

אור פני משה

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

*Shmuessen from
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פרשת בשלח

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לעילוי נשמת
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אייזיק זצ"ל צין

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וַיְהִי בַּשְּׁלַח פָּרַעֲה אֶת הָעָם וכו' (שמות י"ג י"ז)

Good Middos Even When It's Inconvenient

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was troubled by the wording of this *pasuk*. Why does the Torah attribute *Yetzias Mitzrayim* to Pharaoh? It was the Ribono Shel Olam himself that took the Yidden out of Mitzrayim; Pharaoh, if anything, only complicated matters. Says Rav Chaim, there is an important lesson in *mussar* here: כיון שנכנסתי ברשות, אינו בדין שאצא שלא ברשות - once I was welcomed in with permission, it is not becoming of me to leave without permission. When the Yidden originally arrived at Mitzrayim, Pharaoh accepted them with open arms; he gave them the entire city of Goshen and told them to bring their families and settle in comfortably. Now that they were leaving, it would be inappropriate for them to just stroll out without Pharaoh's express permission.

The point here is that although the Egyptians had tortured the Yidden relentlessly for centuries, they were still owed the *hakoras hatov* for how they had originally treated them. Why is that? Because we don't only conduct ourselves with good *middos* when we have the upper hand. We don't only act kindly and show appreciation when it is easy and convenient for us. We do the right thing when it is supposed to be done, no matter how many times we were wronged and hurt along the way.

This way of life is really alluded to in the words of Chazal, who taught us to always try and emulate the ways of Hakadosh Baruch Hu: "מה הוא רחום אף אתה רחום, מה הוא חנון אף אתה חנון" - Just as he is merciful, so too shall you be merciful; just as he is gracious, so too shall you be gracious." We must always follow Hashem's lead. Hashem is always filled with kindness and compassion, even when His child is rebelling against Him for years, constantly disobeying His request. Hashem is gracious to him at all times, not only at times that it 'feels' right. So too, Klal Yisroel fulfilled their obligation of having good *middos* - being

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makir tov, in this instance - even at a time when they felt nothing but disdain towards the Egyptians.

זֶה אֶ-לִי וְאֶנִּיהוּ (שמות ט"ו ב')

Three Definitions of “זה א-לי ואניוהו”

There are three famous explanations of the words “זה א-לי ואניוהו”:

The first *pshat* brought in the Baraisa in Shabbos (133b) is that the word ואניוהו comes from the root word נאה, beautiful. This means that we must do our utmost to beautify Hashem's commandments: we should wear beautiful *tzitzis*, we should build a beautiful sukkah, and so on.

We can derive this point from the events that took place at *Kriyas Yam Suf*. Let's first illustrate this idea with a *maschal*:

Imagine a person is on a cruise ship, and he suddenly notices a fellow falling overboard. He immediately runs to the edge of the deck and tosses a tube into the water. This tube happened to be filthy; it was covered in layers of mud and grime. Now, is there any chance in the world that the poor fellow in the ocean would reject the tube and request a cleaner one? Of course not! The only thing he could possibly be thinking of is saving his life - this is no time for niceties!

When the Yidden were standing between the Yam Suf and the ferocious Egyptian army, they couldn't have been too preoccupied with niceties either. They just wanted to survive what appeared to be imminent death or enslavement. Simply splitting the sea would have sufficed, muddy floor and all. And yet, Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose to lead Klal Yisroel through the sea like kings: The ground was dry, the walls were smooth, and there was food sprouting out in all directions.

ואנוהו: התנאה לפניו This is why Chazal teach us this concept of. The same way Hashem beautified our salvation, without us deserving it - and of course not expecting it - we must also do our utmost to beautify and enhance his *mitzvos* in every way possible.

“זה א-לי ואנוהו” Remembering to be Honest While being Mekayem

A person can sometimes delude himself into thinking that his own preferences for nice things are coming from his desire to be *mekayem* זה א-לי ואנוהו. He wants to wear expensive clothing and have the most lavish car in the Shul's parking lot - all, of course, in the name of Hashem, and bringing beauty and honor to his name. Because, after all, I run a big *chesed* organization, or I am the dean of a successful *mosad*; people need to respect and revere me, just because I represent *gemilas chasadim* and *chinuch* wherever I go.

Imagine a *bachur* tells a *shadchan* that the reason why he's so particular about looks is because he views himself as a top-tier *ben torah*, and it is unbecoming of him to not have the fairest wife. Wouldn't that sound ridiculous? The *shadchan* should tell him, "First let me see how *makpid* you are on your *tefillin* being checked and polished every few years. Let me see how sparkling white your *tzitzis* are." We must try to focus on beautifying Hashem's commandments in ways that truly bring **Him** honor, rather than blaming זה א-לי ואנוהו on our own personal desires.

“זה א-לי ואנוהו” The Remaining Pshatim in

The Baraisa in Shabbos brings another *pshat* to explain the *pasuk* of זה א-לי ואנוהו:

"אבא שאול אומר, ואנוהו - הוי דומה לו, מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה וכו' "

"Abba Shaul says: Be similar to Him; just as he is merciful, so too shall you be merciful; just as he is gracious, so too shall you be gracious." Rashi explains that Abba Shaul viewed ואנוהו as a compound word, comprising the words 'אני והוא', meaning Hashem and I have to be similar.

Targum Onkelos reveals a third *pshat* in זה א-לי ואנוהו: He translates, 'ואבני ליה מקדש', and I will build for him a Bais Hamikdosh. This is derived from the word נוה, meaning a place of dwelling, which is included in the word ואנוהו.

These three *pshatim* can be applied to marriage as well. A person who genuinely cares for his or her spouse should want to (a) live in a home just with that person, (b) emulate his or her positive character traits, and (c) attempt to beautify them with jewelry and presentable clothing. These are all recipes for a healthy relationship, and they are also ways of showing *ahava* to Hashem.

זה א-לי ואנוהו – The Importance and Magnitude of

Let us try to clarify the importance of the *mitzvah* of זה א-לי ואנוהו. First of all, is it an obligation מן התורה or only מדרבנן?

The Gemara in Bava Kama (9b) says that הידור מצוה עד שליש - the requirement of beautifying and enhancing a *mitzvah*, which we learn from זה א-לי ואנוהו, is only obligatory up until a third of the median cost. The Gemara then asks: is this third calculated מלגיו or מלבר? Meaning, let's say the regular price of an *esrog* is \$60, do we say that a third of this sum is 20 - so we must therefore add 20, and now the person is obligated to pay up to \$80 for an *esrog*? (This would be considered מלגיו, or from within the median price itself.) Or, is this Halacha referring to a third of the final obligatory price - meaning, we split the median price in half, which in this case would give us 30, and we then add it to the regular \$60, which would result in \$90? (This would be considered מלבר, because the requirement to add a third is referring to an external third - a third of the final outcome.)

The Pilpula Charifta points out that the Gemara does not give us a conclusive answer for this question, rendering it a ספק, and we therefore choose the more lenient approach - מלגיו. However, the Ra"n says that we must follow the more stringent approach, and calculate the third מלבר. The Mishna Berura says that the Halacha is like the Pilpula Charifta, although there are those that are *machmir*.

It would appear that the dispute between the Pilpula Charifta and the Ra"n revolved around our question: the Pilpula Charifta

understood that *זה א-לי ואנוהו* is a *דרבנן*, and we therefore say *ספק דרבנן*. While the Ra"n learned that it is *מן התורה*, and we therefore say *ספק דאורייתא לחומרא*.

What Comes First - My *Hiddur* or My Friend's Basic *Chiyuv*?

Now, let us give an example where we can apply the two opinions of this dispute. Suppose you have two candles which you are planning to light on the second night of Chanukah. Your neighbor, on the other hand, cannot afford even one candle. He then comes to you and asks if you can give him one of your candles so that he can be *mekayem* the basic requirement of lighting on Chanukah. So, to set the question up in clear terms: should this fellow give up his *הידור מצוה* of lighting two candles on the second night of Chanukah, just so that his friend can be *mekayem* the essential obligation, which is to light one candle on every night of Chanukah?

Well, it would seem that the answer to this question depends on the aforementioned dispute: if we say that the concept of *הידור מצוה* is a *דאורייתא*, then even in a case like Chanukah, which is only a *דרבנן*, it would appear that he shouldn't be giving his *mitzvah* away; what preference does his friend's obligation have over his own? However, if *הידור מצוה* is only a *דרבנן*, then we can understand why he should give up the extra candle for his friend's basic requirement. Indeed, the Mishna Berura *paskens* that he must give away the candle, which would be difficult to understand according to the Ra"n.

Perhaps we can say that this depends on the first two *pshatim* in *זה א-לי ואנוהו*: According to the first opinion, the most important thing is beautifying the *mitzvos* - which possibly implies that this Yid's obligation to light two candles overrides his responsibility for his friend's basic halachic requirement. However, according to Abba Shaul, the prime requirement is for one to emulate his Creator - meaning that he must first be a *רחום* *הנן* towards his brother, and he should help him perform his *מצוה*.

Alternatively, maybe we can say that even according to the first opinion in the Baraisa in Shabbos, the *mitzvah* of *זה א-לי ואנוהו* is only achievable when our fellow Jew is also able to glorify Hashem as

well. One person enhancing his *avodah* while consciously allowing his fellow to fail to do so is a folly attempt at glorifying and serving the Ribono Shel Olam in a beautiful manner. It smacks of self-indulgence and self-centeredness more than subordination to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Spending Money On Shabbos Food: For Yourself or for Hashem?

There's a *marshal* from the Dubno Maggid that would help us understand this idea:

There was once a wealthy individual who only had one daughter. When the exciting and long-anticipated time had come for his child's wedding, he sent a letter to his two brothers that lived in a far away town. The letter said: "I want you to honor me with your presence at this wedding. But aside from your presence, I want you to honor me by dressing in royalty; spend as much as you can on your attire and transportation. Showing everyone my aristocratic and well dressed family will cause me great pride. Whatever you spend, I will pay back double."

One of the brothers was more of the 'in the clouds' type. Upon reading the letter, he smirked at his wealthy brother's bizarre request, and went on with his life. He never paid much attention to his appearance, so this was a tall order; it would have to wait a bit. The other brother, however, was delighted by the request. He recognized that this was his opportunity to strike it rich. He immediately began purchasing exorbitantly priced garments. He also ensured that the transportation would be of the highest class available, just to multiply his returns on the investment. This process went on for a few weeks; between a new expensive watch, shoes, suit, coat and so on, he managed to rack up a really large bill - all, of course, in order to bring honor to his wealthy brother.

On the morning of the big day, the newfound aristocrat boarded the magnificent limousine which was going to bring him to the wedding. Suddenly, the other brother came running, timidly asking for a ride. He clearly didn't take the letter

seriously; his suit was in tatters, his hat was smashed - he looked like a beggar. The smartly dressed brother reluctantly agreed, although he was clearly repulsed by his brother's appearance. "What a fool he will look like," he thought. "This is going to be a fancy wedding. He will stand out like a sore thumb. Besides, how can he miss such a good chance to make some money?" He then shrugged the thoughts aside. "Well, it's his problem, not mine," he quietly concluded.

There was a big crowd waiting to greet the family of the bride when they arrived. The wealthy brother proudly watched as his seemingly wealthy brother stepped out of the limo. He was relishing all of the oohs and ahhs of the crowd. Then, his schlepper brother stepped out. The crowd went silent in disbelief. He was terribly ashamed that his brother looked like an absolute tramp.

After the wedding, the well-dressed brother approached his wealthy brother with his bill. "You're not getting a single cent from me," he said flatly. His brother stared back at him with utter shock. "But, you promised..." he began.

"I promised to pay you back for the money you spent in my honor. Given that you were perfectly fine with your brother coming dressed like a beggar, I know what your intentions were with all of your purchases... Nothing but greed. If you cared for my honor, you would have never allowed him to embarrass me like he did; you would have insisted on taking him to the tailor and getting him dressed properly."

The Dubno Maggid used this *marshal* to explain the concept that money spent on food for the honor of Shabbos gets paid back by Hashem. How are we able to discern whether the buyer's intentions were for Hashem or for his own personal indulgence? The answer is, we see how he reacts when his fellow Yid asks him for some Shabbos food. Does he offer him a measly piece of dry matzah, or does he open his arms and offer him delicacies? Does he spend hundreds upon hundreds of dollars on his *seudos*, but then only offer five dollars to Tomchei Shabbos, or is he equally as generous with them?

זה א-לי ואנוהו

This is the point we are trying to make here: enhancing *mitzvos* can only be considered beautifying Hashem if it's for Hashem's sake. If it only includes you, then how can you call it **זה א-לי**? You can't only enrich your Shabbos table, your Sukkah and your *mishloach manos*, while never lifting a finger in support of your brother! That would be the opposite of beautifying Hashem - it would just be self-aggrandizement.

There are two well known stories that illustrate this point:

1. *A poor family in Bnei Brak managed to put together all that they needed for Shabbos. On Friday morning, their impoverished neighbor came to their door. "We don't have any food for Shabbos. Please, can you spare us some chicken?" he asked. The woman came to her husband and asked him what to do. They both thought for a moment, until they concluded: "We have all the basic necessities for Shabbos - a couple of small challos, some cholent, some fish... We'll manage without the chicken. Our neighbors, on the other hand, have absolutely nothing - what kind of Shabbos would that be?"*

The woman ran to the fridge to grab her scanty pan of chicken to take over to the neighbors. Upon opening the fridge, she let out a loud shriek - her three year old was inside, blue in the face. Apparently, the child had thought the fridge was a good spot for hide-and-seek. They instantly called Hatzolah and the child was saved.

2. *There were two Rebbe's in the D.P. camps. (One was the Skulener Rebbe; I can't remember who the other one was.) Miraculously, one of them managed to get hold of a few pounds of matzos for Pesach. However, being that there were numerous people there who wished to be mekayem this great mitzvah, and there weren't too many matzos, the Rebbe decided to only provide two matzos per family. This way, each person would be able to have one matzah for the first Seder, and one for the second.*

As the Rebbe was distributing the matzos, a son of the other Rebbe approached him with a surprising request: his father

wished to receive four matzos. At first, he wanted to refuse the request; had they not made up only two per family? But, reluctantly, he chose to give the Rebbe's son as he wished. After all, he couldn't resist a direct demand from a tzaddik of his stature.

When the Leil Ha'seder arrived, this Rebbe was shocked to discover that he had accidentally made a terrible mistake: he had distributed the set of matzos that he had set aside for his own family. Now, after having orchestrated for this great mitzvah to become a reality for a large number of people, he would be the one missing out on the opportunity.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. It was the other Rebbe's son, holding two matzos in his hand. "My father was concerned that out of your sheer kindness, you would end up with no matzos for yourself. That's why he insisted on getting four - in order to safeguard these two for you..."

לשם שמים - מצוות Doing

Perhaps we can use this thought to explain the story of Nakdimen Ben Gurion. The Gemara (Kesubos 66b) says that this fabulously wealthy individual wanted to give to the poor in a manner that wouldn't make them feel inferior. He therefore chose to always walk on brand new carpets wherever he went, and would abandon them after a single tread, so that the poor would be able to take them and sell them for their own benefit. Despite all of this, Nakdimen Ben Gurion was punished: he lost all of his wealth. The Gemara explains that this was because he had his own honor in mind as well.

One can wonder: Nakdimen intended to do such a pure act of benevolence by giving to the poor in an unassuming manner. He may have enjoyed the carpets as well - but, after all, wasn't his overall intention to do a selfless act?

The answer we can offer is that if a person is attempting to reach such a lofty level of *Avodas Hashem*, then he can't put himself into it, even slightly. Beautifying Hashem has to be purely for Hashem's sake, not our own. Acting on behalf of our personal gain and

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honor sullies the beautiful portrait we are trying to paint by enhancing our *Avodas Hashem*.

We must always remember that serving Hashem is not only our personal goal, but the collective goal of the entire nation, and we must do what we can to include each and every Yid in this magnificent mission.

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