



Parashat Vitzro



English version

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## UNLIMITED POWER

The greatest sin a parent can be guilty of is not making a child aware of the power he possesses. There is no power in the world that can cure like saying the blessing Asher Yatzar after using the WC. The Seder Hayom (time of Arizal) wrote that *if a person would say each word of Asher Yatzar carefully, he would never get sick and would not need a doctor, nor his medicines...* There is no power in the world that can bring you a better Parnassah than saying Birkat Hamazon from a Siddur, with intent. The Sefer Hachinuch (430) writes in the name of his teacher (the Ramban or the Rashba) that *anyone who is careful in Birkat Hamazon will have a respectable Parnassah available for him, a whole life long* (Mishna Berura 185).

But most people have a hard time in believing in the power they have. They prefer to be humble. But R Ben Tzion Aba Shaul would teach us that this is not a place to be humble. Hacham Ben Tzion would point to the seeming contradiction. *הַיָּקֹקֶם כָּל־גִּבּוֹהֵי־לֵב וַיִּגְבֶּה לִבּוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי יְקֹקֶם* *All haughty people are abominable in HaShem's eyes* (Mishlei 16:5) *...and his heart was lifted up in the ways of G-d* (Divrei Hayamaim 2;17:6) The answer is that we should be humble in regard to things of the past, everything that happened until now, the things we cannot control or change. Regarding the future, a person needs to believe in himself. (Or Ltzion 242)

The Talmud in Sanhedrin says something that is mindboggling. *וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶּם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת־הָעָם מִתַּחַת יְדֵי־מִצְרַיִם* *And Yitro said, Blessed is G-d, Who saved you*

*from the hands of Egypt and from the hands of Pharaoh, Who saved the people from under the hand of Egypt. - It was said in the name of R' Papayus that it is was a disgrace for Moshe and the 600,000 Jews that they did not say Baruch-Blessed, until Yitro came and said Baruch Hashem* (Sanhedrin 94a).

What? Moshe? Aharon? Yehoshua? Kalev? Chur? Pinhas? Anybody? How could it be that none of them thought of what Yitro thought of, to say Baruch? Isn't it enough that they said Shirat Hayam, Az Yashir? Doesn't Az Yashir have the power to bring forgiveness from all one's sins, when a person says it with happiness, as if he had gone through the sea himself (Sefer Charedim)? Didn't they bring the Korban Pesach, and accompany it with Hallel? What, exactly, were they missing? What, exactly, was the shame here?

Here is how R Nevantzel, the Rav of the Old City, answers the question. There is a big difference between the Shira and Hallel, all that they did and said... and the magical word Baruch. Baruch is a totally new dimension. How so?

Rabenu Bachye has two explanations of the word Baruch. The first is that Hashem is the Mekor Habracha, the source of all blessings. The second explanation is that the word Baruch comes from the word Berecha, or pool, or connecting to an original source. When you take a branch and connect it to another tree, to give it the ability to grow from the bigger tree, that is called Habracha. (Rabbenu Bachye Devarim 8:10)



By saying the word Baruch, one is adding to the pool of blessing, connecting the hose or pipe to the faucet, so that the blessing of G-d goes to the right addresses. As great as Shira is, it is not like the word Baruch. Baruch does something that the greatest Shira cannot do. Baruch is from the word to make greater; each of its root letters is a multiple of two. ב is two. ר is two hundred. ך is twenty. Adding to the pool of blessing in the Universe. You are not only admitting that what you got came from G-d. You are adding to the Bracha in the world by saying the word Baruch. Yitro was telling them, now is the time to say that G-d is blessed, so that He continue to bring blessing to the world. You are much more powerful than you think.

This concept of R Bachye, of the Nefesh Chayim, is something that is so hard for us to understand. After all, even for the ability to bless, to move our lips, we need G-d. אֲדָרָא שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ. And still, G-d says to each and every one of us, תְּנוּ עֹז לְאֱלֹקִים, Give strength to G-d (Tehillim 68:35). בְּאַלְהֵים נַעֲשֶׂה-חֵיל. In G-d, we will make strength (Tehillim 108:14) ועתה יגדל בא כח ד' And now, may the strength of G-d become great (Bamidbar 14) (see Eicha Rabbah 1; 33). Of course, we cannot change G-d. But G-d allows us to direct His Shefa, His Source of Plenty, through our good deeds, and through our Berachot (Sefer Hachinuch Mitzvah 430). As we find that Hashem told Moshe, הִיָּה לְךָ, לִסְיִיעָנִי, you should have helped me (Shabbat 89a).

## WHY NOT LIE?

In his book *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty*, Dan Ariely, professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University, scientifically tested in great detail how and why humans lie, and what makes it easier or harder for them to keep to the truth. His research was done on college students. The students were offered to step into a classroom, where they were handed a paper of ten math exercises. They were given ten minutes, and for each one of the questions they got right, they were to receive one dollar. After they finished the test paper, though, they were given an answer sheet and told to mark their own papers, and then put their papers through the shredder machine in the back wall of the classroom. They

And this is exactly what the Jews did not yet realize, until Yitro came along. The Jews did not recognize the power they had. They did not realize that HaShem designed the world in such a way that we are empowered to "help" Him, as it were, to bring blessing to His creations, and that He awaits our "help". When Yishmael the Kohen Gadol met G-d in the Holy of Holies, G-d asked Yishmael Kohen Gadol to bless Him (Berachot 7a). How can anyone bless G-d? The answer is that G-d gives *us* the power to give *Him* the power.

Yitro explained to the Jews that the words of their prophecy at the Sea, הָאֵל אֵלֵינוּ וְאֵלֵינוּ, means that G-d set up creation in such a way that He and the Jews run the world together! וְאֵלֵינוּ - אֲנִי וְהוּא. As G-d refers to the Jews in His eternal Song of Songs, G-d called the Jews, יוֹנָתָי תְּמָתִי My Dove, My twin. As the Midrash learns this to mean, that *I am not above you, and you are not above Me*. And the Torah Temimah expounds on this with what we know: *Yisrael, the Torah and G-d are one*. And as we see, anyone who says ויכלו on Friday night - it is as if he is a partner with G-d in the Creation.

The power to literally bring Hashem down into our daily lives is in your hands. It's up to us to connect Hashem to everything we do. This is what Yitro added to the Jews. Something that we forget to often...

would then inform the tester what their mark was, and they would be rewarded one dollar for each question answered correctly.

How did Dan learn whether or not they lied? The shredder was not a shredder. On the other side of the wall, all the papers went into a basket, so that Dan could see exactly how many students were dishonest and exactly by how much. They were led to think that they were in an honor system, that no one would ever know if they lied or not. And it is interesting to note that many of them lied, but not by a lot. The most common was the small lie, falsifying the results by reporting two questions more than the real score. If they got 4 right, they

wrote 6. From this, Ariely disproves the belief of SMORC, Simple Model of Rational Crime. SMORC is the belief that dishonesty is generally rational and the result of a balance between three factors; A- the benefit of the dishonesty, versus B- the likelihood of getting caught and C- the severity of punishment. Here, the people that were tested thought they could have lied and not gotten caught (no B or C factor), and they could have reported ten and gotten ten dollars (high A factor). Ariely played around with these factors, by giving more or less money for each question. He played with the B or C factors, but the factors of SMORC did not bring about more or less dishonesty. Rather, Ariely found that even people who are, on the whole, honest, lie just a little bit, no matter which factors are involved.

Small lies account for the major part of the sum total of all dishonesty in the world. Small theft accounts for most cases of stealing. The majority of stealing is from people who do not steal big. Locksmiths will tell you that your lock is not there to protect you from the professional thief; a professional thief can break any lock. The lock is there to protect you from the people who are, on the whole, honest, but who might be tempted to try your door if it has no lock.

Ariely concluded that when people lie or cheat, it is a compromise. Every person has in him a drive for pleasure. In great contrast, every person has a sense of morality. (In Judaism, this may be referred to as the conflict between Neshama and Nefesh.) When a person is being tested for honesty, he finds himself in a dilemma: which voice should he listen to? Which voice should he obey? His morality, or his materialistic drive? The reason why people lie and cheat, and mostly in small proportions, or in small sums, is because that is something that one's sense of ethics will find it easy to ignore or excuse. It's easier to compromise one's ethical values when there is just a "small" matter involved; the bigger the gamble, the harder it gets to compromise.

Then, Ariely did something that made me fall of my chair when I read it. He made students recall the Ten Commandments before taking the test.

Then, there was no cheating whatsoever, despite the fact that no one was able to recall all ten!! Even atheists, who swore on a Bible, lied less on their tests! Ariely realized that the way to keep people from lying is by reminding them of moral behavior, by recalling G-d and His Word and by being reminded of G-d's word on a daily basis. (Ariely himself is not religious.)

It seems that we compromise less on our morality when we are reminded of G-d. Our morality is not a rational cost/benefit analysis, like the claim of SMORC. It is dependent on how much we remind ourselves of G-d in our lives. And, on how much we *connect* to the Torah.

One of the reasons to be religious, to be a Torah observant Jew, is exactly this. If you are not Torah observant, and your child asks you why he/she should be honest and moral, you can't tell him, "because that is the right thing to do", or "that is the way he will be more successful in life", because he will tell you that even the presidents and government officials lie. Most liars and cheats don't get caught. Who decides what is considered moral? And what if we catch those people, themselves, being immoral?

The only answer we have as parents to our children is that G-d decided what is moral in His Torah. And only if we live with Torah in our lives can we explain to our children that Torah is our moral code, and that we obey the Torah because G-d is real, and G-d is everything. And the only thing that will bring morality into our lives is Torah. Not self-help books, not books on etiquette, and not stories of the honesty of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln.

I have a friend who can't get over an incident that happened in his Yeshiva many years ago. It was a dormitory yeshiva, and a wave of robberies was being reported. My friend, together with another dorm member who was robbed of 300 dollars, decided to put an end to it. They set up a trap in the dorm. They left a wallet with 20 dollars on a desk, and they took turns of endless hours (a sum total of three days, to be precise) standing in the closet, peeping through a tiny hole, to see which student



was the thief. It felt like endless hours, and then, they caught him. They reported him to the Rosh Yeshiva, and the Rabbi had certain proof that this boy was the thief, because of the ink powder that was put on the 20 dollar bill. After seeking the counsel of a Gadol, the Rosh Yeshiva decided not to expel the boy. "Nobody is learning from this boy to be a thief. A Yeshiva is a rehabilitation center, because Torah cures people and gives them morality. Everyone just needs to be more careful to safeguard their money."

All of the Ten Commandments were given with a G-dly Fire, thunder and lightning. Even the Commandments לא תרצח לא תנאף לא תגזב לא תענה ברעך עד שקר Do not kill, Do not have improper relations, Do not steal, Do not lie as witness, which are all mitzvot that are dictated by common sense, needed all the pizzazz of Har Sinai. Why? אמר רבי יוחנן: אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה היינו למידין צניעות מחתול, וגזל מנמלה, ועריות מיונה. Said R Yochanan, If not for the Torah,

we would learn the way of modest conduct from the cat, not to steal from the ant, and not to be in inappropriate relationships from the dove. (Eiruvim 100b). We could learn from Abe Lincoln not to lie! We could learn from George Washington! Why did we need the great sound-and-light show at Har Sinai for these four Commandments?

The answer is that in order for us to become really moral, it does not suffice to work on becoming a gentleman. The only way to really become moral is by recharging our G-dliness through Torah. All the "special effects" of Har Sinai at the giving of these commandments were aimed at infusing our morals with G-dliness in these commandments, as well.

If only we would connect to Torah, if only we would remind ourselves daily of the G-dliness inside each and every one of us, we would merit to be G-d's light to the world.

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