

# NEFESH SHIMSHON



DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה בן רחל נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה  
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

## PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

## Where Do Material Blessings Lead You?

וְנָתַתִּי גְשָׁמִיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ וְעַץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִיּוֹ: (ויקרא כו, ד)

**I will give your rains in their time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (Vayikra 26:4)**

The material blessings promised us for learning Torah and keeping *mitzvos* are all about agriculture. They speak of fruitful fields and vineyards and so forth. Why doesn't the Torah promise us lots of silver, gold and jewels, or abundant real estate?

There is a good reason for this. When a person has silver and gold and other precious objects he feels secure and well-established. He doesn't need to raise his eyes to the heavens and ask for *siyata d'Shmaya* because the blessing is already safely under his control. Gold doesn't rust and silver doesn't rot,

and with money he can buy whatever he needs. He is secure in his wealth. Even if there would be a famine in the land, he will take his money and go to a different country and live there like a rich man.

This is why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gives the one he loves a type of wealth that doesn't detach him and his heart from *Hashem*. He gives him wealth that depends on rain and other natural phenomena that are beyond his control and are only in *Hashem's* hands. This way, the wealthier a person becomes and the more possessions he accumulates, the more his

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heart becomes connected to *Hashem*, and he needs constant *tefilah* and *siyata d'Shmaya*.

The way things normally work is the more a rich man gives to a pauper, the less the pauper is dependent on him, to the point that the pauper becomes financially well-established and doesn't need any further help at all. The rich man's gifts actually cause the recipient to eventually drift away from him.

If *Hashem* would give us that kind of gift, so we wouldn't need His blessings any more, it would not be a blessing but the worst curse that could possibly be. Because the true good is only closeness to *Hashem*, as it says:

ואני קרבת אלקים לי טוב – “As for me, closeness to G-d is my goodness.”<sup>1</sup>

This is why *Hashem's* greatest gifts are those that

cause us to be dependent on Him and constantly look to Him for help. His blessings are thus double. It starts with the blessing itself, which brings great happiness. And the greater the blessing, the more dependent we become on *Hashem* and the more attached to Him.

What are the greatest gifts from *Hashem*? Health, children and life itself. These are things you can't keep in a safe deposit box. Life and health, ours and our children's, are in *Hashem's* hands. He guards them. The same goes with *parnassah*. Even if it sometimes seems like the salary comes in automatically and regularly, we need to be aware that it's not really that way. Everything depends on *Hashem's* Will and His running of the world.

If a person constantly feels that he needs to ask *Hashem* for his *parnassah*, and that his life and health and that of his family are in *Hashem's* hands, and he always raises his eyes to Heaven, his blessings will increase more and more. ●

<sup>1</sup> Tehillim 73:28.

## PARSHAH TOPIC

## Toiling in Torah

אם בַּחֲקָתֵי תֵלְכוּ. (ויקרא כו, ג)

If you will walk in My statutes. (*Vayikra* 26:3)

Perhaps this means *mitzvah* observance? When it says, “And you will keep My *mitzvos*,” we see that *mitzvah* observance is already stated. So what does “If you will walk in My statutes” mean? That you should toil in Torah study. (*Rashi*)

### Keep Learning

The *mitzvah* of Torah learning is different from

all other *mitzvos* in regards to its obligation. Each *mitzvah* has a certain time allotted to it, in which we are to fulfill that *mitzvah*. *Tefillin* is at daytime,

### לעילוי נשמת

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג ז"ל  
ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס ז"ל

נדבת נדידהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני נשים והפארת בני אבותם

*lulav* is during Sukkos, *tzitzis* is on a daytime garment, and so forth. The time for Torah study, however, is whenever a person is able to learn, as the Rambam writes:

Every Jewish man is obligated to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, healthy or in pain.... Among the great sages of the Jewish people were those who chopped wood or drew water for a living, and among them were blind people, and they still occupied themselves with Torah study day and night.... Until when is a person obligated to study Torah? Until the day of his death....<sup>1</sup>

A couple of chapters later the Rambam describes in detail the great obligation to learn Torah and the great virtue of one who learns regularly, and the extent to which a person needs to minimize involvement with worldly business and pleasures in order to merit the crown of Torah:

Someone whose heart moves him to fulfill this *mitzvah* properly and to merit the crown of Torah should not divert his mind to other matters... rather you should make your Torah to be your regular pursuit and your work secondary. You should not say, “When I have free time, I will learn,” maybe you won’t have free time....

*Chazal* exhorted, “Minimize your business activities and engage in Torah learning.” Words of Torah are compared to water, as it says... similarly, words of Torah are not to be found with those of haughty heart.... A person should work every day a little, as much as he needs to live, if he doesn’t have food to eat, and the rest of the day and night he should occupy himself with Torah study....<sup>2</sup>

The Mishnah emphasizes how important it is not to interrupt one’s learning, even when traveling:

Someone who is walking on the road and reviewing the teachings he has learned, and interrupts his learning and says, “What a beautiful tree this is, what a beautiful field this is,” Scripture considers it as if he is liable for the death penalty.<sup>3</sup>

Anyone who looks at what *Chazal* and later sources wrote will see how greatly they emphasized the obligation to learn Torah and not to interrupt one’s learning.

The Torah was originally given to the *Dor De’ah*, the sublime generation that stood at Sinai and attained the level of prophecy. It was Yehoshua bin Nun who was commanded, והגית בו יומם ולילה – “You shall study it day and night,”<sup>4</sup> and was exhorted, רק חזק ואמץ – “Only be strong and fortify yourself.”

*Chazal* taught that just as the reward for Torah study is equal to the reward for all the *mitzvos* put together, so the punishment for neglect of Torah study is equal to the punishment for all the *mitzvos* put together.<sup>5</sup> This means that neglecting Torah study for one moment is worse than all the *aveiros* in the Torah. One who smokes on *Shabbos* or eats all the forbidden foods is better off than one who neglects Torah learning.

Amazingly enough, even though all this was written thousands of years ago and was addressed to the *Dor De’ah*, we in this lowly generation are expected to fulfill the same command. It is the same Torah. It’s hard to understand this, but it’s a fact. We are responsible for all this, like they were.

This brings us to the big question: how in the world can I manage to do this? How can I fulfill my obligation to toil in Torah learning?

1 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:8-10.

2 *Ibid* 3:6-12.

3 *Avos* 3:7.

4 *Yehoshua* 1:8.

5 *Yerushalmi, Peah* 1:1.

## Make It Sweet

The answer to this question is to be found in *Birkas Hatorah*, the blessing recited over Torah learning. Let's look at this blessing. The first part says אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה – “He sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to engage in Torah study.”

This is where all the questions arise. What, me, I am commanded to do this? Learn diligently day and night without interruption?? How can I possibly fulfill this command, practically speaking?

The answer is in the very next line of the blessing: והערב נא ה' אלוֹקינו – “Please, *Hashem* our G-d, make it sweet!” This is in fact a prayer, but it is also the answer to the question.

“Please, *Hashem* our G-d, make it sweet!” is a special prayer that Torah learning should be sweet and pleasant in our mouths. It is in fact a request to be granted the capability to learn Torah. It is written:

וּשְׂמַחַת בְּכֹל הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ –  
You shall be happy with all the good that  
*Hashem*, your G-d gave you.<sup>6</sup>

On this verse the Ohr Hachayim wrote his famous words:

If people would sense the sweetness and pleasantness of the Torah's goodness, they would run after it like crazy and would not consider a whole world full of silver and gold to be worth anything.

The Chazon Ish wrote something similar:

The marriage match between the wisdom and the person cannot be made without longing and appetite. The words of Torah are beloved. The power of affection opens the brain and the heart to swallow wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

“It was said about R. Yochanan, ‘If a person would give all the wealth of his household for the love’<sup>7</sup> that R. Yochanan loved the Torah, ‘He would be scorned’<sup>8,9,10</sup>”

When a person loves Torah, this will bring him to learn constantly, and it will also cause him to properly absorb what he learns. It is written:

בְּחֻקֹתֶיךָ אֶשְׂתַּעֲשֶׂע לֹא אֶשְׁכַּח דְּבָרְךָ — I  
will take pleasure in Your laws; I will not  
forget Your words.<sup>11</sup>

The Radak interprets as follows:

When I think about words of Torah, I take pleasure in them. Therefore I will not forget them, because they bring me happiness and joy.

Enjoying learning causes us to remember what we learned. And the Radak says the opposite is also true: if a person feels that learning is a burden, in the end he won't be able to learn.

The Vilna Gaon was able to learn with tremendous constancy for hours upon hours. We get tired after learning a *daf Gemara* for half an hour. Why? Because learning is not sweet to us like it was to him. That's why we experience it to be hard and tiring. The only solution is to get to a place where learning Torah is sweet and pleasant.

It's easy to pick up a newspaper or a book with stories about *tzaddikim* and start to read and get absorbed in something interesting and not even notice the time passing by. Similarly, it's easy to go through hours with a candy in one's mouth and not get tired out from it. But the Torah is different. It is bitter in the beginning and sweet in the end.

*Emunah* in *Hashem*, and truly recognizing that Torah learning attaches a person to *Hakadosh*

7 Shir Hashirim 8:7.

8 Ibid.

9 Yalkut Shimoni, Mishpatim 363.

10 Igros Chazon Ish 3:1.

11 Tehillim 119:16.

6 Devarim 26:11.

*Baruch Hu*, brought the *Gedolei Torah* throughout the generations to have a zest for Torah and to taste tremendous sweetness in every word they learned. This sweetness enabled them to learn with such great *hasmadah*.

## How to Make It Sweet?

It says in *Mishlei*:

נֶפֶשׁ שִׁבְעָה תְבוּס נֹפֵשׁ וְנֹפֵשׁ רַעֲבָה כָּל מֵר  
מֵתוּק — A satiated soul will trample on  
honey, and for a hungry soul, everything  
bitter will be sweet.<sup>12</sup>

The Vilna Gaon interprets as follows:

When a person has no desire for Torah learning he doesn't taste its sweetness and then he will "trample on honey." But when his soul is hungry, when it desires and longs for Torah study, even "everything bitter will be sweet" because he toiled greatly over it and exerted himself for it.<sup>13</sup>

Here we see that putting sweat and effort into Torah learning brings a person to feel tremendous longing for Torah, to the point that even bitter becomes sweet. The pleasantness that he experiences becomes a wondrous tool to increase his *hasmadah*.

A wise person once told me about a relative who, after the *Shabbos* evening meal, sits down and learns with great *hasmadah* until morning. When asked how he manages to do this, he answered that at first it's hard, but afterward the difficulty goes away and the learning becomes enjoyable and sweet.

The *hasmadah* makes it pleasant, and the pleasantness increases the *hasmadah*, and it just keeps growing and growing. It says in the *Gemara*:

R. Zeira said, and some say it was R. Chinena bar Papa: Come and see how *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* way is not like the

way of human beings. The way of human beings is that you can put something into an empty receptacle, and you can't put something into a full receptacle. But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not like that. For Him, you can put something into a full receptacle, and you can't put something into an empty receptacle, as it says, וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע — "If you heard [i.e., learned] you will hear [i.e., learn more] and if not, you won't hear."<sup>14</sup>

Rashi explains as follows:

If you learned once, in the end you will lend your ear another time. If you learned something old, i.e., you reviewed again and again what you learned last year, you will learn something new. And if you turn your heart away, you will not learn anymore.

Learning with constancy makes the learning enjoyable, and makes a person want to learn more and more, with more and more constancy.

I was fortunate to know R. Nachum Lassman, who was a *tzaddik* and a great *talmid chacham*. Once he needed to stay with a certain Jew in order to attend to an urgent matter. He traveled to the Jew's house but did not find him at home. So what did he do? He went to the *beis midrash* and learned there until morning.

There are people who sit and learn until morning, but it's not like the story about R. Nachum. Other people, when they stay up all night to learn, planned it out in advance. But he originally had no intention of learning all night. For him it was the natural and obvious thing to do in such a situation.

Staying up all night to learn like that might be a very lofty level, but it's all a matter of habit. You simply need to get used to being absorbed in learning, thinking in learning, not spending time idly. Eventually you will feel a most amazing pleasure and love of Torah. ●

<sup>12</sup> *Mishlei* 27:7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Commentary of Vilna Gaon.

<sup>14</sup> *Devarim* 28:1.



## First Remove the Obstacles

There are two types of things that engage us in this world. They are **עשה טוב** and **סור מרע** – avoiding the negative and doing the positive. The positive is to come to an inner understanding and recognition of *Hashem's* Oneness. The negative is to find ways to get rid of all the obstacles, all the forces of evil that try to prevent us from achieving our goal. Evil goes by three names: *Satan*, *Yetzer Hara* and *Malach Hamaves*.<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is to hold us back from serving *Hashem* and to obscure the light of truth.

The primary place where evil exists is this world. However, it does have a certain presence also in the next world up, which is the world called *Yetzirah*. That is the world of the angels. As we mentioned, the *Yetzer Hara* and the *Malach Hamaves* are one and the same. The *Malach Hamaves*, the “Angel of Death,” is an angel. And the ruling angel of Eisav is an angel, too.

Thus, the battle between good and evil takes place also in the world of *Yetzirah*.

It is not so in the world of *Bri'ah*, which is above the world of *Yetzirah*. That is the world of *Kisei Hakavod*, of the Heavenly Throne of Glory, so evil does not reach there at all, as it is written:

לא יגדך רע – Evil does not dwell with You.<sup>2</sup>

The first two sections of the *Tefilah* therefore relate to both good and evil. The first section is *Berachos* and *Korbanos*, corresponding to the lowest world, that of *Asiyah*, and the second section is songs and praises to *Hashem*, corresponding to

the world of *Yetzirah*, which is the world of angels, who themselves sing songs and praises to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. In these two sections of the *Tefilah*, we seek to remove the forces of evil that hold us back from *avodas Hashem* and prevent the revelation of *Hashem's* true Oneness in those two worlds.

The part of the *Tefilah* specially dedicated to the removal of evil is *Hodu*, which begins with the verse **הודו לה' קראו בשמו הודיעו בעמים עלילותי**. This *pasuk* instructs us to go and make it known among the nations that *Hashem* exists. And to tell of His great deeds: **שיחו בכל גפלאתי**. And we tell the nations to see His glory and splendor: **הודו והדר להפני**.

Later on we say: **א-ל נקמות הופיע** – “G-d of vengeance, appear!” After removing the forces of evil, the light of *Hashem* can appear and shine in full force. The preface to all this is, of course, *Berachos* and *Korbanos*.

## The Yetzer Hara's Main Job

The world as we know it is a place where evil has done a very thorough job. Evil spreads out in tremendous dimensions over the entire world (past, present and future, north, south, east and west, above and below). This is called **שלטון הרשע**, the “rule of wickedness.”

Evil wants to prevent a person from eating *matzah* on Pesach and from putting a *mezuzah* on his door. It wants to get him to commit all sorts of sins: *lashon hara*, improper thoughts, pursuing base desires, etc. Evil spreads out over a very wide area, over our 248 limbs and organs and our 365 sinews and nerves. It wants us to commit 365 *aveiros* and to prevent us from fulfilling 248 *mitzvos*.

This is all true, but there is one thing that the *Yetzer Hara* really focuses on, and it enables him

<sup>1</sup> *Bava Basra* 16a.

<sup>2</sup> *Tehillim* 5:5.

to spread out over the whole world. The *Chovos Halevavos* writes:

Human being, you should know that the biggest enemy you have in the world is your *Yetzer*, which is mixed in with the powers and faculties of your soul.... You are asleep regarding it, but it is awake regarding you.... One of the strongest of its weapons that it shoots at you and with which it battles you... is trying to get you to doubt what you know to be true... what is clear to you from your faith and your religion.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the *Yetzer Hara's* main work is one thing only: to blur and obfuscate the truth of *Hashem's* Oneness. It tries to befog us regarding this essential matter.

The *Yetzer Hara* speaks to each person in a different language, according to that person's particular brand of foolishness and type of nonsense that he allows to cloud his mind. In one way or another, he tells a person, "You know, there's a big world out there. It's about time you start enjoying life a little. You can't just live with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He is above and beyond the world. Besides *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* there is a world, in which people eat and drink and enjoy and become wealthy. This world, too, is also a world!"

The sole message that the *Yetzer Hara* tries to communicate to us is as follows: "You can't tell me there is only *Hashem* and only Torah and *mitzvos*. It doesn't work. You can't live that way. Torah is simply not the only thing in the world. Yes, Torah learning is among the most important of things,

but there is a world here, and person needs to be normal and live normally in the world."

Only after the *Yetzer Hara* brings a person to a state of confusion over this issue, then he has a way in. Then he can introduce every kind of evil there is: jealousy and competition, disregard for *mitzvos* that ostensibly get in our way, and so forth. It all comes from one source, which is lack of clarity regarding the Oneness of *Hashem*.

This is why our main *avodah* in *Tefilah* is to declare the Oneness of *Hashem* in the world. This is definitely true of the two first sections of *Tefilah*, which are *Berachos* and *Korbanos*, and *Pesukei d'Zimra* – where we seek to eliminate evil. And the *avodah* of *Yichud Hashem* is even more central to the later sections of the *Tefilah*.

When a person opens his eyes in the morning, the *Yetzer Hara* tells him: "Look, you have eyes." But the person immediately gives it back to *Hashem*, and says, "No, I don't have eyes. Everything is *Hashem's!* פוקח עורים ה'... ברוך אתה ה'. Neither do I have a soul: אלקי נשמה שנתת בי. And I don't have a body either: גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך שאם יפתח אחד מהם או יסתם אחד מהם... רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות. If for one moment, *Hashem* would not make wonders with my body, I could not live."

In this way, a person defeats all the force of evil.

This is generally what *berachos* are all about. There is a big world that attracts a person, and in order to overcome the allures of this world a person needs to internalize the great principle that there is nothing other than *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He is One; there is nothing else besides Him. The more a person recognizes *Hashem's* Oneness, the easier it will be for him to overcome the temptations of *Olam Haze*. ●

<sup>3</sup> *Chovos Halevavos* 5:4.