

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 ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Birkas Kohanim

וְשָׂמוּ אֶת שְׁמִי עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָנִי אֲבָרְכֶם: (במדבר ו, כז)

They shall place My Name upon the Israelites and I will bless them. (*Bemidbar* 6:27)

Arms can be held in three positions: up, level and down. Holding one's arms down is not for Jews. R. Yehudah Hanasi never put his hands below his sash.¹ For Jews there are only two positions: either stretched out levelly, in order to do work, or held up. And when holding the arms up, the fingers

could face either upward or downward.

When the *kohanim* bless us in *Birkas Kohanim* their arms are held up and the fingers are pointed down, as it says:

וַיִּשָּׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת יָדָיו – Aharon raised up his arms.²

¹ *Shabbos* 118b.

² *Vayikra* 9:22.

*This week's publication is dedicated to the merit and success of our dear partners
who have so generously adopted the Kollel:*

הר"ר יונתן לוין והר"ר אשר מורי של"א

*May the zechus of Torah envelop them forever; that Torah should never cease from their mouths
or the mouths of their descendants. May they see success in all their endeavors,
and be blessed with expansiveness, good health, nachas and simcha all the days of their lives.*

This position facilitates bringing down the flow of Divine plenty from above through *Birkas Kohanim*.

When *Hashem* sends us blessing, He sends it through תומיך ואוריך לאיש חסידך – He sends it through the *kohanim* [whose fingers] constitute ten channels that convey blessing from above to below.

The greatest *eis ratzon* we have, the most auspicious time of all, is the time when the *kohanim* bless us. This is when the gates of Heaven open to give us everything we could possibly need. יברכך ה' וישמרך – *Hashem* will bless you with material possessions and protect you from sin. יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך – *Hashem* will smile upon you, He will shine upon you the radiance of His countenance. וישם לך שלום – He will grant you peace, and peace includes all the blessings there are.

It is recounted that the Brisker Rov once *davened shacharis* in a *shul* that didn't have any *kohanim*, and he sent someone to look for a *kohen* to bring in.

People asked him why is it so important to go looking for a *kohen*? He explained that if the rumor would go around that there is a big *tzaddik* in a foreign country whose blessings come true, many people would surely travel to him in order to get a *brachah*. And it says in the Torah about *Birkas Kohanim*, ושמנו את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם. *Hashem* Himself promises that He will bless us. Isn't it worthwhile to make an effort to get a *brachah* from such a Rav?!

A friend of mine was once in a very difficult state of health. I had *kavanah* for him many times during *Birkas Kohanim*, and my prayers were answered. He was healed in a truly miraculous way! ●



Let It Go

וְכָתַב אֶת הָאֵלֶּת הָאֵלֶּה הַכֹּהֵן בַּסֵּפֶר וּמָחָה אֶל מֵי הַמְרִים: (במדבר ה, כג)

The *kohen* shall write these curses on a parchment and erase it in the bitter water.
(*Bemidbar* 5:23)

When a *sotah*, a wife suspected of infidelity, is brought to *Beis Hamikdash*, the *kohen* inscribes *parshas sotah* on a parchment just as it is written

in the Torah, with the requisite *kedushah*. Then he puts the parchment into water, thus erasing and dissolving everything he wrote into the



water, including the holy names of *Hashem*. He then gives this water to the *sotah* to drink. This will clarify whether she has remained faithful to her husband.

Erasing *Hashem's* Name is forbidden by Torah law and is considered a severe prohibition. But here the Torah commands us to erase *Hashem's* Name which was inscribed in sanctity on parchment.

Peace is great! *Hashem* said to erase His Name, written in sanctity, in the water, for the sake of peace – to bring peace between husband and wife.¹

It is so crucial for there to be peace and harmony between husband and wife, and between every Jew, that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* actually commands us to erase His Name to attain it.

This teaching is truly awesome. Let's say a disagreement arises between two people. We all know that *shalom* is a very great thing, that we need to let things go in order to keep the peace, that we must try to be patient and forgiving. But when there is a significant financial loss involved, or a stinging personal insult, people tend to think there is a limit how far they need to go; they don't need to bend over backwards *that* much!

Here the Torah teaches us how far we need to go for the sake of peace: to the extent of erasing *Hashem's* holy Name.

Chazal say² that the entire world shook at the moment when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said at Sinai, לא תשא את שם ה' אלקיך לשוא – “You shall not

take the Name of *Hashem* your G-d in vain.”³ Why did the world shake specifically when this commandment was uttered?

כי ביה ה' צור עולמים – “By means of [the Name] *Yah, Hashem* He created worlds.”⁴ This refers to the two worlds that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created, one through the letter ה and one through the letter י. This world was by the ה and the next world by the י.⁵

This shows that the world's very creation was by means of two letters of *Hashem's* holy Name. His Name is thus the foundation of the world's existence. This explains why the whole world shakes when His holy Name is belittled. Such an act strikes at the world's very foundation.

The same applies to erasing *Hashem's* Name. This, too, is like destroying the world, because the foundation of the whole world is His Name. And how much do we need to let go of our gripes and grievances for the sake of peace? To the extent of erasing *Hashem's* Name. Even if destruction might come to the world, the most important thing is that there should be peace among Jews.

This is such an awesome obligation. We should do everything – waive our honor, forsake our money and even give up on our personal principles (as long as it doesn't contradict the Torah's commands) – in order for there to be peace and harmony in our home and our community.

Chazal say that in the merit of *shalom*, the *Shechinah* rests upon the Jewish people. ●

1 *Yalkut Shimoni, Naso* 711.

2 *Shevu'os* 39a.

3 *Shemos* 20:7.

4 *Yeshayahu* 26:4.

5 *Menachos* 29b.



קָרְבָּנוּ קִעֲרַת כֶּסֶף אֶחָת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ מִזְרֶק אֶחָד כֶּסֶף שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל
הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְגוֹי כֶּף אֶחָת עֶשְׂרֵה זָהָב מִלֵּאָה קִטְרֶת פֶּר אֶחָד בֶּן בָּקָר אֶחָד כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד
וְגוֹי שְׁעִיר עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחַטָּאת וּלְזִבַּח הַשְּׁלָמִים בָּקָר שְׁנַיִם אֵילִם חֲמִשָּׁה עֲתוּדִים חֲמִשָּׁה.
(במדבר ז, יג-יז)

His offering was one silver bowl weighing 130 *shekels*, one silver basin weighing seventy *shekels*... one golden ladle of ten *shekels*, full of incense, one young bull, one ram, one young sheep... one goat for a sin offering, and for peace offerings: two bulls, five rams, five goats, five young sheep. (*Bemidbar* 7:13-17)

Unique Intentions

Everyone who comes to this passage is puzzled that the Torah repeats over and over the offering brought by each tribe's leader, despite the fact that each brought an identical offering. The same thing is thus stated twelve times, which is amazingly repetitious.

The Torah has not even one extra letter. But here the exact same words with the exact same *te'amei hamikra* are written again and again, with all the details. Almost every time there is no difference at all, aside from the name of the leader and his tribe. The Torah could easily have written that there were twelve leaders, each of whom brought such and such.

The Early Commentators took note of this, among them Ramban and Rabbeinu Bechaye. They cited *Midrashim* to explain the matter.

One of the explanations brought by the Ramban is as follows:

Each of the tribes' leaders had the idea to bring gifts for the dedication of the Altar, and each had in mind to bring the same, but Nachshon had a certain intention for bringing them, and each one of the other leaders also had in mind a certain intention of his own.

The popular explanation is that each offering was significant on its own because each leader was different from the others. Each of them was a unique individual and thus brought his own. But the Ramban is not saying that. He is saying that each leader had a different intention, a different understanding of the offering's significance and meaning, and quotes *Midrashim* to detail this:

Nachshon had in mind to bring a *קערת* כֶּסֶף, a silver bowl, which has the *gematriya* of 930. This corresponds to the years that *Adam Harishon* lived. And its weight was 130, corresponding to the number of his offspring.

According to a different *Midrash*, each tribe had a tradition handed down from *Yaakov Avinu* about everything that is destined to happen to it until the time of *Mashiach*. Thus Nachshon began by bringing an offering according to the order of kingship. The bowl and the basin corresponded to two kings destined to descend from him that will rule over the sea and the land. They are Shlomo and *Melech Hamashiach*. So he brought a *קערה*, a bowl, corresponding to the sea, which surrounds the entire world and resembles a bowl.... This was what Nachshon ben Aminadav had in mind.

Nesanel ben Tzu'ar also had the idea to bring the same gifts for the dedication, but he had a different intention. His offering was all about the Torah, since the tribe of Yissachar was praised for their wisdom in Torah. He brought a silver bowl corresponding to the Torah which is called "bread," as it says, לֶכּוּ לֶחֱמוּ בִלְחֶמֶי – "Go eat My bread."¹

Zevulun engaged in trade and exerted himself to support Yissachar, with whom he will share the reward [for Yissachar's Torah learning]. Thus he offered a bowl, corresponding to the sea, since he dwelled by the seacoast [and engaged in maritime trade].²

Along these lines, *Chazal* found for each tribe a special reason for the offering it brought and for the specific numbers of each item. This is why the Torah treated them all the same and detailed each tribe on its own as if the others were not mentioned.³

Scheduled Uniqueness

This teaches us an important principle in *avodas Hashem*. There are two areas where we serve *Hashem*. The first is the framework, the set schedule.

For instance, a *yeshivah bachur* has fixed daily learning sessions. From 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM is the morning *seder*, and then comes lunch. From 3:30 PM to 7:00 PM is the afternoon *seder* and then comes supper. The night *seder* goes until 11:00 PM. The world in general has adopted set schedules, and this is especially true in *yeshivos*.

There is tremendous value in this, but it also has a drawback. The *yeshivah* schedule was established by *Gedolei Yisrael* and enjoyed great *siyata d'Shamaya*. However, some people claim that it caused a lot

of good Jews not to grow great in Torah learning because when a person lives his life according to a fixed schedule he doesn't have room within it to grow.

A person's greatness is expressed mainly in his specialness, his uniqueness. The first to be "special" was *Avraham Avinu*: אחד היה אברהם – "Avraham was one-of-a-kind."⁴ He is called אברהם העברי because the whole world was on one side and he was on the other side.

What about us?

A person who learns in *yeshivah* (I am not talking about lazy people but about those who work and aspire), what is the thought that comes into his head as soon as he decides to grab hold of himself and start growing higher, to become special in some way? He decides that he will learn also in between the regular study sessions. "At night, after 11:00, when the others leave the *beis midrash*," he says to himself, "I will learn until 3:00 AM." Or, alternatively, "I will get up at 4:00 AM and learn until *Shacharis*." Or something else along those lines. This is his plan to be special.

I surely am not coming to downplay decisions like this. A person definitely needs to be special and to try with all his strength to grow higher. But the idea that a person's uniqueness is expressed only when he does exceptional things that go beyond the accepted norm is a mistake. And the proof is right here in the story of the offerings brought by the leaders of the tribes.

There were twelve leaders, twelve *nesi'im*, and each one brought exactly the same thing: one silver bowl, one silver basin, one gold ladle full of incense, one bull, one ram, and so on. Everyone was the same. You could almost think that each *nasi* was a robot, a nothing, just doing what everyone does.

Surprisingly enough, in this very *avodah*, each one found his own identity, his own special greatness and beauty. Each *nasi* was totally unique. And the Torah emphasizes to us that these were the most beautiful

1 *Mishlei* 9:5.

2 *Bemidbar Rabbah* 13:16.

3 Commentary of Ramban on the Torah.

4 *Yechezkel* 33:24.

korbanos, the *korbanos* of dedicating the *Mizbeach*.

This shows that you don't need to be different from everyone else by means of doing extreme things. But you do need to be special. The most beautiful *avodah*, the inner, true *avodah*, is to be special and to open one's heart within the framework and schedule that our Rabbis of blessed memory set up for us.

A person should sit down in the *beis midrash* during the regular learning session and feel that he is not here because Yankel and Shmeryl are here, but because he, on his own, needs to be here. Here, he will do a different *avodah*, attain a different depth of understanding, and do it with a different feeling. It is as if he is the only person in this *beis midrash*. He is alone. He is special!

Daily Greatness

This idea is so relevant to practical life. Sometimes you see a *yeshivah bachur* who takes a *Sefer Tehillim* at the end of the *seder* or after *davening* and fervently recites a few chapters of *Tehillim*. This is surely a good and positive thing. But the question is why does he feel a need right now to recite *Tehillim*?

It works like this: he finished *davening* or the learning session. At this point he thinks to himself, "I need to do a little *avodas Hashem*, to give *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* something that comes from me. I came to *davening* because that's the *yeshivah* schedule. I had to do it. I *daven* because everyone *davens*. That's not called my '*avodas Hashem*.' But now that the regular scheduled *seder* is over, I will give something to the *Ribono shel Olam*." So he starts to say *Tehillim* with great fervor.

According to this line of reasoning, reciting the blessing of *shehakol* is not *avodas Hashem*. And also *Birkas Hamazon* is not considered *avodas Hashem*.

Neither is saying a hundred *berachos* a day. Only *Tehillim* that he recites of his own accord, those ten minutes that he dedicates from his private time – that's *avodas Hashem*. And he is so happy that he had this great merit...

This is a big mistake. There is surely immense value to five extra minutes of *avodas Hashem* expressed in reciting *Tehillim*. But this is not what builds a person. This is not the greatness of a Jew.

A person's greatness is expressed when he wakes up in the morning and says the same *Modeh ani* that his mother taught him to say when he was a young child. Every Jew says *Modeh ani*. But each Jew needs to find meaning and significance in it that no other Jew in the world has. This is "your" *Modeh ani*.

When a person puts energy and feeling into *davening* the daily *Shacharis*, this is where greatness is. The learning and *davening* of the daily schedule that *Hashem* set up for us was not intended to be mediocre and sleepy. On the contrary, the most beautiful *gadlus* can come out of these regular times of *davening* and learning. My great father-in-law R. Mordechai Leib Mann *zt"l* would always say that keeping the regular *yeshivah* times of *davening* and learning is a matter of *kabbalas ohl malchus Shamayim*, accepting upon oneself the yoke of Heaven's Kingship. This is what the *Gedolim* of previous generations had in mind when they established *yeshivos* as we know them today.

The holiness and greatness of a Jew is not built from great, unusual things. It is built from *Shabbos*, from reciting *Lechu neranena*, from *Lecha Dodi*, from reciting *berachos*, from everyday *Shacharis davening*. Until we get in the habit of taking proper advantage of all these regular daily *avodos*, all the beautiful extra things that we do won't have the power to uplift us to true *avodas Hashem*. ●