

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת חקת – בלק

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נתנדב לרגל יומא דהילולא
של האור החיים הקדוש זצוק"ל
ביום ט"ו תמוז
זכותו יגן עלינו

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זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליה פרה אדמה תמימה
אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על: (במדבר י"ט ב')

This is the decree of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying: Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and they shall take for you a Parah Adumah which is without a blemish, and which has not had upon it a yoke.

The Parah Which Moshe Made in the Midbar

In the Parshah of *Parah Adumah*, Hashem says to Moshe, "Speak to the Bnei Yisrael, ויקחו אליה פרה אדמה, and they shall take for you a Parah Adumah..." From the wording of the *possuk* it would seem that *Klal Yisrael* took the *Parah Adumah* for Moshe. What is the meaning of this? Rashi explains that the *Parah Adumah* would forever be called by Moshe's name. It would be called 'The *Parah* Which Moshe Made in the Midbar'.

This had actual ramifications in halacha. All of the Parah Adumah's which would subsequently be made throughout the generations, needed to be mixed with the ashes of the original Parah which Moshe made.

How do we understand this? The entire Torah is called '*Toras Moshe*'! What is the significance of calling this specific *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah* by the name of Moshe Rabeinu?

Mr. Grossman, a very wealthy individual, was extremely generous, and was always happy to share of his wealth with those in need. There was one family in particular for whom he went above and beyond the call of duty. He bought the Finkelsteins a house, a car, he paid their tuition, and he even paid for their children to go to summer camp.

One day, Mr. Grossman knocked on the Finkelstein's door. When they saw who had come to them, they were quick to invite him in. They sat him down, gave him a hot drink, and asked him how they could help.

"Mr. Finkelstein", said Mr. Grossman, "I have come to give you something by which you will always remember me." He then pulled out of his pocket a can opener. "Here", said Mr. Grossman, "Keep this in a safe place, so you should never forget what I have done for you".

This is obviously a ridiculous story. Mr. Finkelstein owed everything he had to Mr. Grossman! His house, his car, his peace of mind, etc. There was no way he could ever forget him! Certainly, the addition of something small, and insignificant like a can opener would do nothing to preserve his memory.

It would seem that calling the *Parah Adumah* by Moshe's name is similar to the above story. Moshe gave us everything. He gave us the entire Torah. He led us out of Mitzrayim and brought us to *Har Sinai*. He led us for forty years in the *Midbar*, and he interceded on our behalf many times when we deserved severe punishment. Being that he has done so much for us, what is the significance of calling this one *Mitzvah* by the name of Moshe? How does this add to the greatness of what he has done for us? It would seem from here that the *Parah Adumah* in fact represents the entire Torah, and therefore by calling it 'Moshe's *Parah*' we are reminded that Moshe brought us the entire Torah. Why is the *Parah Adumah* a representation of the whole Torah?

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Another question, which the Ohr Hachaim asks, is: Why does it say זאת חקת התורה, *This is the decree of the Torah*? It should say זאת חקת הפרה, *This the decree of the Parah*. Again, it seems as though the *Parah* represents the whole Torah, and it is therefore called the חקת התורה. How do we understand this?

I heard from R' Moshe Feinstein zt"l that we can answer this based on a fundamental concept which we find by the *Parah Adumah*. The *Parah* had the unique characteristic of being מטהר טמאים ומטמא טהורים, *it purified those that were tamei, and it defiled those that were tahor*. The person who was originally *tamei*, became *tahor* when the ashes of the *Parah* were sprinkled on him. However, seemingly paradoxically, the person who sprinkled the ashes became *tamei*. R' Moshe said that this concept applies to the Torah as well. The Torah too, has the ability to purify those who are *tamei*, but it can also defile those who are *tahor*. Every *middah* which the Torah teaches has the ability to raise us up if used properly. However, if we misunderstand it, and we don't correctly apply the directives of the Torah, it could end up ruining us.

Heshy was learning Bava Kama, and he came to realize the importance of treating other people's money with respect. He understood that even stealing or damaging something whose value is minimal is wrong. He therefore trained himself to be extra careful with money, and he was even careful not to damage something worth a nickel.

One, day a meshulach came to his door, asking for tzedaka. Heshy reached into his pocket and pulled out a nickel. When the meshulach saw that Heshy planned to give him no more than five cents, he became upset. He complained, "Why must you embarrass me like this? Better to give me nothing than to give me five cents!" Heshy replied, "What do you mean? A nickel is also money!"

This is an example of someone who wrongly applies the teachings of the Torah. It is true one the one hand that when it comes to someone else's property we must treat even the smallest amount with respect, and stealing a nickel is a full-fledged issur d'oraysa. However, it should be obvious that regarding tzedaka, a nickel is a paltry sum to give someone who comes to the door. It indeed shows a lack of basic human respect, and it would be better to give nothing.

Moishy was learning about the middos of Anivus and Savlanus. He took his learning to heart, and he trained himself to overlook incidents in which his kavod was slighted. If, for example, someone cut him in line at the store, he trained himself to stay calm, and he allowed that person to stay where he was. On one occasion, he was even publicly shamed by a woman who claimed that he had taken her spot in line. Although this was totally untrue, Moishy did not lose his cool. He simply said he was sorry, and he allowed her to take his place.

One day, Moishy's son Chaim began speaking to his father with terrible chutzpah. He began saying things which made the onlookers cringe. However, Moishy, by now having mastered the middah of Savlanus, was silent. He quietly accepted this barrage of chutzpah from his son, and he did not make any attempt to rebuke him. Later, Moishy's wife asked him to explain his behavior. She said, "How could you allow Chaim to speak to you like that?" Moishy replied, "I am not makpid on my kavod. I understand that everything comes from Hashem, and that my own personal honor is completely overshadowed by the presence of Hashem. I am therefore fully ready to accept any slights to my honor."

This is another example of wrongly applied lessons from the Torah. While it is very commendable to overlook one's honor, at the same time, one must be makpid on his honor when it comes to training his children. If he does not train his children to treat him with the respect he deserves as their father, he is robbing them of a basic Torah command. Additionally, they will grow to become generally disrespectful, bad-mannered people.

We see that the directives of the Torah need to be applied correctly, and with proper balance, and that misapplying them can have detrimental results. To emphasize this idea the *Parah Adumah* is called the *chukas hatorah*. The Torah is teaching that just as by *Parah Adumah* there exists the concept of מטהר טמאים ומטמא טהורים, so too by the entire Torah it can be מטהר טמאים ומטמא טהורים. If correctly applied, the

lessons of the Torah can bring a person to tremendous levels of *kedusha* and *tahara*. However, if the teachings of the Torah are distorted and misconstrued, then it will bring a person down.

The Torah is an Exact Science

This idea that the Torah is an exact science, and that it is crucial to apply its teachings correctly, is true regarding every area of Torah. For example, The Torah commands us to roast the *Korban Pesach*. This needed to be done to perfection. If it was not fully roasted it may not be eaten. However, it should also not be overdone.

Another example of this concept can be learned from the *minhag* in Yerushalayim to eat *Yerushalmi Kugel*.

By nearly every kiddush in Yerushalayim one will find that they serve Yerushalmi Kugel. Why is that? Is it just because it tastes good? Surely this is not the reason. Every minhag in Klal Yisrael is rooted in halacha or hashkafa. What then, is the reason for this minhag?

*In fact, the reason for this minhag has firm halachic basis. In order to be allowed to eat by a kiddush, one needs to fulfill the requirement of *במקום סעודה קידוש*. It is therefore important to eat at least a *k'zayis* of *mezonos* at a kiddush, because only then can it be considered a *seudah*. However, if one fulfills this halacha with *mezonos* such as cake and the like, he may run into a different issue. If he eats too much cake, he may actually be required to wash and say *hamotzi*.*

*In order to solve this problem, the Yerushalmi minhag is to serve *lokshen kugel*. *Lokshen kugel* presents no such problem because it is cooked in a pot, and as such there can never be a requirement to wash on *lokshen kugel*, no matter how much one eats.*

We see again that the teachings of the Torah are exact, and they need to be implemented with the proper balance. One must eat at least a *k'zayis* in order to fulfill the requirement of *kiddush b'makom seudah*, but at the same time, one should be careful not to eat too much because he may then be required to wash.

The Change from Tumah to Tahara

Perhaps we can offer another reason as to why the *Parah Adumah* represents the whole Torah.

A person who has come into contact with a dead body becomes *tamei* with the highest possible form of *tumah*. For such a *tumah* it is not enough to just go into the *mikvah*, the way we find by other lower forms of *tumah*. The only way to purify oneself of this level of *tumah* is by having the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* sprinkled on him. Additionally, aside from the usual restrictions which someone who is *tamei* must be careful with, a person who has become *tamei mes* is even more severely limited. He has the highest level of *tumah* and he must be careful about what he eats, what he touches, and where he goes.

All this is remedied by the ashes of the *Parah Adumah*. Once a person has gone through the process of having the ashes of the *Parah* sprinkled on him, he is like a new man. He can now eat freely, walk freely, and do whatever he needs to do, without worrying about bringing *tumah* wherever he goes.

The Torah Has the Power to Completely Change Us

This is an idea which applies to the entire Torah. Like the *Parah Adumah*, the Torah has the power to completely change a person over. Without Torah, a person is a slave to his environment. He is like an animal who is totally subordinate to his circumstances. He cannot act freely, making decisions based on what his mind understands. With the Torah however, we can access our minds, and we can act the way our minds tell us we should. The Torah changes us from animals to humans.

I was once sitting in the kollel in Toronto when a completely irreligious person walked in. He came over to me and asked why he should attend Torah classes. "What will the Torah do for me?" he asked. "What will I gain in my life if I study Torah?"

This was a Russian individual, so I responded in his terms. I said, "If you are looking for a new recipe to make vodka, you will not find it in the Torah. The Torah will not help you if you are simply looking to enrich the life which you already live. However, what the Torah will do for you is that it will make you into a person. It will completely change your perspectives, and it will open up an entirely new world for you. You will live on a higher plane, with the ability to act as your mind tells you. You will no longer be constantly searching to fulfill your bodily urges and whims."

There are many *nisyonos* which we encounter on a daily basis, and we would have no way to successfully overcome them without Torah. This true regarding *nisyonos* of anger, *taavah*, *mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro*, and many other areas. Without the Torah we would be like animals, simply following our base instincts. We would thus fail every test that comes our way. It is through the Torah that we become humans, making decisions based on what is right, and not based on our base urges and whims. Torah gives us life!

If one walks into any shul in Lakewood, or any other frum city, on any day during bein hazmanim, he will find many bochurim learning Torah. These are boys who have free time, and they choose to spend it learning Torah! It is not only the boys who are naturally inclined to sit and read books all day. We are talking about talented boys. These boys can hit home-runs! Why are they spending their time learning Torah?

The Torah has taught these boys to understand and to value that which is truly important. These boys have thus learned how to overcome their base instincts which tell them to just go out and play ball, or to sit at home and relax. They have absorbed the lessons of the Torah, and they are therefore equipped to overcome their natural desires and to follow what they know to be right.

Such a blessing is something which only we as Yidden enjoy. Amongst the goyim they deal with all sorts of problems with their youth. Wasting their time playing baseball is very good by their standards. They must deal with drug addictions, stealing, and even killing. We must thank Hashem for giving us the Torah which guides us and brings us to such a high standard of living!

The *Parah Adumah* represents the Torah because it acts as an example of what the Torah does for us. Just as the *Parah* can bring a person from the lowest levels of *tumah*, to the world of *kedushah* and *taharah*, and from a very restrictive lifestyle to a life where he can move freely as he needs, so too the Torah brings us from the lowest levels of *tumah* to the highest levels of *taharah*. It elevates our standards of living and we can live freely as humans, unshackled by the urges and whims of our base instincts.

This is why the *Parah Adumah* is called the *chukkas hatorah* and we refer to it as 'The *Parah* Which Moshe Made in the Midbar'. Surely, the *Parah Adumah* is only one small part of the great many things which Moshe has done for us. However, it represents the sum total of the benefits which we received when Moshe brought down the Torah from Har Sinai. The same way that the *Parah Adumah* can completely change us over, so too did we become completely changed and elevated when we received the Torah.

The Teaching of the Rambam

These are the words of the last Rambam in Sefer Tahara:

רמז יש בדבר, כשם שהמכוון לבו לטהר כיון שטבל טהר ואע"פ שלא נתחדש בגופו דבר, כך המכוון לבו לטהר נפשו מטומאת הנפשות שהן מחשבות האון ודעות הרעות, כיון שהסכים בלבו לפרוש מאותן העצות והביא נפשו במי הדעת טהור, הרי הוא אומר וזרקתי. *There is a symbolism in this (the halachos of tumah and tahara). Just as a person who has in his mind to purify himself, after he immerses in the mikvah he is pure although there is no physical change, so too, one who has in his mind to purify his soul from the impurities of bad thoughts and character traits, once he has decided to separate himself from those ideas,*

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and he has immersed himself in the waters of Torah, he is pure. The possuk says: "And I will throw on you pure water and you will become pure. From all your impurities and all your filth, I will purify you."

The Rambam teaches that if one wants to purify himself, and to elevate his life to a life of Torah and closeness to Hashem, he should learn the lessons of the *tumah* and *tahara*. A person can go from being at the lowest levels of *tumah* to the highest level of *kedusha*, and all it takes is a will to change and immersion in the *mikvah*. In the same way, a person can change from being very far from Hashem to being very close with just a change of attitude, and immersion in the waters of the Torah.

Reshaim are people who are filled with regrets. They constantly do things which they know they shouldn't be doing. When asked why they do things which they know destroys them, they explain that they simply cannot stop. They say that this is simply who they are, and there is nothing they can do to change it.

This is an unfortunate mistake. We learn from the *Parah Adumah* that no level is too low, and it is never too late. All it takes is a sincere decision to change, and immersion in the waters of the Torah. The Torah has the power to remake a person from a total *rasha* into a complete *tzaddik*.

זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל

In this Parshah it says: ...זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל... *This is the Torah, A man when he shall die in a tent...* Chazal *darshen* these words to mean: אין התורה נקנית אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה: *The Torah is only acquired by one who 'kills himself' over it.* This is one of the most fundamental principles of Torah learning. It must be done with total *mesirus nefesh*.

We see again that the Torah chooses to teach the basic lessons of Torah learning in the Parshah of *Parah Adumah*. This is because the theme of the *Parah Adumah* is representative of the entire Torah, as we have explained. No *tumah* is too heavy for the *Parah Adumah* to change, and likewise, no *rasha* is too far to be changed by the Torah. Through *mesirus nefesh* in Torah, any person can become a *tzaddik gamur*.

The Torah Sustains Our Connection to Yiddishkeit

This power of the Torah to change a person, and to sustain his *kedusha*, is true on a personal level as well as on the communal level.

There are many cities in America which had large numbers of frum Jews in the early 1900's. Sadly, there is almost nothing left of them today. This is because these communities did not have yeshivos. Yeshivos sustain their communities because the kedusha of the Torah spills over and effects everyone around it. When there is a Yeshiva in a town, even the balabatim learn Torah every day, and this keeps their connection to yiddishkeit strong, and healthy. However, without the power of the Torah there is no way to stand strong in the face of foreign influences.

Let us undertake to renew our commitments to Torah, and to apply ourselves with *mesirus nefesh*. In this way, we will be elevated to great heights, and we will be zocheh to greet *Moshiach* speedily, in our days.

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