a sudden change of heart. They woke up early and went up the mountain towards Eretz Yisrael saying, 'We are ready to go! We can do this!' Moshe responded that it was too late – they had lost their chance. At this point it truly would be too dangerous to go up to Eretz Yisrael because Hashem was not with them. However, these *yidden* stubbornly continued going, assuming that they were capable on their own.

How do we understand their sudden change of heart? At first they cried that it would be too dangerous to go to Eretz Yisrael, and suddenly, when they are informed that indeed they would not be going to Eretz Yisrael, they brazenly insisted on going. If they originally thought it was too dangerous then why did they suddenly feel they could do it?

The Greensteins were installing a new sprinkler system in their backyard. Throughout the duration of the installation process there were various tools and machines that were left in the backyard making it treacherous for young children to play there. Mrs. Greenstein was insistent that the children only play inside.

One day, three-year-old Yossi said he wanted to play in the backyard. His mother said, "No Yossi it's too dangerous, you must play inside."

Yossi, however, was a stubborn three-year-old and he incessantly begged and pleaded with his mother to allow him to go outside. When his begging turned into a full-blown tantrum, his mother finally relented.

She said, "Okay Yossi, you can play outside. But first let me clear away all the dangerous tools and machines."

She went outside and began lugging the heavy machines to the side of the yard and out of the way. Then she got onto her hands and knees and began clear the yard from the debris had been left there from the working process.

Finally, after twenty minutes, she came inside and called to her son: "Yossi, I finished clearing the yard, you can go play outside now."

However, Yossi just stayed right where he was.

His mother then said, "Yossi, did you hear me? I said you can go outside."

Yossi still did not budge. His mother asked him: "Yossi why aren't you going outside? I just spent all this time clearing the yard for you!"

To this, Yossi simply responded, "I don't want to!"

This is a very normal scenario. Yossi does not need any psychologist or therapist. He is a normal three-year-old. It is normal for someone at that immature stage in life to act this way.

However, Klal Yisrael in the Midbar were not three-year-olds! They were the greatest generation in our history! They had witnessed all the *nissim* in Mitzrayim, and they continued to live with *nissim* on a daily basis. They were talmidim of Moshe Rabeinu! How could it be that people of such great stature acted this way?

The Blinding Powers of the Yetzer Hara

I saw an answer to this question from the Lomza Mashgiach, R' Moshe Rosenstein zt"l. He explained that as long as there was a Mitzvah to go into Eretz Yisrael the Yetzer Hara put up a fight. He blinded the yidden and he caused them to despise Eretz Yisrael and to stubbornly refuse to go there. He caused them to say, 'we would rather die in the Midbar'! However, the moment Hashem said it was too late and there was no longer a Mitzvah to go, the Yetzer Hara stopped working. At that point it became clear again that Eretz Yisrael is a truly wonderful place. Now that they could see clearly again, they were devastated that they had squandered their opportunity to go. They therefore enthusiastically – actually too enthusiastically – embraced the idea of going to Eretz Yisrael. Because they now realized the greatness of Eretz Yisrael they could no longer hold themselves back. This is the power of the Yetzer Hara. At the time of *nisayon* he is able to totally blind a person. He can take wonderful

things and make them seem terrible, and he can take terrible things and make them look wonderful. It is only after the *Aveirah* is done that we recognize the folly of our deeds.

Chaim saw Berel doing something questionable. He began fantasizing about telling this story to his friends. They would be schmoozing in the coffee room and Chaim would say, "Do you know what I saw? I saw Berel do this and this!"

His friends would look incredulous, and they would say, "Are you serious? It can't be!" Chaim would nod disapprovingly, "I know" he would say, "But it is true, I saw it myself!"

As he was fantasizing a giggling voice inside him said, "Chaim, you can't do that! That is pure Lashon Hara! You could cause Berel so much harm if you say that!" However, Chaim could not control himself, and he did not pay attention to the voice. He could only think of the intrigued faces of his friends as he shared this juicy information. They would lean closer to him and ask him to fill them in with more details. He would get so much attention and honor for having supplied them with latest piece of 'hock'.

The more he thought about it, the more enticing it became, and he began to feel that he simply 'must' share this information. He said to himself, 'I just need to share this. If I don't, I think I might explode!'

Indeed, Chaim followed through with his plan, and the very next day he shared the Lashon Hara with his friends. However, after having said it he felt like a deflated balloon. He was very disappointed with himself for his lack of self-control, and he simply could not enjoy all the honor and recognition which he received as a result of the Lashon Hara. He said to himself, 'Chaim, where is your decency? Why can't you control you wagging tongue?'

From one moment to the next, he went from bursting with the information, feeling he simply 'must' share it, to being terribly angry with himself for his lack of self-control.

Sruly has a hard time getting out of bed in the morning. As his alarm rings, he invariably reaches for the snooze button so he can burrow back into his pillow for a few more minutes of peaceful

sleep. Inside his head he hears a little voice saying, 'Sruly you really need to get out of bed right now. Otherwise, you will miss Shacharis like you did yesterday and the day before.' However, Sruly does not listen to that voice. He sees that it is raining outside, and this makes his blanket and pillow feel ever so cozy. He says back to the voice, 'I must stay in bed. If I don't get enough rest my body will be more susceptible to the elements and I may catch a cold. Better to be a few minutes late to Shacharis than to be stuck in bed for a week! Besides, I only need to sleep for ten more minutes, I will get up then and if I hurry, I can even make it to Shacharis on time.'

As is usually the case, ten minutes turns into twenty, and twenty turns into thirty etc. As this stretches on, Sruly begins to imagine that he already has a cold, and in fact it would be downright dangerous for him to get out of bed!

An hour later, Sruly finally gets out of bed. Once he is up, he begins to berate himself, 'Sruly, you good-for-nothing, what is wrong with you? Why are you always so lazy? You don't have a cold, and you've gained nothing from that extra sleep. Now you've missed Shacharis for the third day in a row! When will you learn to control yourself?'

While still in bed, he was convinced that he simply 'needed' to stay in bed. One moment later, as soon as he was out of bed, he realized the truth. It was just simple laziness masquerading as a 'health concern'.

The above are examples which demonstrate the power of the Yetzer Hara to totally warp our minds. This is his power with regard to all of our *nisyonos*. He persuades us to believe that we simply 'must' do whatever *Aveirah* is on his agenda, and we become totally convinced by his argument. We see no way out, and we blindly follow his logic. However, once the deed is done, the Yetzer Hara leaves the scene. We can now perceive the issues with our own minds, and we are startled by the non-sense which the Yetzer Hara has fed us. We become ashamed by our lack of self-control.

This is until the next time the *nisayon* comes around. The Yetzer Hara then pulls us right back into his clutches, and he cajoles us again into believing what we know to be utter non-sense...

This is what happened in our parshah. While the *Yidden* had a *Mitzvah* to go to Eretz Yisrael the *Yetzer Hara* got right to work and

convinced them that Eretz Yisrael was a dark, scary place. They began to be terrified of the prospect of going to Eretz Yisrael. The inhabitants of the land were powerful giants! They would all be killed! Their wives and children would be taken captive! There was nothing that could be said to persuade them otherwise, because they were totally blinded by the *Yetzer Hara*. Even the knowledge that Hashem, who had demonstrated his all-encompassing power, was with them was not enough to calm their fears. They simply could not see the truth.

This was while there was still a *Mitzvah* to go to Eretz Yisrael. However, the moment that the *Mitzvah* was taken away the *Yetzer Hara* left the scene. The *Yidden* could now see clearly again. At that moment they were utterly ashamed by their irrationality. They said, 'What were we thinking? Hashem is with us! Of course, we can fight these giants!' They were so overcome by what they had lost, and by how they had become so blinded to such foolishness, that they turned around and began running toward Eretz Yisrael.

We Must Learn to be Constantly Vigilant

Understanding this power of the *Yetzer Hara* is an important technique in learning to fight him. We must constantly remind ourselves that his arguments are simply lies, and that he is pulling the wool over our eyes. We must remember the results of the last time we listened to him, and how we gained nothing by following his advice. If we arm ourselves with this knowledge, and we become acutely aware of the *Yetzer Hara's* ability to blind us, we will be able to 'expose' him the next time he tempts us to do an *Aveirah*. We will be able to say back to him, 'You can't fool me, I know you are lying!'

However, it is important to be constantly vigilant of the *Yetzer Hara's* tactics, and to quash the temptation before it gets a hold of us. If we so much as allow him to engage us by just hearing his arguments, we are already falling down a slippery slope...

This is the importance of learning *mussar*. By learning *mussar* we will teach ourselves to stay away from *nisyonos* at all costs. We will realize that the moment we enter into the *Yetzer Hara's* territory we are fighting a losing battle. It becomes very difficult to see the truth. Therefore, the best way to fight him is to stay away from him entirely.

Calev Silences the Nation

We can learn this lesson from another part of the Parshah. The *possuk* says, "ויהס כלב את העם אל משה ויאמר עלה נעלה וירשנו אותה כי יכול נוכל לה", *And Calev silenced the people toward Moshe and he said, "Let us go up and*

conquer it, for we surely can do it!" What does it mean when it says 'he silenced the nation toward Moshe'?

The Meshech Chochma explains that the *Yidden* became scared to go to Eretz Yisrael when they heard the *nevuah* of Eldad and Meidad. They had said that Moshe will die and Yehoshua will bring them into the land. When the *Yidden* heard this, they became terrified. Moshe Rabeinu was their leader who performed all the miracles for them! It was through Moshe that Hashem brought the Makkos in Mitzrayim, and it was through Moshe that Hashem split the Yam Suf. They needed Moshe's help to conquer Eretz Yisrael!

'Calev silenced the nation toward Moshe.' In other words, says the Meshech Chochma, Calev said, It is not Moshe who performed the *nissim*. It was Hashem alone. If Hashem promised to take us into Eretz Yisrael, He will do it without the help of Moshe Rabeinu.'

The Contradictory Implications of Korach's Rebellion

We see that when it came to the Mitzvah of going to Eretz Yisrael the *Yidden* were terrified to go without Moshe. However, in Parshas Korach we see the opposite. Korach began campaigning against Moshe Rabeinu and the movement spread rapidly. He managed to galvanize two hundred and fifty people and he organized a rebellion. How do we understand this? At one moment the *Yidden* were too afraid to go to Eretz Yisrael without Moshe, and later we find them rebelling against him. If they were so convinced that they needed him to survive, then how could they have rebelled?

The answer is as we have said. The arguments of the *Yetzer Hara* are all lies, and we only believe in them during the time of the *nisayon*. Therefore, it is even possible to be convinced of two contradictory ideas, each one in its own time. While we had a *Mitzvah* to go to Eretz Yisrael we were convinced that we could not go without Moshe Rabeinu. However, once that *Mitzvah* was removed, and we were confronted with a different *nisayon*, we said, 'Why must we always follow Moshe, why can't we have other leaders?'

תרי כמאה

Another demonstration of this idea can be found in the Ohr Hachaim. He asks: Why did the *Yidden* follow the reports of the ten *Meraglim* over the reports of Calev and Yehoshua? The *halacha* is that תרי כמאה, *two witnesses are given the same credence as one hundred*. This means that if two witnesses testify on one side of a court-case, and one hundred witnesses contradict them, it is considered a tie, i.e., we do not

listen to the majority testimony of the one hundred over the two. (Majority only rules with regard to judges, however with witnesses there is no such rule.) If so, since the testimony was split ten to two - it was Calev and Yehoshua against the ten *Meraglim* – the *Yidden* should have been undecided between the two reports.

The Ohr Hachaim answers that the *yidden* felt that Yehoshua should be disqualified as a witness because he was Moshe's closest talmid. They felt that the fact that he sided with Moshe was only because of this relationship and they therefore did not accept his testimony. It thus became Calev's testimony alone against the ten *Meraglim*. The testimony of one person is not accepted against two or more. Therefore, since it was now only one against ten, the *Yidden* listened to the ten.

How Did Calev Silence the Nation?

Let us now examine the story with the perspective of the Ohr Hachaim. As we have quoted above, Calev silenced the nation before he began to speak. How did he manage to quiet them? Rashi explains that he began by saying: "Is this all that Ben Amram (Moshe) has done for us?" The *Yidden* thought that he was about to add to the Lashon Hara that had been said, and they therefore stopped to listen to him.

The contrast between these two parts of the story is amazing. At first, they refused to listen to Calev, saying that his opinion was ruled out by the majority. They had concluded that his opinion was not worth listening to. Suddenly, when they thought that he was going to add fuel to the fire, they said everyone be quiet! It seems like Calev has something important to share!

This is the power of the *Yetzer Hara*. He can completely blind us from the truth, and he can even convince us of two conflicting ideas at the same time! If we fall into his trap, we are almost guaranteed to fail because we simply will not be able to see the truth.

Let us learn the lessons of this Parshah, and constantly remind ourselves of the powers of the *Yetzer Hara*. Let us learn to avoid engaging with the *Yetzer Hara* by staying away from *nisayon* at all costs. This is the only way that we can be sure that our vision is clear and is not skewed by the agendas of the *Yetzer Hara*.

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