



# 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  
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

## PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

### A Good Sign

וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף. (בראשית מה, כז)

**He saw the wagons that Yosef sent. (*Bereishis* 45:27)**

**He gave them a sign about the subject he was occupied with when he left him – the passage of *eglah arufah*. Thus it says, “He saw the wagons that Yosef sent,” and does not say, “that Pharaoh sent.” (*Rashi*)**

There once was an *agunah* whose husband had left her many years before and disappeared. One day, a man showed up, claiming he was her husband. To prove his claim he showed that he knew all about everything connected to the home. The *Vilna Gaon* instructed them to ask him about his seat in the *shul*. Because if he is lying, and he procured the information from the husband in order to steal his wife, he would not have asked the husband about *kedushah* matters at all.

And so it was. He did not know where his seat

was in the *shul*, and his evil scheme was revealed.

When great *tzaddikim* have a question about a certain matter, they often search in the Torah for an indication, because everything is in the Torah. It is possible that the *Vilna Gaon* found an indication here, in our *parshah*, for the instructions he gave. Yaakov was looking for a sign whether the viceroy in Egypt was really Yosef as claimed. Yaakov didn't believe it until he received a sign about a *kedushah* matter, which was that they had learned the subject of *eglah arufah* together. ●

# How the Torah Explains Itself

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְאָרְיוֹ. (בראשית מו, כט)

**He appeared to him and fell upon his neck. (*Bereishbis* 46:29)**

**But Yaakov did not fall on Yosef's neck and did not kiss him. Our Rabbis say that he was reciting *Shema*. (*Rashi*)**

*Chazal* explain to us why *Yaakov Avinu* did not react when he saw his long-lost son Yosef after so many years. He was reciting *Shema*.

But why did he say *Shema* just then?

Some Masters of *Avodah* explain that when Yaakov saw Yosef, he felt unbounded joy and love for Yosef at that moment; now the Jewish people had reached completion and was slated for eternity. When Yaakov was about to experience this unbounded pleasure over seeing Yosef, he gave this moment to *Hashem* by reciting *Krias Shema*.

This explanation was said over before R. Chaim of Brisk. He was displeased with it and remarked, "You are dressing up *Yaakov Avinu* in your own clothing. Just because you would see fit to recite *Shema* at that moment, does *Yaakov Avinu* have to do the same?"

Rav Chaim of Brisk offered a different explanation. Since *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded Yaakov to go down to Egypt, he had a *mitzvah* obligation to do so, and until arrived in Egypt, he was exempt from *Shema*, as he was involved in the performance of a *mitzvah*. This is in accordance with the general rule: העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה. But when he reached Egypt this *mitzvah* came to an end and thus he immediately

became obligated in reciting *Shema* as usual. Thus he recited it as per his obligation to do so. (Interestingly, we can see that the verses of this passage do not expressly state a command for *Yaakov Avinu* to go down to Egypt. They say only that Yaakov shouldn't fear going down, yet they do not command him to do so. But we do see in the *Hagadah Shel Pesach* that Yaakov's descent to Egypt was according to *Hashem's* command. On the words וירד מצרימה, the *Haggadah* comments: אנוס על פי הדיבור – He was under duress of the Divine Word.)

This exemplifies R. Chaim Brisker's approach to learning the Torah. We cannot interpret the Torah according to our own understanding and feelings, because we are far from true understanding, and our feelings are pertinent only to ourselves, not to the personalities mentioned in the Torah, who had a completely different nature, to the point that we can't even picture what they were really like.

We surely cannot make decisions in Torah matters, or even explain the Torah's decisions, based on our own understanding. We must interpret the Torah by means of what the Torah itself says. Only the Torah itself can understand and explain the Torah.

## לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נרבת נבדיהם ~ עשרת הקנים בני בנים והפארת בנים אבותם

So when we try to solve a puzzling statement from the Rambam or a thorny piece of *Gemara*, we should not explain according to what we find in our own understanding, because it is very far from the Torah. Only the Torah itself can explain the matter.

This is why Rav Chaim of Brisk was displeased also with those who wish to explain *Yaakov Avinu's* behavior according to their own sense of *mussar* or *avodah*, even though the interpretation may be beautiful and sweet. He insisted on interpreting only according to *dinei haTorah*, which indeed apply to *Yaakov Avinu* as well as to us.

However, the above-quoted interpretation of *Yaakov Avinu's* act is mentioned also by leading *Acharonim*.<sup>1</sup> And Rav Chaim Brisker was assumedly not displeased with what these outstanding Commentators wrote.

What is the difference? These *Acharonim*, too, were very far from *Yaakov Avinu*, so how could they explain *Yaakov's* action according to what they themselves considered appropriate? Perhaps what they consider a praiseworthy feeling is not so in the eyes of *Yaakov Avinu*?

The answer is that the nature of the created world came from *Hashem* just as the Torah did. It is written:

ה' בְּחָכְמָה יָסַד אֶרֶץ – *Hashem* established the world with wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

The world, too, expresses the wisdom of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. It is written further:

בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נִעֲשׂוּ – The heavens were created by the word of *Hashem*.<sup>3</sup>

This verse expresses the idea that nature, the created world, is essentially the word of *Hashem*,

just as the Torah is. Accordingly, just as we may interpret the deeds of the *Avos* according to a *halachah* of the Torah, since *Hashem's* Word applied to *Yaakov Avinu* just as it applies to us, so we may interpret based on a feeling or understanding we have due to our essential nature. It is like a *pasuk* in *Chumash* in that way. It applies to *Yaakov Avinu* just as it applies to us.

Accordingly, what made Rav Chaim of Brisk displeased?

His complaint was against us of recent generations. Because nowadays we have gone so far downhill that we don't know any more if our feelings are coming from our essential nature as created by G-d, or whether they are of our own making. So many changes have taken place with us due to *yeridas hadoros*, so many illusory ideas and selfish traits have mingled into us, that we might mistake them for essential human nature.

But in earlier generations, even in the time of the early *Acharonim*, although they, too, had grown very far from the *Avos*, they still held on to their essential human nature. We have lost touch with it. We can't tell our G-d-made nature from our humanly acquired traits.

This was the approach of Rav Chaim Brisker to interpreting the Torah. There were other *Gedolim* who disagreed, and were of the opinion that we can still explain the Torah according to our human understanding.

The pivotal issue is whether we, in our current, lowly state, are still able to identify the pure, natural points within us that were created by *Hashem's* Word, which bear, in that sense, a resemblance to the words of the Torah itself, or whether we have assimilated extraneous matters to the point that we can't tell anymore what is our essential nature and what are our acquired traits. the latter is the case, we can interpret the Torah only by means of the Torah itself. ●

1 See *Gur Aryeh ad loc*, who offers a similar interpretation.

2 *Mishlei* 3:19.

3 *Tehillim* 33:6.

וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָחָיו לְעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו. (בראשית מה, ג)

**His brothers could not answer him because they were dumbfounded before him.**  
(*Bereishis* 45:3)

**Abba Kohen Bardela said: Woe to us when it comes to the Day of Judgment; woe to us when it comes to the day of reproof. Bila'am was the wisest man among the nations of the world, yet he could not withstand the reproof of his mule...**

**Yosef was small, of the youngest among the tribes, yet his brothers could not withstand his reproof...**

**When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will come and reprove each person according to what he is... surely it will be so. (*Bereishis Rabbah* 93:10)**

### Do We Know Ourselves?

*Chazal* are describing to us the great Day of Judgment that will be, when every person will be reproved for his deeds. And this judgment will be “according to what he is.” What is the significance of these words that *Chazal* added to the description?

It alludes to the fact that a person does not really know himself or what he is doing. We have no idea for what we will be reproved and for what we will not. That is why *Chazal* say, “Woe to us when it comes to the Day of Judgment.”

The point is illustrated by what transpired between Yosef and his brothers. The brothers felt something was going on that they did not understand. They went down to Egypt due to famine, and they were told, “You are spies.” They were requested to present their youngest brother, and they discovered their money returned in the mouths of their sacks. They started to get scared, and asked themselves:

מָה זֹאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹקִים לָנוּ – What is this thing that *Hashem* has done to us?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Bereishis* 42:28.

In other words, what is the *middah k'neged middah* here?<sup>2</sup>

They felt that *Hashem* was holding them responsible for something but they had no idea what it was. Then the whole picture suddenly became clear:

אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אָחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי  
מִצְרָיִם – I am Yosef your brother, that you sold me to Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

The brothers were taken by total surprise because they never imagined that Yosef might be the person standing in front of them. When he revealed his identity and said, “You sold me to Egypt,” they could not withstand his reproof. They were simply dumbfounded.

In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will come and rebuke each person according to what he truly is, not according to what he thinks or imagines he is.

I will bring a few examples showing how far we are from appreciating our true inner nature, which has not only its positive side but also its unfortunate side.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rashbam*.

<sup>3</sup> *Bereishis* 45:4.

## Far-Fetched Suspicions?

*Chazal* say that an *am ha'aretz*, a person completely ignorant of Torah, is capable even of murdering. For this reason, it is forbidden to go on a long journey alone with him.<sup>4</sup>

Someone once queried me about this *Chazal*. He recounted to me that he had traveled many times accompanied only by a certain Jew who was totally ignorant of Torah and who did not even observe basic *halachos*. Although he was carrying a large sum of money in his pocket during the journeys, his travel companion did not murder or harm him in any way. If so, what did *Chazal* mean when they said that an *am ha'aretz* is suspected of being a potential murderer?

This question floated back into my mind while I was traveling abroad in the middle of the night, alone with a non-Jew. The thought occurred to me: Perhaps he will try to kidnap me and harm me? After all, *Chazal* say that non-Jews are capable of the same deeds that an *am ha'aretz* is.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, I was not kidnapped or harmed in any way. So what in fact did *Chazal* mean? The explanation is as follows: In truth, an *am ha'aretz* and a non-Jew are potentially capable of murder. But they don't do it. Why? Because nowadays society considers murder to be unacceptable behavior. The *am ha'aretz* and the non-Jew are under the sway of the mores of society, and therefore they refrain from murder and shun it. This is indeed very good and praiseworthy. But it does not mean that deep down, their essential nature has metamorphosed. They still are what they are.

Another example of this point emerges from the experiences of R. Michael Dov Weissmandl, who was an outstanding rabbinical figure of the past generation and made tremendous efforts to rescue his fellow Jews from the claws of the Nazis. He developed connections with high echelons in

Hitler's regime, and in exchange for large bribes was successful in stopping some of the train deportations bringing Jews to the death camps. I personally know Jews who told me that if not for R. Weissmandl they would not be alive today.

In his book *Min HaMeitzar* he describes his activities. He recounts a meeting he held with a man who represented a certain secularist Jewish organization. R. Weissmandl attempted to enlist his support in saving Jews from the death camps. The man replied, "I am an outstanding professor, a leading scientist in the field of chemistry. I have investigated the matter. I can guarantee you that the gas being used to kill the Jews contains opium. They don't feel any pain."

Needless to say, the meeting did not bear fruits.

If this professor would still be alive and he would say such a shocking thing today, would it just go by? Would he not be publicly condemned for his barbarism and falsehood, and exposed as a Nazi collaborator? So how did he dare to say such an outrageous thing back then?

The answer is that nowadays it is not acceptable to say such things. But back then, when Jewish blood was spilt like water, and the world accepted it as a reality that could not be changed, such a statement was socially acceptable. If the professor would still be alive today, the reason he would refrain from saying it now is not because he became a better, more humane person, but simply because nowadays, a person who says such things is rejected and condemned by society.

Here is another example, which I witnessed myself. A child fell down and got a bad cut. He was rushed to the emergency ward in a hospital where the doctors happened to be holding a strike. The nurses were not on strike, however they could not deal with the situation; they didn't know what to do with the bleeding child. A doctor walked by, and a nurse called out to him, "What should we do with this child? He needs stitches, but how..." The doctor just smiled smugly and kept on walking.

<sup>4</sup> *Pesachim* 49b.

<sup>5</sup> *Eruvin* 62a.

It then occurred to me that had there been a patient who was in imminent danger of death, the doctor would have rushed over and worked strenuously to save him despite the strike. This is indeed virtuous. But why would the doctor do it? Because it is accepted policy that even during a strike, real cases of life and death are handled nonetheless. Failure to do so is considered tantamount to murder.

Let's imagine for a moment that the accepted policy would be different, and even cases of life and death would be ignored when there is a strike. Then, what would this same doctor do if a patient was dying? Assumedly, he would smile smugly and keep on walking, just as he did with the bleeding child. It would not bother him to do so, because his behavior would be considered acceptable. So in the end, it is only the mores of society that cause him to care. It is not coming from his inner nature.

The proof is that when he encounters a bleeding child he does not bat an eyelash and even smirks as he walks away. It doesn't affect him, and he doesn't care. Why? Because it is accepted!

When the Day of Judgment arrives, Hashem will evaluate us not just according to our external actions, which might be very meritorious — thanks to the social atmosphere and other external factors — but also according to our true inner nature. In other words, Hashem takes a deep look at us. He sees not just *what* we did, but also *why* we did it. And He judges us accordingly.

## Who We Truly Are

We must realize that *Hashem* judges “each person according to what he is.” Because of this, “Woe to us when it comes to the Day of Judgment.” Who among us knows his true inner nature, and what he might be capable of doing if he were in a different

place and time? *Hashem* wants us to purify our inner nature. He wants us to sanctify our very beings. It is not sufficient to *do* good; we are required to *be* good.

*Chazal* often use the expression מעלה עליו הכתוב – “Scripture considers him as if he did such and such...” What does this mean? When used in connection with a negative act, it means that normal people don't actually commit that particular sin – they would rather sacrifice their lives than do it. However, there is a more subtle sin that bears a similarity to it. And whoever does the subtle sin shows that in truth, hidden deep within, he has the ability to do the gross sin, too.

For example:

Whoever disgraces the holidays is considered as if he worships idols.<sup>6</sup>

This *Chazal* is talking about someone who did *melachah* on *chol hamoed* when he shouldn't have. He is considered as if he served *avodah zarah*. Now, none of us would think of going and worshiping an idol. We would willingly give up our lives rather than commit the sin of idolatry.

However, idol worship is not the *nisayon* of the person about whom *Chazal* are speaking. He would never do such a gross sin because the society in which he lives strongly disapproves of idolatry. His *nisayon* is to properly honor *chol hamoed* and to refrain from forbidden *melachah* during the entire holiday. If he does not sufficiently honor *chol hamoed*, this is a sign that he does not care sufficiently about honoring *Hashem*. Therefore, if *avodah zarah* would be “acceptable,” he would do that, too. If he would be evaluated “according to what he is,” he would be considered an idol worshiper. ●

<sup>6</sup> *Pesachim* 118a.