

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MEVATER

MIDDAS HAVITUR AND ROCHEL IMEINU

In this week's *parshah* we encounter an episode of unimaginable proportions. It's a *ma'aseh* that we can't imagine doing. We can't even fathom it. But we all descend from the person who is the *ba'alas hama'aseh*.

The Torah tells us how Yaakov worked seven years for Rochel. Seven years is a long time. And Lavan was a taskmaster. He didn't give Yakov recess like you get. Lavan worked Yaakov to the bone, and he didn't even pay him. His wages were simply: "After seven years you could marry my daughter, Rochel." (Bereishis 29:19) Then the big night came, the big *chasunah*. And the Torah tells us, *ויהי בבוקר והנה היא לאה*, it was Leah and not Rochel (ibid 29:25).

Chazal tell us Yaakov Avinu gave Rochel *simanim* because he was concerned that Lavan was going to do a "bait and switch" on him. He told Rochel, "I'm giving you these *simanim* to let me know that it's you." And when Rochel saw that it was not herself being escorted down to the *chuppah* but rather her sister Leah, Rochel said to herself, "Wow. This is going to be the most embarrassing moment for my sister!" She went over, and she secretly gave her the *simanim*. She told Leah: "If Yaakov asks you for the password, this is what you say."

We really have to understand and think about Rochel's actions. *Mitzad hadin*, there was no obligation whatsoever on her part to allow Leah to marry her husband-to-be, Yaakov. Yaakov worked for her specifically, for seven years. Rochel's whole dream (it wasn't like Rochel was pushed into the wedding and it wasn't like Lavan sold Rochel against her will) - was to get married to Yaakov. Yet, in spite of that, not only did she not reveal what was going on - by telling Yaakov that there's a switch here - she didn't even do *שב ואל תעשה* by sitting back and saying, "Let's see how things unfold." If she would have just kept quiet, Yaakov would have figured it out. It's not her fault her father switched to Leah. Yaakov would have realized it's Leah and not Rochel. She didn't allow that to happen either. She *pushut* got up on her own, *קום ועשה*, in order that her sister should not be embarrassed. Not *stam*. It's unimaginable!

My *rebbe* (Rav Meir Halevi Soloveichik) would repeat this *ma'aseh* and say the following: "What's the lesson here? What is the Torah telling us? What do we have to take out from this?" And he would then say, "We learn from here how important it is for a person to be *mevater* and to give in for someone else's benefit."

The proportions of this challenge, to me, are mind-boggling. I pictured many times, had I been around in those days and was a confidant of Rochel Imeinu, and she would have said to me, "Yisroel what do you think I should do?" I would have never dreamed of telling her to do what she did. I think maybe I would have said, "I understand you don't want to cause your sister embarrassment. May I suggest you tell your sister to say that she isn't feeling well, and then she should take off running. Otherwise, it's going to be very embarrassing." No, she did not do anything like that.

The gemora (Taanis 29b) says that Menashe, the evil king Menashe, put a form of *avodah zarah* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, in the *heichal*.¹ It says Rochel Imeinu went before Hakadosh Baruch Hu and she said, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, רחמיך מרובים, Your mercy is greater than the mercy of a human being. והלא אני הכנסתי צרתי בתוך ביתי, and not only did I keep quiet but I gave her the *simanim* myself. ולא די ששתקתי אלא שמסרתי לה סימני, so too, You, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, even if Your children brought the competition, the idol, into Your house - the *Beis Hamikdash* - be *mochel* them." Rashi says it, in *Yirmiyah* (31:14), in the name of the *medrash*.²

As this Medrash teaches us, the benefit of being *mevater* is that it arouses tremendous amounts of *rachamim* and *mechilah*, which we all need as Jews and as a *klal*. But you have to also understand how important it is to be *mevater*.

¹ וכן כתוב במלכים ב כ"א: וישם את פסל האשרה אשר עשה בבית, וגו'
² רחל מבכה על בניה. מדרש אגדה אמר שהלכו אבות ואמהות לפייס את הקב"ה על שהעמיד מנשה דמות בהיכל ולא נתפייס נכנסה רחל אמרה לפניו רבונו של עולם רחמי מי מרובים רחמיך או רחמי ב"ו הוי אמור רחמיך מרובים והלא אני הכנסתי צרתי בתוך ביתי שכל עבודה שעבד יעקב את אבי לא עבד אלא בשבילי כשבאתי ליכנס לחופה הכניסו את אחותי ולא די ששתקתי אלא שמסרתי לה סימני אף אתה אם הכניסו בניך צרתך בביתך שתוק להם אמר לה יפה למדת סנגוריא יש שחר לפעולתך ולצדקתך שמסרת סימנך לאחותך (רש"י על ירמיהו שם)

WHEN TO BE MEVATER...WHEN NOT...

There was somebody who was very close to Rav Chaim Kanievsky who presented him with a number of questions about *vitur*. He asked Rav Chaim the following question: "Somebody has to speak before *yom hadin*, Rosh Hashanah, regarding some subject. What do you suggest that he should speak about in the area of *bein adam lechaveiro*?" Rav Chaim said: "Speak about the *middah* of *vitur*. It's **הדבר החשוב ביותר**. The most important thing. There are many sources in *Chazal* about it."

Rav Chaim added: "But you have to know that sometimes it's *asur* to be *mevater*. That is when it's about matters of *ruchniyus*. But when it comes to matters of *olam hazeh*, *vitur* is the most *chashuve* thing."

In the *medrash* (Bamidbar Rabbah 9:2) in *Parshas Naso*, the *parshah* of *sotah*, it says **איש איש כי תשטה אשתו**, a man whose wife strayed. *Zugt Chazal* התורה, **למדה אותך התורה**, the Torah teaches us, **שתהא ותרון בתוך ביתך**, a very difficult tall order. You should be *mevater*. On what? Your wife spills the wine. How can you be a *vatran*? Forget about it. She spills your oil. Be *mevater*. She tears your *kapote* or your suit. Be *mevater*. It gives a whole list of things over there. Whatever happens in your house, be *mevater*. **אבל אם שמעת**, but if you hear something about your wife that's halachically inappropriate behavior, **קום כנבר**, get up like a man. **למה**, why? **שגבר אתה**, because you are a man. So when it comes to *gashmiyus*, the more you're *mevater* the better. When it comes to *ruchniyus*, you've got to be an *ish*, a man.³

RAV AHARON LEIB SHTEINMAN: YOU ONLY GAIN WITH VITUR

A certain *talmid chacham* (Rav Eliyahu Mann) told Rav Chaim Kanievsky that a *talmid* of Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman asked Rav Shteinman: "The *rebbe*, Rav Aharon Leib, constantly says people should be *mevater* and from being *mevater* you never lose. You only gain. What did the *rosh yeshivah* gain from the fact that he was *mevater* many times in his lifetime?" Rav Aharon Leib replied, "I see that Hashem watched over me many times in matters of *ruchniyus* that were relevant to the *tzibbur* and if sometimes I forgot a certain fact - when a *yediah* wasn't in front of my face - Hashem presented it to me when I needed to know it."

So Rav Mann now turned to Rav Chaim and asked him, "What's the *middah keneged middah* in that? Why is it that if you are *mevater* you won't be *nichshal* (stumble) in rulings?" Rav Chaim said, "When you do **לפנים משורת הדין**, Hashem also conducts Himself with you **לפנים משורת הדין**. It's very uncommon for a human being to never make mistakes. But somebody who conducts himself **לפנים משורת הדין**, with *vitur*, Hashem is also *noheg* with him **לפנים משורת הדין** and makes sure that he shouldn't be *nichshal* even when it's the norm to be *nichshal*. That 's the *middah keneged middah*."

RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY'S BIG VITUR

On another occasion, Rav Mann turned to Rav Chaim and said, "I have to tell you an interesting thing. I was once in the house of Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, and he was talking about *vitur*. Rav Aharon Leib said, 'Look, I'll bring a *ra'ayah* you don't lose anything from being *mevater*. Rav Chaim Kanievsky is an only son. And when you have a son and a daughter, the Torah says the son is *yoresh* everything, and the daughter is not *yoresh* anything. After the Steipler (Rav Chaim's father) passed away, Rav Chaim gave everything away to his sister." Could you imagine that *vitur*?! Rav Chaim wasn't a rich Jew. He lived in poverty. And he had plenty of kids. He gave the entire *yerushah* to his sister who happened to be an *almanah*. Rav Aharon Leib turned to Rav Mann, and said, "Nu, did he lose anything from that? *Baruch Hashem* Hashem paid him back for everything *kefel keflayim*."

So Rav Mann turned to Rav Chaim and asked: "But why *taka* was Rav Chaim *be'emes mevater* to her on everything? The *yerushah* was yours *al pi Torah*." Listen to what Rav Chaim answered him. He said: "My father lived in her house all these years. *Es kumt ir*, she deserves it." Unbelievable!

HOW I GOT MY HOUSE

I had a similar story but in reverse. For twenty-eight years, I lived with my family in the home of my mother-in-law *alehah hashalom*, who was an *almanah*. She lived upstairs in the house, and we lived in the basement. At some point in time, there was a discussion about what's going to happen with the house after she passes on. She said, if her son (who was living here, in Cleveland, at that point when the discussion took place), will be here, "I want him to have the house. He'll be the Telzer Rosh Yeshivah. He should have the house." Now, I wasn't happy about that, but I couldn't argue about it. I said okay. If that's what you want, that's what you want. Then, my brother-in-law moved away. Then a lot of people told me, "I'm sure you're getting the house. You lived with your mother-in-law for twenty-eight years. I mean you deserve the house, no?!" I said, "I simply asked them if I could live here as long as I'm here. In the end, they gave me a *chelek* like one of the children." And when it came time to buy a house, I bought that house from them. I just took off my *chelek* and the rest I paid to them. I can't tell you how many people got on my case and said to me, "What kind of business is this? You deserve it." I told them, "Don't worry about it. Hashem is going to take care of it. Hashem knows I was here for twenty-eight years. I have no *safek* that Hashem is

³ דבר אחר, איש איש [איש איש כי תשטה אשתו ומעלה בו מעל", (במדבר ה:יב)] למדה אותך התורה שתהא ותרון בתוך ביתך, נשפך יין הוי ותרו (משלי ח, כא): להנחיל וגו', וכן שמקרה, (משלי ח, כא): ואצרתיהם אמלא. נקרא פסוק (תהלים כ, ו): ומלא ה' כל משאלותך, אבל אם שמעת דבר על אשתך קום כנברה למי שגבר את הוי גברה לכו נאמר: איש איש.

going to take care of me.”

The *yetzer hara* tries to get you. You have to learn to be *mevater*. You know why? Legally, the house was theirs. Halachically, it was theirs. They weren't *mechuyav* to give it to me. They weren't Rav Chaim Kanievsky. They didn't have to give it to me. From this, you see Rav Chaim Kanievsky's *middas havitur*, how far he went. It's amazing!

VITUR IN MARRIAGE

When Rav Chaim heard about a couple that wanted to have a *get*, he said that people today don't know how to conduct themselves. You have to be *mevater* and *mevater*. *Bederech klal* he said, all the issues arise over *divrei shtus*. He said, for a woman, it is harder to be *mevater*. That was to me, a *chiddush*. I once heard from my *zeida* (Rav Avigdor Miller) not like that. My *zeida* used to say that a man is like an ox or like a mule, I forget which one. In other words, man is stubborn. The woman should give in. But Rav Chaim said that for an *ishah* it is harder to be *mevater* and therefore the responsibility of *vitur* is on the husband. That's a big problem though because everybody always says: "Why should I be *mevater*? You be *mevater*!" Rav Chaim said: "A *ben Torah* has to know how to be *mevater*."

VITUR REGARDING THE AMUD

A fellow once asked Rav Chaim about davening the *amud* for his father. What was the *shaylah*? "Could I be *mevater* on the *amud* so that another *chiyuv* could have the *amud* on the *cheshbon* of my father? It's not my *cheshbon*. It's on my father's *cheshbon* when I'm not *davening* from the *amud* for him." Rav Chaim told him this *vitur* is a bigger *zechus* than being the *chazzan*. The man asked: "But I know my father. My father himself would have never been *mevater* in his life. He never would have given in." Rav Chaim told him, "It's not a *ra'ayah*. Now your father is in the *olam ha'emes*. Now, he knows the *emes*. He knows it's a much greater benefit to have you be *mevater*, and how good it is for him to do it that way than the other way."

Until you get to that year of *kaddish*, you can't imagine how people react if you go to the *amud* innocently. I've had people get in my face. I just went into a *shul*, nobody was there, one of these *minyans* factories I went to *daven* in. *Arois*. I got pushed. I got pulled. "Not here." I said, "Isn't this a *minyan* factory?" The guy said, "I *daven* here every day at this time." I said to him, "You got it, buddy. I'm not messing with your father. But one thing I know about my own father. My father would have definitely been *mevater*, and he wouldn't have wanted me to have *machlokes* with you." It's very interesting how people behave.

BUILDING OUT: DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND BE MEVATER

Rav Chaim used to say that *tzaros* that come upon people in *inyanim* of *bein adam lechaveiro* come because people are not *mevater* for each other in *inyanei mamos*. One of the most common things in Eretz Yisrael where people have huge *machlokes*, is when somebody wants to build an extra room in their house. They want to build out. Many times, your extension bothers the guy downstairs. The truth is, though, it often makes it easier for him to extend since now he can add a room more easily because you're giving him a free roof! But people put up fights that you can't imagine! You can't imagine the *dinei Torah* on this! "You're taking away my air, my light!" Don't ask! Rav Aharon Leib used to say, and Rav Chaim said it all the time, "I'm telling you, do yourself a favor and be *mevater*."

My son-in-law bought an apartment on the top floor of his apartment building. The building never had an elevator. He told the people, "I'm going to install an elevator." You'd think they would have kissed his feet. *Nechtige tag*. "You have to pay us. You have to fix over this. You have to fix over that." He told them, "I'm doing you a favor." Now, in his contract, he's allowed to have a porch, but the guy downstairs says: "What do you mean? For years, there was no roof on top of me!" He told the guy, "You sold that roof. You got paid for it. When the guy built on the roof, he didn't build on top of the roof without your *reshus*. He came, and paid you cash to have the *zechus* to build on top of you. It was paid for." The guy said: "No, I don't want you to build." "Okay, I'll give you money." "How much are you going to give me?" Thousands the guy wanted. Thousands! And after that, after he took the money, he's still not sure he's going to let him build. My son-in-law is scared to build out. People can't build. That's a problem today. People live in small *diros*. They want to build out and make a little more room, and that's where the problem of *vitur* comes in.

Rav Chaim used to say over constantly, when a person is *mevater*, many times, he will be able to avoid facing difficult *nisyonos*. Sometimes he's *zocheh* to keep his mouth closed *besh'a'as a machlokes*. The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 7a) tells him he's going to have tremendous *brachah*.⁴

WHEN BIZYONOS IS A SEGULAH

Rav Mann asked Rav Chaim an interesting thing. He said, "I heard the following episode. Someone came and told Rav Chaim, 'I didn't have kids.' He tried many *eitzos* and they didn't work. Rav Chaim told him, 'I'll give you another *eitzah*. In the *gemara* in *Gittin* (36b) it says that somebody who receives embarrassment and he doesn't return the embarrassment, Hashem

⁴ ההוא דהוה קאמר ואזיל טוביה דשמע ואדיש חלפיה בישתיה מאה (רש"י: טוביה דשמע ואדיש - אשריו ששומע חרפתו ושוקת ומרגיל בכך ואדיש כמו דדש דש [גטין דף נו:]; חלפיה בישתיה מאה - הלכו להם בשתיקתו מאה רעות שהיו באות עליו על ידי התגר)

says about him *ואוהביו כצאת השמש*, Hashem loves him, like when the sun comes out.⁵ This type of person, his *brachah* is going to be fulfilled. Go, find a Yid that fits that bill, he's *נעלבים ואינם עולבים*. Find him and get a *brachah* from him.' And the guy did it. He found somebody like that, and he had a *yeshuah!*"

Rav Mann asked Rav Chaim: "Is this story *emes?*" You know what Rav Chaim said? "I've seen this *eitzah* in *sefarim* but I don't remember whether I had this story with anybody." He didn't say, "It's not true." He said, "I don't remember."

Another time, they asked him the same question. He said, "I don't remember giving this *eitzah* but *lema'aseh* there's definitely an *inyan bazeh.*"

Rav Mann was with Rav Chaim when a kid came into the room. A kid from elementary school. He said: "Another boy is embarrassing me in school. Can I return the 'favor'? Can I pay him back and be *ma'aliv* him in return so that he should stop, or is it better that I should keep quiet?" Rav Chaim gave him the

following *eitzah*. "It's not the *halachah*, but I'll give you an *eitzah*. Keep quiet." Rav Mann was standing there. "What's his *sechar* going to be?" He said, "יפה שתיקה עם חכמים – his *sechar* will be that he's going to be a *chacham*, and it's going to be *neskayem* in him יפה שתיקה עם חכמים."

Then Rav Mann told Rav Chaim that he was by Rav Shteinman, and Rav Shteinman said that receiving *bizyonos* is such a good *zach*, it's *moradig*. He said that if a person is not interested in dying, and he doesn't want his wife to die *chas veshalom*, and not his children *chas veshalom*, *bizyonos* is the best exchange for *kapparah*! Rav Shteinman said, "Sadly, I never had *bizyonos.*"

BIZYONOS COME IN DIFFERENT COLORS

Rav Mann said to Rav Shteinman: "What do you mean you never had *bizyonos*? People are talking against you and putting all kinds of pressure on you! They're *mevazeh* the *rosh yeshivah!*" He said, "For me, that's not *bizyonos.*" So Rav Mann asked Rav Chaim: "What's the *pshat?*" Rav Chaim answered him: "He wasn't impressed by what people said, so therefore it's not *bizyonos.*" He also said that sometimes *bizyonos* is *kavod*.

A youngster once came to Rav Chaim and told him that he experienced *gevaldige tza'ar* from a non-*frum* person in Ramat Gan. He was *mevazeh* him very much, and the *youngster* didn't respond. He wanted to know from Rav Chaim, is that a fulfillment of *נעלבים ואינם עולבים*, someone who hears his *bushah* and doesn't answer. You know what Rav Chaim told him? "It was like an animal was shaming you." It's like an animal embarrassing you. Is that called an embarrassment? It's not an embarrassment. Embarrassment means when somebody who is an *adam mechubad*, somebody whose *bizyonos* has an effect on you and gives you *bizyonos*. That's *bizyonos.*"

A Yid came into Rav Chaim and he had a *ta'anah* on Rav Chaim. The fellow said: "How do you say things and write things without hearing the second side?" He continued, "I'll tell you how. Because one of the people in your family, one of the *eineklach*, has connections over here and they got you to sign it. They got you to write it, and that's what it is." He finished his words, and he packed out. The *talmid chacham* who was present with Rav Chaim at the time turned to Rav Chaim, and said, "Aza *chutzpah* to say something like this to Rav Chaim?!" Rav Chaim said: "Nah, אני לא דנתי אותו לרע, I didn't *dan* him for *ra* because he's experiencing *tza'ar* and אין אדם נתפס בשעת צער, what a person says when he has *tza'ar*, he's not going to be held responsible."

I once took a *bachur* in *yeshivah* on a trial basis. I got along very well with him during the short while he was here. At the end, I told him, "I'm very sorry I don't think it's going to work out." He said, "I know you don't mean it." He pulled out a *shtar* from his pocket. The *shtar* said, "I, Yisrael Brog, will happily accept so and so in my *yeshivah behischayvus*. Then he made a line with an x. He put it in my face, and said, "Sign this now." I said, "You only left out one word in the *shtar* - I'm *not* willing to sign it. I will not take you in. I can't. I'm sorry." He said, "Drop dead! I hope you don't wake up tomorrow!" I said, "Thank you." I told him, "I understand now you're a little upset." He said, "I'm giving you the short version of the *klalos.*" I said, "It's okay. I have no *ta'anos* on you."

VITUR HELPS FOR YOM HADIN

A person has to understand that in life, you have to learn how to be *mevater*. I'm telling you, you never lose anything from being *mevater*. Whenever you stick to your guns, even if you're entitled to it 100%, *nu*, who knows if it is worth it? A person has to know from Rochel Imeinu, her *vitur* was out of this world! You're never ever going to lose from *vitur*. It's going to help you in your *yom hadin* at the end of your life, and it's going to help you in your *yom hadin* of Rosh Hashanah. It's going to help you. When you're *mevater* you give yourself wonderful and amazing *zechusim* when you're going to need them. If a person is *מיעביר על מידותיו*, Hashem overlooks all his *peshaim* and all his *chataim*.

⁵ תנו רבנן: הנעלבים ואינם עולבים, שומעין הרפתן ואין משיבין, עושו מאהבה ושמתין ביסורין, עליהן הכתוב אומר: "ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו".

THE BOTTOM LINE

The story of Rochel Imeinu's *vatranus* in giving up the *simanim* to Leah is an incredibly powerful example of how "letting go" can bring tremendous *rachamin* and *mechilah* to us and our families. Being *mevater* not only elevates our own *ruchniyus*, and brings us *chochmah*, but it makes Hashem conduct Himself *middah k'neged middah* towards us. Staying away from interpersonal arguments by being *mevater* in different areas - like we saw from the stories about apartments and balconies in Eretz Yisroel - brings multiple *brachos* and keeps us safe from danger, that was even decreed upon us (footnote #3 and Rashi there). This week, I will look (*bli neder*) for an opportunity to "let go" and keep quiet in a small area of my life where I strongly feel I am right (or the *halacha* is clearly on my side) and the other person is wrong. And in that *zechus*, may I see much *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and *rachamin* in my life.