



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

Aharon is Your Rav

וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל הַר הָהָר עַל פִּי ה' וַיָּמָת שָׁם בְּשָׁנַת הָאַרְבָּעִים לְצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ. (במדבר לג, לח)

Aharon Hakohen ascended Mount Hor, as commanded by *Hashem*, and died there in the fortieth year after the Jewish people left the land of Egypt. It was in the fifth month, on the first day of the month. (*Bemidbar 33:38*)

Aharon Hakohen passed away on *Rosh Chodesh Av*.

This *pasuk* is remarkable because nowhere else does the Torah tell us the specific date on which a *tzaddik* died. Only for *Aharon Hakohen* is the *yahrzeit* stated in the Torah. In fact, it says in the *Tur*¹ that even though this *yahrzeit* is on *Rosh Chodesh*, it is permitted to fast, and it is even praiseworthy to fast, as it is a *ta'anis tzaddikim*.

Why is Aharon's death different from that of all others? Perhaps because Aharon was the great *Rav* of *ahavas shalom* and of *redifas shalom*, loving peace and pursuing peace, and for this reason, the day he

passed away is a time of crying and sorrow for all generations. There is no sorrow like the death of someone who brings peace to the world.

Chazal taught us emphatically:

Be a disciple of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace.²

The first and foremost thing we need is a *Rav* to teach us to love *shalom*. This is because too many people like conflicts and fights. When there is peace, everything is so quiet and boring. But when a good, juicy fight sparks up, it brings interesting experiences,

1 *Orach Chayim* 580.

2 *Avos* 1:12.

and life is more varied.

Not only that, but at times of peace, many people just blend into the background and don't stand out. You don't see them or hear them. But when there is a controversy, they become conspicuous and have an opportunity to voice their opinions.

Let's admit it: too many people enjoy a good *machlokes*. This is why we need a great *Rav* like Aharon to teach us to love *shalom*, and only then will we take practical steps to pursue *shalom*.

This may be compared to a child who came upon a big fire threatening an apartment building. He watches the intense efforts of the fire fighters climbing up and down high ladders, saving people, spraying water. He stands there, mesmerized by the sight. It is even more exciting if he himself helps in

the rescue efforts, and is even applauded for it.

Now he just can't wait for another giant fire like this to take place. He might even be tempted to set a house on fire in order to have another great experience like this, even if it might cause a tragedy, *chas v'shalom*. He is thus in desperate need of someone to teach him not to love fires and not to be a pyromaniac.

This is just what Aharon would teach people. He taught them to love "boring" peace and hate "exciting" *machlokes*.

The day Aharon passed away is thus a time of sorrow and weeping for all generations. We need to remember what Aharon taught, and know that even if fights look fun and exciting, they are nothing but a curse and a disaster. And peace brings us everything good. ●



Get in the Habit of Truth

כָּכֹל הֵיִצָא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה. (במדבר ל, ג)

He shall do just as it came out of his mouth. (Bemidbar 30:3)

Simply speaking, this verse is talking about oaths and vows. When a person swears, or takes a vow, he must fulfill his words and not do differently than he said. However, *Chazal* and *Baalei Hamussar* spoke at length in many places about how great it is to guard one's mouth from speaking falsely even when no oath or vow is involved. A person should train himself to speak only the truth, and whatever he

says, he should make sure to do it.

Habituating oneself to always speak the truth is one of the greatest and loftiest virtues that a person can acquire. It is level of personal perfection that is actually very hard to attain. This is because people naturally deviate quite a bit from the truth.

Chazal say that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wished to create man, the trait of truth argued that



man should not be created, because he speaks falsely so much. People naturally tell lies. Both big lies and little, insignificant lies. And even when they are not telling an outright lie, they often speak inaccurately. They speak lies that are damaging to others, and they tell tall tales that are harmless. It is hard to recount even a short, simple story without exaggerating something or adding something.

This is all for a simple reason. We have gotten used to the fact that in complex situations, which we have experienced over and over again during the course of our lives, we can easily get out of trouble by saying a false word, thus saving ourselves a lot of loss and a lot of unpleasantness.

This habit begins with small matters. Children naturally behave rambunctiously and rollick around. They very often do things they should not. With a little lie, a child can save himself from punishment. And since he is a small, weak child, falsehood is the only means of defense he has. This habit of speaking falsely thus becomes second nature. A person knows as long as he lives that he can deal with a lot of problems in life by telling a little lie, and for this

reason, the majority of people don't stick to the truth.

However, this is one of the main causes of spiritual decline. It distances a person from *Hashem*, and from the Torah, which are the very source of truth.

We might think that words are just a matter of pushing a little air out of our mouth; it's no big deal. But we are seriously deluding ourselves to think this way. A word is a tremendously important and significant matter. It is not by chance that speech has the ability to build worlds and destroy worlds, to break hearts and to reinvigorate the downtrodden. We see this to be true.

We need to realize that even when we don't notice it, our words exert a great influence. Speaking falsely, even about paltry things that don't seem to matter to anyone, is a harmful and destructive act. It disconnects us from *Hashem*, Whose Name is *Emes*.

Fortunate is the person who accustoms himself to speak only the truth, because he is thereby attached to the Source of truth. As *Chazal* say, "The seal of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is truth."¹ ●

1 *Shabbos* 55a.



Things Have Not Changed At All

כֹּה אָמַר ה' זְכוֹרָתִי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבֵּת כְּלוּלֹתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאַרְץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:
(מתוך ההפטרה)

So said *Hashem*: "I have remembered for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days." (*Haftarah*)

We see an amazing thing in the *Haftarah*, which is a passage from *Sefer Yirmeyahu*.

In the first chapter of *Sefer Yirmeyahu*, it says:

וְדַבַּרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטֵי אוֹתָם עַל כָּל רָעָתָם אֲשֶׁר

עָזְבוּנִי וַיִּקְטְרוּ לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַמַּעֲשֵׂי
יְדֵיהֶם – I spoke My judgment of them, for
all the evil they did, that they abandoned
Me and burned incense to other gods and

bowed down to the work of their hands.¹

But right after that, in the beginning of the second chapter, *Hashem* commands *Yirmeyahu* to go and call out into the ears of *Yerushalayim*, telling them that He remembers their splendid behavior of the past: כֹּה אָמַר ה' זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְלֻדְתֶיךָ. כֹּה אָמַר ה' זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְלֻדְתֶיךָ. Not only that, but *Hashem* goes on to say:

קִדְשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵהּ רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ כָּל אֲכָלֶיךָ
יְאֻשְׁמוּ רָעָה תִּבְאֵ אֲלֵיהֶם נָאִם ה'
– They are sacred to *Hashem*, they are the first of His crop. Anyone who devours them will bear guilt; evil will come upon them. So says *Hashem*.²

These two prophecies, the first highlighting the depths of sin and depravity, and the second emphasizing the heights of closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, are like an inseparable couple. Immediately following the somber passages of *churban* and *galus*, *Hashem* informs us that His relationship with the Jewish people has not changed. “I have remembered for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days.” In other words: You, the Jewish people are still My “bride.” Nothing has changed.

This is one of the most amazing things about *Hashem's* ways. His relationship and connection to us remains exactly as it was in the good old times.

I was recently at an outreach seminar and one of the rabbis there described the history of the Jewish people, comparing their relationship with *Hashem* to that of husband and wife:

The Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah were like the “marriage” between the Jewish people and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Yet, while the Jewish people were still “standing under the *chuppah*,” shortly after leaving *Mitzrayim*, the “couple” got into a “fight.” The people made the Golden Calf. But in the end, they “made up,” and the Jewish

people continued to live their lives together with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* throughout the forty years in the Wilderness.

And when they came to *Eretz Yisrael*, they even built a “home” which they shared with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This was *Beis Hamikdash*. It stood for more than four hundred years.

Then *Hashem* “divorced” the Jewish people, so to speak, and they parted ways. The Jewish people went into a long exile. But we are full of hope and expectation to return to *Hashem* soon.

This is how the rabbi described the course of Jewish history to his audience.

One of the participants asked, “If *Hashem* in fact ‘divorced’ us, what are we waiting for? If we are divorced, that means it’s all over.”

I answered him as follows: First of all, we need to know that it is not really so clear that *Hashem* ever “divorced” us. The topic is mentioned a number of times in *Tanach*. In some places it says that there was no divorce. For instance, in one place *Hashem* asks rhetorically:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵי זֶה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת אִמְכֶם אֲשֶׁר
שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ – So said *Hashem*: Where is the bill of divorce of your mother, by which I sent her away?³

This verse is saying that *Hashem* never divorced the Jewish people.

In one sense, He divorced us, and in another sense, He didn't. Because even from the perspective that *Hashem* divorced us, it is different from a husband divorcing his wife and thereby conclusively severing the relationship. This is because *Hashem's* capabilities are infinitely great. Unlike a human being, He can do anything. In one moment, He can turn the most painful and distressful situation into its exact opposite.

The following allegory illustrates the concept. The *rebbe* calls from *yeshivah* to speak to the father of Yankel. The *rebbe* reports that little Yankel

1 *Yirmeyahu* 1:16.

2 *Ibid* 2:3.

3 *Yeshayahu* 50:1.

misbehaved today. He hit other children, he did not pay attention to his studies, he did this, he did that.... When the father heard all this, he decided to give Yankel a proper punishment.

When Yankel came home, Father did not let him into the kitchen. He sent him straight to his room, to go to sleep without supper.

At which point, the child felt absolutely terrible. It seemed to him that his father had rejected him and doesn't love him anymore.

But we understand that the father's relationship

to the child has not changed at all. All the same love and affection that the father had for his child before is still there. It's just that he needed to punish the child, in order to correct his behavior.

So it was when *Hashem* threw us into *galus*. All the same wondrous affection that He had for us when He gave us the Torah, which expressed itself especially during the period of *Beis Hamikdash*, is still very much alive. And we can cause His love to be revealed again at any time. This is one of Judaism's basic principles. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

“When We Remembered Tzion”

Let's take a moment to reflect upon the loss the Jewish people felt when the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed and they were exiled from their land.

At the rivers of *Bavel*, there we sat; we wept exceedingly when we remembered *Tzion*.¹

We are told that when the Jewish people went into *galus*, they sat down by the rivers of *Bavel* and cried. But what did they cry about? “When we remembered *Tzion*.” While they were still back in *Yerushalayim*, in *Tzion*, they were at the highest spiritual level — and in one moment, everything was lost.

Indeed, the physical suffering they underwent in the *churban* was dreadful. Men, women and children were subjected to indescribable torment; small

children were butchered in front of their mothers' eyes.

Those slain by the sword were more fortunate than those who died of hunger.²

It was a ghastly tragedy. Great Torah sages were among the slaughtered. *Chazal* applied to them the verse, “The precious sons of *Tzion*, comparable to fine gold,”³ and commented:

Their beauty put fine gold to shame.⁴

At the time of the *churban*, these sages were trampled in the streets. And consider the Jewish people's tribulations upon arriving in *Bavel*:

The Euphrates River [i.e., “The rivers of *Bavel*”] killed more Jews than did the wicked Nebuchadnezzar. When the Jews were in *Eretz Yisrael* they drank only

¹ *Tehillim* 137:1.

² *Eichah* 4:9.

³ *Eichah* 4:2.

⁴ *Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah* 1042.

rainwater, running water, and spring water. When they were exiled to *Bavel*, they drank from the water of the Euphrates River and many of them died.

Furthermore, the wicked Nebuchadnezzar would sit in a boat [in the Euphrates River] together with all his nobles and ministers, and they had with them all kinds of musical instruments. And all the royalty of *Yehudah* were cast into iron chains and were walking exposed on the bank of the river.

The wicked Nebuchadnezzar raised his eyes and saw them, and said to his servants, “Why are they walking without a burden?” Right away they took a burden and placed it on their shoulders, to the point that they were bent over from the load; for this is what they said about themselves:⁵ “We were persecuted upon our necks.”⁶

We see that they went through a nightmare of torment, injury and starvation. Yet, *David HaMelech* tells us in *Tehillim* that the tears of the exiles in *Bavel* were not shed over all this suffering and slaughter. What made them cry was, “When we remembered *Tzion*.” They wept out of longing for the *Shechinah* that dwelt in *Tzion*!

Imagine a person who was badly hurt in a traffic accident. He is lying in the hospital, a sack of broken bones and injured limbs, with tears running down his face. Everyone around him is sure he is crying because of the great pain that his injuries cause him. Then his weak, broken voice is heard: “Oy, where is my *rebbe*? I so wish I could hear a *sevara* from him!”

When one loves Torah as he should, its lacking hurts more than anything in the world.

We have no idea how great was the love and longing that the Jewish people had for the *Shechinah* as they sat by the rivers of *Bavel*. They forgot

everything — the suffering, death and troubles — because they were hurting from a lack of closeness to *Hashem*. They experienced this pain more intensely than all the physical torment.

Now, when we hear lofty descriptions like this, it’s hard for us to relate to it. It sounds a little farfetched to us. Why is this?

We may be compared to a blind person who is being lectured to on the great importance of sunlight. He doesn’t really appreciate the point; it all sounds a little exaggerated to him because he manages okay without light and always did. We, too, were born and raised in the darkness and thus don’t truly comprehend what *Chazal* are telling us.

Let’s say a child was born in a dark cellar and grew up there without ever going outside. He can’t imagine what the world is like, since he never knew any reality other than the dark, dank cellar where he is entrapped. As far as he is concerned, there is no such thing as “light.” There is only darkness, suffering and filth. He also never heard about parents that he should be yearning for.

This is what we are like. That is why we are incapable of fathoming the deep yearning that the Jewish people felt in those days for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

The Tzaddikim of the Churban

Not only “at the rivers of Bavel” was it like that. In the other *churbanos* as well, the Jewish people had been at a high spiritual level that we can’t even grasp. They were lofty people, focused completely on *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Chazal describe the sin of the Jewish people that brought on the first *churban*:

What is the meaning of, “Who is the wise man who can comprehend this, who received the word of *Hashem*, that he can tell it — why the land was destroyed?”⁷ This matter was stated by the Sages and they did not explain it; it was stated by

⁵ *Eichah* 5:5.

⁶ *Pesikta Rabasi* 28:2.

⁷ *Yirmeyahu* 9:11.

the Prophets and they did not explain it; until *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* explained it Himself, as it says, “*Hashem* said, ‘Because they forsook My Torah that I placed before them.’”⁸ Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: They didn’t recite a blessing before learning Torah.⁹

We see that their sin was a subtle one. So subtle that only *Hashem* Himself was able to explain what they did wrong. “They didn’t recite a blessing before learning Torah.” What does this signify? That on a certain lofty level, perceptible only to *Hashem* Himself, the Torah was not important enough to them.

Chazal tell us further:

In the time of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, when they were occupied with Torah and *mitzvos* and the doing of *chesed*, why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred.¹⁰

Here too we see that the people were learned, observant Jews full of *mitzvos*. Their only sin was *sinas chinam*. Aside from this one sin, we have no idea how wondrously great they were.

These myriads of holy and pure people were crushed at the time of the *churban* by a cruel enemy. About the destruction of the city of Beitar, *Chazal* tell us:

They killed so many of them that horses sank up to their nostrils in blood, and the blood flowed so much that boulders the size of forty *seah* rolled and went four *mil* out into the sea. And if you say that it was close to the sea, this is not so: it was four *mil* away from the sea. Andrianus [the Roman general] had a large vineyard, eighteen *mil* on each side, like the distance from Teveria to Tzipori. He surrounded it with a wall made of those slain in Beitar. He did

not allow that they should be buried, until a certain king arose and decreed that they be buried.¹¹

How did those holy people respond when all this happened to them? What were their feelings?

Wounded and Lovesick

Shir HaShirim contains a wondrous description of the Jewish people’s relationship to *Hashem* at the time of the *churban*. First we will cite a few verses according to their simple translation, and then we will explain their meaning on a deeper level.

The voice of my Beloved is knocking [and saying]: “Open for me, My sister, My dear one, My dove, My perfect one, for My head is full of dew, and my locks, the heavy raindrops of night”... The guardians who patrol the city found me; they beat me and injured me. The guards of the walls removed my fine jewelry from me.

I adjure you, daughters of *Yerushalayim*: If you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick.

“Why is your Beloved special, you most beautiful of women? Why is your Beloved special, that you have so adjured us?”

“My Beloved is white and red, He is surrounded by myriads [of warriors]... His abdomen is like ivory adorned with sapphires. His thighs are pillars of marble standing on bases of fine gold... His palate is sweetness; He is all delight. This is my Beloved, this is my Dear One.”¹²

Hashem came and “knocked” on our doors, saying, “Open for me, My sister, My dear one, My dove, My perfect one.” He wished to bestow upon us an abundance of blessing. “My head is full of dew, and my locks, the heavy raindrops of night” — this means that when *Hashem* came to the Jewish people

⁸ *Ibid.*, v. 12.

⁹ *Bava Metzia* 85a.

¹⁰ *Yoma* 9b.

¹¹ *Eichah Rabbah* 2:4.

¹² *Shir HaShirim*, ch. 5.

He was bearing rain, dew, and the other worldly blessings.

Since we did not open for Him at that time, there was an immediate result: “They beat me and injured me.” The Jewish people was wounded all over: the destruction of the first *Beis HaMikdash*, the destruction of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, and after that, innumerable destructions and tribulations throughout all the generations.

The expulsion from Spain was one of the greatest *churbanos* we ever went through. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children left everything behind, going into exile bereft and penniless. Among them were very wealthy people who were at the top of society and could have stayed in Spain and kept observing the Torah in secret. But since this is not the right way to keep Torah and *mitzvos*, they left it all behind and went into exile empty-handed. About them it can surely be said:

“He cast down from heaven to earth”¹³
— from a high roof to a deep pit.¹⁴

One of the wondrous stories we know of that period concerns a certain Jew who fled by sea, with his wife and children, from the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition. They made their way in a tiny boat through the tempestuous sea and came to a rocky island. Lightning struck and killed his wife. He buried her on the way, as was done with *Rachel Imeinu*. While still on the beach, a stormy wave struck and washed his children out into the sea.

All alone, ragged and barefoot, he continued to make his way forward onto the abandoned, rocky island. With outstretched hands, he turned to *Hashem* and said:

“*Ribon HaOlamim!* I fled to this place so I could serve You freely, fulfill Your *mitzvos*, and sanctify Your Name in the world. You have put me through many *nisyonos* that seek to take my faith away from me. But I am telling you, my G-d and the G-d of

my fathers: You can oppress me, You can take from me the best and the most precious things I have in the world, You can torture me to death — but I will always believe in You! I am a Jew, and a Jew I will remain. I will not question Your ways, no matter what You have done to me or will do to me!”

When we hear stories of this sort, we are like the above-mentioned blind person hearing a description of sunlight. We have no conception of the great love for *Hashem* that these Jews had, despite the pain and suffering they went through.

Another example is the most recent major destruction, the Holocaust. There were Jews who for a period of years were slowly starving to death, while at the same time were brutally forced to perform backbreaking labor all day long. Their suffering was indescribable.

The reaction of *Klal Yisrael* to all those oppressors and persecutors was always: “I adjure you, daughters of *Yerushalayim*: If you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick!”

This was always our impassioned outcry.

We don’t ask them to tell *Hashem* about suffering and slaughters and massacres. To us, all this pales in comparison to the greatest pain of all: “I am lovesick.” The worst tragedy of everything that happened to us is that the *Shechinah* is no longer with us. This alone is what pains us and brings on our sickness.

We are lacking the wonderful feeling of “May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Your love is better than wine”¹⁵ — the heartfelt joy we experienced at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, when we rejoiced for seven days and nights without stop, and drew from there *ruach hakodesh*.

Everyone knows how to draw water. You take a bucket and go to the pump or the well. But how does one draw *ruach hakodesh*? We don’t know how to do it, but they did.

“On my bed at night I sought the One my soul

¹³ *Eichah* 2:1.

¹⁴ *Chagigah* 5b.

¹⁵ *Shir HaShirim* 1:2.

loves.”¹⁶ The *churban* was such a painful reality: just yesterday we were wealthy, and today we are destitute. Yesterday we had children; today we buried them. It is normal to toss and turn at night under such frightful conditions. Yet what was it that disturbed their sleep?

“I sought the One my soul loves.”

This Is My Beloved

When the nations of the world heard us speaking this way, they were startled. They asked: “Why is your Beloved special, you most beautiful of women?”¹⁷ They wanted to know what *Hashem* is like, the One we so love.

We started to explain to them what we lost when we went into *galus*.

“My Beloved is white and red.”¹⁸ *Hashem’s* face as it relates to us is white, as pure as snow. When *Beis HaMikdash* was standing and the *Shechinah* dwelled among the Jewish people, we had a wondrous clarity of *emunah*. We knew our task in this world, and *Hashem’s* great kindness was evident to all. Someone who did a *mitzvah* saw an immediate effect. He sensed *siyata d’Shemaya* enveloping him. And someone who did an *aveirah* was punished on the spot. A Jew (even if he was the king) who entered the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* would immediately perish. Because of the spiritual awareness that was so prevalent, the *tzaddikim* were the leaders in those days, and *resha’im* were considered the lowest of the low.

In this way, Jews would be clean from all stain of sin when they reached the end of their lives, because they had been punished for every sin right away.

Once, we had *Nevi’im* who would show us the path to success and growth in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Now they are no more; thus, years go by and we still stand bewildered, trying to figure out the right way to act. We are in the dark. We don’t know

what *Hashem* requires of us, and whether our deeds are pleasing to Him or not. A person can devote himself to a certain goal for a lifetime, and in the end find out he was going down the wrong path.

True, we are not capable of fathoming the wondrous spiritual light that once shone. Nevertheless, even a child born in a dark cellar, who never saw the light of the sun and is thus unable to comprehend what it is — if there would be a tiny crack in the wall through which some light filtered in, he could mentally multiply this light millions of times and thereby arrive at some understanding of the sun’s radiance.

“His locks are curls that are black as a raven.”¹⁹ This alludes to the rows upon rows of *tzaddikim* whose faces grow dark from the great struggle and effort they invest in understanding the Torah. Only *bnei Torah* know how many difficulties the *yetzer hara* puts in the way of the Torah learner: the *yetzer hara* takes away his zest for learning, robs his strength, makes him tired... but nevertheless, he overcomes it all and engages in Torah learning.

“His abdomen is an ivory piece studded with sapphires.”²⁰ Rashi explains this metaphorical reference to the “abdomen,” saying it alludes to *Sefer Vayikra*, which is in the middle of the five *Chumashim*, like the abdomen is in the middle of the body; furthermore, the abdomen has a smooth appearance like an ivory piece.

What does it mean that we regard *Sefer Vayikra* as “smooth”?

Sefer Vayikra contains the laws of ritual purity. All the Torah’s teachings regarding *taharah*, as set forth in the tractates of *Taharos*, *Nega’im*, *Keilim*, etc. — with all their profound *halachos*, and despite the prickly questions that might arise regarding them — we view as an “ivory piece,” as something that is smooth and clear, without any rough surfaces.

It is a tremendous pleasure to learn Torah in a state of purity, in practical fulfillment of *Seder*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5:9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, v. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 14.

Taharos, as we once did. It brings a special closeness to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that we no longer have.

If we ever felt the sublime pleasure of *teshuvah* on *Yom Kippur*, it was for us a matter of minutes or hours, whereas in *Yerushalayim* of old, it was a state of:²¹

A person never lied down for the night in *Yerushalayim* while maintaining a sin, as it says, "Righteousness shall lie in it."²²

No one woke up in the morning with sin. Imagine it! When we wake up in the morning, we have so many sins still with us. There is *bitul Torah*, *lashon hara*, *Kerias Shema* without proper *kavanah*, etc. But in *Yerushalayim* of old they would get up every morning pure from all sin. An ordinary weekday for them was on the level of our *Yom Kippur*.

Arise, illuminate, for your light has come...

What is the light we are hoping and waiting for?

...and *Hashem's* glory has shone upon you.²³

Light is something the Jewish people has indeed been blessed with. The *Menorah* that *Moshe Rabbeinu* made was a candelabrum that illuminated the *Mishkan* with a wondrous light. When *Moshe* ascended *Har Sinai* he was able to enter the heavenly, supernal places of the angels and the *seraphim*, but when the *Shechinah* would fill the *Mishkan*, *Moshe* could not enter. Such was the wondrous *madreigah* of *Moshe Rabbeinu's Menorah* and the effect it had. Yet, the Jewish people is not satisfied with this. They

²¹ *Bemidbar Rabbah* 21:21

²² *Yeshayahu* 1:21.

²³ *Yeshayahu* 60:1.

long for more!

Shlomo HaMelech, too, made a *Menorah*. He lit this *Menorah* in *Beis HaMikdash* on the day called *Hashem's* "wedding day" and "joy of His heart."²⁴ So great was the joy and celebration that it superseded *Yom Kippur* that year. Instead of fasting, the people ate and drank and rejoiced over the building of *Beis HaMikdash*. Yet, even the light of this *Menorah* does not satisfy the yearnings of the Jewish people. We are waiting for the highest peak that can possibly be: "Arise, illuminate, for your light has come, and *Hashem's* glory has shone upon you."

After these explanations that the Jewish people offered to the nations of the world, the concluding line is:

His palate is sweetness; He is all delight.
This is my Beloved, this is my Dear One.²⁵

The message is as follows: If you think that this description has given you an idea of *Hashem's* greatness, you are making a mistake. It is comparable to a person who tasted a candy or honey, and then tries to "explain" his experience to someone who never tasted sweetness in his life. It is impossible to convey the experience! "His palate is sweetness; He is all delight." After all has been said, you should know that you still haven't grasped even a fraction of the taste and sweetness that make us yearn for Him. It is a case of "I am lovesick."²⁶

The spiritual loss that befell us is so great, it simply dwarfs all the physical suffering and persecution we have gone through, making it small and secondary by comparison. ●

²⁴ *Shir HaShirim* 3:11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:5.