

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
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פורים

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ברוך מאיר לייב בן
הרב שלמה אביגדור רבינוביץ זצ"ל
ואשתו אסתר בת פנחס יוסף מילר ע"ה
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פורים

The Comparison Between Purim and Yom Kippur

The *heiligh Yom Tov* of Purim is around the corner, so let's try to focus on some points that can help us maximize this auspicious day.

The *seforim* are replete with descriptions about the holiness of the day of Purim. It all starts with the famous Zohar that teaches that Yom Kippur is merely a *Yom K'Purim* – a day like Purim, implying that Purim is in a sense greater than Yom Kippur¹. Based on these words, the *seforim* bring numerous explanations into the deep meanings that lie within this elevated time of year.

However, regardless of which *p'shat* we choose to delve into, there is definitely a simple reading of the text of the Zohar that we can't possibly overlook – and that is the comparison between Yom Kippur, the day filled with intense repentance and atonement, and Purim, the day filled with joy, feasts and laughter. At first glance, the juxtaposition of these two days can seem rather paradoxical; however, after careful examination of the inner workings of these elevated *zmanim*, one can find many deep similarities between the two that can shed some light on their shared loftiness. Without getting into detail, we can at least say this: During these two days, we are clearly on a *madreigah* of sitting in the direct presence of the King of the Universe. And just as before Yom Kippur we are obligated to cleanse ourselves through processes of *teshuvah* in preparation of this experience, so too we must surely do our utmost to do *teshuvah* before Purim.

¹ איתא בתיקוני זוהר דף נ"ז ע"ב, וז"ל פורים אתקריאת על שם יום הכפורים, עכ"ל. והוסיפו הספרים בשם האריז"ל שפורים גדול יותר מיום הכיפורים, שהרי יום הכיפורים הוא יום כ"פורים", ומי תולה במי, קטן תולה בגדול.

The First Step in Our Preparation: *Machshava*

Now, before we get involved in understanding the Zohar, I would like to share a brief *vort* that I heard in the name of Rav Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin which pertains to this topic. The Gemara famously teaches: “משנכנס אדר, מרבין בשמחה” – *From when the month of Adar enters, we increase our happiness*. Rav Tzaddok points out that the word “בשמחה”, *happiness*, contains the same letters as the word “מחשבה”, *thought*. In other words, this statement of Chazal is also teaching that the first step in the preparation for Purim is to think. We must contemplate the depths of this elevated time in order to achieve the proper *teshuvah* and *simcha* that it warrants.

This insight is very revealing of the nature of Chodesh Adar and Purim. While the preparation for Yom Kippur is all about reflection and introspection, along with making the right choices to move forward on the correct path in life – Purim requires a different sort of *hachana*. As Adar approaches, we must begin to contemplate the entire existing world around us – the trees and the roads; the politics and the wars; the sorrows and the successes that make up our personal lives. We must take a hard look at all that we experience and witness day by day, and begin to ponder some age-old questions: Why is there so much unrest on the world stage? Why do so many good people suffer? Where did all the gorgeous nature around us come from? Why is it so difficult for me to triumph over my struggles? How did I muster the strength to change that bad character trait for the good?

Then comes the next step in the “מחשבה preparation” process: recognizing that the answer to all of these questions, and an endless amount of others, is one thing: *Hashem Yisborach*.

By pondering these realities in depth, any honest Yid will come to the conclusion that everything is scripted from Above. There is a reason for everything that happens – both on the individual level and as it pertains to the world as a whole. As we learned in the story of Purim, the Ribono Shel Olam is always there, pulling the strings – and sometimes, the miracles aren't so apparent. In Shushan, our salvation did not come through the splitting of a roaring sea as it did by the Yam Suf, nor through the miraculous, instantaneous decimation of an entire army like what happened during the days of

Chizkiyahu. Instead, the miracles were a sequence of events that could have been viewed as mere coincidence and happenstance.

But it is precisely this kind of salvation that calls for the greatest joy imaginable – the miracle that reveals that *everything*, even the seemingly natural side of things, is miraculous. Not just the grand, magnificent miracles are manifestations of Hashem's *hashgacha*; rather, *everything* is Hashem's *hashgacha*. Even when we hear news that sounds like it will spell doom for the Yidden – it is just the planting of the seeds for our salvation. As we learned from the story with Esther, even when our odds for salvation seem low – Hashem has already put all the cogs in place for a grand הוה הפוך in the end.

So, if we enter Chodesh Adar with the attitude of using our "מחשבה" a little more, then the result will be that we will enter a true state of "בשמחה" – pure joy and happiness. There's no greater feeling than knowing that every time we are faced with a seemingly insurmountable *nisayon* – it is all Hashem. When we hear terrible tidings about *tzaros* that befell our brothers around the world – it's all Hashem. When we see evil people rise to positions of great power and influence – it's all Hashem. If we utilize our מחשבה to view things this way, then there will never be any good cause for alarm or despair. We will just walk around all day with a spring in our step and a wide grin on our faces. With a preparation like this, we will definitely be ready for joyous and exuberant celebration on the day of Purim. And we will approach this great day with *teshuvah*, just like we approach Yom Kippur – except that this time, it will be a *teshuvah* that comes completely through *simcha*.

Tasting Hashem For Real

The Mashgiach of Lomza Rav Moshe Rosenstein zt"l used to ask the following question. The *pasuk* in Tehillim says: "טעמו וראו כי טוב השם" – *Taste and you will see that Hashem is good*. However, don't we often see that this is not the case? So many people try out *davening*, they taste a *seder* in Yeshiva, they put on *tefillin* – but they ultimately don't wind up recognizing the greatness of Hashem, or how wonderful it is to be a Yid. So many Yidden try out Yiddishkeit during their youth but end up falling through the cracks. So what, then, does the *pasuk*

mean when it says that if one were to merely “taste” – then he will surely see how good Hashem is?

Rav Moshe Rosenstein answered this simple question with a *mashal*:

A pauper was walking past a high-end restaurant, and he observed a wealthy-looking individual eating a slice of cake. He couldn't help but notice how the wealthy man was visibly engrossed in the food on his plate; every one of his senses was getting totally stimulated with every bite. He asked another person in the street what the man was eating, and the fellow replied: "That? Ahh, that is a true delicacy. It's called strawberry shortcake. Every self-respecting man knows that eating strawberry shortcake is a pleasure that must be experienced from time to time. There is nothing in the world as tantalizingly delicious as that confection, I guarantee you."

"Every self-respecting man, eh?" the pauper thought to himself. "You know what? I'm not going to be a loser my whole life. I'm gonna be a self-respecting man. I'm gonna get my hands on some strawberry shortcake!"

The pauper ran home and immediately told his wife: "Chana! I want you to bake me some strawberry shortcake!"

His wife looked at him as though he had gone completely insane. "Strawberry shortcake? That's for wealthy people!" she said. When her husband asked why, she began to explain: "I need strawberries to make strawberry shortcake!"

The pauper paused. "Nu nu," he reasoned, "how important are the strawberries anyway? Make it without them."

"But... I need whip cream – and we can't afford it!" his wife shot back!

"Nu," he said again, "so skip the cream as well."

"But what about sugar? Or lemon juice? Or eggs? I don't have any of the necessary ingredients!" his wife moaned.

The pauper paused again, and then finally said: "These are all minute details. Make do with whatever you have – I just need

to taste some strawberry shortcake! I want to do what every self-respecting man does – I can't let these silly details get in my way!"

Well, his wife reluctantly went ahead with his command. She mixed a little bit of flour with some water, baked it in the oven, and then offered the dried out and blackened result to her husband. After gagging and spluttering on the first bite, the pauper thanked his wife profusely and threw out the rest. "Ha! How foolish those wealthy people are!" he told her, and pretty much anyone he met for the next couple of weeks. "I tasted the great strawberry shortcake. It's horrible! This is what the wealthy people all go crazy for? I'd rather stay poor!"

Rav Moshe Rosenstein explained that those who claim they have 'tasted' Yiddishkeit, yet still chose to abandon it – never actually tasted it. These people went through the motions – they rattled off the words of *davening* emotionlessly, sat through *shiurim* while listening with half an ear, went to the zoo on Chol Hamo'ed, and so on. You think they tasted Yiddishkeit? Not at all. Tasting Hashem means to actually experience closeness with Him on a real, meaningful level. Many people never get there and therefore leave the fold with relative ease, but if they would only give it a try and use their *מחשבה* to actually appreciate what Hashem is all about – then they would be unable to deny the truth.

Practical Ideas for Experiencing Hashem for Real

Well, how can we 'taste Hashem' for real? One practical piece of advice Rav Moshe Rosenstein would give was to make a short *cheshbon hanefesh* before starting to *daven*. This can be done in two minutes; the person just has to think for a moment about the fact that he's about to have a private meeting with the king, and it would probably be beneficial if he would first let go of his past behaviors that may have gone against the king's wishes. By doing this small act of *teshuvah*, the person will automatically be much more aware of the value of his *tefillah*, and he will far more likely to actually feel like he's talking to Hashem.

Another example would be preparing oneself before learning. Studying the Torah is not something that we just do casually; it is an *avodah* that requires much *mesiras nefesh*, as we have discussed many times in the past. When sitting down by a Gemara, perhaps it would be worthwhile to contemplate for a moment about what you're about to do: remember that you are one of the few lucky people in the world that is fortunate enough to delve into Hashem's words, and that learning these words are surely deserving of self-sacrifice and real focus. He should try to think of something that he is sacrificing at that moment in order to learn Torah, and then start learning with these thoughts in mind. It will be an entirely different experience!²

“קימו וקבלו”

The Gemara in Pesachim (68b) says that Mar Brai D'Ravina used to fast every day of the year, aside from Shavuos, Erev Yom Kippur, and Purim. Rav Aharon Kotler *zt"l* in Mishnas Rav Aharon says that the common denominator between these three days is that they are all days of Kabbalas Hatorah. How so? Shavuos is the day that we accepted the first *Luchos*; Yom Kippur is the day that we accepted the second *Luchos*; and on Purim, we did the “קימו וקבלו” – we reaccepted the Torah upon ourselves with love.

The Gemara teaches us that this act of “קימו וקבלו” was referring to the *Torah Sheba'al Peh*.³ This is implicit in the order of the words “קימו וקבלו”. The *pashut* translation of these words is that they “fulfilled and accepted” the Torah upon themselves; however, it would be strange for the *pasuk* to say that the Yidden were *mekayem* the Torah before they were *mekabel* it. Therefore, the Gemara deduces

² עי' נפש החיים שער ד' פרק ו', שכתב וז"ל לזאת האמת שזו היא הדרך האמתי אשר בזה בחר הוא ית"ש, שבכל עת שיכין האדם עצמו ללמוד, ראוי לו להתיישב קודם שיתחיל עכ"פ זמן מועט ביראת ה' טהורה בטהרת הלב, להתודות על חטאתו מעומקא דלבא, כדי שתהא תורתו קדושה וטהורה, ויכוין להתדבק בלימודו בו בתורה בו בהקב"ה, היינו להתדבק בכל כחותיו לדבר ה' זו הלכה, ובוזה הוא דבוק בו ית' ממש כביכול, כי הוא ית' ורצונו חד כמ"ש בזהר, עכ"ל.

³ איתא בגמ' מס' שבת דף פ"ה ע"א, אמר רבא אף על פי כן הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש, דכתיב קימו וקבלו היהודים, קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר. וביארו הפנ"י ועוד כמה אחרונים דהיינו שקבלו תורה שבעל פה.

that this verse is actually referring to the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* – meaning, the Yidden fulfilled everything that they knew from the *Torah Shebichsav* and agreed to firmly accept upon themselves the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* as well.

The Midrash Tanchuma on Parshas Noach says that a person has to work much harder to get a *kinyan* in *Torah Sheba'al Peh* than to get one in *Torah Shebichsav*. The latter is finite; it may be long, but it is confined to the 24 books of Tanach, making it easier for a person to master it fully (at least in *pashut pshat*). However, the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* is endless; it is more vast than the seven seas. In order to make a *kinyan* in *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, a person has to invest a great deal of effort, and he must toil tirelessly for an entire lifetime.

From here we see another important preparation that we need to make before Purim. If we want to be *zoche* to accept upon ourselves a large portion of the *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, then we have to be ready to sacrifice for our learning. We have to be willing to learn and to yearn for growth even at times when it is difficult for us.

What Was So Bad About Attending the Party?

Let's go on to one more point about Purim. The Gemara in Megillah famously teaches that the Yidden in the days of Mordechai were decreed to death because they participated in Achashveirosh's party. The question one may ask is that there was actually a good reason to participate in the party. One of the *taynos* Haman sold to Achashveirosh about the Yidden was that they were disinterested in and didn't care about the kingdom's affairs. By going to the party, they were being politically correct; they were showing the king that they were involved. Perhaps this was the right thing to do – just for the safety of the Yidden spread out throughout Achashveirosh's kingdom?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt"l* answered this question with a story.

During the years of Stalin's reign in Russia, many displaced children were rounded up into shelters. The officials at these shelters used to indoctrinate the children with their ideologies on a daily basis.

One of their indoctrination methods went as follows: Some mornings, the shelter would not provide any breakfast for the children. As the morning would wear on and the children would begin to cry out in hunger, one of the 'caretakers' would get up and say: "Dear children, we need breakfast. I want you all to cry out together to G-d and ask for bread!" The kids would then pray and cry for food for a few minutes. But then, the caretaker would come out again and say: "You children are not praying hard enough! G-d must not hear you. Yell louder!" The children would continue to pray fervently, now screaming desperately for food.

Eventually, the caretaker would come out and say: "Children, this is not working. Let's try something else. Everyone, shout out together: 'Stalin, give us bread!'" With a thundering roar, the children would then all cry out in unison: "Stalin, give us bread!" And then, immediately, tables filled with cereal, eggs and bread would get rolled out into the dining room.

If the Yidden would go to the party, it would be like saying "Hashem doesn't give bread, Stalin gives the bread." If the party is a *treifeh* place to be, then the Ribono Shel Olam doesn't want you to be there – and no political reasons can justify going. Hashem is the *kol yachol*, and He will make sure the Yidden are safe despite the fact that they are skipping the party.

Another Mehalech to Explain the Severity of the Sin

The only problem with this answer is that Achashveirosh had arranged for top-notch *kashrus* for his Jewish subjects. Why should the Yidden deserve to be obliterated for simply joining a party – that was 100% kosher?

Perhaps we can suggest another answer to these questions: that although it may have been kosher food, and the intentions were good ones – the Yidden ended up enjoying themselves. The political reasoning and the *heterim* were all legitimate – but a Yid shouldn't be partying and celebrating alongside *goyim*. This kind of frivolity can have a tremendous effect on our *neshamos* in a very profound way.

How can we prove that the Yidden enjoyed the various indulgences at Achashveirosh's party? I once heard from R' Dovid Safer, a Rebbe in Toronto, the following proof: The *pesukim* in the beginning of the *Megillah* (starting at *Perek 1, Pasuk 6*) describe the decor that Achashveirosh's team had arranged for the party. There were eloquent drapes of various colors; there were beds of gold and silver; the floor was made of marble and other costly stones.

Now, let's imagine the following scenario:

A Yid was driving down the Garden State Parkway when he suddenly spotted flashing lights in his rearview mirror. He pulled over, and the cop ran over to his car and immediately arrested him. He asked what was going on, so the cop explained that he was speeding and swerving excessively, and although the cop was chasing him for a while, he resisted pulling over for a long period of time. Therefore, he was being arrested for evading an officer. The Yid tried to explain to the officer that he had the wrong man – but there was nobody to talk to. The cop drove him over to the local prison and threw him into the holding cell.

This innocent Yid looked around, and he couldn't help but notice the terrifying figures surrounding him. The people being held in that cell definitely seemed to be anything but friendly; one wrong word could cost him his teeth. He sat there deep into the night, shivering in fright, for close to five hours – until he was released, thanks to a couple of phone calls his wife had made to some local askanim.

Now, let's say the next morning back in Lakewood, he bumps into a friend who asks him rather tactlessly: "Did you notice what kind of floors they had in the prison?"

"Nope," he responds. But his friend isn't done yet: "How about the ceilings? Did they use drop-ceiling or regular sheetrock?"

"I have no idea," the Yid answers, starting to get agitated.

"I don't understand you," his friend exclaims incredulously. "You sat in that room for five hours. You can't tell me anything about the floors or the ceiling?"

As we can all imagine, in a situation like the one we just described, nobody would be capable of taking note of the materials surrounding them. They would be far too preoccupied with their fear and determination to survive. Well, why does the *Megillah* give us a detailed illustration of the decor at Achashveirosh's party? Perhaps it's to show us that the Yidden *noticed* the fine, intricate embroidery and extravagant stones that were on display at the grand event. If they were really there just to ascertain the safety of their brethren throughout the kingdom – they would be focused on the job at hand, and they wouldn't sit there and examine the king's lavish display of wealth.

Now, it's not very easy to sit in the midst of a grand display and not take notice. But if you're there for the right reasons, and your intentions are 100% *Leshem Shomayim* – then you get a special *Siyatta Dishmaya* in maintaining your purity and avoiding exposure to *tumah*.

Let me give you an example where this lesson is very *nogea*. Suppose your friend is in the hospital and you're going to be *mevaker choleh*. Now, you're sitting in the waiting room at the hospital for twenty minutes – and the television is playing away. It doesn't take a rocket-scientist to notice that the stuff that's playing on that screen wasn't made for you; it was made for *p'chusim*, for impure minds that live a very different life than you do. Well, how are you going to manage? It's hard not to look! But if you really came there *Leshem Shomayim* – you just wanted to be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* – then you will receive assistance from Above to do the right thing. All you have to do is focus on the task at hand; think about the reason you came to the hospital. Don't make the mistake so many Yidden made at Achashveirosh's party; remember that by staying focused on your *Avodas Hashem*, you will be protected from the waves of destruction and impurity that permeate throughout our world.

A Freilichen Purim!

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