

אור פבי משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

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לעלוי נשמת
דינה בת עישה חייה ע"ה מנצור
לכבוד היירצ'יט ט' שבט

פרק ב'

בָּא אֶל פְּרָעָה כִּי אַנְּיָה הַכְּבָדָתִי אֶת לְבָוֹ (שמות י' א')

Pharaoh's Stubborn Heart

In the beginning of Parshas Bo, Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe to go to Pharaoh once again, and to demand that he release the Yidden from Mitzrayim.

The Ohr Hachaim says that Moshe Rabbeinu was extremely discouraged by Pharaoh's behavior. How can he still be putting up a fight after the events of ברד? The hail brought complete devastation upon the land of Egypt, from its crops to its livestock. Many Egyptians were killed. The might of Hashem was in full display during ברד.

The *midrashim* teach us that the fire and water made peace in order to teach Mitzrayim a lesson. In fact, the Malbim says that more rules of nature changed during this *makkah*: normally, light is the fastest traveler, followed by the speed of sound, and finally, the force of gravity. Therefore, during a regular thunderstorm, the first thing that is spotted is the lightning, then we hear the thunder, and only afterward does the rain reach the ground. But during ברד, things were different. Moshe warned the Egyptians that there would be hail (ברד), thunder (קולות), and lightning (שָׁא) - so, many of them figured that if Moshe's predictions would actually materialize, they would first see lightning and hear roaring thunder, which would provide them the opportunity to run indoors. However, the rules of nature were changed; the lightning, thunder and hail all came crashing upon the Egyptians in one instant, just to show them that there is no way to outsmart the Master of the Universe.

Knowing all of this, it was hard for Moshe Rabbeinu to comprehend how Pharaoh could still refuse their request. Says the Ohr Hachaim, this is what Hashem was addressing in the first *pasuk* in the Parsha: "כִּי אַנְּיָה הַכְּבָדָתִי אֶת לְבָוֹ", for I am the One Who has hardened his heart. You may be doubtful that Pharaoh will ever change his mind, based on his unbelievable show of defiance that you are currently experiencing. However, fear not, for I am behind his stubborn behavior.

Did Hashem Confiscate Pharaoh's Bechirah?

Now, we have discussed many times that Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't take away people's *bechirah*. He is in full control of everything, yet we have the ability to choose right from wrong, and that is not a contradiction. We have given *meshalim* in the past to explain this concept. (As a reference - the *Sfas Emes* tackles this paradox a few times in this week's Parsha.) If so, then how can we explain "כִּי אַנְּיָה הַכְּבָדָתִי אֶת לְבָוֹ"? These words surely imply that Pharaoh's *bechirah* was taken from him.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Hashem didn't literally remove Pharaoh's ability to make decisions; rather, he made the test more difficult. How so? At the end of last week's Parsha, the *pasuk* tells us that מכת ברד destroyed the flax and the barley, but לא נכו"ה - the wheat and spelt were not struck. Now, Pharaoh was perplexed by this; what power caused these two crops to be spared? He summoned his advisors and presented them with his query. Some answered that perhaps this was a test from G-d to see whether the Egyptians would doubt his complete control. Others, however, argued that perhaps there was another power that had control over the wheat and spelt, and maybe the G-d of the Jewish people had no strength over this other power. Pharaoh preferred this explanation, and then took it one step further, saying: maybe Hashem doesn't have power over us either? And there is proof to this theory: why does this G-d keep sending his messengers to me, to request my permission to release the Jews? Can't he just take them out on his own? This must mean that he really has no power over the Egyptian people.

Pharaoh fell for Hashem's bait - hook, line and sinker. He really should have stepped back and looked at the bigger picture, and recognized that the first explanation was really true, for Hashem had

already displayed his might over the Egyptians numerous times throughout the first seven *makkos*. Instead, he chose to focus on an infinitesimal detail - the survival of the wheat and spelt.

Details Vs. the Bigger Picture

We suffer from this weakness in our lives all the time. Instead of focusing on the bigger picture - whether with regard to our financial success, our marriage, our learning, and so on - we zero in on our minute shortcomings, and deem ourselves a complete failure.

Here's another example. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe Rabbeinu that "בְּחֵצָוֹת הַלִּילָה" - exactly at midnight - the firstborn of Egypt will all die. But how does Moshe relay the message to Pharaoh? He says "בְּחֵצָוֹת הַלִּילָה" - **approximately** at midnight the plague will take place. Why did Moshe change Hashem's wording? One answer Rashi gives is that Moshe was concerned that the Egyptian astrologers would have a different way of calculating the time, and according to their *cheshbon* the *makkah* would not take place precisely at midnight. He felt that this would cause them to once again deny Hashem's absolute control. He therefore modified the words to "בְּחֵצָוֹת הַלִּילָה" - approximately at midnight.

But what do we see from here? The very fact that Moshe Rabbeinu suspected that the Egyptians would react that way comes to show that they possessed this terrible *middah* of focusing on the minuscule, unimportant details, as opposed to the obvious, overwhelming truth staring them in the face.

I remember sitting by the Seder as a young child, and noticing an interesting phenomenon. We were all extremely preoccupied with the shiurim: making sure that our bechers were a real revi'is, that the alcohol content in the wine was sufficient, that the matzos were a full k'zayis, and so on. But my father zt"l was not there. That was just not his focus. He was too busy thinking about Siberia, the Nazis, and the other oppressions our nation has gone through. And I used to wonder: why isn't he focusing on the real deal? Why isn't he getting all passionate about the different opinions regarding the shiurim like we are?

But when I grew older, I understood. Of course, it was important to him to be mekayem the mitzvos with the proper shiurim. But those weren't the conversations he was interested in having on the Leil Ha'Seder. His focus was 'cheirus'. His focus was the bigger picture of Pesach and Geulah.

Getting Preoccupied

Sometimes people get busy with insignificant things. You can find a fellow spending two hours trying to take apart and reconstruct his toaster that stopped working. In reality, he can probably buy a brand new one for \$11.99 - and of course, he would never do work for anybody for just \$5.99 an hour - but he won't see defeat. He is completely fixated on rebuilding his toaster from scratch. In the meantime, his son is waiting to do his homework with him, his *chavrusa* is waiting to learn with him - but he's busy. Busy with a silly, insignificant task.

And there's more to be said here. People often get lost on their devices - even filtered devices - just doing nothing. They're not taking a healthy break from learning and accomplishing - they're just wasting time. Hours and hours get wasted this way. Sometimes, they're just playing childish games that were designed literally for the purpose of killing time. What are your priorities? Why don't you focus on real life instead of meaningless distractions?

Minor Details That Can Cost Us a Great Loss

Some people won't take a pauper into their home because they're worried about bed bugs. Is there any realistic reason to suspect bed bugs in such a scenario? Maybe. But what message are you sending your children? That you are repulsed by *mitzvos*? You are teaching them that the slight *chahsash* of bed bugs, a minuscule detail, overrides the incomparable importance of feeling for others and doing *hachnosas orchim*.

This lesson is very relevant for *shiduchim* as well. People say no to wonderful boys who are serious *bnei torah* and phenomenal girls who have sterling *middos* - just because of a silly detail. They hear that he once went on a certain vacation, that she was once friendly with a specific girl - and they discard the resume. They throw away what may be their own child's *bashert* because of nonsense.

Enjoyment That Lasts A Minute

A relative of mine told me that he was once at an auction. There was a con artist there who was hosting a show about various antiques, and he was trying to convince everyone about these items' monumental importance and worth. One couple that was there got talked into purchasing an old vase for \$500.

A few minutes later, my relative saw the couple trying to fit the large vase into their trunk. Suddenly, he heard the husband say: "Why did we do it? Now we're broke! And for what? A great big vase filled with air!"

It's scary, because that's exactly what the *yetzer hara* does to us on a regular basis. He pumps the idea up with loads of hot air, and tempts us to do it - only to discover, a few moments later, that there was absolutely nothing to it. Chazal call sin *מכת רגע אחד* - pleasure which lasts for a fleeting moment. They were being brutally honest with us; the *yetzer hara* makes the action sound so tantalizing, but sadly, we crash back down to earth a moment later - only to discover that it was just a minuscule detail, a distraction from the bigger picture; another way to steal our eternal reward in *Olam Habah*.

This is the lesson we must take from the Mitzrim. They missed the tremendous opportunity of accepting Hashem's existence after *מכת ברד* because of the wheat and spelt. They almost missed the massive wakeup call that was *מכת בכורות* because of a supposed miscalculation of a couple of seconds. Can you imagine? All that death and despair could have been completely in vain. We must learn to focus on the big picture, and not get hung up on the little details.

אני הכבדי - Getting Over Our Past Shortcomings

There is another lesson we can take from Hashem's hardening Pharaoh's heart.

כִּי תֵצֵא לִמְלחָמָה עַל יוֹבֵךְ, וְרָאֵת סָוס וּרְכָב, עַם (ברברים כ' א'): "When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot - a people more numerous than you - you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d, is with you..."

The Ohr Hachaim says a *drush* on these words: If a person feels that he is made up of *רכב* - meaning, he is, or combined with *חומר* (physical material), and he isn't fully spiritual; if a person feels that he is a *סוס* - he has a strong battle horse inside of him, i.e. a powerful *yetzer hara* - he should recognize that this is not his main issue in life. He is fully capable of overcoming these obstacles. Then what is his biggest issue? The *רב עם* - the large army of *aveiros* that he has done in the past. A person's past sins tend to bog him down and keep him rooted in his spot. They constantly send him the message that he is a complete failure, incapable of ever achieving true greatness.

לֹא תִירְאֵם כִּי ה' אֱלֹקֵיךְ עַמָּךְ ... Do not fear the effects that your *aveiros* have had on you, for this too is in the hands of Hakadosh Baruch Hu - and he is with you, at your side, healing you from your past and aiding you in your journey into the future.

We must learn from this Ohr Hachaim to not focus on our shortcomings; we must never plaster the word 'failure' across our foreheads. We must recognize that the bigger picture is at stake; our *Olam Habah* is up for grabs, and nobody can take that from us... Not even our *רב עם* of sins.

The Sfas Emes discusses this *nekudah* in this week's Parshah: Hashem tells Moshe, "כִּי אַנְּנִי הַכּוֹדֵתִי אֶת לְבָךְ", I am the one who has hardened Pharaoh's heart. A person has to appreciate the fact that sometimes, Hashem has enlarged their *nisayon* in order to enhance and amplify their reward. If they have failed so many times, this doesn't in any way mean that they are goners; on the contrary, it is just a tougher - and more profitable - opportunity for them to overcome their *yetzer hara* and to truly soar to the highest heights. Hashem was behind the intensity of the test, and He too will be behind you on your road to recovery.

זאת حقת הפסח כל בן נכר לא יאכל בו (שמות י"ב מ"ג)

How to Deal With a Yid Meshumad

The Targum Onkelos has an interesting way of translating this *pasuk*: “**כל בר ישראל דישתמא “כל בר ישראל דישתמא”**” - a **Yid** that has joined a different religion, a **Yid** that has begun to worship *avodah zarah* - he may not partake in the eating of the *korban pesach*. Rashi, on the other hand, brings from the *Mechilta* that this verse is referring to both a *goy* and a *Yisrael meshumad* (as Onkelos learned). The question is, why did Onkelos choose to only translate the *pasuk* as referring to a *meshumad* and not a *goy*?

The *Malbim* answers that regarding a non-Jew, it wouldn't be a *chiddush* to say that he can't eat the *korban pesach* - a *goy* is prohibited from consuming any *korban*. The real *chiddush* here is that a **Yid** who strayed from the path of believing in Hashem's oneness may not eat the *korban pesach* unless he does a full repentance.

The *Meshech Chochma* answers the question differently. He explains that the Torah was written for the *Yidden* - any mention of a non-Jew's prohibitions is only spoken about with relation to the **Yid**'s obligation regarding them. Meaning, if this *pasuk* was coming to inform us that a *goy* may not consume the *korban pesach*, then it should have said: “you may not **feed** a **בן נכר** the *korban pesach*,” rather than saying “a **בן נכר** may not **eat** the *korban pesach*.” This is why Onkelos chose a *Yisroel meshumad* as the primary focus of the verse.

Well, now we can ask a different question: What is the purpose of the Torah telling us that a **בן נכר**, or *Yisroel meshumad*, may not eat the *korban pesach*? This fellow worships *avodah zarah* - he doesn't heed the words of the Torah. So why would he accept the words of this *pasuk* either?

Welcome Them In, Or Push Them Away?

Perhaps we can offer two **מהלכים** to explain this point.

- 1- The *meshumad* may choose to come to the *Seder* to participate in the family event. He may want to come to show solidarity and support for his family's traditions. To this effect, the Torah commands us to respond with a resounding “No.” You are not welcome to eat the *korban pesach* with us. You have declared that you do not believe in *Yichud Hashem*, and we will therefore not allow you to consume his holy sacrifice.

I remember when I was a child in the Bronx, when we would leave Shul on the first night of Pesach, it was hard to cross the street; there were so many cars double-parked in the street, some honking uproariously to try and get a spot. Many of the old-timers in the neighborhood had children and grandchildren that were completely secular, who all had one thing in common: they would all come home for the Seder. It was an extremely crucial factor in their association with Judaism - or whatever was left of it. They would all go to Pathmart to pick up their free copy of the Maxwell House Haggadah - and, of course, their box of after-Seder mints - and they would spend the night with their family. It would make them feel like they had some sort of tangible connection with their dear heritage - their almost completely forsaken religion. Half of these people were married to non-Jews, and all of them would drive on Shabbos and Yom Tov - but they all desperately wanted to partake in the Seder night feast.

- 2- Or, perhaps we can say the complete opposite: The *meshumad* may be wondering why the Torah chose to single him out in the *pasuk*. The answer to this is that the Torah believes in him; the Ribono Shel Olam has confidence that he will try to return, and He signals this to him by giving him a special commandment (albeit not a very positive one).

Well, depending on which *p'shat* we utilize, there is a tremendous difference in how we are obligated to respond to such a situation - at least, in the days that we used to eat the *korban pesach* at the *Seder*. According to the first *mehalech*, the *pasuk* is telling us to be very firm with our response to *meshumadim*, or people who openly renounce even a small portion of the Torah. We must tell them, “I'm

very sorry, but this meal and this offering is a very sacred declaration of Hashem's oneness and total reign over the entire universe. Someone like you who refuses to accept those terms may not consume this holy *korban*. In fact, it would be insulting to us and the truths we stand for to have a person like you join us in this festivity."

However, the second explanation has an entirely different approach to the recalcitrant souls of Klal Yisroel who wish to join the Seder. We are supposed to allow them in, and tell them that they are totally welcome. Why? Because even the Torah gave them their own special commandment. Hashem wants to show them that He has confidence in them, and He is anxiously awaiting their return.

It seems that in our day and age, the second method is the more accepted one. If we have such people in our lives, then we should do our utmost to make it clear to them that their Father in Heaven loves them dearly, and no matter how far they fell, he is always awaiting their repentance. Just as we discussed before, no matter how much he augmented his army of sins, the Ribono Shel Olam cares about one thing above all else: the bigger picture, the final endgame.

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