

# 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 רחל נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה  
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM  
FROM THE PARSHAH

## Come to Sinai

ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני. (שמות יט, א)

**On this day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. (*Shemos* 19:1)**

**The Torah could have just written, “On that day.” What is the meaning of “On this day”? [It comes to teach us] that the words of the Torah should be new to you as if they were given today. (*Rashi*)**

We should relate to Torah every day as if it was brand-new to us, as if we just got it today.

But why is this message written here? The *pasuk* isn't even talking about the Giving of the Torah. It is just mentioning when the Jewish people came to the wilderness of Sinai, in preparation for receiving the Torah a number of days later.

The question is the answer. Here we see that arriving at *Midbar Sinai* was actually the beginning of *Kabbalas Hatorah*, so this is actually an appropriate place for a message about how to learn Torah.

This resolves a well-known question on something we say in the *Pesach Hagadah*. We say, “If He would have brought us to *Har Sinai* and not given us the Torah, דיינו – it would have been enough for us.”

But coming to Sinai is just a means to an end, which

is receiving the Torah. Why would it be enough to just come there? Because coming to *Har Sinai* was more than just a step bringing us closer to *Matan Torah*. It was actually the beginning of *Kabbalas Hatorah* itself.

How so?

We will explain by way of allegory.

A great, well-known *tzaddik* comes to a mass gathering attended by tens of thousands of people. The crowd is packed in from all sides and it is almost impossible to even get close to the *tzaddik*.

Now the *tzaddik* calls a certain person in the audience to come over to him. This person is understandably excited. But he will be even more excited if, when he comes over, the *Rav* doesn't just shake his hand but gives him a kiss. And if the *Rav* also invites him for a visit at home, he will feel that something incredibly

amazing is happening to him.

This is how it was at *Har Sinai*. We owe Him special thanks just for bringing us there, close to Him. Coming to *Har Sinai*, where the *Shechinah* to come down, represented taking part in a life that we share with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This alone is reason to thank

and praise Him. Because *Yiddishkeit* is all about living a life shared with *Hashem*, in love and affection. Life together with *Hashem*!

However, *Hashem* also gave us *mitzvos*, because without the *mitzvos* we won't be able to keep up this life shared with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. ●



## How to Get Torah

וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה. (שמות יט, ח)

**The entire people responded together, saying, “All that Hashem spoke, we shall do.”**  
(*Shemos 19:8*)

These verses describe the exalted event that took place at *Har Sinai*, and the wondrous gift we received there: Torah and *mitzvos*.

Out of all the *mitzvos* we received at Sinai, the most important and wondrous of them all is the *mitzvah* to learn Torah. It says in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* as follows:

And even greater than this is the holy Torah, which has more light and additional holiness over and above all the *mitzvos* put together. If a person will fulfill all the 613 *mitzvos* with true perfection, just as they should be done... then his entire person will become – with all his limbs and organs and faculties – a complete base on which will rest the supernal holiness of all the *mitzvos*.

But even so, the holiness and light of the *mitzvos* do not compare at all to the

tremendously great holiness and light of the holy Torah. And the Torah's illumination will come upon a person who studies it and occupies himself with it properly. It is greater because its holy source is far above the root of the holiness and supernal light of all the *mitzvos*.<sup>1</sup>

The tremendous wondrousness of Torah learning is not just for great *chachamim* who know and understand the entire Torah. Rather, as *Chazal* say,<sup>2</sup> there is a *mitzvah* of Torah learning in each and every word a person learns. Each word is a great *mitzvah* on its own, equal to all the other *mitzvos* put together. Each word contains the entire awesome wondrousness of the Torah.

*Rabbeinu Yonah* makes forceful remarks about Torah study:

1 *Nefesh Hachayim* 4:30.

2 *Yerushalmi, Peah* 1:1.



### לעילוי נשמת

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים והפארת בני אבותם

When people finish their work and business, and they go home, if they are idle, or talk about idle matters, this is very bad. It is a very heavy sin because they are despising the Torah. If they would believe that there is endless reward for Torah learning, why wouldn't they pick up their feet and go to the synagogue to learn *Talmud* or read *Chumash*, or the *Siddur*?

Therefore, every person is obligated to set up for himself, also in his home, a special place, and he should put *Talmud* or *Tanach* or *Tehillim* there, or a *Siddur*. And when he finishes attending to his business, he should go there to learn *Talmud* or to read *Tanach*. This practice, too, will work wonders to save his soul from destruction.<sup>3</sup>

When *Hashem* gave the Torah at Sinai, He did not give it to just anyone. We got the Torah because

<sup>3</sup> *Rabbeinu Yonah, Iggeres Hateshuva*.

we were ready and willing to receive it. Only after we accepted upon ourselves to learn and keep the Torah, only when we said *נעשה ונשמע*, “We will fulfill it and we will study it,” then we got the Torah.

And the same is true today. Our success in drawing close to *Hashem* and acquiring Torah depends on how much we accept the Torah upon ourselves, how much we are willing to devote ourselves to it. The most important thing is to make up our minds to stand strong as a wall and keep the times we have designated for Torah study, to show *mesirus nefesh* and keep those times holy for *Hashem*, and not allow disturbances to take those times from us. The stronger is our decision to keep up our learning times, the more *Hashem* will help us, and the disturbances will go away.

The week of this *parshah*, in which we read about *Kabbalas Hatorah*, is a prime opportunity for us to set up a daily schedule with clearly defined times for Torah learning, and to guard those precious times. If we do this, *Hashem* will help us keep it up. ●

## PARSHAH TOPIC

# Intro to Torah

אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׂרִים וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: וְעַתָּה אִם שְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקִלִּי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי וְהֵייתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְּלַכְתּ כַּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (שמות יט, ד-ו)

**You saw what I did to Egypt, and that I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. And now, if you will surely listen to Me, and you will guard My covenant, you will be a special treasure to Me from among all the peoples, for the whole world is Mine. And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Yisrael. (*Shemos* 19:4-6)**

### Here are the Basics of Judaism

*Hashem* gave us a Torah, and before He gave it to us, He gave us an introduction to this Torah. The contents

of the introduction are crucial. We can't even receive the Torah with them.

The basics of Judaism and the life goal of every Jew were written right here in this passage before the

Torah was actually given. Here we find the purpose and the conditions of the covenant between *Hashem* and us. And after the people heard it, they answered unanimously: **כל אשר דיבר ה' נעשה** – “Everything that *Hashem* said, we will do.”<sup>1</sup>

Here we accepted upon ourselves partnership with *Hashem*.

These *pesukim* are crucial. We should go over them again and again all our lives.

## Each One of You

The first thing *Moshe Rabbeinu* was commanded to tell the Jewish people was, “You saw (**אתם ראיתם**) what I did to Egypt.”

Sometimes the Torah says “you” in the singular (**אתה**) and sometimes it says “you” in the plural (**אתם**). Here the Torah uses the plural. What does this signify?

The Vilna Gaon writes<sup>2</sup> that whenever the Torah speaks to us in the plural, it is referring to each and every individual member of the Jewish people. And when it addresses us in the singular, it is speaking to the community as a whole, as one unit.

Here in this first word is the first introduction *Hashem* gave us before actually giving us the Torah. **אתם**, **ראיתם**, in the plural. *Hashem* relates to each and every individual. He speaks to me, personally. *Hashem* did not address us as a community, but rather individually. He spoke to me personally. What does this tell us?

So to speak, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* feels toward each and every Jew as if he or her was His only child.

This may be compared to a father who has ten children. One child is ill, and the father totally devotes himself to the sick child with all his energy. If we would ask him, “Why are you exerting yourself so much for him? You have nine other children!” he would answer, “It’s not just another child. This is my Reuven. I have only one Reuven!”

Now let’s imagine the father goes for a visit to the *yeshivah* one morning, and doesn’t find his Reuven...

“Did you see my Reuven?”

“Oh, your Reuven? He’s probably over at the newsstand sipping on a coke.”

“But why is he over there at eleven o’clock in the morning, in the middle of *seder*?!”

“I guess he’s catching up on the news. But it’s not really so terrible, after all. There are another hundred *bachurim* who are sitting and learning here in the *beis midrash*.”

This father didn’t come down to the *yeshivah* to see a hundred *bachurim* sitting and learning, however beautiful a sight that may be. He’s here to see how his Reuven is doing. That’s the only thing that interests him right now.

This is the allegory, now let’s apply it. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* comes to the *yeshivah* at 9:35 AM and immediately asks, “Where is my Reuven?”

What will we tell Him? *Hashem*, you have a hundred *bachurim* sitting and learning here in the *beis midrash*. Look what a big *tzibbur* You have!

Will this satisfy *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? Right now, He is interested only in how His dear Reuven is doing. He is not here to see a hundred *bachurim* studying assiduously. He came to see His “only child” in *yeshivah*.

This is the first word: **אתם**, “You,” in the plural. *Hashem* says: I am speaking to you, to each individual Jew. I took you and brought you on eagles’ wings. You are My **סגולה**, My special treasure. I don’t forget you for a moment, and I want you to be special. This is My condition; this is what I want.

We can’t allow ourselves to forget this for even a moment because this is the condition of being a Jew, of entering the covenant of Torah with *Hashem*.

## You Saw It Yourself

Now we come to another of Judaism’s basics. **אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים** – “You saw what I did to Egypt.” The *Midrash* makes the point we want to bring out:

I am not telling you something based on oral tradition, I am not sending you a written text and I am not bringing witnesses before you. Rather, **אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים** –

1 *Shemos* 19:8.

2 *Aderes Eliyahu, Devarim* 29:18.

“You saw what I did to Egypt.”<sup>3</sup>

Our belief in *Hashem* and His Torah is not built on faith. It is based on what we saw clearly with our own eyes and therefore know to be true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

If you want to check something out and evaluate it, you need to know on what basis it stands. All the religions of the world are based on someone who came along and said he is the prophet of G-d. So it all boils down to how much faith you place in him, how much credence you accord his words. He says he is a prophet...

Judaism is different. It does not stand on the words of a self-proclaimed prophet. It's all about what you saw yourself. “You saw what I did to Egypt.” Our belief is based on a real historical event witnessed by millions of people.

It says about *Matan Torah* a similar thing: אתם ראיתם כי מן השמים דיברתי עמכם – “You saw that I spoke to you from heaven.”<sup>4</sup> And here, too, the *Midrash* brings out the point:

There is a difference between when a person sees something and when others tell him about it. When others tell him about it, sometimes he doesn't want to accept it. But here it says אתם ראיתם – “You saw.”<sup>5</sup>

We saw how *Hashem* came down on Mount Sinai and we heard Him speak to us. The heavens opened up before our eyes and we perceived that there is no power other than Him.

Jewish belief is based on what “You saw.”

Correctly speaking, Jewish belief should not even be called “belief” because it is not something we “believe” but rather something that we know as a fact.

<sup>3</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni, Yisro* 276.

<sup>4</sup> *Shemos* 20:19.

<sup>5</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni, Yisro* 302.

However, it does include certain matters that are above our comprehension, for instance, *Hashem's* infinity and almightiness. We are unable to properly grasp and conceptualize these matters, so it may be referred to as a “belief.” But that the world has a Creator Who runs it and Who gave us the Torah – these are all facts that we know to be true. It's not a matter of “belief.”

This is a totally fundamental thing that every Jew needs to know.

A *yeshivah* boy once asked me how we know G-d exists. He said he posed this question to a certain person who answered him, “Indeed, we don't have absolute knowledge of it. It is something we believe.”

I told the *yeshivah* boy that this answer is *apikorsus*, it goes against the fundamentals of Judaism. Jewish belief is a matter of absolute knowledge, just like  $2 + 2 = 4$ . It is something we actually saw. Millions of people saw *Maamad Har Sinai* with their own eyes. And every father dedicatedly passed on the memory of this event which he himself witnessed to his children after him, commanding them not to change even one iota of it, and that it would be better to die a thousand deaths rather than alter the tiniest detail in the Torah. Furthermore, only eighty to a hundred generations have passed since then. Our Jewish beliefs are as solidly founded as could be.

The *mitzvah* of *Emunah* is to believe even those matters that are above and beyond human comprehension. For instance, that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* got 600,000 adult Jewish males to stand between the two poles of the *Aron Hakodesh*, which were only a few feet apart. This is incomprehensible so it requires *Emunah*. Since we know for a fact that *Hashem* exists, we believe He did this, even though we can't exactly figure out how. But that *Hashem* created the world, and that every word in the Torah is absolutely true, and that *Moshe Rabbeinu* is a true prophet – we saw all this with our eyes and heard His voice speak clearly to us. ●