



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

The Greater the Sin, the Greater the Prayer

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הִעֲתִירוּ אֵלַי ה' וַיִּסַּר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּנִּי וּמֵעַמִּי. (שמות ח, ד)

Pharaoh called to Moshe and Aharon, and said, “Pray copiously to *Hashem*, that He remove the frogs from me and my people. (*Shemos* 8:4)

Whenever it says עתר it denotes praying plentifully. (*Rashi*)

Pharaoh requested of Moshe and Aharon that they pray a lot for him. He realized that due to the serious nature of his evil deeds, and his great stubbornness, it will not suffice if Moshe just prays a regular prayer. Moshe needs to *daven* abundantly in order for *Hashem* to answer him. And indeed, it says after this:

וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' עַל דְּבַר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם –
Moshe screamed out to *Hashem* about the frogs.¹

Moshe needed to engage in *tefilah* with *tze'akah* in order to relieve Pharaoh of the frogs that were plaguing him and his people.

¹ *Shemos* 8:8.

Later, in *makas arov*, Pharaoh again asked הִעֲתִירוּ בעדי, “Pray copiously for me.” And it says that Moshe indeed went and prayed copiously to *Hashem* – וַיִּצַּא מֹשֶׁה מֵעַם פַּרְעֹה וַיַּעֲתֶר אֵלַי ה' Rashi explains that Moshe “exerted himself in *tefilah* and prayed a lot.” Because at that point, a single scream would no longer suffice. Moshe really needed to *daven* a lot.

The third time, at *makas barad*, when Pharaoh requested of Moshe הִעֲתִירוּ אֵלַי ה', Moshe replied as follows:

כִּצְאֹתִי אֶת הָעִיר אֶפְרֹשׁ אֶת כַּפַּי אֶל ה' –
When I leave the city, I will spread out my hands to *Hashem*.²

² *Ibid* 9:29.

It is explained in *Targum Onkelos* that “spread out my hands” means outstretching his hands in prayer. This type of prayer is mentioned in *Megilas Eichah*:

נִשָּׂא לְבַבְנוּ אֶל כַּפַּיִם אֶל אֱ-ל בְּשָׁמַיִם – We will raise our hearts to our hands, to G-d in heaven.³

This is pouring out one’s heart in prayer. It is as if a person takes himself out of his body and rises to above and gives over his very soul in prayer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This is an awesome and powerful type of prayer, entailing *mesirus nefesh*.

The first time Moshe intervened on Pharaoh’s behalf, one scream was enough. The second time, he needed to *daven* a lot. And the third time, only *tefilah* with *mesirus nefesh* was effective.

This shows that the deeper a person sinks into sin, the more powerful a *tefilah* he needs to arouse *Hashem’s* mercy.

There is a wonderful *eitzah* here for us all.

It is written לֵב יוֹדֵעַ מֵרַת נַפְשׁוֹ – “The heart knows its soul’s pain.”⁴ A person knows his spiritual “pains” better than anyone else does. He knows how far he falls short in his obligations to Heaven. Yet, when sickness or trouble comes along, and we pray to *Hashem* to remove it, or when we pray on *Yamim Noraim* for our lives and all our needs, we often take it too lightly. We think that if we just exert ourselves a little bit in *teshuvah* and *tefilah*, all our problems are supposed to go away.

But this minimal type of effort is really not enough at all. The more sins we have committed, and the more times we have committed those sins, the *tefilah* that can get us out of our troubles becomes harder and harder.

This may be compared to a physical illness. Let’s say a person ate something that is bad for his health, and he doesn’t feel well, and he rushes to the doctor, and the doctor writes him out a prescription. But when it happens again, the regular medicine won’t do the job anymore. The more he repeats the harmful behavior, the more damage it does to him, and he might even need an operation now.

It is the same with spiritual ailments. We shouldn’t think that in the meantime, we can take things easy a little, we can let up a little on Torah learning, or *davening* with *kavanah*, or guarding the purity of our eyes and thoughts; we shouldn’t think we can get angry a little, or quarrel a little, etc. etc. – and then, when we need to, we will just let out a scream to *Hashem*. It’s not so simple. The more *aveiros* accumulate, the more we engage in them, the harder it is to do *teshuvah*.

We can also learn from here how supremely righteous the leaders of the Jewish people are.

Moshe Rabbeinu suffered from Pharaoh’s stubbornness, and prayed for him, and *davened* more and more to the point of *mesirus nefesh*, and never once snapped back at Pharaoh, saying, “Enough with your stubbornness! *Daven* for yourself – if you can!” Instead, Moshe prayed again and again, and took his heart in his hands, even for evil Pharaoh. He showed endless mercy and compassion. ●

3 *Eichah* 3:41.

4 *Mishlei* 14:10.



Pure Speech

וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדָתָם. (שמות ו, ו)

I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt and I will save you from their slavery. (*Shemos* 6:6)

Rav Huna said in the name of Bar Kaparah: In the merit of four things, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. They did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not have *lashon hara*, and none of them behaved licentiously. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 226)

Even when our forefathers were in Egypt, they spoke Hebrew, *Lashon Hakodesh*. This signifies more than just speaking a Jewish language. They also kept up the special nature of *Lashon Hakodesh*; they spoke purely and did not use vulgar words and expressions. This is the nature of *Lashon Hakodesh*. The Rambam writes¹ that Hebrew is called *Lashon Hakodesh*, the Holy Tongue, because it does not have words for obscene things. It is composed only of holy, clean language.

If a person uses foul language, even if he thinks he is speaking in Hebrew, this is not *Lashon Hakodesh*. This is not the language that our forefathers kept up, in the merit of which they were redeemed from Egypt.

It is not small thing at all that our forefathers maintained their purity of speech in Egypt. The land of Egypt is called *ervas ha'aretz* because the rules of decency were not observed there at all. It is a special *zechus* that our forefathers continued to speak purely there, and because of this, they were redeemed.

In this day and age, when the basics of decent behavior are trampled upon, it is a special thing to keep one's speech pure. Our success in all matters depends on this, as will be explained.

Purity of speech means more than just avoiding dirty words. Even someone who would never talk

like that needs to make sure he does not use overly harsh language. Even when he is expressing anger over the deeds of *resha'im*. The Chofetz Chaim, besides totally eschewing all *lashon hara*, never ever expressed himself in an uncivil or discourteous manner, even when speaking against evildoers, despite the fact that denigrating *resha'im* is permitted and sometimes even a *mitzvah*.

A person's mouth may be compared to the spigot of a wine cask. If the spigot has filth on it, even a little, all the clean wine that comes out through it will get contaminated and will be undrinkable.

Let's say a person is full of *tefilah*, Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. But his mouth is soiled with crude speech, even a little. All the Torah and all the *tefilos* that come out of his mouth will get fouled and lose their value.

This is really something to think about. It seems like a minor detail, but if we don't pay attention, it can cause major damage.

And the converse is true. If the spigot is imbued with a delicious flavor or fine scent, it can turn even a barrel of plain water into something really special.

If a person's speech has grace, if his choice of words is refined, this affects everything that comes out of his mouth. Even when he is speaking about worldly matters, his words will pick up a delightful fragrance, and sanctify the Name of Heaven, and *Hashem* will be proud of him: יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בְּךָ

אֶתְפָּאֵר. ●

¹ *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:8.

כְּצֵאתִי אֶת הָעִיר אֶפְרֹשׁ אֶת כַּפַּי אֶל ה' (שמות ט, כט)

When I leave the city, I will spread out my hands to Hashem. (Shemos 9:29)

But inside the city, Moshe did not pray, because it was full of idols. (Rashi)

Moshe's Shortcoming

Moshe Rabbeinu did not want to pray inside the city of the Egyptians because it was full of idols, and he was concerned about the influence this might have on him.

At first glance, this seems to reflect positively on Moshe. It seems to show his spiritual greatness. However, I once heard a great *talmid chacham* from *Yeshivas Beis Hatalmud* in America explain that this was actually a shortcoming of Moshe's, on a certain lofty and subtle level.

How so?

The Torah says that during *makas bechoros*, Hashem Himself passed through the land of Egypt – ועברתי בארץ מצרים.¹ Now, how could Hashem pass through a city full of idols? The answer is that the vast difference between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the impurity of Egypt made it impossible for Egypt to wield any influence on Him.

Accordingly, why did *Moshe Rabbeinu* need to leave the city? If he was so distant from the Egyptians and so elevated above them, what they did would not have disturbed him. They would have had nothing to do with him at all.

So we see that the Egyptian environment could potentially have had some subtle, faint influence on *Moshe Rabbeinu*, thus he needed to leave the city.

A Vast Difference

This teaches us an important point about the influence of the environment on us.

The Rambam made this point clear:

It is the basic nature of human beings for their views and deeds to follow those of their neighbors and friends, and for them to do as their countrymen do.²

We can't just ignore this fact, and say, "What do I care about the surrounding environment? I don't pay any attention to it," because a person by nature follows his environment.

If so, how can a person stop a corrupt environment from affecting him?

The answer is that a person can only be affected by his environment when he has some connection to it. For instance, let's say a person raises chickens for a living. Day after day, for hours upon hours, he is working with chickens and is right there in close contact with them. But he is not influenced by them in the least. He never ever entertained the thought of going into the coop with them and starting to crow...

When a person works with animals, he is not influenced by them. Because a person is influenced by his environment only if he has some connection to it, if he has something in common with it. A human being and his livestock are so different by nature that they don't influence one another.

If a person comes to the internal realization that the difference between him and those around him is a vast and essential difference, like the difference between a man and his livestock, then he can guard himself properly from bad influences.

The Protection of Torah Learning

¹ Shemos 12:12.

² Mishneh Torah, Hilchos De'os 6:1.

It says about *Hashem*:

אֲנִי ה' לֹא שָׁנִיתִי – I, *Hashem*, have not changed.³

Hashem doesn't change. The environment doesn't touch Him and doesn't affect him.

There are expressions from the Zohar that appear again and again in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*, such as "The Jewish people and the Torah and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* are one," and "The Torah is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*."

Unlike other *mitzvos*, in which the *mitzvah* draws a person closer to *Hashem*, when a person learns Torah, it is as if he is learning *Hashem* Himself.

There are many types of spiritual greatness. We have *tzaddikim*, *chassidim*, *yerei Shamayim*, *ohavei Hashem*. But do we have *tzaddikim* today? *Chazal* say:

Tzaddikim are guided by the *Yetzer Tov*.⁴

Everything a *tzaddik* does is directed by the *Yetzer Tov*. A *tzaddik* doesn't just grab a cup of something to drink unless he actually needs to drink at that moment. And even then, only if the drink will really achieve its intended purpose. And if it has extraneous ingredients, such as flavors, a *tzaddik* will stay away from it.

Let's say we want to buy a food product and we look at the list of ingredients and we have no idea what some of them are. We might comfort ourselves, saying that it is probably okay, it doesn't look like anything is *treif*. But a *tzaddik* relates to a non-kosher food product as if it is poison. Until he knows for a hundred percent that it is genuinely kosher, he is afraid to touch it. Similarly, a word of *lashon hara* is to a *tzaddik* like being cut with a sharp knife.

Although we don't have so many *tzaddikim*

in our generation, and this is surely because we live in such corrupt times, but we do have a lot of *talmidei chachamim*. Why is this? Isn't the state of our generation un conducive to learning Torah and *gadlus* in Torah, as well?

The answer is the only thing the surrounding environment cannot mar and damage is the Torah, and this is for the reason that the Torah is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Learning Torah has such great *kedushah* that impurity has no connection to it at all. *Tumah* cannot touch it or affect it.

Words of Torah do not contract impurity.⁵

Everything can become impure, except for words of Torah.

Since we live in an environment soaked with *tumah*, the only way we can guard ourselves is by learning the *Torah Hakedoshah*. This is the only wall that can protect us from the nefarious influence of the surrounding environment.

In the past, when Jews lived in *shtetls*, there were those who were ignorant and bereft of Torah learning. Some didn't even know how to read and write. But due to the atmosphere of *kedushah* that prevailed in the *shtetl*, they were able to be *mitzvah*-observant even without Torah learning. This won't work nowadays because an atmosphere of impurity has taken over. For people who don't learn Torah, who don't learn Torah with devotion and are not in a Torah framework, it is practically impossible for them to protect themselves from being affected by the environment.

Torah learning is the only defense we have. It is the only guarantee for protecting our Jewishness and that of our children. Only learning the holy Torah with devotion and self-sacrifice can do it. ●

³ *Malachi* 3:6.

⁴ *Berachos* 63b.

⁵ *Berachos* 22a.