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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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Parashat Yitro

Ask Your Father and He Will Tell You; Your Elders and They Will Say to You

Questions:

- 1- Our *parasha* states (19:12-13) that Hashem told Moshe to warn the Jewish Nation not to ascend nor touch *Har Sinai*, and that anyone who did so would be put to death. Yet in *pasuk* 21, we find that Hashem once again asked Moshe to warn *Bnei Yisrael* not to ascend the mountain. Why was it necessary to warn them twice?
- 2- In *pasuk* 23, Moshe responded to Hashem's request to warn the Jews, by stating that there was no need to do so; Hashem knows exactly what needs to be done – why did Moshe say it wasn't necessary?
- 3- How did Hashem convince Moshe that he nevertheless needed to warn them?

The Phenomenon of Our Generation

In our generation, the "generation of *teshuvah* (repentance)," there has been an appearance of a number of new trends. There are men who have donned white clothing; women who wear black shawls; there are women who are especially scrupulous and even wear black scarfs. Similarly, there are trends that affect man's physical features. For example, there are men who perform *teshuvah* and do not give any thought to their appearance; they grow unkempt *peyot* and an unkempt beard. Sometimes they dress in a disheveled manner and do not think about how this disgusts their wives and negatively affects their marital harmony. This also applies to educating their children; they forcibly educate them in a way that differs from the norm, assuming that this is the Torah way. Sadly, they are well off target. This is one of the major reasons for children breaking away from the Torah world; a result of being educated in a way that lacks sensitivity and understanding for the child's soul. Rather, everything begins and ends with the father's perspective and his desires for his son, despite the fact that what he wants is not compatible with the strengths and ability of his son. For example, he might force a child to pray at sunrise or force him to immerse even in a cold mikvah. I have heard that there are those who even immerse their **babies** in a cold mikvah in order to transform them into angels. There are various other strange practices as well. **Indeed, we must stress that everything they do stems from a pure heart that wishes to do the Will of Hashem;** however, they err in their methods. This is due to the fact that they do not have anyone to constantly guide them along their path. On the flip side, there can be a *baal teshuvah* who has a lot of charisma and energy and turns into a guide for the masses, despite the fact that he himself errs in his own path. He simply continues to ingrain all of his mistakes into others. This is one of the plagues of our generation, that many *baalei teshuvah* who are still totally unfit to instruct and guide the masses assume this responsibility and cause the masses to stumble. On account of such a phenomenon did Shlomo HaMelech state in *Mishlei* (7:26), "For she has felled many victims, the number of her slain is huge." Our Sages (*Avodah Zara* 19b, *Sotah* 22a) expound on this verse by stating that it refers to a student who has not yet reached the level of issuing *halachic* rulings but, nevertheless, does so. Therefore, everyone is required to know that this is one of the main fundamentals of our religion, as the *pasuk* states (*Devarim* 32:7), "Remember the days of old; understand the years of every generation. Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will say to you." Our Sages (*Shemot Rabbah* 3) expounded on this *pasuk* that anyone who asks advice from the elders will not stumble. This teaches us that in order to be saved from mistakes, we must go and contemplate the elders and Torah greats of our generation. We must imitate their ways, for they bear the tradition transmitted by the previous generation and the one before that, all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu. Anyone who devises a new path is acting incorrectly, as we will soon learn from the *parasha*.

The Torah Teaches that Man is Required to Learn From the Actions of the Previous Generation

We will begin by explaining what the Torah states in our *parasha* (18:7), "And Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law; he bowed to him and kissed him. They inquired about each other's welfare and they entered the tent." Rashi explains that Yitro was greatly honored at that time, for since Moshe went out to greet him, so did Aharon Nadav, and Avihu. Who from amongst the Jewish people could have seen them going out and not go out themselves? I saw that there are those who asked how Rashi knows that Aharon also went out. After all, it is not



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stated explicitly in the *parasha*. They answer that in *Parashat Vayeitzei* it states, "*Vayeitzei Yaakov, And Yaakov left,*" but it does not say, "*Vayeilech Yaakov, And Yaakov went.*" Our Sages expound that this teaches us that when a *tzaddik* leaves a certain place it leaves an imprint, because the place's shine and glory leave as well. So too, in our *parasha*, the *pasuk* states, **Vayeitzei Moshe**, which implies that the illumination and glory of the place left as well. Now if you will say that Aharon – who was equal to Moshe – did not go out, how is it possible that the shine and luster left? Rather, we must say that first Aharon went out after Moshe, and then the entire Jewish people did so as well. We learn from here just to what extent the behavior of the Jewish people followed the decision of the *Gedolei Hador*. Therefore, the *Gedolei Hador* went out, and the rest of the Jews followed suit. This is as the *pasuk* states, "Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will say to you."

Why Did Moshe First Warn About Two Things and Not Three

With this, we can also understand a question that we earlier posed about the *parasha*. Moshe had originally assumed that both he and Aharon were forbidden to ascend the mountain as well. Therefore there was no reason to warn the Jewish Nation not to ascend, because who would see Moshe and Aharon refraining from ascending and then ascend himself? After all, the Jewish people respected their leaders. Hashem had commanded Moshe to warn the Jews with three warnings: "Sanctify yourselves," "And be prepared," and "Set boundaries for the Nation." However, in actuality, Moshe only initially warned about two things – the sanctity and preparation, but not about setting boundaries. How could he not have fulfilled the command of Hashem? The answer is that since he understood that he would also not be ascending the mountain, the third warning of setting boundaries around the mountain would be kept regardless. He and Aharon would remain by the bottom of the mountain; therefore, who would have the audacity to ascend when he would see that they were not ascending? In that sense, it is as if he explicitly instructed the Jews not to ascend. However, Hashem told Moshe that he and Aharon **should** ascend the mountain. Therefore, lacking a personal example from their leaders, there was therefore a need to warn them. This is why Moshe descended to warn the Jews.

How R' Akiva Eiger Nullified a Vow

R' Akiva Eiger once arrived in the city of R' Binyamin Diskin, the father of the *Maharil* Diskin. He told R' Eiger that the city had a stressing issue which they were unable to resolve, and it was difficult for the city's inhabitants to deal with it. The story was as follows: A certain *talmid chacham* took a vow not to leave the *beit midrash*. They therefore needed to sustain him and tend to him. Since they had no *eiruv*, it was very difficult for them on Shabbat. They did not know what to do, since they were unable to nullify his vow, as they could not find grounds that would prove that he regretted making it in the first place. R' Akiva Eiger told R' Binyamin that he would nullify the vow, but on condition that he join him in visiting the man in the *beit midrash*. Indeed, the entire city was awe struck at the sight of R' Akiva Eiger and the *Av Beit Din*, R' Binyamin going to visit the man in the *beit midrash*. Who could see them going out and not go out themselves? Therefore, many of the city's people joined them. This proved to be a valid *petach* [lit. "opening"] to nullify the vow, for had the *talmid chacham* known that his vow had burdened everyone to come, he never would have made it in the first place.

The True Role Models are the Gedolei Hador

We have therefore learned that the proper way is to watch and imitate the ways of the *Gedolei Yisrael* and not to create new trends other than those established by the *Gedolei Hador*. For by doing so, one destroys belief in our Sages and causes himself to belittle the significance of the *Gedolei Hador*. He does so because of a feeling that his way is better than theirs, and he therefore makes jest of what they say. This is especially so in our generation, the "generation of *teshuvah*," when there are many who are returning in repentance. Due to their great excitement, they wish to transform themselves into angels. They therefore develop different and strange actions, thinking that they are loftier than everybody. This is mere arrogance, and any reward they may have accrued is lost. This is because by doing so, they will not accept the words of the Torah greats, since they feel like they are on a higher level than the *Gedolim*. Furthermore, despite the fact that in his fervor, he performs a righteous action, however, he eventually regrets it, because he understands how difficult it is to continue it. Also, his old habits and character



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traits that have been ingrained in him do not simply disappear. Rather, changing his character traits requires tremendous labor on his part. This is as we have seen, how sometimes *baalei teshuvah* seem like angels, but when they suddenly have a disagreement with someone or when on the road, they turn into lions. Seeing their rage, it is as if a different person is standing in front of them, both regarding their words and their deeds. R' Yisrael Salanter said that it is easier to learn the entire *Shas* than to rectify one bad character trait. He inevitably meets with many different predicaments, and is unable to stand strong in the face of his trials. He then returns to his erroneous ways and desecrates the Name of Heaven. This is because, on one hand, he performs a very righteous act, but on the other hand, he falls to petty behaviors. Therefore people say, "Look at how *chareidim* act." However, the proper way is to "Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will say to you." One should see and learn from the leaders of the generation how to act and how to conduct their homes. This is what our Sages have stated, "Do not be overly righteous." Each generation is commanded to follow the righteous behaviors and actions of the leaders of their generation.

Story About R' Ben-tzion Abba Shaul and Maran R' Ovadia zt"l

R' Tzurial Krispal told me the following story: "When my oldest son turned three, we performed the customary *chalaka* (first haircut). I brought him to the *chacham* R' Ben-tzion Abba Shaul so that he would bless him and cut a small amount of hair. My son had long and thick hair, and when he was already very young, my wife combed his hair so that his *peyot* would be curled and go down to his cheeks. He had thick and nice looking *peyot*. We thought to leave these *peyot* even after he turned three. Incidentally, I also had long *peyot* behind the ears. We approached the *chacham* Ben-tzion, and I bought him the scissors in order to cut the bangs in front of his forehead. However, the *chacham* Ben-tzion stretched out his hand in the direction of the *peyot* and surprisingly cut off the right *peyah*! I tried to dissuade him, telling him that we wished to leave his *peyot*, however, he did not listen to me. He said that it is not the custom of the *Eidut Hamizrach* to grow *peyot*. He told me that even my *peyot* were not according to the tradition of our great Sefardic rabbis." The same thing happened with their second son, who attended the *talmud Torah* "Hamessilah." There was a teacher there who prepared the students for their future *yeshivot*. He told them that their son's *tzitzit* should hang out and that his *peyot* should be grown long, like the custom of the *yeshivah* world. Since they knew that R' Ben-tzion was opposed to *peyot* and he, sadly, had already passed away, they went to ask the advice of *Maran R' Ovadiah zt"l*. They told him what had happened with R' Ben-tzion and what the *talmud torah* was requesting of them; they wished to know what to do. The *Rav* ruled that the *tzitzit* could be allowed to hang out, but growing *peyot* is in opposition to their tradition; therefore he should not grow them. **There is no doubt** that the explanation for the views of these two luminaries is not because they lacked *yirat Shamayim*. Rather, it was due to their foresight of whether the child would be able to acclimate socially if he looked different than what was accepted. Since it would place him in a trial that was too difficult for him to withstand, our Sages words, "Do not be overly righteous" was deemed appropriate.

Zohar's Explanation Why Yitro Merited that a Parasha Should be Named After Him, Trump's Announcement

The *Zohar* [68b] asks why the *pasuk* states that Yitro heard – did not everyone hear? It answers that Yitro heard and made decisions about his path in life, but others heard and did not do *teshuvah*. However, when Yitro, who was the like the Pope of his generation, did *teshuvah*, many others converted, and this caused a great *kiddush Hashem*. You see from here just how great an influence a personal example can have. Similarly, in our times, an event took place, the likes of which we have not heard in some time. The President of the US, the greatest world power, announced to the entire world that man has no worth if he does not have spirituality and belief in G-d. He said that it is G-d who watches over us and that all of our success is dependent upon Him and upon our performing His Will. I am certain that the enormous courage displayed by the President – a gentile – in making such a statement before the entire world, will earn him limitless reward. It is similar to the deed of Yitro's; a deed which earned him eternal mention in our Torah. This is something which we sadly to not hear in our Land; it is a very great pity.



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Words of Mussar

We have learned two things: The first is that when man is doubtful about his path, "Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will say to you." He should contemplate the behavior of the *Gedolei Hador* and imitate their actions. He should not act arrogantly and act "better" than they do, especially with things that can be seen by the public and will cause him to grow prideful. The second thing is to know that the foundation of *chinuch* is setting a good example and being a walking *sefer mussar* in one's actions. His descendants will learn from him, and this is the greatest form of *mussar*.

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,
R' Mordechai Malka