

# 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

## A Mother's Wish

הַמַּעַט קָחַתְךָ אֶת אִישִׁי וְלָקַחְתָּ גַם אֶת דּוֹדָי בְּנִי. (בראשית ל, טו)

**Is it a small thing that you took my husband, and now you will also take the mandrakes of my son? (*Bereishis* 30:15)**

Leah's reaction to her sister Rachel's request for some of the mandrakes that were picked by Reuven seems very strange. Reuven, who was Leah's oldest son, went out to the field and found some of these special herbs. When he came back, Rachel asked Leah for some of them. Then Leah complains that Rachel "took her husband." This doesn't seem right, because Yaakov was originally Rachel's husband exclusively. Yaakov worked for Lavan only because he sought to marry Rachel. He originally did not have in mind at all to marry Leah. In fact, Rachel was the one who brought Leah into marriage with Yaakov, at tremendous personal expense. How could Leah say that Rachel "took her husband"?

*Chazal* teach us:

If someone opens the door for his

friend, the latter owes the former his life.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Leah should be tremendously grateful to Rachel. Now that Rachel asks her for some mandrakes, she has an opportunity to pay Rachel back a little bit for all the good she did for her. So why does Leah respond like that?

It says later on in the *parshah*:

ויזכור אלקים את רחל – G-d remembered Rachel.<sup>2</sup>

Rashi explains that *Hashem* remembered Rachel's great act of giving the signs to Leah and thus saving her from humiliation. *Hashem* remembered the *chesed* that Rachel did.

<sup>1</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 4:2.

<sup>2</sup> *Bereishis* 30:22.

But nowhere do we find that Leah herself remembered this act of kindness at all. And when Dinah (דינה) was born, whose name indicates that Leah judged herself (דנה), Rashi explains that Leah judged how many sons were destined to be born to Yaakov, and made sure that Rachel will not undergo the humiliation of having less sons than the maidservants did. But it does not say that she did this out of appreciation for the great *chesed* that Rachel did for her.

Why does Leah seem so ungrateful to Rachel?

Rachel and Leah had no personal interests here. They both had the same goal and the same interest: to build the House of Yisrael. Leah had a special method to accomplish this goal, in accordance with her trait, as she was the *bechorah*, and thus had the ability to give birth to all the virtues and distinguished qualities of the Jewish people. From her came the *Kohanim*, the *Levi'im*, the royal dynasty and all the other virtuous of the Jewish people.

To paraphrase it, this is what Leah was saying to Rachel: strictly speaking, you should have been out of the picture altogether, and Yaakov should have been my husband exclusively, because if I would have built the House of Yisrael on my own, every Jew would be either a *kohen* or a *levi* or a king or a head of *Sanhedrin* or wealthy or one of the children's teachers, who are like stars forever, or something else great and important. There would never have been such a thing as a "simple" Jew.

This totally changes the picture. It shows how great our *Imahos* were. Even though Rachel put herself out so much for Leah, and Leah was naturally very grateful for this, Leah did not lose sight of her appointed mission to build the House of Yisrael as befits Leah. This is why she declined to give Rachel the mandrakes, which are an herb conducive to having children. Only when she received Yaakov that night, as recompense for the mandrakes, was she willing to give them to Rachel. That night Leah conceived, and thus brought Yissachar into the world. The tribe of Yissachar was distinguished by Torah study and had many leading members of *Sanhedrin*.

Originally, Binyamin was meant to be born from Leah. But Leah let Rachel give birth to him instead, after she "judged" herself.

It seems that if Leah would have given birth to Binyamin, then the *Beis Hamikdash*, which was built in the territory of Binyamin, would have been superior and exalted to the extent that only the members of the tribe of Binyamin would have entered it, to stand before the *Shechinah*.

Binyamin would have been like the tribe of Yehudah and the tribe of Levi, who have exclusive rights. The former holds the royal dynasty, and the latter holds the *Kehunah*. Only because Rachel was the one who gave birth to Binyamin did *Beis Hamikdash* become the place of the *Shechinah's* presence for the entire Jewish people. ●

## לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמָת

מורה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומורה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

גדבת נבדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני נשים ותפארת בני אבותם

# A House

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית אֱלֹהִים. (בראשית כח, יט)

**He called the name of that place, “The House of G-d.” (*Bereishis* 28:19)**

What is a “house of G-d?” First let’s grasp what a house is, on the simplest level.

*Chazal* say:

Not like Avraham, for whom it is written, “mountain,” as it says, בְּהַר – “As it is said this day, on the mountain, *Hashem* will be seen” (*Bereishis* 22:14).

And not like Yitzchak, for whom it is written, “field,” as it says, וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׂוּחַ – “And Yitzchak went out to pray in the field” (*ibid* 24:63). Rather, like Yaakov, who called it “house,” as it says (*ibid* 28:19), וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא, בֵּית אֱלֹהִים – “And he called the name of that place, ‘The house of G-d.’” (*Pesachim* 88a)

This *Gemara* expresses the different approaches taken by the *Avos*. What is the right way to achieve a personal connection and relationship with *Hashem*? Avraham chose the way of the “mountain,” Yitzchak, the way of the “field,” and Yaakov, the way of the “house.” And *Hashem* cherished the way of the “house” above all.

Obviously, it is impossible to build a relationship with *Hashem* in the street or the park, as the relationship requires privacy. If a person spends his time in the street, this surely will not help him grow to be an outstanding *talmid chacham* and *yerei Shamayim*. But *Avraham Avinu* maintained that climbing to the top of a high mountain and thus separating himself from the impurity of his surroundings

granted him sufficient privacy with *Hashem*.

*Yitzchak Avinu* disagreed: A mountain is not enough. True, there are not very many people on top of a mountain; nevertheless, it is an area open to all who wish to enter. What we need is a field because a field is private property. That is why “Yitzchak went out to pray in the field.” He felt that to be alone with *Hashem* and build a relationship with Him, the additional privacy of a field is needed.

*Yaakov Avinu* countered that even the privacy afforded by a field is insufficient to build a proper relationship with *Hashem*. What we need is total privacy – that of a house. A house is one hundred percent private. No one comes in without knocking, even when the door is unlocked. This is because everyone knows that a house is a private place, and no one may enter unless granted permission by the master of the house.

*Hashem* agreed with *Yaakov Avinu*: “Rather, like Yaakov, who called it ‘house.’” Here, Yaakov taught us something very important. To build a relationship with *Hashem*, it is not enough to just have *deveikus*. The *deveikus* needs complete privacy. Not like Avraham’s mountain, and not like Yitzchak’s field, but like Yaakov’s house.

In *Beis Hamikdash*, we lived in closeness to *Hashem*, in *kedushah* and *taharah*. Nowadays, when there is no *Beis Hamikdash* anymore, being a *talmid chacham* has the same nature. A *talmid chacham* is someone who lives in closeness to his Creator in a relationship of absolute privacy, without allowing entrance to foreign influences. ●

וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרַחֵל הִיְתָה יְפֹת תֹאֵר וְיְפֹת מְרֹאָה: (בראשית כט, יז)

**The eyes of Leah were soft, and Rachel's face was finely formed and shined beautifully. (*Bereishis* 29:17)**

## Close Your Eyes

It says in the *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>1</sup> that we should close our eyes during the *Shemoneh Esreh* (or look only in the *siddur*, which is similar to closing our eyes).

Simply speaking, this is so we will remain focused on our prayers. However, we need to have *kavanah* in all parts of the *Tefilah*, not just in *Shemoneh Esreh*. So if keeping our eyes open disturbs our concentration why isn't there a *halachah* to close one's eyes also during *Berachos* and *Pesukei d'Zimra*?

The answer is that closing our eyes during *Shemoneh Esreh* has a deeper meaning, beyond the fact that it helps us to keep focused on our prayers. Early Torah sources say that the source for this *halachah* of closing eyes is the verse from our *parshah*: וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרַחֵל הִיְתָה יְפֹת תֹאֵר וְיְפֹת מְרֹאָה – “The eyes of Leah were soft, and Rachel's face was finely formed and shined beautifully.” It says in Early Torah sources that Rachel is called “a beautiful maiden but she doesn't have eyes.”

So when a Jew *davens* he needs to close his eyes, as if he doesn't have eyes. About a person who closes his eyes it says:

כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי – A person shall not see Me and live.<sup>2</sup>

The *Midrash* comments on this verse:

While they are alive, they do not see Me, but they see Me when they die.<sup>3</sup>

If a person closes his eyes when he prays, he will merit seeing the *Shechinah* when he dies. But if a person doesn't close his eyes in *Tefilah*, when he dies, he sees the

*Malach Hamaves*, and that is a dreadful sight indeed.

We need to understand what *Chazal* meant when they said that Rachel doesn't have eyes. We also need to understand how this connects to the idea of reciting *Shemoneh Esreh* with closed eyes.

## Leah Versus Rachel

Let's compare Leah to Rachel. Leah has “eyes.” Leah expresses the power and the greatness of the Jewish people. She gave birth to Reuven, who is the *bechor* of the Jewish people. She gave birth also to Shimon, who teaches the children. And to Levi, who has the *Kehunah* and the service in *Beis Hamikdash*. And to Yehudah, who has the royal dynasty of David. And to Yissachar, who were heads of *Sanhedrin*. And to Zevulun, who had wealth, and supported Torah learning. This is the greatness of Leah.

What did Rachel contribute to building the Jewish nation? Ostensibly, nothing. She doesn't have “eyes.” She has physical eyes, but she doesn't see anything with her eyes. She is a “simple Jew” without any special traits of greatness.

Leah was the mother of all those who were special in some way. Rachel was the mother of Yosef, about whom it says:

הֵבֶן יִקִּיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם – Efraim is a precious son to Me.<sup>4</sup>

Efraim is Yosef, and the whole Jewish people is termed “Efraim” in many places in *Tanach*. What is special about Efraim? Nothing, really, but *Hashem* loves him, as it says in the *pasuk*. Rachel is thus the mother of the Jewish people in general. She is the mother of the simple people.

<sup>1</sup> *Orach Chayim* 95, *Mishnah Berurah* *sv* 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Shemos* 33:20.

<sup>3</sup> *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:22.

<sup>4</sup> *Yirmeyahu* 31:8.

Yaakov did not want to marry Leah. He did not feel that greatness, which Leah represented, was necessary. Being king causes one to miss out on Torah study. Kings don't usually have time to sit and learn all day. *Kebunah* is not necessary, either, because *Chazal* say that *Hashem* told *David Hamelech*:

One day that you sit and occupy yourself with Torah learning is better to Me than a thousand burnt offerings that your son Shlomo will bring before Me on the Altar.<sup>5</sup>

A simple Jew who sits and learns is more precious in *Hashem's* eyes than a *kohen* offering *korbanos*.

This is why Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel. Leah will be for Eisav. Wealth, kingship and other positions of power and influence are appropriate for him. And Yaakov? He will sit in the corner and learn. He will get by on bread with salt and a jug of water. He will thereby merit *Olam Haba*, and then he will have greatness.

This is how *Yitzchak Avinu* looked at things when he sought to bestow the blessings upon Eisav. But Rivkah didn't agree. She held that the blessings need to go to Yaakov. Rachel, too, looked at it that way, that Leah needs to marry Yaakov first. The Jewish people needs greatness.

### Blind to Greatness

Our *parshah* says that "the eyes of Leah were soft," implying that she has eyes. This signifies that she sees greatness. Leah looks at herself and sees: *bechorah*, *kebunah*, *malchus*, heading the *Sanhedrin*, supporting Torah learning. "Rachel's face was finely formed," but she doesn't have "eyes." She does not see how great she is. Rachel is "a beautiful maiden but she doesn't have eyes." She does not appreciate the greatness of the simple Jew. She does not have eyes to see how precious and important she is to Yaakov.

This is our problem, too. So to speak, we don't

<sup>5</sup> *Shabbos* 30a.

have "eyes." We are likely to say to ourselves things like, "If learning this *daf* of *Gemara* will make me into a great *rosh yeshivah* or the head of the *Sanhedrin*, it's a good deal. If, because of my success in Torah learning, I will become very wealthy and will be able to support *yeshivos*, this, too, is a worthwhile deal. But just to learn a *daf Gemara*? I am not going to get anything so great out of it."

This is "a beautiful maiden but she doesn't have eyes." We don't have eyes; we don't know how to appreciate how beautiful and how important is the learning of one *daf Gemara* by a simple Jew, how beautiful is the recitation of a chapter of *Tehillim* by a simple Jew.

### Shemoneh Esreh Without Eyes

The time when we are standing in the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer is actually the most beautiful situation a Jew can be in. It is standing before *Hashem*.

In Jerusalem there once was a great *Mekubal*, expert in all areas of *Kabbalah*. He was called *Chacham Salman Mutzafi*. He would *daven Shacharis* for three hours (he *davened* in the *Zichron Moshe shteiblach* and stretched through several *minyanim*.) He would intend all the *kavanos* of the *Arizal* as he *davened*. Once the *chazan* finished the *Amidah* and didn't take three steps back. He called out to him, "You are still in *Atzilus!*" You are still standing before *Hashem*...

A Jew might *daven* the *Shemoneh Esreh* and think to himself, "What good is my *tefilah*? What big changes is it going to make? All I am doing is standing here with my eyes closed, saying words." This person doesn't know what every word of *tefilah* does in Heaven.

We don't know how to appreciate the wondrous beauty of the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer. It is the time of ultimate greatness and we don't know how it appreciate it properly.

This is indeed "a beautiful maiden but she doesn't have eyes." ●