



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

Don't Let Go

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל נָא תֵעָבֶר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ (בראשית יח, ג)

He said, “My L-rd, if I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not leave Your servant.” (*Bereishis* 18:3)

According to another explanation, [this Name] is sacred. Avraham was saying to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to wait for him until he runs and brings in the guests. (*Rashi*)

Chazal learn from this story that bringing guests into the home is greater than receiving the presence of the *Shechinah*. How so? *Avraham Avinu* was experiencing prophecy. He was standing before the *Shechinah*. Yet he interrupted this exalted state to go and bring in guests.

This idea is well known. But there is another point here that many people miss: when *Avraham Avinu* went to fulfill the *mitzvah* of bringing in guests, he did not break off completely from the *Shechinah*. He did not just walk away to do something else. On the contrary, his whole request was, “Please do not leave Your servant.” He asked *Hashem* not to leave him. Although physically speaking, he was totally involved in the great *mitzvah* of bringing in guests – it was *Hashem’s* Will that he do so – in his heart

and mind he didn’t leave his former state of standing before the *Shechinah*.

It says later on in the *parshah*:

וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדֵנוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנָי ה' – Avraham was still standing before *Hashem*.

Rashi explains that it really means, “*Hashem* was still standing before Avraham.” This is two sides of the same coin. Avraham did not take his mind off standing before *Hashem*, which is why *Hashem* did not leave and was still standing before Avraham.

This is a very important practical lesson. Nowadays, the presence of the *Shechinah*, the closest we can come to *Hashem*, is in Torah learning. Yet, *Halachah* obligates us to stop learning in order to perform a *mitzvah* that others cannot take care of.

This is why we leave *yeshivah* to go to weddings,

and to funerals, and to perform other necessary acts of *chesed*. But many people think that they are thereby permitted to “slam the door” and turn their backs on Torah learning to go do something else. They consider themselves exempt from Torah study. They throw off the serious attitude they had when they were sitting and learning that day. On their way to the wedding, they chat gleefully about all kinds of nonsense, they act silly and lightheaded because they think they are released from the yoke of Torah.

But this is not what we learn from *Avraham Avinu*. Even when he went to bring three Arab wayfarers into his home and was deeply involved with attending to their needs, he did not go and join them and be like them. “Avraham was still standing before *Hashem*.” He did not disconnect from the *kedushah* for a moment.

Why did Avraham ask *Hashem* to wait for him? Why not let *Hashem* leave, and come back when Avraham is finished attending to his guests?

It says in *Sefer Daas Torah* that if *Hashem* leaves a person, it is very, very hard to get *Hashem* back. If a

person manages to attain the state of *יעלה בהר ה'*, if he reaches an elevated spiritual level, he should try very hard to fulfill also *יקום במקום קדשו*, to stay there and not drift away from it. Because if he lets himself drift away, he can't get back so easily. This is why Avraham asked *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to wait for him.

We should apply this lesson to ourselves. If we disconnect from Torah learning, even to go do a *mitzvah*, it's not so easy to get back the *siyata d'Shamaya* and closeness to *Hashem* that we had before. This is why *Halachah* dictates¹ that when a person takes leave of his rabbi he should not turn his back to him, but should step backwards with his face toward his rabbi.

This indicates that even when we leave Torah learning to do something important, we should keep facing the Torah, we should look forward to the time when we will can get back to our learning. Because then, when we get back to it, we will find the *siyata d'Shmaya* standing and waiting for us, and we will remain always connected to *Hashem*. ●

1 Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 242:16.

The Nisayon of Sarah's Burial

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נָא אֵם ה' (בראשית כב, טז)

He said, “I swear by Myself, so said *Hashem*.” (*Bereishis* 18:3)

What need was there for this oath? Avraham said to *Hashem*, “Swear to me that You will not test me another time, and also not my son Yitzchak.” (*Midrash Rabbah* 56:11)

Avraham asked *Hashem* to swear to him that He will not bring him another *niyason*.

לְעִירֹתֵי נִשְׁבָּעוֹת

מִוִּהָרַד מִשָּׁה בֶן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְבוּרָג ז"ל

וּמִוִּהָרַד בְּרוּךְ זָאב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קְרָאוֹס ז"ל

נִדְבַת נִבְדִּיחִם ~ עֲטֵרַת אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּנֵי וְהַפָּאֵרַת בְּנֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ

But this is puzzling, because *Rabbeinu Yonah* says in *Pirkei Avos*¹ that Sarah's burial was also a *nisayon*. There, too, *Hashem* tested him. Avraham found himself in an untenable situation. He couldn't find anywhere to bury Sarah, to the point that he had to purchase a burial plot, although the entire land of Yisrael had been promised to him.

So we see that Avraham underwent another *nisayon* after the *Akeidah*. How does this fit with the above-quoted *Midrash*?

We could answer that the trial Avraham underwent when burying Sarah was not a new and different *nisayon*. It was actually a continuation of the *nisayon* of the *Akeidah*.

How so?

When a person does a great act, when he makes a big sacrifice for *Hashem's* sake, he might expect *Hashem* to show him special grace. And when the opposite happens, he is likely to grumble in his heart.

Here Avraham was, after the great and heroic act of the *Akeidah*, immediately faced with the tough situation of burying Sarah. This was a continuation

1 5:2.

of the *Akeidah*. The purpose was to clarify whether Avraham had indeed performed the act of the *Akeidah* with a full heart, all the way. The true issue was not the burial spot, but to be the finale of the *Akeidah*.

We see the same with Yosef. Right after he successfully passed the trial with Potiphar's wife, he was thrown into the dungeon. *Chazal* say² that *Hashem* brought about the story of *Sar Hamashkim* in order to take public attention off of Yosef, as people were talking bad about him after Potiphar's wife slandered him. [Thus we see that landing in the dungeon was actually a continuation of the previous *nisayon*.]

This is an important lesson for all of us. A person shouldn't think after he did a good deed, even if it was truly a big thing, that now he will surely receive nothing but sweet blessings from Heaven. It is normal to encounter difficulties and trials even at that point, and a person must constantly keep up full and unblemished faith in *Hashem* – תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך ●

2 *Bereishis Rabbah* 88:1.

PARSHAH TOPIC

Laughter is Good

וּתְצַחֵק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לְאָמֵר. (בראשית יח, יב)

Sarah laughed inside herself, saying. (*Bereishis* 18:12)

Surprised Laughter

Yitzchak's name, יצחק, means "he will laugh." It derives from the Hebrew work for laughter: צחוק. He is so named after the laughter of his parents Avraham and Sarah.

What is so significant about laughing? Why was

Yitzchak Avinu called after the laughter of his parents?

– כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר בֶּן שָׁחַק הַכֶּסֶל –
Like the sound of the thorns crackling under the pot, so is the laughter of the fool.¹

This is explained in *Sefer Divrei Eliyahu* in the name of the *Vilna Gaon*:

1 *Koheles* 7:6.

The meaning is according to the *Midrash Rabbah* that says: “The fruit trees were asked, ‘Why doesn’t your sound travel afar?’ They answered, ‘We don’t need it. Our fruits speak for us.’ The barren trees were asked, ‘Why does your sound travel afar?’ They answered, ‘If only our voice would be heard and seen!’ This is the meaning of, ‘Like the sound of the thorns.’”

The advantage of a human being over an animal is wisdom, as it says, **יותר האדם** **מן הבהמה אין**, and the word **אין** refers to wisdom, as it says, **והחכמה מאין תמצא**. But for a fool, who lacks wisdom, his advantage over an animal is laughter, since an animal cannot laugh. This is why a fool laughs all the time. It is to show that he, too, has an advantage over animals.

Trees, too, have an advantage. They produce fruit and their wood serves as fuel. But thorns don’t produce fruit. So when they are ignited they make noise, to show that they, too, are among the trees.

We see that human beings have two advantages over animals. They possess intelligence, and they laugh. Similarly, the vegetable kingdom has two advantages over the mineral kingdom. It produces fruit, and it serves as fuel. Just as thorns make noise when they are burned, to show that they are not from the mineral kingdom, so fools laugh loudly to show they are human beings.

But animals don’t laugh. Only human beings laugh. This implies that laughter, a uniquely human trait, must have special meaning and significance.

What makes people laugh? Something unexpected. Let’s say someone is walking along proudly, wearing a well-ironed white shirt, and suddenly falls into the mud and gets dirty from head to any foot. This naturally evokes laughter. Why? What is so funny about it?

It is the opposite of what we expected. A fine, white shirt covered with mud deviates from the norm. And a proud man falling into the mud is an abnormal

occurrence. The stranger, the more unexpected a thing is, the more laughter it provokes.

This is why laughter is uniquely human. An animal never notices that something strange and unexpected happened. Let’s say an animal eats barley every day. If one day we would feed it sweet-tasting delicacies, even if it would eat them, it would not have the experience of newness. It would just eat the food, and that’s it.

Hashem is True

The critical quality that distinguishes human beings is intelligence, as we say in our blessings: **אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה**. The creation called man is characterized by that which the intellect grasps, which is wisdom.

Wisdom is all about knowing the truth. And what is truth?

The Rambam writes:

If a person would entertain the notion that all beings other than G-d do not exist, then G-d alone would exist, and His existence would not cease due to their existence having ceased. This is because all other beings need Him, and He, may He be blessed, needs neither them nor any one of them. Therefore, His truth is not like the truth of any one of them.

This is what the prophet said: **וה' אלקים – אמת** – “*Hashem*, G-d is truth.” He alone is the truth, and no other is true like His truth. This is what the Torah said: **אין עוד מלבדו** – “There is nothing else besides Him.” In other words, no other being is true like He is.²

The Rambam is saying that all other beings exist only due to *Hashem*. He made them and He sustains them. Thus, no other being has a truly independent existence. So they don’t exist in a true and absolute way; they have only contingent existence. But *Hashem* has absolute, independent and essential existence. Only His existence is absolutely true.

Thus wisdom, which is truth as perceived by the

² *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, beginning.*

intellect, can be called true wisdom only in regards to knowing *Hashem*.

However, just knowing that *Hashem* exists is not enough. A person doesn't actually have awareness of *Hashem* unless he attributes Divine qualities to Him. If he thinks that *Hashem* is some kind of a very wealthy person or very expert doctor, then he doesn't recognize *Hashem*. Indeed, we cannot grasp *Hashem's* true nature and essence, but we still need to see Him as possessing special, Divine qualities, or else we are not even talking about *Hashem*.

Infinite Chiddush

We need to see *Hashem* as He Who possesses unlimited capabilities and infinite greatness. In the Thirteen Principles of Faith, this is described as אינו כלל גוף ולא ישיגוהו משיגי הגוף ואין לו שום דמיון כלל – “He is not physical, and cannot be perceived by physical means, and has no image at all.”

Everything physical is limited. The first thing we need to know about *Hashem* is that He is unlimited in any way. His capabilities are unlimited and He is infinite.

And which powers of *Hashem* most express His unlimitedness? The power of creation, of making something new that never was. Once we recognize *Hashem's* ability of *chiddush*, we recognize His infinity.

This is for a simple reason. Let's say we want to determine whether a certain great and awesome act is possible or not. For instance, can the entire world be put inside a tiny box? The answer is: no, it cannot. That's impossible. Now let's figure out what makes this impossible. The answer is it contradicts the basic nature of reality. You can't put something really big inside something really small. It just doesn't work.

However, it all boils down to the laws of nature. It has always been a basic law of nature that something big doesn't fit in a small space.

But what if totally new things could be created, things that never were before? What if things could be created ex nihilo, *yeish me'ayin*? Out of no prior existence at all? Then nothing is impossible. Nothing goes against reality, because if a certain thing doesn't

work according to the current laws of nature, it will work according to the newly created laws of nature. With the power of *chiddush*, it's no problem at all.

This is why the quality of *chiddush*, of being able to create totally new things, expresses infinity in the most powerful way. It does away with all limitations. And the converse is true, too. If a person lacks the power of *chiddush*, his capabilities will always be limited. He is limited by the existing reality, by the rules of nature. To be unlimited, one must have the capability to create totally new things that never existed before.

Thus, the more ability we have to recognize the power of *chiddush*, the more ability we have to understand *Hashem*. This is a uniquely human ability. It grants us awareness and knowledge of *Hashem*.

We could explain this more simply. Let's say a person lacks the ability to recognize new, totally novel things. This means he knows only himself and that which is on his level. That's as far as he goes. Anything above him is new, is novel, and thus beyond his understanding.

What about animals? They can't recognize anything beyond themselves. For example, when an animal looks at a human being, it just sees another kind of animal. So how is it supposed to understand *Hashem*?

Human beings are different because they can recognize new and different things. Thus they can understand that which is above them, enabling them to understand *Hashem*. It's all because of recognizing the power of *chiddush*.

The moment a person grasps this awesome *chiddush*, the moment he realizes how great and lofty *Hashem* is, and what's more, that *Hashem*, with all His greatness, is close to him and loves him and cares about him – which is an even more astounding *chiddush* – he immediately laughs out of joy and true amazement.

This is a human being.

Yitzchak was Something New

Now let's get back to Yitzchak. He was named after laughter, *tzechok*, because he was a thoroughly new and novel creation.

His birth was a novel event. Avraham and Sarah were barren. Not only were they physically incapable of having children, but Avraham studied his Zodiac and saw that he was not meant to be a father. It was intrinsically against the laws and forces governing the world for him to have a child. When Avraham and Sarah heard the good news, it was a tremendous *chiddush* and brought them to laughter.

Sarah was never criticized by the Torah for her laughter itself, but because her laughter carried a tone of mockery, as the idea of her giving birth was so revolutionary. The Torah says:

לְמָה זֶה צָחָקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הֲאֵף אֲמַנָּם אֵלֶּיךָ -
Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying, 'Will I indeed give birth?!'³

The verse is saying: why did she have laughter like that, and not laughter of joy over the novelty of it? So when Sarah denied it out of fear, and claimed that she did not laugh at all, *Hashem* said to her לֹא כִי צָחָקְתְּ – “No, you laughed.” *Hashem* was saying that she did indeed laugh, and it was good that she laughed, but she should not have laughed that way. It should have been laughter of joy and thankfulness over the novelty of it.

When Yitzchak was born, Sarah said:

צָחַק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כֹּל הַשְּׂמִיעַ יִצְחָק לִי -
G-d made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh for me.⁴

Everyone will laugh because the birth of Yitzchak was such a novel event.

Later, *Hashem* commanded Avraham to put Yitzchak on the altar, and so did Avraham, and the knife even touched Yitzchak's throat, at which point Yitzchak's soul flew out of him and he became ashes, as *Chazal* say:

³ Bereishis 18:13.

⁴ Ibid 21:6.

The ashes of Yitzchak are piled up on the altar.⁵

Nevertheless, Yitzchak remained here in this world, and this is an unparalleled *chiddush*, a great cause for laughter. He was sacrificed on the *mizbeach* and is still here in this world!

This is an additional reason why he is called יִצְחָק, which, if we change the order of the letters, spells קֶץ חַי, “the end of life.” This signifies that Yitzchak came to the end of his life but kept on living.

Yitzchak's soul remained in the state of a perfect, unblemished *korban* all the rest of his life. So much so that *Hashem* placed His Name upon him while he was still alive, something He did not do with Avraham and Yaakov. This is because Yitzchak was already firmly attached to *Olam Haba*. His whole being was tied to *kedushah*. And this is a very funny thing. What is a person like that doing here? He doesn't belong here! It evokes great laughter.

Above all, Yitzchak's name is in the future tense. יִצְחָק – “he will laugh.” This is because he built for the Jewish people the reality of *Olam Haba*. He is the patriarch of connection and closeness to *Hashem*, which is the very nature of *Olam Haba*, when we will take delight in *Hashem* and enjoy the radiance of His Presence. The experience of *Olam Haba* is a greater novelty than everything else. About this it is written:

אָז יִמְלֵא שְׂחוֹק פִּינוּ - Then our mouths will fill with laughter.⁶

In the future we will be laughing at every moment over the *chiddush* that is revealed at that moment. Each moment will bring something that never was, and the *chiddushim* will continue that way, every moment, forever. ●

⁵ See *Zevachim* 62a.

⁶ *Tehillim* 126:2.