



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

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Bottom of the Siphon

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו וגו' וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות
טהרות. (ויקרא יד, ב-ד)

This shall be the law of the *metzora* on the day of his purification... the *kohen* will command to take two living, pure birds for the one being purified. (*Vayikra* 14:2-4)

***Tzara'as* comes because of *lashon hara*, which is an act of verbal chattering. This is why birds were required for his purification, as they constantly chirp with their voices. (*Rashi*)**

Tzara'as used to come as a punishment for speaking *lashon hara*. We need to understand why *lashon hara* is such a serious *aveirah* that it warrants this severe and unusual punishment.

Fortunately for us, the Chofetz Chaim already explained it,¹ based on the *Zohar*, and this is the main idea:

It is written:

טהור עיניו מראות רע – His eyes are pure,
He does not see evil.²

Hashem normally “looks away” from sins

committed by Jews. *Hashem* is good and sees good, and there is no evil in His presence.³ So to speak, *Hashem* doesn't even want to know about bad things.

However, we were created in G-d's image. We have *tzelem Elokim*. One of our “G-d-like” faculties is that every word we speak rises to heaven and comes before *Hashem*.

Imagine that no Jew in the world would ever speak any *lashon hara*. If that would be the case, then Jews could do every sin there is, and *Hashem* would not react. He would not exile them or bring suffering upon them or do anything else. It would be as if

1 *Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechirah* 2.

2 *Chavakuk* 1:13.

3 *Tehillim* 5:5.

He doesn't see and doesn't know. But the moment someone comes along and speaks *lashon hara*, his talking brings the *lashon hara* up to *Hashem*, and then it is only fitting for *Hashem* to react accordingly.

In other words, when a tragedy takes place, or when someone falls ill, there could be various sins that caused the tragedy. It doesn't have to be because of *lashon hara*. However, without the *lashon hara*, the sin would not come before *Hashem*, so there would be no punishment for it. The *lashon hara* is the prosecutor that brings all the sins of the Jewish people before *Hashem* to be judged.

The Jewish people could do a lot of *aveiros* but the entry point that enables the prosecutor to come before *Hashem* is a very narrow entrance. Everything needs to go through the mouth of a Jew. If this entrance is closed, nothing goes through.

It may be compared to a funnel whose top opening

is very wide and the bottom opening through which the liquid enters the bottle is very narrow. You can fill up the funnel as much as you wish but if you close the little opening at the bottom, it will all stay right where it is and nothing will get into the bottle.

The opening that lets everything in is the mouth. This doesn't mean that the mouth is the source of all evil, but it is the funnel through which it all goes.

So the main work of the *yetzer hara* is to make sure this opening doesn't close. Let's say you don't want to do a certain *aveirah*. The *yetzer hara* can live with that; you might do a different *aveirah*, it doesn't matter so much. As long as the mouth stays open, that's the main thing. Because if the opening of the Jewish mouth gets closed, it's a showstopper for the *yetzer hara*.

This is why the sin of *lashon hara* is so severe, and the one who commits it is afflicted with *tzara'as*. ●



Daven for Him

וְטָמָא טָמָא יִקְרָא. (ויקרא יג, מה)

He shall announce, “Impure, impure!” (*Vayikra* 13:45)

It is taught: “He shall announce, ‘Impure, impure!’” He needs to inform the public about his troubles, so the public will pray for him. (*Shabbos* 67a)

A person who is afflicted by *tzara'as* must call out, “Impure, impure!” when he is in a public area. This is not just so people will know that they should avoid contact with him if they wish to remain pure; it is also to let them know of his troubles, so they will

pray for him.

This brings us to the subject of *davening* for others who are experiencing troubles. Doing so is a lofty matter and an obligation that rests upon all of us.



It is natural for any decent person who sees his fellow in distress to come to his assistance if he can. It is hard to find someone so bereft of this inborn human trait that he will see someone lying in the street bleeding, and just walk by without trying to assist him or call an ambulance.

And if we see someone suffering from poverty, we would surely help him out if we had the money to do so. Furthermore, if we had a very wealthy friend who gives generously to anyone in need, we would surely ask him to help the suffering pauper we saw.

Let's say we notice that someone around us is lacking in Torah knowledge or *yiras Shamayim*. We would surely help him if we could.

The truth is that every one of us has a Friend Who loves us dearly, a merciful Father Who has the ability to save the day, no matter what the situation may be. And we can call out to Him for our poor suffering fellow, asking that He should help with whatever he is lacking. *Chazal* stated wonderfully and simply:

Anyone who can pray for his fellow and fails to do so is called a sinner, as it says **גַּם אֲנֹכִי חָלִילָה לִּי** – “Also as for me, far be it from me to sin to *Hashem*, to fail to pray for you^{1,2}”

If a person does not pray for his fellow, either he lacks faith in our closeness to *Hashem* and ability to pray to Him, which are basic Torah principles, or he is callous and doesn't care to help his fellow. Either way, he is labeled a sinner.

Regarding someone who kills another unintentionally, it is written:

כִּי בְעִיר מִקְלָטוֹ יֵשֵׁב עַד מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל –
He shall dwell in his city of refuge until the *Kohen Gadol* dies.³

Chazal say⁴ that the mother of the *Kohen Gadol* would provide food and clothing to unintentional

murderers who dwelt in the refuge cities so they will pray for her son, the *Kohen Gadol*, that he shouldn't die. Why is there concern that the *Kohen Gadol* will die? Because he should have prayed for his generation so that even unintentional murder should not take place, and he failed to do so.

The *Levush* comments on this as follows:

Since he failed to pray that this mishap should not occur among the Jewish people in his lifetime, which is why the mishap happened to this person, the Torah obligates him to dwell in his city of refuge until the *Kohen Gadol* dies, and he will be pained that he cannot go back home as long as the *Kohen Gadol* is still alive.

This will cause him to pray for the death of the *Kohen Gadol*, and his prayer will be accepted, and the *Kohen Gadol* will thereby receive his just and fitting punishment. Since he did not pray, he will die before his time, by means of the prayer of the unintentional murderer. Another *Kohen Gadol* will then be appointed, who will pray, and this mishap will not occur among the Jewish people.⁵

This commentary teaches us that the unintentional murderer praying for the *Kohen Gadol's* death is not just something that *might* happen. It is actually the Torah's intent for him to pray like this, so the Torah brings him to do so by locking him up in the refuge city. This is in order that the current *Kohen Gadol* will leave his post, and another one – who feels for his generation and prays for them – will take his place. Then mishaps like this won't occur.

This is a strong statement. It really underscores the importance of praying for others.

But what about people who don't happen to be the *Kohen Gadol*? Do they, too, need to pray for others? Many *Sefarim* write, based on the Rambam's message at the end of *Hilchos Shemitah v'Yovel*, that Torah learners in every generation are like the tribe

1 I *Shmuel* 12:23.

2 *Berachos* 12b.

3 *Bemidbar* 35:28.

4 *Makkos* 11a.

5 *Levush Ha'orah*, *Bemidbar* 35:28.

of Levi and the *kohanim*.

Furthermore, *Chazal* say:

R. Pinchas bar Chama expounded: anyone who has a sick person in his household should go to a sage to pray for him, as it says **חַמַּת מֶלֶךְ מְלַאכֵי מוֹת וְאִישׁ חָכָם יִכְפַּרְנָהּ** – “The fury of the King is angels of death, and a wise man will atone it.”^{6,7}

Here we see that it is the *talmid chacham*, who is like the *Kohen Gadol* in his time, who must pray for the people of his generation.

This task of *davening* for others devolves especially on those who devote themselves to Torah study, just as it was one of the tasks that devolved on the *kohanim*. Torah learners have been especially entrusted with the power to pray for the sick and for other people experiencing troubles and difficulties. If they are lax in fulfilling this duty, the Torah sets causes into effect that ultimately result in their replacement, may *Hashem* protect us.

When we hear about a fellow Jew who fell ill, perhaps from a note hanging in *shul*, perhaps from a notice in a publication, saying, “Please *daven* for...” we might be tempted to just ignore it and go on. Sometimes *Tehillim* are recited for a few minutes after the *minyan*, and we might feel we don’t have time. Who knows how many people we could have

6 *Mishlei* 16:14.

7 *Bava Basra* 116a.

helped or even saved, but didn’t? Who knows what we might be held accountable for?

This, too, is just a matter of getting into the habit. When we walk along and see a Jew in a wheelchair, or otherwise encounter a Jew who is suffering in some way, we should immediately pour out a short *tefilah*. We see from *Chazal* that this was the normal habit of Jews in former times:

A tree that throws off its fruit should be marked with red paint.... How does this heal it? When people see it, they will pray for it.⁸

The idea of marking a sick tree is derived from the above-mentioned law applying to the *metzora*. If a person is afflicted with *tzara’as*, when he goes through a public place he must let the public know about his unfortunate state, so they will pray for him.

It was the normal habit of Jews to pray for an ill tree when they saw it, and surely we should practice this habit when we see a suffering Jew himself.

Let’s say you are going down the street and you see young Jews who are just hanging around at the street-corner and obviously up to no good. They are very ill! How much suffering their mother and father have from them, how much pain their Creator has over them! Just say a short *tefilah* for them, that they should come back and be healed.

We should adopt the habit of always calling out to *Hashem* Who is close to us to hear our prayers. ●

8 *Shabbos* 67a.

PARSHA TOPIC

Seven Complete Weeks

The Meaning of Counting

The Torah tells us to count seven weeks, and each week, seven days. But what do we count and how do we count it? And when we count the days,

are they good days or bad days? A day by nature is a receptacle that can contain almost anything, good or bad. (Even the day Amalek was born was a day.)

And what is the significance of counting seven weeks, seven times?

And what does the sum total of the days and weeks represent, when we reach the number fifty?

It's not so easy to answer all these questions on a simple level. However, *Sefer Hachinuch* explains as follows:

Among the roots of this *mitzvah*, on a simple level, is that the Jewish people exists for Torah. Because of the Torah, heaven and earth and the Jewish people were created.... And this is the root and reason that the Jewish people were redeemed and went out of Egypt: so they will receive the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it....

For this they were redeemed, and this is their greatest good. It is a great thing for them, more so than freedom from slavery.... Therefore, since it is what the Jewish people exists for, and because of it they were redeemed from Egypt and rose to all the greatness they attained, we were commanded to count from the day after the *Yom Tov* of Pesach until the day of the Giving of the Torah.

This is to demonstrate our great desire for the glorious day that our hearts long for, as "a slave longs for the shade."¹ A Jew is constantly counting: when will the time he longs for arrive, so he will be freed? This is because the act of counting demonstrates about a person that all his desire and longing is to reach that time.

This is why we count the *Omer*. In other words, such and such a number of days have passed from the sum total. We don't count how many days we have left until the time, because all this demonstrates our strong desire to come to the time....²

(This explanation needs to be clarified, because in principle, *Rosh Chodesh* is declared according to the

sighting of the new moon, which could appear on either of two days at the end of the lunar cycle. Thus, the months of Iyar and Sivan could both turn out to be only twenty-nine days long, and in that case, the count of fifty days would not correspond to the day of the Giving of the Torah. If so, how can it be said that we are counting toward the Giving of the Torah at Sinai?)

There is a well-known question on the explanation of *Sefer Hachinuch*. When a person counts toward something he is waiting for, he counts the days remaining, not the days that passed. He makes a countdown, not a count-up. For example, let's take a boy before his *bar mitzvah*. He counts how many days are left until his *bar mitzvah* will arrive. If so, we should start with the number forty-nine, and the next day count forty-eight, and so forth, thus counting down to *Kabbalas Hatorah*.

Counting and Building

In order answer this question, we will first quote the illuminating words of R. Aharon Kotler *zt"l*.

The Torah recounts to us that Yaakov had to wait seven years in order to marry Rachel. And it says about this, "They were to him like a few days because he so loved her."³ This seems strange, because we know that human nature is exactly the opposite. The more a person wants something and is waiting for it, the longer the passing days seem to him, until he attains his desire. A day seems to him like a year.

We must say that the Torah is telling us here that *Yaakov Avinu* sanctified and purified himself and prepared himself for building the Jewish people.⁴

The following allegory elucidates this idea. A man is in desperate need of a million dollars. If he

1 *Iyov* 7:2.

2 *Sefer Hachinuch*, *Mitzvah* 306.

3 *Bereishis* 29:20.

4 R. Aharon Kotler, *Essay on Learning Chumash*.

hears that a hundred days from now he will receive a million dollars, he will be happy. However, each day he waits feels like an eternity to him. He sees the days of the interim period as separating him from the million dollars.

Now let's change the story a little. A man needs a million dollars. He is offered a job that carries a salary of ten thousand dollars a day. So at the end of a hundred days, he will have a million dollars. The days pass quickly for this man.

What's the difference between the two men?

When a person needs a million dollars and is told to wait around for a hundred days until he receives it, they are just empty days of waiting. All those days do is separate him from the money. But if the hundred days are not a waiting period, but rather a means to earn and obtain the money he needs, then the days are not empty. They are not getting in his way. On the contrary, each day is a day of building, of advancing toward his goal, and they pass by very quickly. Each of the hundred days is a day he is happy about, because if he skips one day he won't achieve his goal, which is the complete sum of a million dollars.

That's how it was with *Yaakov Avinu*. During the seven years preceding his marriage, he built himself. Thus, every day that passed was a day he was happy about. It was a day of preparation for building the Jewish people. This is why it says, "They were to him like a few days because he so loved her." This love was Yaakov's holy and pure desire for the Divine unification of *ישׁוּב וּשְׂכִינְתִּיהָ הוּא בְּרִיךְ הוּא* that will result from his marriage to Rachel. Every day that passed added another brick to the building. The seven years were seven years of building toward the goal he so desired, so they passed by quickly. "They were to him like a few days."

This makes all the difference. If *Sefiras Ha'omer* would just be a passive waiting time for *Kabbalas Hatorah*, if it just would be a period of fifty days in between, then we would surely count down, from fifty to one, because we would be waiting for the days to pass by already and get out of our way so we can

receive the Torah. But it is not that way. These are days of preparation and building toward *Kabbalas Hatorah*. After one day of building, we are more ready for receiving the Torah, and after two days, we are more ready, and after three days we are even more ready, and so on, until at the end of the forty-nine days of counting we are completely ready to receive the Torah.

This is the simple meaning of *Sefiras Ha'omer*. We count forty-nine days of building toward *Matan Torah*.

These days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* are just begging us to fill them with content. This is what they were created for. Otherwise, we would just make a countdown. Fifty days left, forty-nine left, forty-eight.... But we count up, because the *mitzvah* is to fill these days with content, with positive preparation. We fill up one day, and then two days, and then three days....

These are very important days. The Arizal says that ordinary days of the year are like water that comes down drop by drop, whereas *Yamim Tovim* are as if the channels of heaven opened up, and the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer*, too, are as if the channels of heaven opened up. They are days of building toward *Matan Torah*.

What to Put into Sefiras Ha'omer?

So far we have explained the meaning of *Sefiras Ha'omer* on a simple level. They are days of building toward *Kabbalas Hatorah*. But we still need to explain what we count. Do we count days of building good character traits? Or of building *hasmadah* in Torah learning? Or of working on *Tefilah*, such that during this period of forty-nine days, we will climb higher and higher in *avodas Tefilah*? (The Alter of Kelm is quoted as saying that the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* correspond to the forty-eight matters by which the Torah is acquired, as enumerated at the end of *Pirkei Avos*. On these days we need to build these *kinyanei Torah*.)

We don't find it stated openly anywhere what is the content of the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer*, and this

requires explanation. Why doesn't it say?

The answer emerges from the following teaching of *Chazal*:

In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will grant 310 (ש"י) worlds to every *tzaddik* as an inheritance, for it says לְהִנְחִיל אֶהְבִּי יְשׁ – “To grant שׁ as an inheritance to those who love Me, and I will fill their treasure houses.”⁵

This teaching of *Chazal* interprets the word שׁ by reversing the order of its letters so that it reads שׁי, which has the numerical value of 310. Thus, *Hashem* will grant 310 worlds to every person who loves Him.

However, even after we interpret the word שׁ as signifying 310, the verse still does not tell us 310 of what. How did *Chazal* know that it means 310 worlds? Maybe it means 310 chests of silver, or of gold, or 310 rivers of balsam oil? How did *Chazal* know that *Hashem* will give the *tzaddikim* worlds?

When a person talks about a sum of money without expressly stating the currency, it goes according to his location. Whatever is the currency in that place, that is what he meant. For instance, a person goes into a store in the United States and sees that a certain item bears a price tag of 199. Of course, it means 199 US dollars. In England, the price will be in pounds, and in Japan, in yen. Every location speaks in their own currency.

What is the Torah's “currency”? In other words, what is *Hashem's* terminology? We recognize *Hashem* by means of worlds. Worlds are all-inclusive. That's what there is; there is nothing else we can see and speak about. So if the Torah speaks of שׁי, of 310, it obviously means 310 worlds, because the “currency” and terminology of the Torah is of worlds.

Now let's get back to *Sefiras Ha'omer*. We know

⁵ *Mishnah Uktzin* 3:12.

we need to count something, and we know it is days. But what kind of days?

Days of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And since He is true and He alone is true and there is nothing besides Him, He is One and there is no other, we must be counting days of *Hashem's* Oneness. This doesn't need to be stated, just as it doesn't need to be stated that an item in an American store with a price tag of 199 costs 199 US dollars. It goes without saying.

It thus goes without saying that these days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* need to be days that are only for *Hashem*. The Rambam writes about *Hashem*:

If we would say that He does not exist, then nothing else could possibly exist. But if we would say that all things other than Him do not exist, He alone would still exist. He would not cease because they ceased. Everything that exists needs Him, and He, blessed is He, does not need them or any one of them. Therefore, His trueness is not like the trueness of one of them.

This is what the prophet meant when he said וְה' אֱלֹקִים אֶמֶת – “*Hashem*, G-d, is true.”⁶ G-d alone has trueness, and no other has trueness like His trueness. This is what the Torah meant when it said אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבַדּוֹ – “There is none other besides Him.” In other words, there is no other existing thing with trueness like His.⁷

What exists? There is only *Hashem*, only His Oneness. Since *Hashem's* Oneness is all there is, these days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* must be days of *Hashem*. This is the kind of days we need to build. Forty-nine days on which *Hashem's* Oneness expresses itself in everything we do. ●

⁶ *Yirmeyahu* 10:10.

⁷ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:2-4.