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# PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS - KEDOSHIM



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR

## MAKING TORAH YOURS

I want to begin with a small story that the Gateshead Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Avraham Gurwitz shlita, said over from his grandfather. He's a grandson of the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rav Eliyahu Lopian, and *be'ezras Hashem yisbarach* on Ches Tammuz my granddaughter is going to be marrying his grandson, Rav Aryeh Leib Kaplan. Rav Eliyahu Lopian used to arouse the *olam* to do the proper *avodah* during the days of *sefiras haomer*. He used to say that there are 48 ways of how to acquire Torah. Many people may not realize that there are two ways to study Torah. Most people who study Torah do just that, they study Torah. They study a lot of things. They study Torah, too. But there's another way of studying Torah, so that the Torah becomes an acquisition. One of the most amazing *chassadim* that Hashem granted the Am Yisrael is that a Jew, a simple, *pashute* Jew, could actually make an acquisition and receive a stake in the Torah to the point that the Torah becomes his Torah. Before that, when you start to study, it's the Torah of Hashem, but if a person invests in the 48 ways of acquiring Torah, the Torah can actually become his. Imagine the amount of Torah Rav Chaim Kanievsky acquired.

The way you acquire it is by toiling on it, investing time, effort, your mind, your physical body, giving up creature comforts. The Torah can then become yours. It's *moradig* when you think about Rav Chaim. When he came upstairs he must have looked like a walking, talking *sefer Torah*, nothing less. Better than a *sefer Torah*. He had Bavli. He had Yerushalmi. He had Sifri, Sifra, Tosefta. It was all there right in front of him. Not *stam*.

I'll tell you a story. A man decided to put out a *sefer*, a rare *sefer*, very rare *sefer*. It's called *Ohr Pnei Moshe* (R' Moshe HaLevi Sofer, 1720-1806) and there are a lot of places mentioned in that *sefer*, and he doesn't always write where you could find the source. Somebody told him to go to Rav Chaim. Instead of spending days and weeks on finding the sources, go ask Rav Chaim. So he brought a list of the *ma'arei mekomos* that he couldn't find and he brought them to Rav Chaim and showed Rav Chaim the papers. "Can you tell me where these *ma'arei mekomos* are?" Rav Chaim looks at it and

says, “The first one is here. The second one is here. The third one is here.” Then he turns to the man and says, “Are you putting out the *Ohr Pnei Moshe*?” That’s what he said to him. “Are you putting out the *Ohr Pnei Moshe*?” Can you imagine that?! The man almost had a heart attack on the spot. That means it wasn’t one of R’ Chaim’s *chovos* that he learned. It wasn’t one of his daily learning *sedarim*. But he figured it out from some of *ma’arei mekomos* on the list, not even from all the list, from only some of the list he figured it out what *sefer* it was. *Moradig*.

### RAV ELCHONON’S AMAZING ADVICE

Rav Elya Lopian would tell people that during the days of *sefirah*, it’s a time to work on the 48 *kinyanim*, and on the 49th day of *sefirah*, you review all the 48. Now, one of the people who was there when Rav Gurwitz said this speech raised his hand and asked, “How is it *shayach* in 48 days to acquire all these things? How could you acquire one *kinyan* in a day? It’s not *shayach kemat*.” So Rav Avraham explained to him with a story.

He said he once heard from Rav Nosson Wachtfogel (1910-1998), the *mashgiach* in Lakewood, that when he was a *bachur*, he began to learn the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. Many people have started *Mesillas Yesharim*. That is based on the *breisa*, on the teaching of Rav Pinchas ben Yair, and it says each level, level by level by level, what you go through to reach the *shpitz*. Rav Nosson said he was having a very difficult time. He couldn’t get to the next *perek* and go forward to the second chapter because he felt he didn’t yet acquire the first chapter. Then the next thing happened the next time. So he didn’t know what to do. He felt that he hadn’t acquired the first attribute and was going to the second one.

He went to express his disappointment to Rav Elchonon Wasserman (1874-1941), *Hashem yinkom damo*, the great *talmid* of the Chafetz Chaim, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the Baranovitch Rosh Yeshivah, and he told him, “I feel very terrible about this. How do I go *vaiter* in *Mesillas Yesharim*?” Anyone who ever learned *Mesillas Yesharim* dealt with this problem. Rav Elchonon told him that for every single *middah* that exists out there, it’s possible for a person to acquire it 100% or a person can acquire it 5%. It’s not everything or nothing. Rav Elchonon told him, “Where the *doros*, the generations have become very small, so it’s enough to go forward to the next chapter in the *Mesillas Yesharim* and climb the ladder with an acquisition of 5%. If you have 5% you can go on. And every single *middah* is the same way.”

Rav Avraham told this to the man who asked him the question. It’s the same thing with the *kinyan*, the 48 ways of acquiring Torah. Of course, the days of *sefiras haomer* are not enough to acquire the

48 ways, 100%. But you don't have to get 100%. You have to get some percent and then you move on.

Now what's the lesson over here for us? Many of us go through *sefiras haomer*, and if you're a *chassid*, you make a big fuss about the *leshem yichud*. They're into that. But besides for the *leshem yichud* and a few *kapitelach* of *Tehillim* afterwards, *sefirah* is not used as it could be. And if you're a Litvak, many of them go through *sefiras haomer* making the counting in a clear fashion. *Hayom*, today is *chamishah asar yom shehem* and then say the week. You say the *harachaman* that Hashem should have *rachmanus* and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash in the near future. The *emes* is, you have to know, that the 49 days of *sefirah* are a very unique *zman* and it's a time of tremendous *avodah*. I want to share with you an insight that you may not have known.

### CHANGES ARE CHANCES TO REFRESH KOCHOS

Did you ever notice in the world that everything is not the same? Hashem created the world in such a fashion where things are always changing. It doesn't stay daytime all day long. Day changes. First, it's morning when the sun comes up. Then, there's midday, when the sun is really bright. Then the sun starts to set. As it gets closer to night, it gets darker. Hashem is always flipping the *zman*. You know every night we sing the praises of Hashem that He's *meshaneh itim*. Have you ever thought what is the great praise that Hashem is *meshaneh itim*? Okay, I can think of a lot of things Hashem does for me. What is the great praise that Hashem is *machalif es hazmanim*. What is the *groise zach* here?

You have to realize that this is one of the biggest *chassadim* that Hashem does with human beings. Human beings get bored quickly. Human beings have a very difficult time retaining their attention. They always need change. You know what Hashem did? Hashem established years. Everybody knows a new year, a new *zman*. Today was beautiful, the first day of the *zman*. Everybody came to *davening*. I was thinking: *meshaneh itim*. If it would have been last month, we wouldn't have been *zocheh*. But we were *zocheh baruch Hashem*. There were a lot of people who came on time. Hashem changes the times. He has years. He has months. He has weeks. He has days. There is summer. There is winter. There is a day. There is a night. There is spring. There is fall. Shlomo Hamelech thought about this and he said *לכל זמן*, everything has a *zman*, *ועת לכל חפץ*, תחת השמים. There is a time for this, a time for that, and he lists, you know how many things he lists over there? 28 different *zmanim*. Unbelievable.

Now a person is *יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו*. A person is challenged and overcome by his *yetzer hara*. Human nature is that as soon as

something becomes repetitive, his interest, his excitement, begins to wane. My Rebbi (R' Meir Halevi Soloveichik) used to say that if he had the ability and he would have a printer, he would print the first word of every page of the *gemara* in its own box. Have you ever seen a *mesechta* where the first word on each page is printed in the box by itself? My Rebbi said there is a big psychology behind it. It's a *chiddush*. Ah! It's a new thing. The second you turn the page, the *hischadshus* goes off. The *frishkeit* goes off. He would suggest putting the first word on every page in a box so you imagine that you're starting something new every day.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu creates these *zmanim* in order that a person utilizes his *kochos*, refreshes his *kochos* and brings out things to function in the best possible time, best possible way. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created different times of the year and these times are like wells, from which a person derives unique *kochos* to strengthen and develop himself.

The *kadmonim* present a *marshal*, and the *marshal* goes like this: There was a *melech* that was traveling in the desert with some of his people and they ran out of water. The servants were trying to figure out how they were going to get water. So there were two schools of thought. One school of thought was that a couple of guys are going to take off on their own on the fast animals and they're going to go quickly to find a *yishuv*, a settlement, and they'll fill up their barrels with water. And some servants said maybe they can dig for water. There is water underground. Let's figure out where the water is around here, we'll go looking, and we'll produce water from underground.

The *kadmonim* say what's the difference between these two ways? From the king's perspective it makes no difference. All he wants is water. He doesn't care if you're bringing barrels or if you dig for water, but there's a very big difference. The difference is that once the *avadim* - who race off on camels or horses to fetch water - secure it, no *roshem* is left behind. There's no impression left. It's a one-time episode, and it remains a historical event. It's just a story. In 10 years they'll tell a story, that we were in the desert and we rode off. But the *chachamim* who would be *matzliach* to produce water from the ground, from then and onward anybody who travels in that desert, in that place, will have water and from where to drink and from where to be nourished. The impression that it will have on others will be unimaginable.

## MOADIM PROVIDE OPENINGS TO KOCHOS

Nu. You have to know that all the *moadim* that Hashem granted us are like that. They are not episodes in history. Many of us look at it like that. It happened a long time ago. What does it have to

do with me? *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was Hashem opening a tremendous wellspring in the world for us. He opened a *pesach* to *shamayim*, a doorway to amazing *kochos* and many miracles that happened during Pesach. We say that in the *haggadah*. Does anybody know where? It says at the end of the *haggadah* ארבע עשרה הפלאות בלילה בראש ("Many were the miracles [You performed] long ago, at night"). *Rov nissim*. Do you know why? Because on this night Hashem opened up a window, opened up a doorway and changed the course of history.

Similarly, you have to know that *sefiras haomer* is such a wellspring with such an opening that we can't begin to imagine what it was. Let us think and observe what was *sefiras haomer*. Most of us don't know. Most of us have no idea what was the well, the doorway, the huge window that Hashem opened up for Klal Yisrael.

### **SEFIRAH ALLOWS FOR TESHUVAH, BIG TIME**

Now, what's unique about *sefiras haomer*? This period is framed by two great days of *kedushah*: Pesach at its onset and Shavuot - *kabbalas haTorah* - at its culmination. What happened to Klal Yisrael during this period of time? What did this period of time prepare Am Yisrael for? You know what? To be fit, to graduate and attain the level that was needed for the purpose of *yetzias Mitzrayim* to come to fruition. The whole purpose of *yetzias Mitzrayim* was to get to *kabbalas haTorah*. בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלוקים על ההר הזה. That was the whole purpose. Could you imagine what it took for Klal Yisrael to start out from *yetzias Mitzrayim* and reach that goal of *kabbalas haTorah*? Was it a simple walk in the park? No. Klal Yisrael that were in *Mitzrayim* were at the bottom level. It's unbelievable. They were so deep into the *tumah* of *Mitzrayim*. Everybody knows the famous Arizal that says they had to get out of there in a hurry because if they would have stayed in *Mitzrayim* one more moment, they would have fallen to the 50th level of *tumah* and *chas veshalom* there would have been no future for them. Can you imagine that? I can't imagine that. It was an emergency salvation.

So we have Klal Yisrael at the lowest level that's imaginable, one step away from the 50th level of *tumah*, and from that position they had to begin to climb and create such a *mahapeichah*, such *iberkerenish* (overturning). They had to get to the *madreigah* of *kabbalas haTorah*. It says ואתה הראת לדעת, Hashem was able to show you the deepest secrets to communicate with Him face to face in a way that's unimaginable for us. Klal Yisrael came to a level where they were able to see spoken words. What does that mean? That means they were able to see words? You hear words. You don't see them. But it was so amazingly clear to them that they were able to reach the state of רואה את הנשמע. Unbelievable!

Not only that, they were *mekabel* the Torah in such a way that all their sins were wiped away, all their sicknesses went away. Everything. They became completely changed human beings. The level of *nekius*, of purity, that they reached was unbelievable. Nu.

It comes out that during these 49 days, the greatest change ever for Klal Yisrael to experience actually happened. The turnover that happened during these 49 days is simply mind boggling. And that became a wellspring that was dug for us, for me, for you and every one of us. Wherever you stand, wherever you are, you're able, during these days, to elevate yourself and acquire something that's unbelievable.

We should all think for a moment. We all know ourselves. Every one of us has bad habits. Do you have any bad habits? Not such great habits. Everybody has habits that he's not proud of, but they're very difficult to change. Everybody knows that. Everyone that I've met in my life tells me, "Oh you know how Rav Yisrael Salanter says how it's easier to learn *shas* than to change a *middah*?" I say, "Did you ever learn *shas*? How do you know that? Do you want to try learning *shas*?" It's not easy, but there are people who do change. I know a lot of people that have changed. I'm sure you know a lot of people that have changed. *You* may have even changed, surprise, surprise. Even if you didn't change 100%, I know people who have made amazing changes.

But you have to know what it takes to change. What's the key to change? You know what most people think? They go to the *rav* and say, "*Oy vey iz mir*, אוי לי מיוצרי אוי לי מיצרי." I used to have a *talmid*, that whenever I called him, that's how he used to start off the conversation. "Woe unto me from Hashem. Woe unto me from my *yetzer hara*." I used to say to him, "You have nice lines, cute little jokes." He had *gevaldige* lines with his sense of humor.

He actually called me yesterday, this fellow, and he said, "Do you remember there was a fellow who worked at a pizza shop in Cleveland, someone that you tried to be *mekarev* 40 years ago? I said, "Yes, I remember. Of course I remember him." I remember that he was a Modern kind of guy. He came from Eretz Yisrael. He was a real pizza shop guy. You know, that's the best job he could have gotten, but he was the most *aidele* guy. I said, "Come. Let's learn. Let's have *shaychus*." I was *mekarev* him. And he let me. Not too much but he let me. He told me, "He died yesterday, the guy." A young guy. But he said, "You know he *frummed* out very much." I told him, "I didn't know." I haven't seen him for some years. He said, "He *frummed* out. He didn't walk without a hat. He *davened* with a minyan three times a day. He was *mechazek* himself, *mamash shteiged*." Pshhh. He changed. He said, "I'm impressed by him."

I'm impressed by him because he wasn't like that when he was a kid. He became like that." *Baruch Hashem*, he was *zoiche*.

## THE KEY TO CHANGING

People do change. You know what the key to changing is? Not to go to the *rav*. The key to changing anything you want is, you have to make an inner decision, "I'm going to stop. I'm going to change my ways." There are many people who have a very difficult time getting up for *davening* in the morning, very normal, but they never decided they want to change. They never decided that. They'd like to, against their will, if they're not tired, under the right conditions. You have to know without that inner decision to change, you'll never, ever change! When you see somebody who went from a *frei* person to a *frum* person it's because he made an inner decision to change, and he changed hundreds of things in his life, which is mind boggling. I'm impressed by that like nobody's business!

I remember being in the *kiruv* world and thinking to myself, if these guys can change, why can't I change? And then I said: what's the difference? I said: I've got to give myself my own *mussar*. I tell them, "Make one *kabbalah*, make a decision. You're going to start to change." I started myself and it actually worked.

What Rav Yisrael Salanter meant was that you're not going to accomplish anything without making an inner decision. Saying *Tehillim*. People think you could say *Tikun Klali* and that'll change you. People think, yeah, definitely. I've told many people who called me and said, "How do I change bad habits?" I said, "*Tehillim* can help you, but you first have to decide I'm going to change. Not that you want Hashem to change. That *you* want to change, and you accept on yourself to change." And then when you do that, you accept that upon yourself, then you say the *Tehillim* and then you will be empowered. Then you will have *siyata deshmaya*. You can't change the simplest things in you unless you make that decision.

Klal Yisroel went from being *ovdei avodah zarah* to the pinnacle of *kabbalas haTorah* - just mind-boggling! But they made that decision.

There is a *sefer* called the *Akeidah Yitzhak* written by a *kadmon* Rav Yitzhak Arama (1420-1494), and on the *passuk* of *ואשא אתכם* *על כנפי נשרים*, "Hashem says, 'I lifted you up on the wings of eagles,'" he says, that for Klal Yisrael to accomplish what they accomplished during these seven weeks of *sefirah* was simply impossible. It wasn't *shayach* for all the changes that they experienced to take place, even if they would have counted 49 years. It's not *shayach*, he says. If they had an *avodah retzufah* of 350 days and seven times *bederech hateva* they could not have changed and divested themselves of the

*tumah* of Mitzrayim, he says. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave them *siyata deshmaya*. Hashem created a doorway, an opening, *lema'aleh* from all *darkei hateva*. Hashem says ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, “I lifted you up above everything, and I carried you out on eagles’ wings.” You accomplished this in seven weeks, something you couldn’t have accomplished in 50 years!

Rabbosai, every year during *sefirah*, those *kochos* come back. Every year Hashem offers us an opportunity to change in all areas. In all areas! A person could change. A person can divest themselves from their bad habits or actions. The first thing is you have to say, “I want to change,” and you have to invest some effort in making that change come about. That’s *hischadshus*. A person gets married. It’s a tremendous time of *hischadshus*. Sadly, many people are foolish and they use that time to go down and they lose whatever they gained. A few of the wise ones use that opportunity to actually grow, actually elevate themselves, become higher.

Let us focus on this. Let us tell Hashem we want to change and ask Hashem for *siyata deshmaya*, and make an effort. Make a little effort, whatever you can, to make the changes happen and come draw from this wellspring and enhance your life.

### IN SUMMARY

The days of *Sefirah* are an amazing opportunity for *hischadshus*, during which we can rise to the level of acquiring the Torah that we learn, making it ours. The Bnei Yisrael changed themselves from being people who were *ovdei avodah zarah* to being people who were fitting for *Kabbalas HaTorah*. They worked very hard to achieve that level, and Hashem gave them *siyata deShmaya*; without it they could not have been successful. This created a “well” from which we can drink the same waters: Whatever level we are on, we can elevate ourselves during the *Sefirah*, every year. The key to change is making an inner decision to change! To tap into the spiritual *kochos* that are available, we should decide that we want to improve and then tell Hashem, “I want to change.” He will then give us the *siyata deShmaya* that we need. This week I will (*bli neder*) learn Torah without any conversation or other interruption for a half hour, or pick a mitzvah connected to *limud haTorah* and do it with greater focus.

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