

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

The Sword and Bow of Tefilah

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי בַחֶרֶבִי וּבַקֶּשֶׁתִּי. (בראשית מח, כב)

Which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow. (*Bereishis* 48:22)

Onkelos translates “sword” as “prayer,” and “bow” as “supplication.” Thus we see that prayer (*tefilah*) and supplication (*bakashah*) are two different things. Let us understand this.

Every *mitzvah* has power by its very nature. For instance, if we affix a valid *mezuzah* to the doorpost, it possesses the intrinsic power that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* stands there and guards the doorway, so to speak. The difference between having a valid *mezuzah* and not having one is the difference between health and the lack of it, between finding a *shidduch* and not finding one. It is the difference between *Hashem* guarding us and the lack of Divine protection.

Also the *mitzvah* of *Tefilah* carries great power, and it has two parts. The first part of *Tefilah* is the main bulk of the *mitzvah*, which is the three daily prayers established by the *Avos*, as *Chazal* say:

The prayers were instituted by the *Avos*.

Avraham instituted the morning prayer, Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, and Yaakov instituted the evening prayer.¹

The prayers of *Shacharis*, *Minchah* and *Maariv* carry tremendous power. When we daven *Shacharis*, we employ the power of *Avraham Avinu*, who was “The great man among giants.”² *Minchah* is the power of *Yitzchak Avinu*, and *Maariv* is the power of *Yaakov Avinu*.

A person gets up in the morning tired and rubs his eyes. He went to sleep at 4:00 AM and now it’s already time to rise. He gets to *shul* and asks himself how will a sleepy prayer like this ascend to the *Kisei HaKavod*?

It can get there. The following allegory explains how.

¹ *Berachos* 26b.

² *Yehoshua* 14:15.

Let's say a person wants to get from New York to England. Swimming it is out of the question, because even if he is a really expert swimmer, and has only good weather the whole way, and manages not to drown in the middle, it will take him years. The best solution is to go to the airport and get on a plane.

We too, in order to *daven Shacharis* in the morning, need to get to a distant destination. How will we do it? By getting on *Avraham Avinu's* plane. Avraham instituted the prayer of *Shacharis*, and our prayers can ride on his *Shacharis* all the way to the Heavenly Throne of Glory.

Yitzchak instituted the *Minchah* prayer. Every time we *daven Minchah* we are standing on the shoulders of *Yitzchak Avinu*, so to speak, and he takes us up to the *Kisei Hakavod*. And so it is with *Yaakov Avinu* and the *Maariv* prayer.

How does it work? Let's use the metaphor of blasting through a wall. Someone throws a hand grenade at a wall and blows a hole in it. What made the hole? Not the force his throw. The explosives inside the hand grenade are what blasted through the wall.

We "throw" the words of the *Tefilah*, and the *Avos Hakedoshim* fill those words with explosives, so to speak, thus turning them into powerful bombs that can work wonders.

This is the first part of *Tefilah*. It is the body of *Tefilah*. But there is something else, called *bakashah*, "supplication."

But the Rambam rules³ that every Jew has a Biblical obligation to pray at least a short prayer every day. The Ramban holds that there is no Biblical obligation to pray every day. However, when a person finds himself in trouble, he has a

Biblical obligation to pray and beg *Hashem* to save him.⁴

This type of prayer is not riding on the power of the set *tefilos* enacted by the *Avos*. This is *bakashah*, "supplication."

Let's say something starts to really hurt a person, and it is not the time of *Shacharis*, *Minchah* or *Maariv*. And he doesn't even have a *Sefer Tehillim* on him. How will his prayer ascend to heaven? This is where the power of *bakashah* comes into the picture.

If a Jew is in pain and he turns to *Hashem* and cries out: *Ribono shel Olam*, it hurts me! then at that moment he doesn't need Avraham or Yitzchak or Yaakov or *David Hamelech*. Because *Hashem* Himself is right there with him. *Hashem* is with everyone of a lowly and oppressed spirit: **מָרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֲשַׁכּוֹן וְאֵת דְּכָא וְשַׁפְּלֵי רוּחַ**.⁵

For instance, someone is driving down the highway at 11:30 AM and he needs to get somewhere at 12:00 to sign a contract. Suddenly he gets a flat tire. He is in trouble now. At this moment he has a Biblical obligation to turn to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and ask Him for help. He can speak in English, Yiddish, Spanish, French, or any other language he wishes. *Hashem* understands all languages.

There are places where the *Shechinah* rests even though we don't have *Beis Hamikdash* anymore. The Jewish home is a place of the *Shechinah*. The *shul* is a place of the *Shechinah*. But the place that actually has the presence of the *Shechinah* more than any other is the hospital. The hospital is the biggest *Beis Hamikdash*, so to speak. Because "The *Shechinah* rests above the pillow of the sick person."⁶

4 *Hasagos l' Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvas Aseh 5.*

5 *Yeshayahu 57:15.*

6 *Shabbos 12b.*

3 *Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvas Aseh 10.*

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ר משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ר ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נדיהם ~ עשרת הקנים בני בנים והפארת בנים אבותם

When a Jew is in trouble, when he is in pain, he doesn't need something to raise his prayer up to Heaven, because *Hashem* is right there, next to him. It is written:

כִּי לֹא לְעוֹלָם אָרִיב וְלֹא לְנֶצַח אֶקְצוֹף כִּי רוּחַ
מִלְפָּנַי יַעֲטוֹף וּנְשָׁמוֹת אֲנִי עֹשִׂיתִי – “I will not
quarrel forever, and I will not be angry for
all time, because a spirit from before Me
will suffer, and I made the souls.”⁷

Rabbeinu Yonah explains this verse:

7 *Yeshayahu* 57:16.

When a spirit, which came from *Hashem*, will suffer, *Hashem* will no longer quarrel and be angry. Because He will surely have mercy and compassion for the precious soul that He made.⁸

Where there is a suffering Jew, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is to be found.

Of course, this is all on condition that the suffering Jew turns to *Hashem*. If a Jew is in trouble and he turns to *Hashem*, his prayer will surely not come back emptyhanded. ●

8 *Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:3.

The Lofty Trait of Truth

יְהוּדָה אֶתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אַחֶיךָ. (בראשית מט, ח)

Yehudah, your brothers will admit to you. (*Bereishis* 49:8)

Yehudah, you admitted to the act with Tamar, so your brothers will admit to you, and will be called “Jews” (יהודים) after your name (יהודה). (*Targum Yonasan*)

There is a big *chiddush* here. The name “Jew” that we bear derives from the trait of admitting the truth. We are called as we are due to the attribute of truthfulness.

The trait of *emes* is among the highest of virtues, especially the strength to admit the truth even when it is to our disadvantage. For someone who does this, the name of “Jew” expresses kingship and grandeur. Truth is his honor and glory. *Sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* elaborates on how great truth is:

The *neshamah* was created from the place of *ruach hakodesh*, as it says, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת – “He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life.”¹ And it was hewed from a place of purity,

1 *Bereishis* 2:7.

and it was created from the supernal radiance, from the Throne of Glory. And above, in the place of the holy of holies, there is no falsehood; rather, everything is truth, as it says, וְה' אֱלֹקִים – “*Hashem*, G-d, is truth.”² G-d made man to be straight, and the seal of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is truth. And it is written, דִּבְרַר שְׁקָרִים לֹא יִכּוֹן לְנֶגֶד עֵינַי – “The speaker of lies will not be established before My eyes.”³

Someone who merits thinking about these things, about how souls are hewed from the source of truth, will perform all his matters truthfully, and will not bring falsehood into the

2 *Yirmeyahu* 10:10.

3 *Tehillim* 101:7.

place of the holiness of truth.

Therefore the verse says, ה' לְכָל קְרָאִיו קְרוֹב – “Hashem is close to all who call to Him, to all who call to Him in truth.”⁴

Someone who speaks only truth will live a long life and be rescued from trouble. This is supported by the verse, וְהִי אֱלֹקִים אֱמֶת הוּא – “Hashem, G-d, is truth; He is the G-d of life and the King of the world.”⁵ If a person speaks only truth he will be saved from trouble all his life, as it is written, תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת הִיְתָה בְּפִיהוּ וְעוֹלָה לֹא נִמְצָא בְּשִׁפְתָיו – “The Torah of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found on his lips... because he is an angel of Hashem of H-sts.”⁶

There is no virtuousness like that of he who speaks truth, and so it is written, ראש דְּבָרְךָ אֱמֶת – “The head of your word is truth.”⁷ And it says, מְדַבֵּר שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק – “Distance yourself from a matter of falsehood.”⁸ Even a person’s nonverbal communications should be truthful, because the reward of truth is very great.

Therefore, a person should accustom

himself to go in the way of truth, and should learn Torah and know the truth, so he will be able to do the *mitzvos* in their true form and according to their *halachos*. One should always admit to the truth and not be embarrassed to accept the truth from whomever it may be. Even if it is the smallest and lowliest of people, accept the truth from him, because a precious jewel in the hand of a small and lowly person is still a valuable jewel.

Now that the *galus* has dragged on too long, due to our many sins, Jews should separate themselves from the vanities of the world and take hold of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s* seal, which is truth. They should sanctify themselves even in permitted matters, and not lie, neither to a Jew nor to a non-Jew, and not mislead them in any matter. For it says, שְׂאֵרֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ עוֹלָה וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ כָזָב וְלֹא יִמְצָא בְּפִיהֶם לְשׁוֹן תְּרֻמִּית – “The remnant of Yisrael will not do iniquity and will not speak falsely and the language of deceit will not be in their mouths.”⁹

May the All-Merciful guide us in His truth and bring us into His chambers, to reach the supernal light, which is the secret place of His strength and the beauty of His splendor.

These are the beautiful and inspiring words of *Sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* regarding the trait of *emes*.

⁹ Tzefaniah 3:13.

⁴ Ibid 147:18.

⁵ Yirmeyahu *ibid*.

⁶ Malachi 2:7.

⁷ Tehillim 119:160.

⁸ Shemos 23:7.

PARSHAH TOPIC

There is a Jewish practice called *Shovavim*. The name שׁוֹבָבִים is an abbreviation made up of the first letters of the *parshiyos* of יתרו בשלח בא שמות וארא בא בשלח יתרו משפטים. The practice of *Shovavim* has its roots in the Kabbalistic writings of the Arizal, which say that

a person should make special efforts to do *teshuvah* for certain *aveiros* during these weeks.

In earlier generations there were people who fasted and made a big deal of *Shovavim*. When I grew up I did not see a special atmosphere during

Shovavim

these weeks even among *bnei Torah*. According to *Kabbalah*, one should try to fast eighty-four times. But there is a shortcut, which is to fast two days straight. I know someone who fasted two days straight, and he did it three times. He did this every year, together with other *talmidei chachamim*. They recited *selichos* and did *teshuvah*. He got up one time at midnight and simply fainted. I ran over to him to tell him to stop fasting, but he did not want to listen to me.

There are still people in our generation who make a big deal of *Shovavim*. I want to tell you an easy way by which we can connect to this matter of *Shovavim*, which was practiced by Jews throughout the generations.

It is very interesting that great *tzaddikim* would tremble before *yom hadin*, and simple people were not as worried about it. Most of us feel that we are neither super great, spiritually speaking, nor super terrible. We tend to feel that we are not perfect but we are not in such bad shape either. We live a Jewish lifestyle. We don't do big *aveiros*.

On the other hand, there are *tzaddikim* whose *kedushah* and *taharah* cannot even be described. When *yom hadin* approaches they weep to *Hashem* and beg of Him to grant them purity: לֵב טָהוֹר בְּרָא לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נְכוֹן חֲדָשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי. They seek ways to attain atonement for their sins.

Shovavim is a special opportunity to be cleansed, to gain purity and atonement.

The Torah describes the exile in Egypt as *kur habarzel*, the “iron crucible.” *Hashem* put the Jewish people in *Mitzrayim* to cleanse them in preparation for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. When we read these *parshiyos* we try to connect to this process of purification and refinement that is in the air at this time due to the *parshiyos* of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Do I Need This?

The question in our minds at such a time is probably like this: Do I actually need this cleansing process? Is my *neshamah* so stained?

As an introduction to the answer, let's talk in

general about the subject of educating our children.

Chazal say regarding the first Torah subject that children should study:

Let those who are pure come and occupy themselves with *taharos*, with that which is pure.¹

Children are pure. And they are to learn *taharos*, “that which is pure,” referring to *korbanos*. The offerings in *Beis Hamikdash* were maintained on the highest level of purity. *Korbanos* are traditionally the first Torah subject that Jewish children learn. We will explain why.

Let's say a person has a rash on his skin that doesn't go away. He pays a visit to the doctor and expects to get a skin cream. But the doctor sends him to the pharmacy with a prescription for a tablet that he needs to take every two hours.

The patient is surprised. He doesn't understand what a tablet will help him? The doctor explains that the problem is not a superficial skin condition. It's something internal, in his blood. The rash is caused by a bacterial infection. Rubbing a cream on it might make it go away in that particular place on the skin but it will reappear somewhere else. Whereas if the infection itself is treated, the skin will heal and become as clear as a baby's skin.

Sometimes treating a problem superficially is not the right approach. We need to dig deeper and get to the source of the problem.

Now let's apply this to a different type of problem, to *chinuch*. Let's say you have a child who just can't sit still. He jumps around all the time, he bothers his brothers and sisters, when he is put in the chair to eat he jumps out of the seat a second later. What should you do? Buy glue to fasten him to his seat? That won't help. He will jump with the seat. So what's the solution – bolt his seat down to the floor? Obviously that is not the solution either. Because the problem is not the jumping itself. The problem is deeper. Perhaps there is an emotional issue or a neurological

¹ See *Shach* on *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 245:8.

issue. Gluing him down or bolting his chair is not treating the problem.

Now let's say a child speaks up rudely to his parents and teachers. Some teachers will just tell him to sit down and keep his mouth shut. That is like gluing the hyperactive child to his chair. The problem is not that the child gets up and rudely opens his mouth. The problem is deeper than that.

Or let's say a child steals. What should you do – tie his hands? Nowadays in our “enlightened” era, when theft becomes too prevalent they put more police officers on duty. So what happens? The phenomenon develops that police officers themselves steal. We don't solve the problem by increasing police presence.

These problems are not superficial; they are rooted in the *neshamah*. Who knows and understands souls? *Hashem* does. *אלקי נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא* – “My G-d, the soul that you placed within me is pure.” This *neshamah* needs nourishment. It needs purity. *Hashem* tells us that when a young child jumps and is overactive, he needs *Chumash Vayikra*, he needs to learn *korbanos*.

I will give you a different allegory to illustrate the point. Someone buys a new luxury car. He turns the key and nothing happens. He goes back to the manufacturer and says, “What did you sell me? The car doesn't work.”

The manufacturer says, “Did you put gas in the tank?”

He says, “What's that?”

The manufacturer goes and brings a gas cannister, and the customer starts shouting, “You're going to put that stuff in my fancy car?!”

The manufacturer says, “Please understand. We produced this car. We know how it works. And I am telling you, without gas in the tank, your car won't work.”

Hashem says to us, so to speak: I manufactured this child. I created him. He has a *neshamah* that needs *Chumash Vayikra*, and the story of Yosef and his brothers. It may not sound logical to you, but that is what it needs. If you give the *neshamah* what it needs, you will see how this works wonders.

This is the basis of Jewish education. We learn Torah and keep *mitzvos* in order to penetrate deep in, to the *neshamah*, and solve the problems of the child and of the adult alike.

I remember when I was a child that my uncle R. Yaakov Weinberg, *rosh yeshivah* in Baltimore, would come to visit us. Every time he came he would start to talk in learning with my father, and within five minutes they started to shout, and then they chased one another around the table. If you go into a *yeshivah* you hear shouting. Why are they shouting? Because we want the *kedushah* to get really deep in, all the way to the *neshamah*.

Mitzvos Reach Deep

Now let's return to the subject of *Shovavim*.

Mitzvos have a much deeper effect that we tend to think. It says in the Zohar that *matzah* is called *nahama d'mehmnusa*, “the bread of faithfulness,” because eating *matzah* gives us the spiritual strength of *emunah*, just as eating regular bread gives us physical strength. *Matzah* is also called *nahamah d'asusa*, “the bread of healing,” because it heals all our spiritual and emotional problems.

It's the same with *aveiros*. If a person commits a sin it puts a stain on his *neshamah* that goes a lot deeper than we tend to think. An *aveirah* causes impurity to penetrate deep down to the *neshamah*. But I don't want to talk about *aveiros* right now.

Let us focus on our generation and try to evaluate whether *Shovavim* is for us or not.

To be continued next week