

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 Shul is a Mikdash

וּמִקְדָּשֵׁי תִירָאוּ. (ויקרא כו, ב)

You shall fear My sanctuary. (*Vayikra 26:2*)

Chazal say that every *shul* is a מקדש מעט, a small *Mikdash*. However, many people misunderstand what this means. They think it is not much more than a figure of speech.

In truth, nothing changed in our connection and relationship with *Hashem* when we lost *Beis Hamikdash*, because the *shul* is today just like it always was. This can best be illustrated by a metaphor.

Thirty or forty years ago, the tape machine, which people used for audio recording and playback, was a large and clumsy object. Now we have small cassette machines.

How did it get smaller? Did someone come and cut half of it off, leaving us with half of the original tape machine? Obviously not. Everything that the big tape machine had, the small cassette machine has, but in miniature.

The “small *Mikdash*” is like this. It is not a little piece of the original *Beis Hamikdash*. It is a

complete, full *Mikdash* in miniature. It has all the presence of *kedushah* that the *Beis Hamikdash* itself had. *Beis Hamikdash* was a closed place where the Jewish people secluded themselves with *Hashem*, and nothing else was there but *Hashem* and them.

And so it is until this day, in *Galus*. The *deveikus* and revelation of *Hashem's* Oneness that once were in *Beis Hamikdash* have not ceased. They are completely here in the *shuls* of our generation, which are “a small *Mikdash*,” in other words, a miniature but complete *Beis Hamikdash*.

For this reason, we should not change anything in our *shuls* from their original form, which is the form of *Mikdash*. Because if we slice off anything from it, it won't be *Mikdash* anymore.

We need to know that even in this whole long, bitter *Galus*, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is with us. And we, too, need to be with Him absolutely, without any turning toward other worlds. ●

This may be compared to a sheep that got lost from the flock and is now wandering around in the scorching sun without water. The shepherd searches after it for a long time, and when he finds it, he yells at it and whacks it with his stick.

These blows comfort the lost sheep, it loves the smacks from the stick, and not just because it knows that now it will get water to drink. The sheep feels in these hits that the shepherd is close to him. ●

PARSHA TOPIC

We Are All Servants of Hashem

כִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. (ויקרא כה, נה)

The people of Yisrael are servants to Me; they are My servants, for I took them out of the land of Egypt. (Vayikra 25:55)

What is a Servant?

Hashem informs us that we are His servants. Until now, we were servants of Pharaoh, as it says, עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לַפַּרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם – “We were servants to Pharaoh in Egypt.”¹ Now *Hashem* rescued us from our plight; He took us out of *Mitzrayim*. But He did not release us from bondage. He did not set us free. He rather acquired us as His servants. From now on, we serve Him. Just as we were in bondage to Pharaoh before, so we are now in bondage to *Hashem*.

Since we were and remain servants, it behooves us to know what a servant is.

Nowadays, there are no more servants in bondage to their masters, because slavery was abolished in the modern world. But we can imagine to ourselves what it entails. A servant is totally subjugated to his owner and master. For him, there is no day and no night. He has no vacation and no rest. He has nothing to himself.

Once I participated in wheat grinding, to make *matzah* flour for Pesach. I started to turn the mill,

and it was so exhausting that after a few minutes I ran out of strength and could not continue. So what did I do? I asked a friend of mine to take over for me, and I left the grindery. This is what it means to be free...

It is not like that for a servant in bondage. He has someone with a rod standing over him, and if he starts to slack off, he gets a whack on his back, and a rebuke as well: “If you don’t keep working you’ll get another one!” If they catch him trying to eat without permission, another whack. Night comes, and the servant wants to go home, but of course he can’t do that, because he doesn’t even have a home of his own. He sleeps in the servants’ quarters.

This is a servant in bondage.

And *Hashem* informs us that we are His servants. כִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים. You do not belong to yourselves. You don’t do what you feel like. I decide where you will sleep and what you will eat. There is Torah and there is a “rod.” It is not the rod of Pharaoh, but a rod called *Gehinom*. And there is the concept of eternity.

We are servants of *Hashem*. This is what *Yetzi’as Mitzrayim* means.

¹ Devarim 6:21.

What is Freedom?

The big question is about freedom. We say in *Tefilah* every day: ויוצא את עמו ישראל לחירות – עולם – “He took His people Yisrael out, to eternal freedom.” And we say in the *Haggadah* on Pesach: לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות וכו' הוציאנו מעבדות לחירות – “Therefore we must give thanks... He took us out from servitude to freedom.”

If we are servants in bondage, then in what way are we free?

The answer is simple, and we can understand it by way of metaphor.

Imprisonment is universally regarded as a form of punishment. What happens if we take a person and put him into a prison that has all the good things; it is like a luxury hotel? He can choose what food he wants to eat, he has the fanciest furniture, etc etc. There is only one thing he is not allowed to do – leave. Despite what he has inside the prison, it is still a severe punishment to be locked up against his will.

Why? What's so terrible about being prison? What does he lack in there?

A chicken sits in the coop and enjoys life. It lacks nothing. By contrast, a person who is locked up in a coop is suffering greatly.

Why? What's the difference?

Hashem created the human being in such a way that he stretches from one end of the world to the other.² Constraining a person to a small and limited space goes against his very nature. It is like someone forced to hold his arms up all the time. He is not made for that! A chicken's whole life is in the coop. It is a chicken's nature to be cooped up. But a person reaches around the whole world. That is his nature.

An energetic child who normally can't sit still, when riding in a car he can sit in his place for hours, glued to the window. Why? How does he manage to sit still for so long?

Because he sees new things. He is taking in the world. He is conquering the world.

People find this extremely pleasurable. There are those who feel a need to travel to the other side of the world, despite the fact that there are many places in their own city that they have not yet visited. People feel a drive to travel far. This is human nature.

A person needs to extend from one end of the world to another. He needs to know what is happening all over the world. If there is a strike somewhere, he needs to know about it. If the newspaper didn't come today, it really irks him. Why? Because he feels limited and cooped up. It goes against his grain.

Okay, so let's imagine a person in prison. They tell him: You are free to leave, but there is one place that is off limits to you. Under no circumstances may you go to the moon!

He feels pretty relaxed. He has nothing to do with the moon anyway. It's not his world. If you hold a person back from a world that he has no

² *Chagigah* 12a.

connection to, it doesn't bother him. But if you constrict and limit his own world, it is very, very painful.

It's Not Like Serving Pharaoh

We were servants to Pharaoh in Egypt. And it was a terrible slavery. It was oppressive and went against our essential human nature. It was like human beings being put into the chicken coop.

Came *Hashem* and told us: I am not releasing you, I am not setting you free; I am transferring you into My service. You are subjugated to My Torah, to My *mitzvos*. It is bondage.

But there is a tremendous difference between bondage to *Hashem* and bondage to Pharaoh. The kind of service we needed to render Pharaoh went against human nature. Why do we need to serve Pharaoh? If we need to perform backbreaking labor, if we need to do *avodas parech*, at least let us do it for ourselves!

By contrast, serving *Hashem* is the most beautiful thing in the world. We are free, we have freedom, because it puts us in our natural place. This is where we belong.

Let's say we take a person and say to him: I am placing you in bondage! You may eat only what you want, go where you want, do what you want. But you are absolutely forbidden to do something that you don't want!

This is bondage, but the person remains free. He is as free as can be to do anything he wants, whenever he wants to do it.

Hashem says to us that we are in bondage to Him. In other words, we may do only what is written in the Torah.

And this is freedom. Because a person by nature lives in *Hashem's* world, and it is the most beautiful world that can possibly be, to be involved with Torah, which is the sweetest of the sweet. This is our true place, our natural place.

But if a person wants to escape the yoke of Torah, and he thinks that he is free to do what is right and desirable in his own eyes, then *Hashem*

says to him, so to speak: Listen, there is a Boss here. You are a servant. You are not free to do whatever crosses your mind. You were in Egyptian bondage, and I acquired you to be My servant.

This is the Torah's most basic principle.

The Servant of a King is a King

Moshe Rabbeinu was the Jew on the highest *madreigah*, and *Hashem* called him עֶבְדֵי מֹשֶׁה, "My servant Moshe."³ This servitude, this bondage, is the sweetest and most beautiful thing that could possibly be.

Chazal say that "the servant of a king is a king."⁴ What does this mean? The servant goes for a walk where the king goes for a walk. He eats what the king eats. There is no more beautiful servitude than to be the servant of a king. But it is servitude.

Servitude to *Hashem* is the most beautiful thing that can happen to a person because he is being "locked up" in the world that is truly his own. This is where a Torah life begins. We must keep this in mind. This is what *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* is all about. We need to know that this is what being a Jew means.

And what does being a *ben Torah* mean?

There is a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* that talks about prisoners: מוֹצִיא אֶסְרִים בְּכוֹשְׁרוֹת.⁵ Who are "prisoners"? *Chazal* explain:

"Prisoners" refers to *talmidei chachamim*, who devote their lives to *Mikra*, *Mishnah*, *Midrash*, *Halachos* and *Aggados*.⁶

In former times, there were *talmidei chachamim* who would lock themselves up. *Tzaddikim* such as the Arizal built neighborhoods and made for themselves a "prison" into which they brought people who separated themselves from the world. They were assisted with their *parnassah* and they dedicated ten or fifteen years to learning.

3 Bemidbar 12:8.

4 Tanchuma 96:13.

5 68:7.

6 Tanna d'Vei Eliyahu Rabba 25.



As Jews, we need to understand that we are not free in the common sense of the word. We are servants of *Hashem* and in bondage to Him. But when we are also *bnei Torah*, this means we are even imprisoned. And such imprisonment is the sweetest and most wondrous thing that a person can experience. Because if not for this imprisonment, we are placed in a different imprisonment, as the Ibn Ezra says:

All people are enslaved to the desires of the world.⁷

And that kind of imprisonment is harsh and bitter. We are fortunate to be in the *beis midrash* and we don't even know how bad and bitter imprisonment to worldly desires is.

⁷ Commentary of Ibn Ezra on *Bemidbar* 6:7.

We must recognize the truth that we were not released from bondage. We are not free to do as we wish. This is the whole point. A Jew who feels that he has the freedom to learn or not, to *daven* or not, even if he chooses to do so, he is missing the most essential and fundamental point of being Jewish.

If a person gets up in the morning, puts on *tefillin* and feels that he deserves a reward for this, he is totally missing the point. That's not Jewish life. We need to know that we are in bondage. We are obligated due to our servitude to fulfill the *mitzvos*. And this servitude is not just about *tefillin* and *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*. It is about every area of life. This is what it

means when we say *Zecher l'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim*.

This is one of Judaism's great principles. We are servants of *Hashem*. Even when we left the bondage of Egypt, we remained in bondage. We never received a document of release. We just changed hands.

However, servitude to *Hashem* is very different. In Egypt they forced us to live in a way that was against our essential nature, whereas *Hashem* puts us into the world that is truly ours, and locks us up inside it, so to speak.

This is why *Chazal* say אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה, "The only free man is the one who engages in Torah study."⁸ Because this is our world, this is where we draw all our life and vitality

⁸ *Pirkei Avos* 6:2.