

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת אמור

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וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן (ויקרא כ"א א')

The Importance of Upholding our Elevated Status

The Ohr Hachaim points out that this *pasuk* does not follow one of the basic grammar rules of *Lashon Hakodesh*. In English, the adjectives generally precede the noun - for instance, a person would say: "I have a black, dusty book." However, in *Lashon Hakodesh*, the nouns usually precede the adjectives. In other words, one would say "ספר שחור מלא אבק". According to this, the *pasuk* should have read *בני אהרן הכהנים* because the word *הכהנים* is describing the children of Aharon. Why, then, did the *pasuk* switch the order?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah is bringing out the reason and the concept upon which the extra prohibitions of the kohanim are based. The unique prohibitions conferred upon the kohanim are not meant as extra burdens for them; it is rather due to their great, elevated status that they are prevented from acting in manners which would be demeaning to their position. Hashem therefore used an expression of *אמירה* which conveys importance, and He explained that this *מעלה* of theirs is because they are *כהנים*. This conveys the idea that the halacha being imparted is one which pertains to the important status of the kohanim, and how they must be careful to uphold and safeguard that status.

I would like to add, that although the simple reading of the *pasuk* is referring to *Kohanim*, there is also an underlying message for all of *כלל ישראל* - that anyone who wishes to spend their lives clinging to the Ribono Shel Olam through Torah and *mitzvos* can be a part of the *ממלכת כהנים*, the elevated members of the nation, and should be careful to uphold their elevated status.

The *pasuk* continues on discussing the prohibition of a *Kohen* being *metamei* himself to a deceased person. Says the Ohr Hachaim, from the Medrash Tanchuma that HaKadosh Boruch Hu was expressing about the *kohanim*, "It is not befitting of one who comes and goes before Me to gaze at a dead body!" A person is influenced by what he sees, and seeing a deceased person can have a negative effect on one's *neshama*. The Chasam Sofer said that when he was a child, he once saw the corpse of a goy, and he believed that had he not seen that corpse, he would have reached higher *madreigos* in his *avodah*. This is also a lesson for all people who wish to live elevated lives, that we must be careful to only see sights of *kedusha*, and not *רוחניות* any sights that will take away our *mesikus* for *רוחניות*.

Each One of Us are a Part of Klal Yisroel's Gadlus

Either way, let's get to the main point that I want to discuss from this Ohr Hachaim. He later points out that the *pasuk* starts out in the plural form (*הכהנים*), yet the commandment continues in the singular form - *לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו*. This is coming to tell the *Kohanim* that they shouldn't make the erroneous assumption that only their entire *shevet*, or at least most of it, shouldn't become *tamei meis*, but a few individuals may occasionally do so. This is incorrect; the Torah switched to a singular form to clarify that each individual *Kohen* has the responsibility of remaining pure for the *avodah* at all times.

We must recognize that this message too stands true for the rest of Klal Yisroel as well. The idea the *pasuk* is implying is that a person must realize that the *avodah* should only be done through him; he shouldn't just wait around and rely on others to accomplish the things that must be done.

Let us elucidate this point. Many years ago, there were big *Gedolim* that encompassed all forms of *gadlus* in Torah and *avodah*; they often even took care of Klal needs. People like Rav Akiva Eiger, the Chasam Sofer and so on - they were the *poskim*, they were the spiritual guides, they were proficient in all areas of Torah - and, at the same time, they were the ones that collected the money; they were deeply involved in *tzorchei tzibbur*. So too, a Yeshiva would cover all facets of Torah; they would learn everything from א to ה. Today, however, we have one Yeshiva that focuses on *Nashim* and *Nezikin*, while another

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focuses on *Kodshim*; we have *kollelim* that focus on *Yoreh De'ah*, while others produce *dayanim* in *Choshen Mishpat*. And each one of these institutions has their own Rosh Yeshiva, Mashgiach, and fundraiser. The *doros* have dwindled, and it's much harder to find individual people or Yeshivos that include everything.

However, Rav Yisroel Salanter said that in the later generations, we must recognize that Yeshivos are very often our *Gedolim*. Let's take Beis Medrash Govoha, for instance. There are thousands of *talmidei chachomim* learning in the Yeshiva; this one is a *baki* in *Brachos*, this one in *Hilchos Shabbos*, this one in *Bava Kama*. You can find people there that are exceptionally well versed in *sifrei mussar*, and others in *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*. Between everybody, we have one big tremendous force of Torah and *Yiras Shomayim*. So, the merits our nation would once get from a *Tzaddik* that spent his whole life cleaving to the *Eibishter*, constantly undergoing *siggufim*, fasting, sleeping minimally, and learning and *davening* for twenty hours a day - all of that is divided amongst the members of the Yeshiva. Each individual brings his own tremendous *zechus* to the rest of the nation.

Two Lessons to be Learnt from This

This concept should teach us two lessons:

1 - That we each play a big role in the collective success of, and accumulation of *zechusim* for, the entire nation of Klal Yisroel. We must therefore realize that whenever we have an opportunity to go another step upward, we shouldn't think: "Eh, I'm not on that *madreigah*. Look at everything else I do; I'm not so *machmir* in other areas of Yiddishkeit, so why should I be more *frum* when it comes to this?" The correct mindset should be that every bit of *gadlus* that we individually attain enhances the level of *gadlus* of the entire nation. You may not be the *Gadol Hador*, but the great levels that you achieve make the *Dor* a *Gadol*.

2 - That we shouldn't despair over our current generation's shortage of *Gedolim* the likes of those of previous generations. We have something that didn't exist in the past: numerous massive Yeshivos and *kollelim* around the world that are home to all sorts of *talmidei chachomim* and *yir'ei shomayim*. Besides for mammoth Yeshivos like the Mir and Beis Medrash Govoha, there are also so many other Yeshivos which provide our nation with tremendous *zechusim*, by producing so many Yidden that excel in their own individual fields.

Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai: The Value of a Good Name

The Ohr Hachaim here also discusses a topic that we have spoken about many times - the importance of showing our children and *talmidim* the proper balance of *ahavah* and *yirah*. This concept applies very much to Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai, and now that it's Lag Ba'omer, I would like to delve into this discussion.

R' Shimon Bar Yochai says the following in the fourth *perek* of *Pirkei Avos*: "ג' כתרין יש, כתר תורה, כתר כהונה, כתר מלכות, וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן *Kehuna*, and the crown of *malchus*, but the crown of a 'good name' rises above them all.

These words need some clarification: if there are only three crowns, how can R' Shimon go ahead and refer to a fourth one, the crown of a good name?

The *pshat* is that really there are only three crowns, or levels of *gedulah* that a person can attain - but if he doesn't work on getting a good name, then he will be unable to succeed with these three *inyanim*. Rabbeinu Yonah expounds on the Chazal that teaches טוב שם משמן טוב - a good name is more valuable than a fine oil. He says that when a person owns שמן אפרסמון (a valuable type of oil), all those who come within close proximity of his home benefit from the delectable aroma that emanates from inside. His friends, his family members - they all enjoy the rich and flavorful smell. A good name also affects all of those people - and beyond. It has the power to influence multitudes of people who never even visited the country that this person lives in. This is why a *gadol b'torah*, a *kohen*, and even a king, is not nearly as influential as he could possibly be until he develops a שם טוב.

R' Shimon: Devotion to Our Beloved Creator

The Midrash on Shir Hashirim tells the story of a couple who were married for ten years but were not blessed with children. This couple approached R' Shimon Bar Yochai and asked him whether the time had come to get divorced, and seek new spouses with whom they may be zoche to children. R' Shimon answered that if they wished to get divorced, then they must do so with the same amount of festivities and musical accompaniment as they did at their wedding.

The bemused couple went ahead and arranged a date for their נט, and also hired a band and prepared a large feast, as the holy Tanna had prescribed. At the divorce 'celebration', after the husband had a few cups of wine, he called over his wife and told her, "I know that this divorce is a difficult thing, and I therefore ask you to go to the house, take anything that you desire and keep it for yourself. Whatever you can get your hands on - it's yours."

Shortly after making his offer, the husband fell into a deep sleep. His wife quickly asked some of the attendees to carry him to her parents' home. When he woke up in the morning, he was shocked to discover that he was in his shver and shvigger's house. When his wife entered the room, he asked her: "Wait - didn't we get divorced yesterday? What am I doing here?"

"Well, don't you remember that you gave me the right to take anything from your home to keep for myself?" she asked.

"Yes, I did say that," he admitted.

His wife looked him in the eye and said: "אין אני חפץ אלא בך" - I don't desire anything other than you. She didn't want his car, his computer, his expensive bottles of schnapps, expensive jewelry - just him. Of course, the husband was blown away by this. The two of them immediately returned to R' Shimon Bar Yochai and said, "We cannot separate from each other. We need you to guarantee us that we will have a child together."

The wise and holy Tanna blessed them, and sure enough, they were holding a lovely baby in their arms less than a year later.

The Midrash concludes: if one human being told another "אין אני חפץ אלא בך" - I don't desire anything other than you - and she saw a tremendous *yeshuah*, then *kal vachomer* if the Jewish people would only turn their hearts to the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and exclaim, "Hashem, we don't desire anything but you!" then they would see a true salvation.

What does the Midrash mean by this? Doesn't every good Yid desire closeness with Hashem? The answer is that with everything in life, there is a "בי" and there is a "בך". When a person is sitting with his *chavrusa*, in the middle of a serious *seder*, and he suddenly remembers a good joke - he is faced with two choices: either he says the joke, and derives a little bit of pleasure from his friend's feedback, or he chooses to keep the learning going - which would benefit his *neschama*. The first option would be feeding his pride, his "בי", while the second option would enhance his relationship with Hashem, his "בך".

And it's like this with any *nisayon* you can think of. When there is an inappropriate image in the street - he can either feed his physical desire and gaze at it, which would only be an act of "בי", or he can choose to avert his eyes, which would be a sacrifice for "בך", Hakadosh Baruch Hu. R' Shimon Bar Yochai was teaching us that "נגילה ונשמחה בך" - the only path to true happiness, to unlocking *yeshuos*, to acquiring *Olam Habah* - is to rejoice "בך", with Hashem, and not with our physical desires.

Being Quick to Defend Hashem and His Torah

The Gemara in Me'ilah (17b) tells the following story:

There was once an evil decree against Klal Yisroel. The Yidden discussed who to send to the emperor that would be able to advocate on their behalf, and they decided to send R' Shimon Bar Yochai,

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because he was 'a regular with miracles'. Next, they had to find him a companion. One of the assembled suggested sending R' Elazar Ben R' Yosi, but his father disagreed. Why? Because R' Shimon was known for his ability to gaze at people who did things slightly against Halacha and turn them into a pile of bones. R' Yosi feared that his son would not come back alive. However, R' Shimon promised he was going to refrain from punishing him, so R' Yosi allowed the two of them to go together.

Shortly after they began their journey, a Yid approached the two Tannaim and asked a shaila. R' Elazar Ben R' Yosi quickly opened his mouth to answer - and R' Shimon punished him. (There are two versions of this story: the Yerushalmi says that R' Shimon actually remembered his promise and spared R' Elazar.)

Tosafos explains that the reason why R' Yosi was concerned about sending his son was because he was quick with his tongue, and he feared that he would say a Halacha in front of his Rebbe. Plus, R' Shimon was a person who was easily angered, and he was *makpid* on very small infractions.

This is a very difficult *sugya*. We all know that the Mishna in Pirkei Avos says what a terrible thing it is to be a *noach lich'os*, a person who is easily angered. We are talking about R' Shimon Bar Yochai here; he was one of the greatest people in history, and yet he couldn't control his own anger - and couldn't refrain from severely punishing people for slight mistakes? This is the Tanna that taught us the importance of having a *shem tov*, a good name?

I think that there is a simple way to explain this Gemara and Tosafos. Let's start with a *mashal*:

Imagine you're walking down the street and you see an elderly man sitting on a wheelchair, peacefully enjoying some sunshine. Suddenly, a young child walks up to the man and pushes him off the wheelchair. He then begins to kick the old man, who is now lying on the ground, too weak to even call for help. You immediately fly into a rage, grab the child by the scruff of his neck and violently pull him away from the old man, screaming while you do so.

Now, somebody comes running from across the street and tells you, "My friend, you really have to work on your anger. It's really important to have a good name; people are gonna think of you as a madman for having grabbed that boy the way you did."

Suppose you are in the hospital, visiting a sick person who is on life support. Suddenly, one of the nurses walks in and says, "Why are we keeping this fellow alive? What a waste of the hospital's money!" The nurse then begins pulling all of the tubes out of the patient, and starts shutting down the machines around his bed. You immediately start yelling, at the top of your lungs: "HELP! This patient is being killed! Somebody help!"

Later on, someone comes over to you and tells you quietly, "That screaming you did before was out of control. You really have to learn to curb your temper."

The Ohr Hachaim on this week's Parsha discusses the many different components of the *neshama*. He goes at length to describe how each element corresponds with different configurations of the names of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He also describes how each minimal transgression affects these holy *shaimos* in terrible ways, and shakes all of the *olamos ha'elyonim*. To R' Shimon Bar Yochai, these weren't abstract ideas; they were reality. When he would see sin, he would see the *olamos* shaking. When a *talmid* would *pasken* a Halacha in front of his Rebbe, R' Shimon would see that elderly man being trampled on the ground.

Being a קנאי When Necessary

We can tie this idea into this week's Parsha. Towards the end of the Parsha, we learn the story of the *mevarech es Hashem*, the blasphemer. The *pasuk* says " ויוציאו את המקלל אל מחוץ למחנה וירגמו אותו אבן, ובני " - "and they took the blasphemer to the outside of the camp, and they stoned him to death; and the Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem had commanded Moshe." The Ohr Hachaim asks on this:

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the *pasuk* already told us that they stoned the blasphemer, so why did it have to repeat that they did as Hashem had commanded Moshe?

Says the Ohr Hachaim: by engaging in act of קנאות in the name of Hashem, the Torah considers them as having accomplished every *mitzvah* in the Torah. This is why the *pasuk* says “ובני ישראל עשו כאשר” - it was considered as though they had done *everything* that Hashem had ever commanded Moshe Rabbeinu.

There were two prestigious doctors living in the city of Munkatch. At one point, they started to be מקהלל שבת בפרהסיא; they would stroll down the main street on Shabbos while smoking cigars. Rav Chaim Sofer zt”l, the Rav of the city, was infuriated when he heard about this development. He gathered all the Yidden in the town’s main Beis Medrash and delivered a fiery speech about decrying Chillul Shabbos. He called out the two doctors by name, announced that they were to be placed in cherem, and that nobody should use their services.

The doctors wouldn’t go down without a fight. They sued Rav Chaim Sofer for publicly defaming them and attempting to destroy their livelihood. The court readily accepted the case and summoned the Rav to a hearing.

At the court case, the town judge read out the allegations against the Rav angrily, and even added his own view of the matter: “These two men are regular citizens who are free to live whichever lifestyle they choose. How can you justify disparaging them and vilifying their names in a public setting?”

The Rav answered with a mashal. “Honorable judge, I would like you to envision the following scenario: You are walking down a crowded street alongside your father, minding your own business. Suddenly, a man approaches your father and begins to shout at him, call him names, insult him - all in a roaring voice. The bystanders are all turning their heads to see who this man is that seems to deserve so much scorn. Tell me, dear judge - would you not retaliate in your father’s defense?”

“Of course I would,” the judge replied.

“Well,” said the Rav, “the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth is my Father. When people openly mock His laws in a public setting - especially the laws of Shabbos, which are meant to bear witness that He is the true Creator - then I have no choice but to cry out loud in defense of His holy name.”

The judge accepted Rav Sofer’s argument and promptly cleared him of all charges.

Upholding Hashem’s Torah must become second nature to us. We often see others making a *Chillul Hashem*, but we quietly slip away, thinking: “It’s none of my business. He is doing a terrible thing, and he is going to pay for it - but it’s not my place to make a scene.” This thought process is dead wrong! We must see it the way Rav Chaim Sofer did - that the Eibishter is our father, and he is being disrespected! The Ohr Hachaim said that קנאות is akin to achieving all of the 613 commandments, and for a good reason: because defending Hashem’s honor shows that we firmly believe in the validity of the entire Torah!

קנאות and a Good Name: How do they Coexist?

The truth is, though, there is a bit of a balance here that may be difficult to grasp: on the one hand, we have the lesson from the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh of upholding the honor of Hashem - but, on the other hand, we just learned all about R’ Shimon Bar Yochai and the value of שם טוב! If a person engages in קנאות, then he will very likely acquire new enemies. Isn’t a person supposed to do his utmost to become a נוח על הבריות - one who is considered pleasant and lovable by other people? Aren’t we supposed to acquire a good name?

But the answer is simple. If a person is a tremendous *Baal Middos*, and he always greets those around him with a big smile on his face - then it won’t hurt him to be a קנאי when necessary. Why? Because everyone will understand that what he is doing is pure *Avodas Hashem*, and nothing else - for if he actually has an angry, unpleasant nature, then why doesn’t it manifest itself in any of his other interactions?

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Rav Avigdor Miller *zt"l* was the sweetest, nicest person - he was the epitome of a *שם טוב* - and yet, if anybody would talk during davening in his shul, he would kick them out. He viewed talking during davening as a denial of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's presence in the Shul, and it therefore angered him greatly. But nobody considered him to be a *כעסן*, or even slightly unpleasant; they all saw him as the most loving man around. The same goes for the Satmar Rav, *zt"l*: he was a tremendous *קנאי* when it came to matters of *Chillul Hashem*, yet all those who ever came into contact with him were entranced by his warmth, his kind and caring nature, his love for every Yid.

Chillul and Kiddush Hashem: It's all on Our Shoulders

It's interesting to note that in this week's Parsha, right before *רביעי*, the *pasuk* says: "ולא תחללו את שם קדשי, ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל" - "and they should not desecrate my holy name, but rather I should be sanctified among the Bnei Yisroel." These *pesukim* were in the middle of listing a few Halachos - not leaving over the edible parts of a *korban* until morning, not slaughtering a mother cow or sheep along with its child on the same day - and then, it interjects these words. It seems to be teaching us that if we fail to adhere to **any** of Hashem's commandments, then we are the ones who are *desecrating* His name; but if we uphold them, then we are *sanctifying* his name. The "ולא תחללו" and the "ונקדשתי" - it all depends on keeping to Halacha; if we are successful, we are doing a great thing, but if not, then we are shaming and desecrating Hashem. It's a *פחד נורא*; we must become sensitive to this.

Not too long ago, there was a massive scandal surrounding the U.S. military. It was discovered that a number of American soldiers in Iraq were brutally torturing and murdering many of their captured enemies. The reports got so bad that at one point, President Bush had to get up and publicly apologize to the Arabs for the atrocities his soldiers had carried out.

The Arabs had a field day after Bush's comments. They were thrilled that now the whole world could see that they weren't singular in their terrorism; the greatest country in the world also has plenty of cruel terrorists among them. Maybe by the Americans, there were some less, and by them there were some more; but in the end, they're all the same. They all use brutality against their enemies.

This story is a perfect *mashal* for bringing out what the effects of *Chillul Hashem* look like. The *goyim* don't really care if the number of Yidden being caught doing terrible things is a low one; the second even a handful of Yidden are found to be guilty of crime, they all say, "We're all the same. There's nothing special about the so-called 'Chosen Nation'. They do bad things, and so do we; they're just better at covering it up than we are. In reality, we're all rotten at the core."

Can we now understand why *Chillul Hashem* is so terrible? Can we now somewhat comprehend why R' Shimon Bar Yochai was a *ממהר לכעוס* according to Tosafos? The *kavod* of the Melech Malchei Hamelachim is at stake, and we must do what we can to uphold His honor.

Why is a Newborn Calf Called an Ox?

Let's talk about one last point. The *pasuk* by the *korbanos* says, "שור או כשב או עז כי יולד". Why does the *pasuk* call it an 'ox' upon its birth? Shouldn't it be called an "עגל", a calf?

There are three different factors we can learn from this *pasuk*. One refers to a person's *avodah* on himself - his battle against his *Yetzer Hara*; one refers to his relationship with others; and one refers to his relationship with Hashem - his accomplishments in the areas of *תפילה*, *קיום המצוות*, and so on. Let's focus on them one by one:

The Kli Yakar explains that a *שור* בן יומו איקרי *שור* - an ox is already called an ox on the day he is born. Why? Because all of an animal's natural capabilities are already there when it is born; it just needs to develop naturally, and it will end up as a regular ox like any other. However, a person can't just develop naturally; a person has a *Yetzer Hara*, and if he doesn't work on himself, his evil inclination will slowly develop into being the more dominant side of his nature. A person's *Yetzer Tov* is the one that must be worked on; he is not naturally interested in suppressing his physical desires and becoming an elevated

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human being. This is the lesson of the *pasuk* - a *korban* is supposed to remind us that we are different from the animals, for we must actively work on our growth and development. This is the first factor: בין אדם לעצמו.

The Midrash on these *pesukim* points out that the Torah chose specifically these animals to be *korbanos*, because Hashem desires the נרדפים (the victims, or the prey), not the רודפים (the attackers, the carnivores). Hashem wanted us to bring *korbanos* from those that do not hurt or attack others. I was thinking that perhaps this is why the *pasuk* doesn't use the word "עגל" - because a newborn lion can also be prey! A tiger can attack and kill a lion cub easily! In order to bring out the idea of the Midrash, the *pasuk* had to call the newborn calf an 'ox', to show that even in its fully grown state, it is still a נרדף. This is the second lesson: Hashem desires the *Avodah* of those that are kind and considerate to their peers. This is the point of בין אדם להבירו.

The final lesson is as follows. The Seforno points out that when a person has in front of him a slice of white bread, and also a complete loaf of coarse, cheap black bread - he is obligated to make his *bracha* on the שלם, the complete one. Why, though? The white bread is so much more *chashuv*! The answer is, the Torah is teaching us here to prefer an item which is complete over an item which is only a sliver, even if it is of lesser quality.

So too, when the *pasuk* discusses an ox, the Halacha is that it must be a שלם; it cannot have any blemishes. Therefore, even though you may sometimes have a fully grown ox that looks as scrawny and emaciated as a newborn, and you also have a fat and strong one, but the scrawny one has no blemishes, whereas the strong one has a slight blemish - then the Torah prefers the scrawny one. The adult ox which looks like it was just "כי יולד", it was just born - that one is preferable to the one which is fat and meaty, but has a slight puncture in its eye.

This can be a lesson in the third factor - בין אדם למקום. A person may look like a big Rosh Yeshiva, a big *askan* - but if his *davening* isn't שלם, if he is not fully there when he says *brachos* or puts on his *tefillin* - then the Eibishter prefers the *avodah* of the simpleton, who at least is fully focused while he *davens* and does *mitzvos*. Hashem desires the שלימות of the *avodah*, not the overall status of the עובד.

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