



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

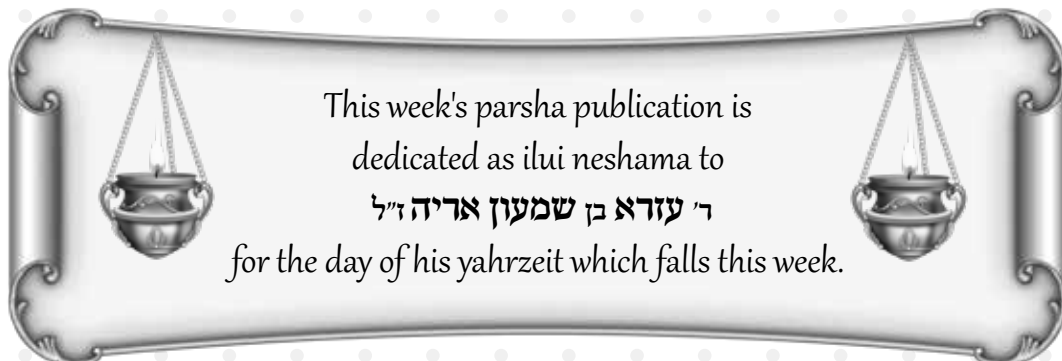
Don't Pain People

כָּל אֱלֻמָּנָה וַיִּתּוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן. אִם עָיִה תַעֲנֶנָּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צָעֲקוֹתוֹ, וַחֲרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּחֶרֶב. (שמות כב, כא-כג)

Do not oppress any widow or orphan. If you do oppress him, then if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry. My anger will flare up against you, and I will slay you by the sword. (*Shemos 22:21-23*)

“Any widow or orphan” – It is the same regarding every person, but the verse spoke of the common case. This is because these people’s strength is weakened, and it is common for them to be oppressed. (*Rashi*)

We are normally careful about the feelings of great, respected personages. We don't pain them or aggravate them, we make sure they have everything they need, we give them what they ask for, to the best of our ability. This is standard treatment for great *Rabbanim* and exceptionally wealthy people



This week's parsha publication is dedicated as *ilui neshama* to ר' עזרא בן שמעון אריה ז"ל for the day of his *yahrzeit* which falls this week.

and VIPs in general.

When it comes to ordinary folk, and surely those commonly viewed as below average – such the poor or the Torah-ignorant or the weak-minded – we usually treat them in a different manner. Even when we assist them with something, or listen to what they have to say, we might first let them wait, or try to hurry it up.

However, our *parshah* bears a powerful message regarding this. It teaches us to make sure we honor all people and not pain anyone. The Torah's approach is the opposite of common practice: The lower a person is, the more downtrodden he senses himself to be, the more we must concern ourselves with him, not to cause him pain or aggravation. We see how strongly the Torah speaks regarding the punishment for he who mistreats widows and orphans, and Rashi explains this applies to all downtrodden people, not just widows and orphans.

Gedolei Yisrael were very concerned about this matter; they feared they were more likely than others to transgress this warning. So we see from the following story about R. Shimon ben Gamliel and R. Yishmael, who were sentenced to death by the Roman authorities.

R. Yishmael was crying.

R. Shimon ben Gamliel said to him, "In another two steps, you will be in the domain of the *tzaddikim*, and you are crying?!"

R. Yishmael replied, "I am crying because we are being executed in the manner of murderers and *Shabbos* desecrators."

R. Shimon ben Gamliel said to him, "Maybe it happened that you were in the middle of a meal, or you were sleeping, and a woman came to you to ask about her

Halachic state of purity, and your attendant told her, 'He is sleeping.' And the Torah said **אִם עָנָה תְּעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ** – 'If you do oppress him... I will slay you by the sword.'"¹

We see that these saintly Torah giants were gravely concerned they might have shown insufficient respect to common people.

Chazal also offer a different version of the story:

R. Shimon ben Gamliel said to him, "Maybe it happened one time that a person came to you with a court case, or a *Halachic* question, and you kept him waiting until you drank your cup or tied your shoe or put on your shawl. And the Torah said **אִם עָנָה תְּעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ** – 'If you do oppress him.' [The punishment] is the same for a great oppression and for a small oppression."²

Clearly, it is not just the widows and orphans that we need to be careful about. Whenever a person comes to ask a question or make a request of you, at that moment he needs your help, so he feels a little down, as he is dependent on someone else's favors. At that time, the Torah considers him like the widow and the orphan, and we are commanded not to prolong the shame and discomfort he is experiencing.

The Rambam was exceedingly careful about this, and recounts how he handled himself when people would come to him with requests regarding their sicknesses:

I go out to them to calm them and please them, to beg them to forgo their honor and

1 *Maseches Semachos* 8:8.

2 *Mechilta*.

לעילוי נשמת

מוה"ר משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ר ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני נשים והפארת נשים אבותם

wait until I eat my small, daily meal. I go out to heal them and to write them notes and prescriptions for the healing of their sicknesses. People come in and out until nightfall. And sometimes, as per the faith of the Torah, for two or more hours into the night I speak to them and instruct them and converse with them; as I am lying flat out from exhaustion the night comes and I am so weak I can't talk anymore.³

The Rambam writes even more in that place about his supreme dedication to helping the simple

³ *Igros Harambam.*

people.

And what about us? We might be tempted sometimes, when waiting in line at the grocery store, to cut in front of a young child. Or we might ask a child or a person of lowly status for a favor, or send them on an errand, when we wouldn't ask someone else to do it for us. And they often go and do it just because they don't feel comfortable saying no. There are so many similar examples.

If the Torah punishes so heavily for taking advantage of the weak, surely the reward is many times greater if we show concern for them. If we are careful about the feelings of others, we will merit a long and pleasant life, for us and for our family members. ●



The Truth and Only the Truth

מְדַבֵּר שֶׁקֶר תִּרְחֶק. (שמות כג, ז)

Stay far from a false word. (*Shemos* 23:7)

Here we are commanded to stay far from *sheker*. Why is it a *mitzvah* to stay far away? Why doesn't the Torah just tell us that lying is forbidden, and leave it at that?

We may compare it to *parah adumah*. There was a certain leniency in regard to *parah adumah*: its ashes were prepared by a *tevul yom*, by someone who was not absolutely pure but rather had a minimal level of impurity. (This was done in order to go against the view of the *Tzedukim*.) *Chazal* therefore enacted all sorts of stringencies for *parah adumah*, so we won't treat its purity lightly in other ways as well.

It is the same with speaking falsehood. There are cases in which we can and should change the truth a little bit (in order to keep the peace, or for other reasons specifically mentioned by *Chazal*). Therefore, to provide proper balance, the Torah

commands us to be extra stringent about *sheker* and stay far from it.

Let's talk a little about truth and falsehood and what are our obligations regarding it.

There are those who think it is only forbidden to lie if it causes damage or loss to someone, but there is nothing wrong with telling an "innocent" lie, such as saying, "My name is Beryl," when in fact my name is Shmeryl. Because what does it matter? No one gains or loses anything if I say my name is Beryl. And since I don't want people to know my name, why not say I am Beryl?

This is how many people look at it. But it is mistaken. Even if no one in the world cares what my name is, when I spoke a word of falsehood, I did a very destructive thing.

Falsehood by its very nature is counter to the

world's existence and could very well be a Biblical prohibition as well. (It says in the introduction of *Sefer Chafetz Chaim* to *Hilchos Lashon Hara* that someone who speaks *lashon hara* and tells a lie is transgressing the prohibition of **מדבר שקר תרחק**, "Stay far from a false word.")

To just tell an "innocent" lie, to say something that isn't correct, is the wrong thing to do. Speakers sometimes change the facts of a story in order to make it sound more impressive, and this isn't right.

Gedolei Yisrael considered it very important to speak only the truth. There are wondrous stories about how very careful they were regarding truthfulness.

The Chafetz Chaim was known to be very exacting when it came to speaking the truth. If someone would ask his friend, "What time is it?" and his friend would start to tell him, "I think it's five o'clock," the Chafetz Chaim would get upset. How can you say, "I think it's...?" If you know what time it is, say clearly, "It is five o'clock." And if you don't know what time it is, don't answer. Or simply say, "I don't know."

In Yiddish there is an expression "*Ich mein*," I think.... The Chafetz Chaim could not tolerate this expression. How can you say, "*Ich mein*?" Either you know, or you don't know. Even if it is such a small thing as, "I think it's five o'clock," it is still considered speaking falsely. It is *sheker*. The Chafetz Chaim was very unhappy with the whole attitude of, "Oh, come on, is the time of day my responsibility? What does it even matter whether it is five o'clock or five after five? The approximate time is good enough for you!"

The world's existence depends on truthfulness and justice. When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sits to judge the world, this means He determines the position of each star and the location of all the celestial bodies, that so-and-so must die and that another person will live a long life. If there is *sheker*, if the star assumes a different position and the heavenly bodies move from their proper location, and so forth, everything falls apart. The world simply cannot exist that way.

This is because *mishpat*, "justice," is straightness. It means not being bent out of shape. This is essential to the existence of the world, to all of *Hashem's* creation. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

The Purpose of Pain

וְרַפָּא יִרְפָּא. (שמות כא, יט)

He shall heal. (*Shemos* 21:19)

This is the source that a doctor has permission to practice healing. (*Berachos* 60a)

Painkillers

When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brings illness upon a person, he is allowed to try to heal the illness.

However, one of the biggest fields in medicine today is painkillers. In the past, doctors focused mainly on remedying illness. But today there a highly developed science of pain relief even if the disease

itself cannot be cured.

Pharmacists say that only about fifteen percent of the medicines sold by them are remedial. The rest are pain relievers, whether it is physical or emotional pain.

In the past, people considered pain to be part of life. It is recounted that one of *tzaddikim* of past generations suffered greatly from pain in his legs. When he grew old, those close to him urged him to go to a doctor. He did, and the doctor healed him, and

his pain was relieved. The *tzaddik* then remarked that he suddenly realized it is possible to walk around in *Hashem's* world without pain. He said that he always thought pain to be an integral part of life. Just as a person sees and hears, so he also has aches and pains.

But today, if something hurts us, we quickly take a pill to alleviate the discomfort. And if that doesn't help, we take two. When we are in pain we find it hard to function. Life stops, and we feel we must get rid of this pain. Nowadays a dentist is considered good if he can treat patients painlessly. Even when we get a shot nowadays, for vaccination or something else, they spray a little anesthetic on the spot, so it won't hurt us too much.

What does the Torah say about this? Are aches and pains a superfluous burden, or perhaps they have a role to play in our *avodas Hashem*?

The Shechinah's Pain

Chazal say as follows about experiencing pain:

When a person is in pain, what does the *Shechinah* say? "My head feels heavy, My arm feels heavy."¹

Rashi explains that the *Shechinah* feels heaviness of head and arm, so to speak, similar to how a person feels when he is exhausted and worn out.

My grandfather would tell of a certain pious Jew who was badly beaten in the street by non-Jews. While he was being hit, the Jew cried out, "It doesn't hurt me! It doesn't hurt me!" Afterward, people asked him what he meant by that. He explained that when a Jew experiences pain, *Hashem* suffers, too, and he didn't want *Hashem* to suffer because of him.

When a person is in pain, the *Shechinah* does not just empathize with his pain. It is much more than that. It is as if the *Shechinah*, too, is in pain and suffering. There is a concept called *נושא בעול עם חבירו*. When a friend or relative suffers, we are concerned about his wellbeing. We look for ways to help him. Not only does *Hashem* show us this type of concern, but it is if *Hashem* Himself is experiencing

the same pain. *עמו אנוכי בצרה* – "*Hashem* is with him in his trouble."

When we have a headache, the problem is not our pain, but *Hashem's* pain. There is nothing as powerful as pain to connect us tightly to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

We need to take advantage of this wonderful connection to *Hashem*.

Pain is not an end in itself. In the physical world, pain indicates that something in the body is not functioning properly. When a person has an infection, his body temperature rises. Running a temperature is a warning signal that there is a problem somewhere in the body and it needs to be treated. Something in the vital processes is not working right.

There are people whose body does not react to infection by a rise in temperature, and they are in a high-risk category, because the infection is likely to spread throughout their body without them noticing it.

Pain is a sign from *Hashem*. It has one clear purpose: that we should exercise our will to live.

The Drop of Ink

The following allegory illustrates this. A young child is being taught how to paint. The teacher guides the child in producing a painting of steps leading up to a building, and the painting comes out great. The child worked on it day after day until it was a real work of art.

Suddenly a big, ugly drop of paint fell in the middle of the picture. The child broke out in bitter tears. The picture he worked on so hard, for such a long time, is ruined!

The teacher reassured him, saying, "Don't cry, we have a picture of steps here, and in the middle of it is a drop of paint. Let's add in a child walking down the steps, and we will incorporate the drop of paint into the picture of the child."

Now the painting is even better than before.

All of life contains hidden meaning. Just as *esrog* has hidden meaning, just as *matzah* has hidden meaning, so life itself has hidden meaning. We don't know the purpose for which we are alive or what role

¹ *Sanhedrin* 46a.

we are meant to play in the world. These are hidden matters known only to *Hashem* Who created us.

When suffering comes upon us, or anything else that is ostensibly disturbing our routine, this is like a drop of pain falling into the middle of our tranquil life. There is a hidden meaning in this drop of paint.

Hashem has a reason for sending it to us.

What should we do with it? If we try to erase this “drop of paint,” if the child in the above-mentioned allegory will try to wipe away the drop of paint that fell on his picture, it will smear all over and ruin the whole painting.

So instead of trying to get rid of suffering, we should rather incorporate it into our life. We should accept its presence and bring out its true message, the message that *Hashem* has sent us.

We should create “life” out of it. Growth and eternal deeds. Then, our whole life will take on a completely different dimension, a much more wonderful dimension. Life will be much more beautiful than it was without this suffering.

The Danger in Suffering

Although suffering brings us a wonderful opportunity to connect to *Hashem*, it can also lead us in the opposite direction, *chas v'shalom*.

When suffering comes upon a person he is liable to say, “I can’t *daven* in such a state, I can’t learn Torah like this,” and so forth. Suffering is like a car. It can get us very far quickly and easily. But if we don’t know how to drive, a car can be detrimental to us.

There are people who are very emotional, and when something bothers them, when something is disturbing them and worrying them, they go to the fridge and start to eat.

This is one way to deal with a stressful problem. But if we follow this way, we lose out on a precious treasure. We lose the opportunity to connect with

Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We were granted a wonderful gift: emotional distress. And instead of taking advantage of it to connect ourselves to *Hashem*, we connect to a piece of chocolate cake.

Pain, Yes. Sadness, No.

“Pain” is not synonymous with “sadness.” There is happiness and there is sadness. Happiness expresses hope, growth, aspiration. Sadness expresses despair.

There is an expression of *Chazal* that we could apply to this:

Poverty follows the pauper.²

Poverty follows poor people around. By contrast, nothing brings more riches to a person than riches itself. Nothing brings more poverty to a person than poverty itself. When a person conducts himself in a wealthy and dignified manner, this itself brings him wealth and dignity.

In the same way, nothing brings a person more joy than joy itself. The best *segulah* for *simchah* is to create joy artificially, and true joy will follow.

When a person is in pain he should not try to escape. If he trains himself to overcome it, he can live with the pain. But there is one thing we must do, and that is learn a lesson from the pain. We should take the force of pain, which stimulates our will to live, our will to grow, and take advantage of it for true life. We should *daven* with more *kavanah*, draw ourselves closer to *Hashem*, become partners with Him in His world.

Then the suffering will turn into a wonderful gift that *Hashem* gave us.

Suffering is the force that awakens the will to live, the will to increase our growth. We should take advantage of it to build ourselves and elevate ourselves spiritually. ●

² *Bava Kama* 92a.