

# CHUMRAS MUST BE STAGE-IN-LIFE APPROPRIATE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Parshas Behaaloscha

### Chumras Must Be Stage-in-Life Appropriate

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 684 - Kissing A Sister. Good Shabbos!*

This week's parsha contains the people's complaint about their lack of meat. The Almighty's response was sending of massive quantities of pheasants (Slav), which the people consumed and subsequently died. The Torah tells us "The meat was still between their teeth, not yet gone, when the wrath of Hashem flared against the people, and Hashem struck a very mighty blow against the people." [Bamidbar 11:33]

The Talmud derives the prohibition of eating dairy foods after meat (milchigs after fleishiks) from the expression "the meat was still between their teeth". One of the reasons for this prohibition is that we see from this pasuk [verse] that meat remains between a person's teeth after he has consumed it and thereby, he will in effect be eating meat and milk together if he eats milk products following the eating of meat.

In discussing the laws of waiting between meat and dairy dishes, the Talmud [Chulin 105] quotes Mar Ukva as stating "Regarding this matter, compared to my father, I am like vinegar compared to wine. My father would wait 24 hours between meat and cheese, and while I would not eat meat and cheese in the same meal, I would eat cheese at the next meal, even the same day."

This is the basis of the famous dispute among the early commentaries as to the meaning of the phrase "the next meal". Some Rishonim interpret literally that a person is allowed to say the Birkas HaMazon and begin a new meal (of dairy products) immediately following the conclusion of a meat meal. Others (Ramba"m and Shulchan Aruch) interpret that a person must wait the amount of time between the morning meal and the evening meal, which is the source of the custom to wait 6 hours between meat and milk.

Be that as it may, Mar Ukva said he was spiritually not in his father's league. His father waited 24 hours and he merely waited until the next meal. The question should be asked - why in fact did Mar

Ukva NOT follow the custom of his father? While there may be some parental stringencies (chumras) to which a son might not realistically aspire, this would not seem to be one of them. All that is involved here is waiting. What is so hard about that?

Perhaps we would understand if his father used to spend a full hour davening Shmoneh Esrei. A son may realistically argue that he is not on his father's level - and cannot drag out his Shmoneh Esrei for a whole hour! But why couldn't Mar Ukva wait 24 hours after meat in order to follow his father's tradition in this area?

We learn from this Gemara that observing stringencies for the sake of doing stringencies, when one is not really on that spiritual level is a very hollow act. A person can adopt a certain practice, but if he is not ready for that 'chumrah,' if he is not ready for that spiritual level, then it can become a self-defeating act of piety. It may indeed lead to feelings of emptiness and spiritual regression when one takes on levels of super piety that he is not "ready for".

This is a very important lesson that people should learn about chumras. I was told that a certain Jewish books store sells baseball caps that have a caption: "I keep chumras that you haven't even heard of." A person must know where he is holding in the spiritual world. Halachic chumras are not a one-size-fits all religious expression. They must be appropriate to one's level of ascent of the ladder of spirituality.

Dovid HaMelech [King David] asks "Who will ascend (mi ya'aleh) the Mountain of Hashem?" [Tehillim 24:3]. Undoubtedly many will say "I can do it!" But then Dovid HaMelech adds "And who will maintain his location (mi yakum) in His holy place?" It is easy to say that I can jump up there and go where I do not really belong, but who can really stay there and maintain his elevated stature? Only the few good men for whom stringencies are meaningful should embark on the road of ultra-piety. This is not the proper approach for the masses. Many people think they can ascend the Mountain of Hashem, but most of those who jump up there do not succeed in remaining at that elevation on a permanent basis.

This is the lesson of Mar Ukva. It is also the lesson taught by the Gemara [Yoma 47a] which relates that Kimchis had 7 sons who became High Priests because she was so modest that "the beams of her house never saw the hairs of her head" (She would always keep her hair covered even in the privacy of her own home).

The Gemara comments that "many tried to do what Kimchis did, but they were not successful". Why not? Anyone can keep their hair covered at all times. But only Kimchis and a select few like her can keep their hair covered at all times, even in the privacy of their own homes, as the result of an acute sense of the presence of the Ribono shel Olam [Master of the World] and what tznius [modesty] is all about. It is not a chumra that is appropriate for everyone.

## **Moshe's Lack of Ego Qualified Him To Be The Most Trustworthy in G-d's House**

The Parsha ends with a validation of who Moshe Rabbeinu was. This is one of the Torah's greatest testaments to his unique status. Miriam and Aharon complained that Moshe Rabbeinu had separated from his wife. G-d tells them: "Please hear My words. If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I make Myself, Hashem, known to him, in a dream shall I speak with him. Not so is My servant Moshe, in My entire house he is trusted. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a vision and not in riddles, and at the image of Hashem does he gaze." [Bamidbar 12: 6-8]

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato (RaMCha"l) writes in the Derech Hashem that other prophets only grasped small details that the L-rd wished to reveal to them. However Moshe Rabbeinu merited that the entire order of creation be revealed to him. Everything was opened to him. He had the keys, so to speak, to Heavenly secrets that were never given to anyone else. This is alluded to in the pasuk "In all My House he is the most trustworthy." [Bamidbar 12:7]

Rav Shimshon Pinkus, z"l offers the following example. A business owner may have a trusted employee who is trusted with the books and all the inner running of the business operation. And yet there will be certain personal business secrets that remain off limits even to him. He is trusted "only" 99.9%. Still, there remains that slight distinction between the owner of the business and his employee. After all, the employee is a different individual, who has his own ego and may have his own agenda. The owner and the employee are not the same.

When the Torah says regarding Moshe Rabbeinu "In all My House he is the most trustworthy" it means there are no reservations on G-d's part about Moshe's trustworthiness. He could be given over all the information about G-d's business, as it were. Why was Moshe worthy of such unique trust? It is because "The man Moshe was the most humble person who ever walked the face of the earth" [Bamidbar 12:3]. Relative to the Almighty, he completely nullified himself. He had no ego when it came to the Ribono shel Olam. His agenda was 100% the agenda of the Almighty such that the Almighty did not have to withhold any secrets from him. Therefore, as the RaMChaL writes, every secret of creation was open to him.

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