



Adapted from the Sefarim חמ"ן במוצאי שבת and חזקוני דזעיר אנפין collections of  
maamarim

given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

### *Melave Malka Parshas Vaeira 5766*

In tonight's portion of *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* we find the following lesson:  
"Teshuva is greater than *tefilla*, for we see that all of Moshe Rabeinu's  
*tefillos* to enter *Eretz Yisrael* were not accepted, but the *teshuva* of  
Rachav the *zona* was accepted."

It is difficult to understand the comparison presented in these words of  
Eliyahu Hanavi. First of all, how can *tefilla* and *teshuva* be compared? If  
he had compared the *tefilla* of Moshe Rabeinu to that of Rachav, or the  
*teshuva* of Moshe Rabeinu to that of Rachav, there would have been a  
basis for comparison. Instead, he presents us with a comparison of Moshe  
Rabeinu's *tefilla* to Rachav the *zona's teshuva*.

Also, it is difficult to understand how any aspect of Moshe Rabeinu's life  
can possibly be compared to that of Rachav the *zona*. Moshe Rabeinu was  
the greatest of all *neviim*. No other human being reached the *madreiga*  
of Moshe Rabeinu who is called איש אלוקים, a G-dly man, whereas Rachav  
was a Canaanite woman who, at the time of her *teshuva*, hadn't yet  
converted to Judaism. Not only does the *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* compare  
them, but it also teaches us that her *teshuva* was greater than Moshe  
Rabeinu's *tefilla*!

Perhaps we can compare this to a story in the Talmud Yerushalmi  
(תענית א:ד). Once, when there was a drought, R. Avahu was told in a  
dream that if a certain man named Pantakka would *daven*, rain would  
come. R. Avahu summoned the man in order to assess his character. It  
became clear that Pantakka not only sinned greatly himself, but even led



[1]

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others to sin every day. However, R. Avahu also discovered that once, Pantakka saved a Jewish girl from committing a certain *aveira*, and that explained why his *tefilla* would be accepted.

This story is also baffling. R. Avahu certainly *davened* for the drought to end, and his *madreiga* was vastly more elevated than that of the sinful Pantakka. How could it have been that the *tefilla* of that *rasha* was able to accomplish that which R. Avahu's did not?

This question comes up in our *Parsha* as well. The *Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael* (בשלח, מסכתא דויהי פתיחתא) says that in the merit of Pharaoh's admission ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים – Hashem is just, and I and my nation are wicked. (שמות ט"ז:כ"ז), Hashem rewarded him by enabling the Egyptians who died at *Yam Suf* to be buried. Pharaoh was also rewarded for this admission with the Torah's command, לא תתעב מִצְרִי – Don't abhor the Egyptian (דברים כ"ג:ח).

This is also difficult to understand. In response to Pharaoh's admission, Moshe Rabeinu said ואתה ועבדיך ידעת כי טרם תיראון מפני ה' אלקים (שמות ט"ז) – I know that you and your servants do not yet fear *Hashem Elokim*. Clearly, Moshe Rabeinu understood that Pharaoh's admission was simply lip service. How could such an insincere statement earn such reward for the nation of Egypt?

I would like to propose an explanation that can answer all of these questions.

There is certainly no doubt that Moshe Rabeinu achieved the highest level that can be attained by a human being. It is also clear that R. Avahu had also reached very high levels through his Torah and Avoda.

There is certainly no way to compare Moshe Rabeinu's *madreiga* to that of Rachav, or that of R. Avahu to that of Pantakka. Both Rachav and Pantakka degraded themselves by involvement in the worst *aveiros*. It



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also goes without saying that Pharaoh, whom *sefarim* describe as *tokef ha'klipa*, the essence of negativity, was the lowest of the low.

However, it is specifically the lofty *madreigos* of Moshe Rabeinu and R. Avahu that prevented them from doing *teshuva* that could compare to the *teshuva* of Rachav and Pantakka. Both Rachav and Pantakka were so immersed in sin that in order to refrain from committing an *aveira* they had to shatter their self-identity and transform their nature with true *mesirus nefesh* - self-sacrifice.

To *baalei aveira* - serial sinners, Chazal (ע"ז י"ז.) applied the *pasuk* כָּל בָּאֵי שָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּבוּן – All those who arrive there won't return. This doesn't mean that they can't do *teshuva*, but rather that because they have become so habituated to sin, it is very difficult, and requires deep transformation. According to one opinion in the *Gemara*, the *baal aveira* can become so linked to *aveira*, that his process of *teshuva* can be so traumatic that it will lead to his death.

In the *Mechilta D'Rashbi* Chazal said that Rachav was involved in promiscuity throughout the forty years that Bnei Yisrael spent in the *midbar*. Pantakka had also been a life-long *baal aveira*. It is hard for us to imagine how difficult and painful it was for them to break ingrained habits and overcome their desires, their negative *midos*, and the essential personality they had developed, in order to refrain from *aveira*.

Therefore, it was *davka* Rachav's *teshuva* that was more powerful than the *tefillos* of Moshe Rabeinu, and *davka* Pantakka who was able to overturn the laws of nature and bring rain when no rain was going to fall.

We can now understand the impact of Pharaoh's insincere admission. Relative to the power of the negative *klipa* that dominated him, just uttering the words ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים, even if he didn't mean them, required him to break his *midos* with intense effort. Therefore, Hashem who sees the inner depths of each person rewarded his efforts by



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commanding us not to reject the *Mitzri* and by allowing those who died at *Yam Suf* to be buried.

*Tzadikim* on the other hand, don't need to fight such soul-shattering battles in order to follow Hashem's will. They live with the constant aspiration to do what Hashem demands of them, and the constant fear of doing something opposed to the will of the *Borei Olam*. Even though Moshe Rabeinu was incomparably greater than Rachav and R. Avahu far greater than *Pantakka*, the specific *avoda* of *sheviras ha'midos* with *mesirus nefesh* wasn't available to them. Only those immersed in *aveira* for years were able to bring about such a powerful transformation.

For example, a Jew who grew up keeping *mitzvos* doesn't have to struggle to avoid eating שרצים ורמשים (creeping and crawling creatures). In fact, the very idea makes him feel nauseated. However, a Jew who has grown up as a *tinok she'nishba* (with no knowledge or understanding of Torah and *mitzvos*) may have grown up eating and enjoying such creatures. When he faces the *nisayon* of having to refrain from eating a favorite delicacy, he needs to fight a mighty battle to overcome tendencies developed over years.

Let us not forget that even though those of us who grow up in *frum* communities may not face such *nisyonos*, the *yetzer hara* still burns within us. We face *nisyonos* of speaking *lashon hara* and *rechilus*, anger, *shemiras einayim* and *machshava*. Each day we struggle to come to *mincha* on time, or not to skip saying *korbanos*. We can only withstand those *nisyonos* by breaking our negative *midos*, sometimes with actual *mesirus nefesh*.

When we encounter such a *nisayon*, we should rejoice as if we have discovered a treasure trove. If we manage to overcome our natural tendencies and resist temptation, no matter how lowly we may be, our *tefillos* will be answered like those of *Pantakka*.



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Now, during the days of *Shovavim*, each of us has been given special strength that can help us overcome the *nisyonos* that challenge us every day. We must take advantage of this special period. If we do so, we can extend the strength and light of these days to the entire year.

לשבר את מדוניהנו ומהותינו למען שמו יתברך באהבה, אכי"ר



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