

# NEFESH SHIMSHON

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

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

## PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

## Simple Faith

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא (א, א)

### In the beginning of creation. (1:1)

The *Gemara*<sup>1</sup> tells the story of Talmi, the Greek king who called in seventy-two *Chachamim* and told each one separately to translate the Torah for him into Greek. *Hashem* placed the same idea in the mind of each *chacham*, and they each changed the order of the first verse, and wrote אלקים ברא בראשית instead of writing בראשית ברא אלקים. Rashi explains that they made this change so the Greeks won't say that an entity named "Bereishis" created "Elokim," who then went and created everything else.

This raises a question: why are Jews different, such that they are not prone to this mistake? In our Torah it says בראשית ברא אלקים and it is not considered a problem. But for the non-Jews, it has to be written אלקים ברא בראשית or else they will get it all wrong. What's the difference between us and them?

The *Seforim Hakedoshim* say great things about a simple Jew's straightforward faith in *Hashem* and

His Torah, and encourage everyone to strive for this *emunah peshutah*. It is commonly thought that this means we should simply accept, on faith, the Torah's tenets which we receive from the hand of tradition, and not think about them analytically.

But what is so great about just believing everything without even thinking? It is written, "A fool will believe anything."<sup>2</sup>

It seems the *Seforim Hakedoshim* rather mean that a person should believe the truth as his eyes perceive and his intellect understands that such is the simple, straightforward truth, without resorting to far-fetched interpretations and without raising unreasonable questions.

Let's say two people see a building. The first one says, "Why did they build it this way, and not that way?" The other one replies, "How do you know that anyone built this building? Maybe it grew of its own

1 *Megilah* 9a.

2 *Mishlei* 14:15.

accord, by chance?” You can raise any possibility at all, if you want to be silly. Maybe I am really a star, and the star really is me. Maybe this and maybe that. But it’s all nonsense.

An intelligent person believes simply and straightforwardly in what he sees clearly before his eyes, and he doesn’t veer way off track with all sorts of crazy theories.

So it is when we consider the world at large. A person who thinks straight will accept that which is obvious and evident. He will understand that the world has a Creator. If we see a globe suspended from the ceiling, we understand that someone manufactured it and someone hung it from the ceiling. The sun is an awesome globe of fire, several times bigger than the Earth, and it provides life-giving warmth and light to everything in the world. And it is just suspended up there in space. Someone must have made it and Someone must have placed it there. People who say, “But maybe... but maybe...” are talking nonsense. They simply aren’t thinking straight.

This is *emunah peshutah*. It means to simply believe that which is obviously true and standing right in front of our eyes. This is actually the highest level: to accept the simple and obvious truth as exactly that.

The same applies to the Torah tradition as handed down to us from generation to generation. This matter may be compared to a country where all the inhabitants praise and laud the king, see themselves as subject to his laws, and base their whole society and way of life on the fact that the king rules the land. But some idiot could still come along and start asking a series of absolutely “brilliant” questions that no one in town ever thought of before: maybe there

is no king? And maybe there is no capital city? And maybe the edge of the world is a little bit beyond the next village over? Maybe there is no America and no Russia and no France, because I never saw anything of them. Maybe and maybe ad infinitum.

But someone who thinks straight will simply believe that which is obviously true, unless it is proven otherwise.

This applies to the Thirteen Principles of Faith, as well. They are all simple and self-evident truths. *Emunah peshutah* means to simply live according to them. Let’s take belief in *Olam Haba* and *Techiyas HaMeisim*, for example. The *Mesilas Yesharim* writes in the first chapter that it is simply not plausible that G-d created man with such a lofty *neshamah* just for the life of this world. This applies also to belief in the coming of *Mashiach*. It is clear beyond a doubt that G-d must have set a final goal for the course of the world. That’s how it is when any intelligent being deliberately performs a series of actions – you can be sure that he has a goal in mind. And the same goes for all the Thirteen Principles; they are simply true.

Now let’s get back to the beginning of the Torah, and to the difference between Jews and the nations of the world. We will translate the opening words of the Torah according to their simple meaning. When it says בראשית ברא אלקים, it is explaining the order of Creation: “*In the beginning of G-d’s creation...*” But if it would say בראשית ברא אלקים, then it would be saying that G-d created the world, which is a fact that need not even be stated.

The very fact of Creation is so obvious as to be superfluous. It may be compared to someone standing there and staring at a marvelous palace, and people want to explain to him how it was built. They say, “First of all you have to know that people

## לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

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actually built it, and it didn't sprout from the ground by itself, neither was it composed by chance due to some explosion that took place long ago." After that introduction, they then proceed to explain to him all the various building stages that took place until the palace was completed.

You only need to talk that way to a fool. It's obvious to all normal people that someone built the palace; the whole introduction is simply ridiculous.

So it is regarding the creation of the world. When speaking to the nations of the world, who have a hard time accepting reality as it is, the Torah must begin: אלקים ברא. First, the obvious must be stated.

G-d created the world. Then it is explained how He did it, i.e., the order of Creation. On the first day, He created this, and on the second day, He created that, etc.

But when speaking to Jews, who don't have crazy preconceived notions that stop them from thinking straight, the obvious need not be stated. Of course G-d created the world, because it obviously did not happen by itself, and only G-d is capable of creating such a vast and wondrous universe.

So for us, the Torah goes right away into its explanation of the order of Creation: בראשית ברא אלקים וגו'.



## Being Human

נְעֻשָׂה אָדָם (א, כו)

### Let us make man (1:26)

Let's talk about what being human means.

We relate to human beings completely differently than we do to animals. If a child suddenly runs into the street in front of a car, any normal driver slams on the brakes because he is terrified of the thought of running him over. He doesn't feel the same if a cat crosses the street. A person is a very special creature; he is not just an intelligent animal.

What makes a human being so special?

A human being is a creature that has the ability to conceive of G-d. He possesses the basic understanding that the world has a G-d, Who created all the amazing things around us.

An animal cannot conceive of this. As far as it is concerned, the only thing that exists is the fodder in its feeding trough. But a human being can understand that G-d is great, he can observe

and contemplate the wonders he sees, such as the intricate functioning of the human body's amazingly complex systems, and be inspired by this.

For instance, the heart is an astounding pump that circulates the liquid blood through a system of veins and arteries that, if stretched out end to end, would encompass the globe twice and a half. And the heart does this 70-80 times a minute, sixty minutes an hour, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, for ninety years. The functioning of the other organs in the human body, such as the kidneys and the lungs, is similarly wondrous.

Only man can realize this is a wonder.

This is a human being. A creature that is capable of clearly and conclusively recognizing the existence of the Creator. ●

## The World at Your Fingertips

Our generation has seen tremendous advances in science and technology. Today we have abilities that people did not even dream of a hundred years ago. We have fast, advanced communication and transportation, among other things, and people are understandably proud of the achievements of our times.

We, too, can't help but be pleased over convenient transportation by car and plane. It is so much better than traveling by horse and boat.

One of the amazing innovations of modern life is that the whole world is now at our fingertips. A businessman can sit in his office in New York and know in real time how much gold bullion is being purchased in Hong Kong. There are people who can affect the whole world just by pressing a button. We all can talk on the phone with a relative on the other side of the world. This gives us a type of control over the whole world. Everything is within our reach. This is an impressive achievement that can't be denied.

And it makes us wonder why all these tremendous developments are happening only now? Why not a hundred years ago, or two hundred years ago, or back when the world was created? Before the advent of air travel, which was just a few decades ago, if you wanted to go overseas you needed to travel by ship for a couple months. Why did our generation merit that which was previously beyond people's dreams?

## Man was Created to Reach Around the World

There is a fundamental rule in physics, corroborated by *Chazal*, that the true nature of something can be ascertained only if it is observed in its original form. Let's take Formica as an

example. It is a synthetic product that looks like wood, but is manufactured from petroleum. No matter how much this wood look-alike is processed, no matter how many changes it goes through, its essential nature does not change. If the processed Formica will be broken down in a laboratory to its constituent elements, it will always be found to be made of petroleum. The processed product will always have the chemical characteristics of petroleum.

The same is true with man. Human beings have gone through a lot of changes from *Adam Harishon* until our generation, but we are still made of the same stuff. The true nature of man can be ascertained by observing him in his original form, as he was created. This will enable us to understand ourselves today.

*Chazal* say<sup>1</sup> that when *Adam Harishon* was created, his size was "from one end of the heavens to the other end." However, they disagree whether Adam reached from one side of the world to the other, i.e., from east to west, or whether he reached from earth to the heavens. The *Gemara* concludes by stating that they are the same measurement. In other words, it is the same essential definition of man's nature, either way you measure it.

When *Adam Harishon* sinned, the *Gemara* says that *Hashem* "placed His hand upon him,"<sup>2</sup> and diminished his size. Man no longer reached across the world or up to the sky; he was now a mere hundred *amos* (approx. 150 feet). With every subsequent generation he shrunk more, until he reached the dimensions we are familiar with today.

We may not see ourselves as being tall as the sky

<sup>1</sup> *Chagigah* 12a.

<sup>2</sup> *Tehillim* 139:5; *Chagigah* *ibid*.

or as reaching all the way around the world, but that is man's original form, and this is our essential nature, too. Either we reach up to heaven or we reach out around the world. Our physical height was compressed to five or six feet, but our true nature remains the same forever.

## It's not Natural to be in Jail

One of the hardest things for a person is to be confined to a jail cell.

When I was a child, I thought to myself: "What is so terrible about being in jail? Prisons nowadays are almost like hotels. You get food and everything else you need for free." Yet, we all know that imprisonment is a dreaded punishment. This is because being imprisoned is against man's essential nature, as we see from the following story in the Tanach.

It is recounted in *Sefer Melachim*<sup>3</sup> that before *David HaMelech* passed away, he commanded his son Shlomo not to let Shimi ben Geira to die a peaceful and natural death, since Shimi had cursed David severely, and was deserving of punishment. Shlomo was to find a clever way to bring Shimi to a violent demise.

Now, Shimi ben Geira was no simple man. He was the head of the *Sanhedrin*. How will young Shlomo outsmart him?

Shlomo had a solution. When he became king, he ordered Shimi to build himself a home in Jerusalem and dwell there without traveling around. He forbade Shimi on pain of death to leave town, and warned him that the day he crosses the Kidron stream outside Jerusalem, he is shedding his own blood.

If Shimi leaves Jerusalem, he will be judged as one who rebelled against the word of the king, and will be punished accordingly.

But Shimi was already living in Jerusalem, and one's hometown can hardly be considered a prison.

However, Shlomo in his great wisdom understood that the seemingly innocent order that Shimi dwell in Jerusalem was in fact a cunning way to bring Shimi to the grave and thus fulfill his father's last will and testament.

And so it was. Sometime later, two of Shimi's servants ran off, and he chased after them, out of Jerusalem. Shlomo found out about it, and executed Shimi.

If Shlomo had not commanded Shimi to stay in Jerusalem, Shimi could have lived there for a hundred years without feeling the need to leave. But the moment Shlomo forbade him to leave, the nature of man is to want to break out of the bounds. It is inevitable that he will try to do so, sooner or later. A human being cannot stand being imprisoned.

Why is this? A chicken happily sits in the coop day after day. It doesn't need to go on trips. Why does man feel this urge to get out and travel the world?

It is because man in his original form reached from one end of the world to the other. He had his hands on the whole world, and this is essential to his nature. He feels compelled to conquer the whole world. Let's say a person would be taken up to the height of two hundred miles above earth and placed in a coop. This would be the worst punishment of all for him. A person wants to stretch out to his natural height and breadth.

This is why people can sit and look out the window of a moving vehicle for hours on end. A person can drive his car for eight hours straight, enjoying the scenery around him, and not grow tired.

This brings us to a deeper point. It says in Torah sources that knowledge creates a connection between the knower and the known. If I can see a mile ahead, I have a mental connection what I see, and this grants me a certain control over it. I have my eyes on it. If I can see ahead another mile, I have my eyes on that, too. As much of the world as

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3 2:8-9.

I can see, I “conquer” and incorporate into myself. It becomes a part of me as a human being.

This is the nature of every person. He has a natural desire to know the whole world. Everything interests him, because he was originally created to encompass the entire world.

## Up or Sideways?

As mentioned, man’s naturally large dimensions can be either vertical or horizontal. He can reach up to the heavens above, or he can reach out to the ends of the world.

*Adam Harishon* was very tall. His feet stood on the ground, and his head reached heaven. When he lied down, his body stretched from one end of the world to the other.

Until about a hundred and fifty years ago, people had their feet on the ground and their heads in heaven. They did not know much of the world at large and had little contact with faraway places. Jews lived in a world of *kedushah*, of spirituality. Non-Jews lived in a world filled with spirits, goblins and witchcraft. Also these were supernatural. A person by nature reached the heavens above. Someone could live in a tiny village, with his cows and chickens, and if he would be asked, “Don’t you want to see the whole wide world out there?” he would look up to the heavens above, and gaze at the stars, and they would be the most magnificent view for him. People had extensive knowledge of astronomy even in ancient times.

Then man suddenly fell. Until now, his feet were on earth and his head in heaven, but now he fell flat on his face, so to speak. Nevertheless, his innate nature is unchangeable. That’s why *Hashem* gave him a telephone, a radio, a plane and the other technological means that connect him to all the ends of the earth. He holds the whole world in his palm. Because this is the man’s nature; he can’t do without it. If a person doesn’t reach heaven, and doesn’t reach the whole world, for him it is like

being locked up in a coop.

Our great-grandparents did not have this kind of breadth. Nevertheless, they were not more restricted than us. The difference between us and them is that their heads reached heaven. They lived with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. Unfortunately for us, we don’t live that way. We reach around the world, instead.

## Stretch Up on Shabbos

But it’s different on *Shabbos*. Ostensibly, *Shabbos* is one big prison. A person who can reach the ends of the earth, who could get in a car and drive across the country, is now forced to stay in his place, within the *Shabbos* boundaries.

But in truth, *Shabbos* is when *Hashem* stands us up straight, to our proper height. Instead of stretching crosscountry or beyond, our heads reach up to heaven. Instead of making a phone call from New York to New Zealand, we have a direct line to Above. It is similar to how Jews lived a couple hundred years ago. They would just say *Baruch Attah Hashem*, and it would be a much more distant and thrilling connection than anything the modern world can offer.

We are proud to know what is happening in the world. But in truth, it is not something to be proud of. It means we are lying on the ground, so to speak, instead of standing up.

All the modern technological tools are gifts from *Hashem* that we need due to our essential nature. A human being by nature must have a certain degree of control over the whole world. He needs everything to be under his fingertips. Not to know what is happening in China and Russia, and how the next generation of automobiles will look, and the latest developments in the fields of medicine and physics – being severed from all this is for some people almost like a form of death.

But on *Shabbos*, *Hashem* says to us, so to speak: “Instead of lying on the ground and stretching to

the ends of the earth, you can stand up instead.” When we do this, we discover that things are no less interesting, no less beautiful. It is simply a different dimension. It is stretching up from earth to heaven.

## The Beauty of Life

When Torah scholars would take leave of one another, they would part with the words, “May you see your world in your life.”<sup>4</sup> In other words: “Try to see the true beauty of life, in your own life.” A person can’t live without having his hands on the whole world. That’s how he was created. The question is: on whose world does he have his hands?

They would wish each other, “May you see **your** world in your life.” Your world, which you inherited from Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. That’s the world we want to discover and see and have.

It is written:

אֶלְקִים וְגוֹי מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּבוֹשָׁרוֹת –  
*Hashem* releases the imprisoned, safe and sound.<sup>5</sup>

*Chazal* explain who the “imprisoned” are:

“Imprisoned” refers to Torah scholars, because they utterly commit themselves to [the study of] Scripture, *Mishnah*,

*Midrash*, *Halachos* and *Aggados*.<sup>6</sup>

Is there anything more limited and restricting than spending day and night glued to a *yeshivah* bench, sitting in front of a *Gemara*? Ostensibly, *yeshivah* is the most imprisoning experience on earth. But in truth, it is a whole world unto itself. It is an upwards-oriented world, full of great beauty and vivid color. It is the most interesting world, the deepest world.

“May you see your world in your life.” Don’t wait until you leave this world. Enjoy now the world you live in. As soon as we put behind us the “horizontal” way of life, the life of being sprawled out on the ground, grasping for the ends of the earth, we will enter upon the “vertical” way of life, standing up straight, at our natural height, with our heads reaching heaven.

In *avodas Hashem*, the proper order to follow is:

סוּר מֵרַע וְעֲשֵׂה טוֹב – Turn away from evil, and do good.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the first step is to abandon our bad ways. To let go of the thought that we need to know all about what is happening in the world. This first step is not easy; it might even feel like a form of death. But when we take this step, we will automatically seek to broaden our world in different dimension, because this is human nature. Then we will discover the holy Torah, which is our true life and our true world. ●

<sup>4</sup> *Berachos* 17a.

<sup>5</sup> *Tehillim* 68:7.

<sup>6</sup> *Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabba* 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Tehillim* 34:15.

