

אור פני משה

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

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פרשת חיי שרה

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נתנדב ע"י הר"ר אלימלך פערזיכרט
שליט"א לרגל לידת בנו
יה"ר שיזכה לגדלו לתורה ולחופה
ולמעשים טובים

פרשת חיי שרה

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכָל (בראשית כ"ד א')

And Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything.

The Blessing of "בכל"

The Gemara (Bava Basra 16b) brings several *p'shatim* as to what 'blessings' this *pasuk* is referring to. One *p'shat* says that Hashem had blessed Avraham with a daughter named בכל. The Gemara brings another *p'shat* that the blessing was that Avraham was *not* granted any daughters. Of course, this requires some clarification: how can it be a blessing to not have any daughters?

The *meforshim*¹ explain that we see from the story of Eliezer and Rivka that it was exceedingly difficult to find a proper match for a child of Avraham in those days. Now, it's one thing to find a *shidduch* for the son of Avraham Avinu; he would be the anchor of the home, leading it in the ways and teachings of his father Avraham. Eliezer's job would then be to find a girl that had impeccable *middos* and was willing to follow Yitzchok every step of the way. However, suppose it was Avraham's daughter that needed a *shidduch*; Eliezer wouldn't have had the choice of just going to the local Yeshiva and finding a serious *Talmid Chacham* to marry his master's daughter. In fact, even if he would manage to find a young man with sterling character traits—this boy would still have his own views and opinions about the world and its origins. Finding a young man who would be willing to build a home based on the firm belief that there is but one Creator and we

¹ עי' רמב"ן שכתב וז"ל דרש רבי מאיר שלא היתה לו בת לאברהם, וזו לו לברכה כי לא היה יכול להשיאה רק לבני כנען הארורים, ואם ישלחנה לארצו גם כן תעבוד שם עבודה זרה כמותם, כי האשה ברשות בעלה, ואברהם לא יחפוץ שיצא זרעו הכשר משרה אשתו חוצה לארץ, ואף כי יעבוד עבודה זרה, עכ"ל.

must follow in His divine will—that would be a rather daunting task indeed.

A Portrait that is Larger than the Canvas

The Midrash on this *pasuk* says the following: if someone were to paint a portrait of a מלך בשר ודם (a human king), then naturally, the canvas would be larger than the drawing of the king's face. However, with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, *lehavdil*, it is the opposite: He is far greater than the *shomayim*, which is His 'background'. Of course, this Midrash is not meant to be taken literally, but to get an idea of what the Midrash is conveying to us, we must pay close attention to the *pasuk* that it references after making this statement: "ברכי נפשי את השם" – *Bless, my Soul, Hashem.*

Allow me to explain. Every person is essentially composed of two major factors: a body and a soul. The body is like the canvas; it is there to host the painting—the soul, which is a *Chelek Eloka Mima'al*. Perhaps this is the interpretation of the *pasuk* that the Midrash was alluding to: "ברכי נפשי את השם" – it is the soul that blesses Hashem, not the body, which is but a mere backdrop. The underlying message here is that the *ruchniyus* is always far greater than the *gashmiyus*.

Lessons to be Learnt from Technology

I had this thought recently. The Chofetz Chaim used to say that all of the technological innovations of the world come to teach us something. The camera was invented to actualize our belief that Hashem will one day show us a playback of all of our actions. The tape recorder was invented so that we would relate to the idea of our words being recorded and kept for a later date. So. I was thinking that perhaps we can add the following: our cell phones today are phones—but they are also cameras, calculators, recorders and alarm clocks. Perhaps the lesson we should be taking from them is that the same way this little piece of *gashmiyus* is capable of accomplishing so many different things—then all the more so can we, the ones who embody *ruchniyus*, achieve many great things in our lives. Instead of thinking that we only have 'this talent' or 'that positive trait' and so on, maybe we can begin to appreciate that every *neshama* is a multi-faceted gem

that has the capability of accomplishing many different *mitzvos* in many different fields.

What is This World All About?

The Mesillas Yesharim in *perek* 1 brings two arguments to prove the belief that this world was created for the sole purpose of attaining our reward for the next – as opposed to the false belief that it was simply created for the enjoyment of its inhabitants.

First of all, if the sole purpose of creation was for the people to enjoy – then clearly, creation was a tremendous failure. All around the globe, there are people who are suffering terribly – some people can't put food on the table, others have deadly illnesses, while others are inflicted with emotional issues – and even the ones who have somewhat regular lives are busy running around all day to make a living. All in all, the majority of Earth's inhabitants do not spend their days enjoying what the world has to offer.

Furthermore, if this was indeed the master plan for our world – then why were we granted such elevated souls that constantly yearn for spirituality? It is glaringly obvious that the *neschama* derives absolutely no pleasure from *gashmiyus'dik* enjoyments. The Mesillas Yesharim then gives the following, famous *mashal*:

A simple fellow from a small town got lucky enough to marry a princess. One morning, he wished to please her, so he brought her a delectable breakfast – or at least, what he thought was delectable. A fresh loaf of coarse pumpernickel bread, a few slices of salty herring, and a glass of water – what could be better? He walks through the door with a spring in his step, excited to present his wife with his gourmet meal – but she nearly vomits at the sight of the cheap bread and malodorous fish. She's a princess; she's used to royalty!

Says the Mesillas Yesharim: "The soul doesn't like these earthly pleasures... Rather, it is repulsed by them!"

The Authenticity of the Soul Speaks For Itself

Now, does the Ramcahl need to convince us into believing that we indeed have this elevated soul within? Of course not! We have all experienced our *neshama's* manifestations countless times. Every Yid knows the feeling he gets after doing an act of true *chesed*; the feeling he gets after a good *seder* or *tefillah*. There's nothing like it! Our bodies just begin to melt away from the luminous glow that is swelling from inside. And I believe this is the takeaway from the aforementioned Midrash: *בה' ברכך את אברהם בכל* – the only things that have significance to us are the ones that feed our *neshama*. Our *ruchniyus* is the only thing that counts. Hashem blessed Avraham with *ruchniyus* – and that was 'everything' to him.

A 28-year-old man is visiting his parents when he chances upon an old photo album. He begins leafing through the old book, and he comes across a section filled with pictures from his very own second birthday. One picture shows him grinning from ear to ear over a large chocolate cake, long curly hair all over his face. The next one shows him riding on a carousel horse, his childish smile frozen onto the page. What do you think his thoughts are when he sees these photos? He may feel grateful to his parents for having given him a positive and warm childhood, or something along those lines. But I can sure tell you what he's not thinking: "Wow, that birthday was so much fun. I love chocolate cake! I love going up and down on kiddy rides! I wish I could go back and relive that day. In fact, maybe I should go right now and find a carousel!"

Obviously, if those are his thoughts, then he really needs help. When you are 28, childish fun doesn't talk to you anymore.

Rabbosai, when we come to *Shomayim*, we will be shown photos and videos of ourselves. But they won't necessarily be photos of our two-year-old selves atop a plastic horse; they will depict our 30-year-old selves, smiling broadly as we sat in our brand-new Lexus. They will show us in this or that restaurant, with our agape mouths watering at the sight of the long menu. My friends, when we see these photos, we will be repulsed by the way our entire being had gotten completely consumed by the pleasures and gratifications of this world! At that point, we will no longer have a *guf*; we will be just a

pure *neshama*, and we will be shocked to see ourselves tripping over our feet in hot pursuit of utter futility.

Never Stopping to Climb Higher

We mentioned last week that Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to learn from the beginning of our *parsha* the importance of constantly moving upward without a *hefsek*. The *pasuk* says that Sarah lived for “one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years”, implying that her years were all equal in *Avodas Hashem*. Rav Chaim used to reference the Gemara about R’ Akiva and his decision to turn around after a long journey in order to not make a *hefsek* in his Torah study. This made me think of the following *mashal*:

A big askan from Toronto was marrying off his son in Lakewood’s Bais Faiga hall. The Rabbonim from his hometown felt that out of hakaras hatov for all that he has done for the Toronto community, it was befitting for the members of the kehilla to travel to Lakewood for the wedding. And so, twelve buses filled with Torontonians traveled to New Jersey for the event. One of the buses was filled with the town’s choshuve Rabbonim, and from the beginning of the journey, they were discussing whether they had made the right decision to schlep all the bachurim and yungerleit out of yeshiva for a chasuna. Did their obligations of hakaras hatov really warrant such a large degree of bitul Torah?

Finally, as the twelve buses were a mere three minutes away from Bais Faiga – the bus with the Rabbonim pulled into the gas station at the corner of County Line Road and Madison Avenue. “We’re turning around,” the driver radioed to his colleagues. “The rabbis decided that this trip was a mistake, and they are ordering all of the buses to head back to Toronto.”

Imagine what it was like when R’ Akiva informed his *talmidim* that they were turning around. This wasn’t a group of twelve buses; this was a mass assembly of 12,000 men! Can you imagine the preparation for such a trip? I can get a headache just thinking about the amount of sandwiches that must have been prepared! I’m sure some of the *talmidim* must have been pleading: “Rebbi, we came all

the way here already... Just go in for five minutes! We'll wait for you outside!" But R' Akiva said no. He wanted 24 years of learning, not two sets of twelve. The strength that this great Tanna had is unfathomable!

We must take these two timeless lessons to heart. Our *neshama* is the only thing that is relevant; everything else, other than what we strictly need for our health and survival, is unnecessary – and it limits our eternal reward. If we can try to keep our eyes focused on the goal, and only follow a continuous upward trend, then we will be *zoche* to reap the fruit of our labor, and we will be מזוי השכינה in Olam Habah.

A Side Note: Retaining Our Connection to the Previous Generations

Last week, I was at the levaya of Rav Dovid Kviat zt"l. (This shiur was given in 5773.) It was very painful for me to attend this levaya; Rav Kviat was the last of the seven Rebbeim that I had in the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn who was still in this world. He was a great Talmid Chacham; he was especially well-known for his authorship of the Sukkas Dovid. Let me share with you a story that I had with him a little over a year ago:

Last Sukkos, I took my wife and kids to visit Rav Dovid Kviat. We talked in learning and we farbrenged a little; we had a very nice time. Anyway, at one point Rav Dovid started speaking about the beauty of the generation. He said: "I was in Lodz, I was in Bialistok; I spent time with the Chassidim and the Litvaks of yesteryear. And I'm telling you: this generation is better. Yes, on the individual level, the people were much bigger in those days. The Gedolim were on a much higher madreigah, the Talmidei Chachamim knew a lot more – but the overall picture was nothing like today. These days, you just have to take a look at Boro Park, Williamsburg, Lakewood, Monsey – wherever you turn, there are ehrliche Yidden walking in the streets. There are shuls on every block, and there are always Yidden davening or learning within. When I was growing up, the average Yid did not look like our average Yid looks today."

It was interesting to hear this positive perspective from such an elderly Talmid Chacham who came from a totally different world. But even more interesting was what I experienced at his levaya last week: Rav Yosef Rosenblum, his old friend, was maspid him, and during the half-hour long hesped, he hardly spent any time talking about Rav Dovid. Rather, he spent a long time giving strong mussar about our current generation: he spoke about the internet, the phones, the distractions. He spoke about people making lavish Bar Mitzvahs while they abstain from paying tuition; he demanded that people learn to be more ehrlich about their financial priorities. And the whole time I was thinking to myself: how does this hesped relate to Rav Dovid Kviat, whom I knew had a very positive attitude towards our generation?

But the truth is that the hesped was very befitting for the levaya of a Yid like Rav Dovid Kviat. Rav Dovid was more of a private person; his interaction with other Yidden was mostly in shul. Rav Yosef Rosenblum, on the other hand, has people knocking on his door all day, pouring out their souls about all of their horror stories – especially ones that are unique to this generation. He hears some of our greatest shortcomings firsthand. Of course, Rav Yosef would agree to Rav Dovid that as a whole, we're better off than we were in the past; but he understood that as we lose the last few vestiges of the previous generation, we must strengthen ourselves to maintain some of the levels of kedusha that the great Yidden of old possessed. Rav Rosenblum wanted us to recognize that as this Galus draws to a close, we must hang on to the interactions and experiences that we had with Yidden like Rav Dovid Kviat—who managed, in a very unassuming way, to impart to us the true beauty of living life completely for Hashem with utmost purity, and not getting impressed by the what the secular world has to offer.

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