



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKafa & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

In memory of R' Shmuel Shmelka ben HaRav Moshe Kizelnik z"l

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THE BAAL CHESED AS A PIPELINE OF BERACHA

The Gemara (Shabbos 53) tells a story of a woman who died in childbirth, leaving her husband to care for the newborn. In that pre-formula, it was common for people to hire wet-nurses, other women to nurse the baby. This particular father however was very poor and had no funds to make such an arrangement. Yet, Hashem in His great mercy made a miracle and caused this man to lactate so that the baby would survive. In discussing this miracle, the Sages debate how we should view it: One opinion praises the man for we see that he was deserving of such a miraculous intervention, yet the opposing view openly criticizes him; were he truly worthy, Hashem would have sent him the money instead of changing the natural order of Creation.

The Ben Ish Chai (Sefer Ben Yehoyada) takes an interesting approach in understanding the Sages' analysis of the miracle: Although the first opinion realized that this was something unnatural, it was necessary to demonstrate that he was truly a tzadik. If he had suddenly seen an increase in income, we might attribute it to his tefillos which can accomplish a lot, even if the person isn't worthy, by virtue of the fact that an ordinary person's prayers ascend to the Heavens along with those of the righteous. By changing nature instead, Hashem gave His public stamp of approval on this man.

If you think about it, it makes sense, but his approach to the second opinion is striking. Those who criticize the miracle do so because by giving him milk instead of money, Hashem denied him the opportunity to give to someone else. Had he been able to support a poor woman (which most wet nurses were, by definition as it was considered a lower class job), he would have earned the merit and played a part in giving to someone else. This would be much greater than any miracle. Only because this fellow wasn't deserving, Hashem had to change the course of nature so that the infant should live.

When Eliezer set out to find a wife for Yitzchok, he looked for someone who excelled in chesed. While chesed is a tremendous midah, there are many good attributes to look for, so why did Eliezer focus on this specifically? Perhaps the answer is that in order to qualify as a mother for K'lal Yisroel, one must be a conduit of the shefa of beracha. If Eliezer wouldn't have seen this in Rivka, despite all her other shining qualities, it might have indicated that she wasn't worthy of being a pipeline of beracha.

Hashem gives us much beracha in our life. Whatever resources we are blessed with (financial or otherwise) are given to us to share with others. It is an opportunity for us to become a conduit of beracha for others. Given the option, why wouldn't we want to choose to do so?

אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא: מימיהן של אבותינו לא פָּרְשָׁה ישיבה מהם. היו במצרים ישיבה עמהם, שנאמר: "לך ואספת את זקני ישראל". היו במדבר ישיבה עמהם, שנאמר: "אספה לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל". אברהם אבינו, זקן ויושב בישיבה, שנאמר: "ואברהם זקן בא בימים". יצחק אבינו, זקן ויושב בישיבה היה, וכו' . (יומא כח:)

Our forefathers sat in yeshiva, constantly pursuing advancement in the study of Torah wisdom. This is expressed in several places. One of them is regarding Avraham Avinu, about whom the Torah tells us was a 'zakein' who was 'ba ba'yamim'. The latter expression certainly means that he had reached an advanced age. Therefore, understanding 'zakein' to mean old would be superfluous and we are relegated to the other understanding of the word, which means one who acquires wisdom, implying that even in his old age, Avraham sought to increase his Torah wisdom.

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the Rosh Kollel...

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The current situation worldwide is still frightening. Please increase your commitment to Torah study, tzedaka and chesed, and of course daven for all the captives, soldiers and the general situation.

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- Rabbi David Lewin

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Sugyas ha' Sedra

WHEN IS MINCHA ?

Chazal tell us that although the avos established the three daily tefilos, Chazal mandated that their times are patterned after the daily korbanos (which we no longer have). The mishna in Pesachim (58a) tells us that the afternoon korban was slaughtered 2 1/2 [halachic] ours before nightfall although if there was a need, it was slaughtered as early as half an hour after chatzos such as when erev Pesach fell out on Friday (in order to facilitate the slaughter and roasting of everyone's korban Pesach). This earlier time is known as mincha gedolah while the seemingly ideal time of 2 1/2 hours before nightfall is known as mincha ketana. Since our tefilos are also in place of the korbanos, the Rambam rules (see Beis Yosef) that one should l'chatchila daven mincha only after the time of mincha ketana has arrived.

It is worth mentioning the words of the Gra (Sh'nos Eliyahu, Berachos perek 4) who explains that the reason we call the afternoon tefilah "mincha" is because the ideal time to daven is closer to the end of the day, when the mincha (flour) offering was brought on the mizbayach. He maintains that just like one who davens k'vasikin ("neitz" - at sunrise) davens at the most optimal time, so too, the most optimal time for mincha is closer to the end of the day (provided of course, he finishes before shkiah)!

The Tur and Rosh however understand that since the main purpose of tefilah is service of the heart and that the times of korbanos were used only to determine the right time to daven, one may l'chatchila daven as early as mincha gedola. While some are careful to daven only after mincha ketana, the consensus of Ashkenazi poskim is to be lenient, especially in yeshivos and kollelim when doing so would interrupt the regular learning schedule, and many of the Sefardic authorities concur and indeed, many sefardic yeshivos daven mincha gedola. Certainly, if one foresees a situation that he might not be able to daven later with a minyan, he should daven mincha early.

If one is davening mincha gedola, he must ascertain that the right time has arrived and not began Ashrei or Krias HaTorah (on Shabbos or a fast day) before. (Poskim. See Ishei Yisroel) B'dieved, if one davened mincha before this, but it was after chatzos, he should not repeat shemoneh esrei, since some opinions maintain that the 'extra' half hour is only to ensure that one doesn't daven before chatzos and was only added as a precaution, l'chatchila. The poskim dispute whether the half hour is thirty minutes on the clock, or a half of one halachic hour (which is determined by dividing the total daylight hours into twelve parts) and recommend waiting the longer of the two (i.e. a minimum of 30 minutes, but waiting longer in the summer).

The Rema writes that in places where the custom is to daven Maariv as early as plag (one and a quarter halachic hours before nightfall) they should be careful to daven mincha before plag mincha. This is an entirely separate discussion, but the Rema concludes that b'dieved, or under extenuating circumstances, one may daven mincha until tzeis

SPARKS OF SHABBOS

The gemara tells us that when Hashem gave us the mitzva of Shabbos, He instructed Moshe Rabeinu to tell us about it, because, when a person gives a gift, he should inform the recipient about it. Rashi explains that the reason for this is so that he isn't embarrassed and refuse to accept it. Telling him, demonstrates the importance of the gift. If Hashem told us about Shabbos, it is incumbent upon us to realize how lucky we are to have been chosen as the recipients, and that Shabbos is a lot more than a well deserved rest at the end of a long week, but a tremendous gift and opportunity for us to come closer to the One who gave it to us!

L' maaseh...

A former student of R' Shmuel Auerbach had left yeshiva and was no longer a Torah observant Jew. One day, R' Shmuel called him out of the blue and told him that he would like to come visit him. Embarrassed to let his rebbe know how far he had strayed, he acquiesced and made up a time a few days later. At the appointed time, R' Shmuel showed up with his gabaim and other students with an entire festive meal and they sat and spoke while they ate. When it came time for bentching, R' Shmuel placed a cup of wine in front of this student and told him to lead bentching. Knowing that as a mechalel Shabbos, he would render the wine prohibited, he declined the honor and told the Rosh Yeshiva to give it to someone else. R' Shmuel was insistent and he didn't know what to do until he remembered learning that if one fully commits to do teshuva, he is considered a tzadik, and so in his heart of hearts, he regretted his ways and made a firm decision to return to shemiras Shabbos. Those who knew R' Shmuel testified that he never bentched with a cup of wine during the week, and this was likely exactly what he intended, and indeed this student went on to become a talmid chacham and marbitz Torah of note.

ha'kochavim. The Mishna Berura takes issue with the wording of the Rema and explains that he only means until bein ha'shemashos which is about a quarter of an hour before tzeis ha'kochavim, meaning that in places where tzeis ha'kochavim is 45 minutes after shki'ah, one could daven up to half an hour after shki'ah, under extenuating circumstances. (This is not dependent on the opinion of the rishonim such as Rabeinu Tam who maintain that there are two shkia'hs; many earlier acharonim understood that even according to the opinion of the geonim, bein ha'shemashos does not necessarily begin at shki'ah.)

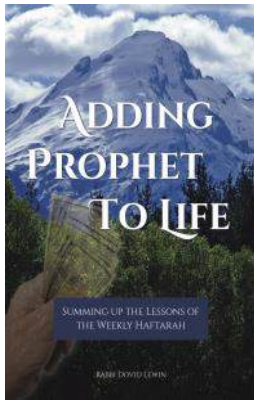
However, the opinion of the Gra, Baal HaTanya and others, is that bein hashemashos begins at shki'ah and one should not daven mincha any time thereafter. Therefore, the Mishna Berura rules that one should rather daven mincha without a minyan, than with a minyan in which he will finish his own shemoneh esrei after shki'ah. In the Biur Halacha, he recommends davening mincha after shki'ah on condition that if it is not a valid mincha, it should count as maariv and that his later maariv will be considered a makeup for the lost mincha ("tefilas tashlumin").

However, not everyone understands that the end time for mincha is shki'ah. The Pnei Yehosua writes that even according to Rabeinu Tam who maintains that there are two shki'ahs, one should have to daven mincha before the first one (i.e. sunset as we know it) since the blood of the korbanos is automatically invalidated at the first shki'ah. However, since tefilah is also asking for rachamim and a service of the heart, Chazal instituted that one can daven until just before tzeis ha'kochavim since the offering of the korban continued into the night.

As we mentioned, the Mishna Berura writes that one must finish davening before shki'ah. Indeed, this was the opinion of the Chazon Ish who maintained that if one isn't sure he'll finish, he shouldn't begin davening either. Others, however disagree. See for example the Aruch Hashulchan who cites Tosfos who says that although Hashem only gets angry for a moment, had Bilam began cursing the Jewish people right then, he would have been able to continue for many minutes. In this author's opinion however, it is difficult to understand how one can equate aggravating someone who is angry to davening to the Ribono shel Olam, unless we say like the Pnei Yehoshua, that tefilah is bakshas rachamim and therefore once one has engaged the Ribono shel Olam in conversation, He's not going to end the dialogue, because the person is already in the door ('midah tovah merubah').



In shemoneh esrei we say "re'eh b'anyeinu" asking Hashem to see our suffering and redeem us. This is known as the beracha of geulah. The truth is, however, that we have other berachos for the geulah; we daven for kibutz galiyos (ingathering from the Diaspora), and for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the restoration of Dovid's reign. Rashi (Megilla `17b) explains that the essence of the beracha of "go'el Yisroel" is a tefilla that we should be spared of all the tragedies and calamities that we unfortunately experience throughout the generation. This is true on a personal level and on a communal level. The difficulty in the interpretation is that while we begin beseeching Hashem to see our suffering ("re'eh v'anyeinu"), the concluding words of the beracha ("go'el Yisroel") are definitely centered around geulah. Perhaps we can suggest that our personal suffering and certainly communal suffering is supposed to make us realize that we are in golus and so after focusing on our own pains, we can relate to the pain of the Shechina in golus and beseech Hashem to redeem us, so that He too can return to His home!



DIVREI HA'NAVI - ADDING PROPHET TO LIFE

After Eliezer arrives at the well and davens that Hashem send him a shidduch for Yitzchok in a way that he will know, and Rivka arrives and is clearly the one, he proceeds to follow her home to negotiate with her family. After Eliezer relates the entire story and all the clear hashgacha he saw along the way, both Rivka's father and brother were clearly impressed and proclaimed "m'Hashem yatza ha'davar" - this is clearly from Hashem! After Eliezer presented them with gifts that Avraham had sent, he went to sleep for the night and in the morning, began to say his goodbyes, getting ready to leave with the kallah. Yet, both Rivka's father and brother tried to stop them. Besuel, really wanted to prevent this marriage from happening and so the Ribono shel Olam had to remove him from the picture, but Rivka's brother also tried to negotiate that they should wait a year, or at least close to that, but Eliezer was adamant and Rivka herself was determined to join him.

What happened? Just hours earlier, both Besuel and Lavan testified to the fact that this was clearly the ratzon Hashem, and now they decided to put a stop to it? How did they lose sight of this so quickly?

HaRav Shmuel Birnbaum zt"l explains that this happens all the time; many of us have experiences or hear stories that should inspire us. Often they do, but this is only because it is coupled with a lifelong goal of avodas Hashem. Inspiration only lasts if a person is working on himself to fix his midos and come closer to Hashem. The vehicle to do this is Torah and mitzvos. Besuel and Lavan weren't trying to work on themselves or come closer to Hashem, so the inspiration didn't last.

In support, R' Shmuel cites two proofs from krias Yam Suf. First of all, the entire world saw the yad Hashem at krias Yam Suf. Yet, right away, Amaleik attacked us and others sought to destroy us. This is because seeing the yad Hashem only helps fuel the fire of spiritual growth, but doesn't do anything if there is nothing to begin with.

Chazal tell us that at Krias Yam Suf, even a lowly maidservant saw Hashem with greater clarity than Yechezkel HaNavi. If so, every Jew should have become a navi, yet this was not the case. The answer is that Yechezkel worked on himself to become a navi; the Rambam writes how a person can become a navi. It doesn't always work, because not everyone can be zocheh to nevuah, but a navi must clearly prepare himself to be one and this was Yechezkel's life mission. The average Jew leaving Mitzrayim didn't aspire to become a navi and didn't do anything to work on getting there.

In our haftarah, we read of Adoniyahu's attempt to steal the throne. The posuk tells us that his father Dovid "never said why did you do such and such", adding that Adoniyahu was a handsome fellow. On the surface, it seems that the navi is criticizing Dovid for failing in the chinuch of his son, and had Dovid been critical of Adoniyahu, he would have grown up to be a fine young man.

The Ben Ish Chai lightens the criticism and explains that the reason why Dovid avoided criticizing him was because, as the posuk says, Adoniyahu was very beautiful and the reason why he was so, was because he took after his mother who was an eishes yefas to'ar taken in wartime. Dovid knew that if he criticized his son, Adoniyahu would have turned around and criticized him for marrying an eishes yefas to'ar.

The Gra is quoted as explaining the posuk to mean that Adoniyahu never envisioned his father Dovid in front of him, imagining what his father might think about his behavior. Had Adoniyahu focused on how his father would react if he saw him, he would have acted differently, but he didn't. Imagining how others might view a person's actions helps keep him in check and is a key ingredient for someone who is trying to grow, but Adoniyahu wasn't.

We all experience siyata di'Shmaya and hear inspirational stories, especially in Eretz Yisroel in the midst of the current situation. If we are growth oriented and trying to come closer to Hashem, then the stories and bursts of inspiration can help us, but they cannot be relied upon as the sole driving force of growth.