

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

Putting Sins in Context

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בְּעֶרְבָה מוֹל סוּף בֵּין פָּאֲרָן וּבֵין תְּפֹל וְלָבָן וְחִצְרֹת וְדֵי זָהָב: (דברים א, א)

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael on the other side of the Yarden, in the Wilderness, in the plain across from Suf, between Paran, and between Tofel and Lavan, and Chateiros and Di Zahav. (*Bemidbar* 33:38)

Since they are words of reproof, and it mentions here all the places where they angered *Hashem*, the verse did not state the point openly and mentioned it only by way of allusion. This was out of respect for the Jewish people. (*Rashi*)

The first verse of the *parshah* mentions a lot of places but doesn't say what happened there. Rashi gives one reason for mentioning these places, explaining that they were all places where the Jewish people sinned, and since the Torah did not wish to spell out their sins, it merely alluded to them by mentioning the places where they occurred.

However, as we know, the Torah bears more than one interpretation.

וּכְפֹטִישׁ יַפְצֵץ סֶלֶע – Like a hammer shatters a rock.¹

Just as a hammer shatters a rock into many splinters, so from one verse can emerge many interpretations.²

Accordingly, there is room to offer an additional reason for the Torah's mention of these place names.

¹ *Yirmeyahu* 23:29.

² *Sanhedrin* 34a.

Resh Lakish said: What is the meaning of *אָשֶׁר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ פְּעָלוֹ* – “Of his judgment, his deeds?” It means that where a person’s judgment is, there his good deeds are mentioned.³

A person’s good deeds are mentioned in the same place that he is being judged. His virtues and positive characteristics are voiced. This is learned from *Shaul Hamelech*. When he was judged regarding the *Givonim*, his merits came up, as well.

This is because judgment and reproof need to be done in a truthful manner that relates to the nature of the act being judged. It is thus necessary to mention the person’s merits as well, because his good deeds throw light on the true nature of his bad deeds.

Let’s say a person sinned by not giving *tzedakah* when approached by a pauper. We need to know how he normally behaves in order to understand what happened here. If he usually is stingy and refuses to give, we may assume that his refusal to donate this time was a wrong deed. But if he always cares for the poor and sees to their needs, and just this time he turned away from a pauper, it shows that his act has a different nature altogether. It’s not because he evilheartedly committed a wrong deed. He just wasn’t paying attention, that’s all.

This is why a person’s merits need to be mentioned every time he is judged for his sins. Otherwise, his sins are cast in a false light.

3 *Yevamos* 78b.

It is even more important to make mention of any compelling circumstances or other factors that might explain the sin. All this serves to clarify the true nature of the act. The Hebrew word for reproof, *תוכחה*, also means demonstrating and bringing proof for the truth of something.

The Jewish people’s sins had a lot of compelling circumstances and other factors that brought them on. Although these circumstances and factors were not sufficient to fully justify what the people did, they still need to be taken into account in order to fairly judge what the people did. The good side and the excuses need to be considered, too.

This is why Moshe mentioned the Jewish people’s sins by means of these allusions, which bring out the positive points that are in the Jewish people’s favor, as will be explained.

“In the Wilderness” is explained by Rashi as the sin committed in the *Midbar*, where they said *הַמַּבְלִי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר* – “Aren’t there enough graves in Egypt, that you took us to die in the Wilderness?!”⁴ Here the Torah mentions the people’s great merit that they followed *Hashem* into the Wilderness in the first place. Furthermore, the sin itself was caused by being in the Wilderness, in a desolate and inhospitable place.

“In the plain (*ערבה*)” is explained by Rashi as the sin of Pe’or, which they committed in the plains of Moav (*ערבות מואב*). The place they sinned was mentioned because the Moabites who

4 *Shemos* 14:11.



lived in that place were the ones who caused them to sin. The Jewish people were not seeking out sins, *chas v'shalom*. On the contrary, the Moabites set them up and craftily enticed them. If the Torah would have said that they sinned in "Pe'or," it would have sounded as if they were seeking idolatry. Thus it says, "In the plain (ערבה)," to hint that they happened to come upon a place where there were evil people who deliberately caused them to sin.

"Across from Suf" is explained by Rashi as referring to when they came to *Yam Suf*, where they said, הַמִּבְּלֵי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוֹת, בְּמִדְבָּר – "Aren't there enough graves in Egypt, that you took us to die in the Wilderness?!"⁵ Here, too, the Torah mentions that they were facing the Sea of Reeds and were in mortal danger, and this caused them to complain. And the general rule is אין אדם נתפס על צערו – a person should not be held to account for what he said in his time of pain.

"Between Paran" is explained by Rashi as the wilderness of Paran, where they sinned by sending the *Meraglim*. *Chazal* say:

Why is it called "Paran" (פארן)?
Because they increased and multiplied
(פרו ורבו).

They sinned because they had a lot of children. It is natural for a person to be afraid of dangers that threaten his children. People fear for their children's welfare even more than they fear for their own. In this passage, the children are mentioned

many times. The Spies said יהיו לבז – "Our little ones will be taken captive," and regarding the punishment, it says וטפכם אשר אמרתם לבז יהיה – "Your little ones, about whom you said that they will be taken captive...." This implies that the love they felt for their children was a major factor in bringing them to sin.

"Between Tofel and Lavan." This refers to the Manna. The people made accusations against the *Mon*, complaining that "no human being can ingest and not excrete."⁶ They were living on a very high spiritual level, like that of angels, and they didn't want to keep it up, because they were afraid that if they will fall from their high *madreigah*, they will be punished severely. Thus they wanted to live like normal human beings, who ingest and excrete, not like angels, who eat *Mon*. This idea is alluded to by "Tofel and Lavan." ["Tofel" is related to תפלו, to make accusations. And] the *Mon* was white, "lavan." This food was very, very fine. They could not bear its refined, exceedingly lofty nature.

"And Di Zahav."

Because of the silver and gold ("zahav") that You showered on the Jewish people, to the point that they said, "Enough! ("dai"), this caused them to make the Golden Calf.⁷

This last one is a proof to the whole interpretation, which is based on the idea that the place names are to excuse and partially justify the sins committed by the Jewish people. ●

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Yoma* 75b.

⁷ *Berachos* 32b.

Three Weeks That Show Hashem's Love

Love Without Limit

Among all the special seasons of the year – such as *Pesach*, *Sukkos*, and *Yamim Nora'im* – the one we have the least feeling for, and understanding of, is the three-week period called *Bein Hametzarim*.

This time is a fundamental one for the Jewish people, and we need to grasp its meaning. To this end, let us consider a certain well-known story in the Torah. The Torah tells us the seemingly simple story of Balak and Bilaam who unsuccessfully tried to curse the Jewish people. There is a lot of hidden content in *Parshas Balak*, much more than meets the eye.

Chazal say that Bilaam knew how to calculate the exact moment of *Hashem's* anger. Bilaam thereby sought to cast his curse upon the Jewish people at that fateful moment, with disastrous results. But *Hashem* in His great mercy did not grow angry at all during those days on which Bilaam sought to curse.¹

So *Chazal* explain. Yet, as we look at the *pesukim* we see that Bilaam utilized a lot of other strategies and methods as well. Bilaam was the seat of all impurity and evil in the world. He went to war against the Jewish people; as a wily tactician, he did not put all his efforts into just one scheme. He tried all ways possible.

Thus Bilaam did not make do with just calculating the time of *Hashem's* anger; he also sought to bring an *ayin hara* against the Jewish people.² And he also invoked *Cheit Ha'eigel*.³ He made use of all the forces of *tumah* at his disposal. Despite the various things he tried, he did not succeed in harming the Jewish people. Unfortunately, at the end of the *parshah*, the Jewish people harmed themselves

through their faculty of free choice. But without this, all the forces in the world were unable to harm the Jewish people.

What was the key to Bilaam's approach? Bilaam knew that *Hashem* loves the Jewish people, but he assumed there is a limit to it. He thought there is a point where this love comes to an end, that deep down there is a place where *Hashem* says to us, so to speak: Yes, I do love you. But after all, I am the Creator, and you are mere created beings, and the distance between us is infinitely great.

Bilaam wanted to get to this deep inner point. Bilaam's plan was to offer one *korban* after another, corresponding to all the *korbanos* that the *Avos* offered. He wanted to symbolically burn up the whole world on the altar, turning everything to total nothingness. There would remain just *Hashem* Himself, the One and Only. There would no longer be a Jewish people or anything else. And when Bilaam would arrive at that place where *Hashem's* relationship to the Jewish people ends, at that point he would mention *Cheit Ha'eigel*. He would say to *Hashem*: There is a place where You don't actually care about the Jewish people, and in fact they did sin against You by making the Golden Calf. Why not just wipe them out?

Hashem answered Bilaam as follows: You are so foolish! Are you trying to bring up My children's sins to Me? That is like bringing up a child's misdeeds to his father. It doesn't do away with a father's natural love for his son.

Hashem's love for the Jewish people is deeper than deep. In that innermost place, that is where the love is. That is where it flows from.

Another place where we see the depth of *Hashem's* love for the Jewish people is the story of Mordechai and Esther. Indeed, *Matan Torah* was a great expression of *Hashem's* love. However,

¹ *Berachos* 7a.

² *Bemidbar* 24:2, *Rashi ad loc.*

³ *Bemidbar* 24:1, *Onkelos ad loc.*

Chazal say that despite it all, the Jewish people accepted the Torah at *Har Sinai* under duress, with the mountain hanging over their heads. Only through the events of Mordechai and Esther did they tangibly experience *Hashem's* love for them. And then they were persuaded, and accepted the Torah out of love.⁴

How did *Hashem's* love express itself at that time? It is written in *Megillas Esther*:

בַּלַּיְלָה הָהוּא נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ – That night, the king's sleep eluded him.⁵

Chazal interpret this to mean that the sleep of the King of World eluded Him.⁶ So to speak, *Hashem* couldn't "sleep" that night. What does this signify?

Imagine a doctor who works at a hospital. He is a very caring person and he dedicates himself unreservedly to his patients. But what happens when he comes home exhausted after a long work shift? He lays his head down on the pillow and falls asleep. When it's after work hours, he doesn't have a relationship with the patients in the hospital. It's not his own child that is laid up in the intensive care unit.

About *Hashem* it says, "The king's sleep eluded him." *Hashem* "can't sleep," so to speak. Why? Because His child's life is in danger! This awesome love, this infinite caring of *Hashem* for the Jewish people, is what moved the Jews of that time to accept the Torah willingly.

When Hashem Cries

The relationship between *Hashem* and the Jewish people shows itself in all the holidays of the year. Pesach expresses the basic relationship: the freedom from the Angel of Death, freedom from the *yetzer hara*. Shavuos expresses the Giving of the Torah. Rosh Hashanah expresses fear of Heaven, and Sukkos expresses joy. These are all aspects of our relationship with *Hashem*.

⁴ *Shabbos* 88a.

⁵ *Esther* 6:1.

⁶ *Megillah* 15b.

What about the period of the Three Weeks? It expresses *Hashem's* caring, His deep personal relationship with the Jewish people. This relationship shows itself through tears. *Chazal* say that on Tishah b'Av, *Hashem* cried.⁷ Crying expresses the deepest type of connection.

And what about our caring for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? A person can dance and celebrate, eat *matzah* and *maror*, sit in a *sukkah*, but it is all external actions. Crying expresses an infinitely deep relationship of love.

Every person has things he cares about. If the air conditioner breaks down on a sweltering summer day, we care. If the fridge stops working and all the food inside is going to spoil, we are perturbed. But there are deeper levels of caring.

Do we care just about ourselves, or does the pain go deeper than that? We are all ready to forgo celebrations for three weeks, to refrain from bathing and laundering for nine days, to fast on Tishah b'Av. Yet, it is all deeds. The purpose of this whole system is sharpen, clarify, and deepen our inner caring.

This is our main *avodah* at this time of year – how much do we care about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, about the anguish of the *Shechinah*?

Bilaam did not understand this. He was a "Greek philosopher," a classic *kofer*. He tried to penetrate deeper and deeper into *Hashem's* will because he thought that deep down, there must be a point where *Hashem's* relationship with the Jewish people stops. However, *Hashem* did not grow angry during that whole period. The message was: *Hashem's* relationship with the Jewish people is infinitely deep, it is a relationship of love!

Our *avodah* on these days is to acquire our true relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Be Careful

These days teach us an additional point. It, too, has to do with *Hashem's* relationship with the Jewish people.

⁷ *Chagigah* 5b.

On these days we recall and speak of the troubles that the Jewish people went through in all the generations. The destruction of *Beis HaMikdash*, the destruction of the city of Beitar, and everything else. All this comes to teach us an additional point, highlighted by the following *Gemara*.⁸

The *Gemara* states that it is wrong to recite *Shema* and then repeat it. The question is asked: But maybe the person's mind wasn't focused the first time around, and that is why he is reciting *Shema* again? What is wrong with that? To this the *Gemara* retorts, "Is he *Hashem's* companion?!" (Rashi: "Will he treat *Hashem* the way he treats a fellow human being, and not be careful in the way he prays?!") The *Gemara* then comments, "If the person didn't focus his mind the first time around, we hit him with a blacksmith's hammer until he concentrates!" (Rashi: "We instruct him on having *kavanah*, but if he makes a habit of not focusing his mind, we hit him.")

Chazal are stressing the point that *Tefilah* is no small matter. How could a person not pay attention to what he is saying when he *davens*? If he would be under threat, if someone would be standing there and holding a hammer over his head, would he still be able to dream away? *Tefilah* is a most serious concern. *Sefer Nefesh Hachaim* explains how exalted and wondrous and awesome *Tefilah* is. You can't drift off when you are *davening*. You are not just chatting with a friend. *Tefilah* stands at the pinnacle of the world!

A similar message emanates from the Three Weeks. The Torah is no small matter. When the Jewish people failed to keep the Torah, a very great *Churban* resulted.

Why is it so terrible when we fail to observe Torah properly?

Let's picture the legendary giant *Og Melech Habashan*. With a single step he crushes a whole town. Why? Because when you are dealing with somebody big, there are big consequences.

And what happens when we are dealing with *Hashem*?

When the Jewish people sinned by making the Golden Calf, *Hashem* said to Moshe:

לָךְ יָרַד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ וְגו' וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִי
וְיָחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאַכְלָם – Go down, for your
people has acted corruptly... and now let
Me be, and I will show My anger against
them and destroy them.⁹

The entire Jewish people was sentenced to death. Only the prayer of Moshe brought *Hashem* to relent. And when the Jewish people sinned with the daughters of Moav, Moshe's strength ebbed, and again the Jewish people almost perished. Only the merit of Pinchas saved them.

Keeping Torah and *mitzvos* is not child's play. It is a very serious business! When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* shows His anger, everything can be destroyed with a mere wave of His hand. When this happens, six million perish.

There is a very important message here. We have Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos; and we keep them. But in the Three Weeks, the whole issue of *Churban Beis Hamikdash* comes to teach us the significance of it all. It teaches us that the whole system of Torah and *mitzvos* is no small matter. It is an extremely serious system, and treating it lightly in any way results in tragedy.

On the other hand, there is another message here: there is a relationship of love between *Hashem* and the Jewish people. If slighting our Torah observance results in such devastating destruction, this teaches us how profound *Hashem's* relationship with the Jewish people is. When we sit for three weeks, and we hear, so to speak, *Hashem's* awful crying, we understand how much He cares. We realize how deeply *Hashem* is connected to the Jewish people. It is a relationship that runs infinitely deep. *Hashem* cries because He wants us to have this kind of a relationship with Him. ●

⁸ Berachos 33b-34a.

⁹ Shemos 32:7,10.

“When We Remembered Tzion”

Let’s take a moment to reflect upon the loss the Jewish people felt when *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed and they were exiled from their land. על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בזכרנו את ציון – “At the rivers of *Bavel*, there we sat; we wept exceedingly when we remembered *Tzion*.”¹ We are told that when the Jewish people went into *Galus*, they sat down by the rivers of *Bavel* and cried. But what did they cry about? “When we remembered *Tzion*.” While they were still back in *Yerushalayim*, in *Tzion*, they were at the highest spiritual level – and in one moment, everything was lost.

Indeed, the physical suffering was very great. But the thing that really made them cry was “When we remembered *Tzion*.” They wept out of longing.

We have no idea how great was the love and longing that the Jewish people had for the *Shechinah* as they sat by the rivers of *Bavel*. They forgot everything – the suffering, death and troubles – because they were hurting from a lack of closeness to *Hashem*. They experienced this pain more intensely than all the physical torment.

Now, when we hear lofty descriptions like this, it’s hard for us to relate. It sounds a little farfetched to us. Why is this?

We may be compared to a blind person who is being lectured to on the great importance of sunlight. He doesn’t really appreciate the point; it all sounds a little exaggerated to him because he manages okay without light and always did. We, too, were born and raised in the darkness and thus don’t truly comprehend what *Chazal* are telling us.

Let’s say a child was born in a dark cellar and grew up there without ever going outside. He can’t

imagine what the world is like, since he never knew a reality other than the dark, dank cellar where he is entrapped. As far as he is concerned, there is no such thing as “light.” There is only darkness, suffering and filth. He also never heard about parents that he should be yearning for.

This is what we are like. That is why we are incapable of fathoming the deep yearning that the Jewish people felt in those days for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The Tzaddikim of the Churban

Not only “at the rivers of *Bavel*” was it like that. In the other *churbanos* as well, the Jewish people had been at a high spiritual level that we can’t even grasp. They were lofty people, focused completely on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. How did those holy people respond when all this happened to them? What were their feelings?

Shir HaShirim contains a wondrous description of the Jewish people’s relationship to *Hashem* at the time of the *Churban*. First we will cite a few verses according to their simple translation, and then we will explain their meaning on a deeper level.

קול דודי דופק פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי
 תמתי שראשי נמלא טל קוצותי רסיסי לילה וגוי
 מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר הכוני פצעוני נשאו
 את רדידי מעלי שמרי החמות.
 השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם אם תמצאו את
 דודי מה תגידו לו שחולת אהבה אני.
 מה דודך מדוד היפה בנשים מה דודך מדוד
 שככה השבעתנו.
 דודי צח ואדום דגול מרובה וגוי מעיו עשת שן
 מעלפת ספירים. שוקי עמודי שש מיסדים על אדני
 פז וגוהכו ממתקים וכלו מחמדים זה דודי וזה רעי
 וגוי.

The voice of my Beloved is knocking

¹ Tehillim 137:1.

[and saying]: “Open for me, My sister, My dear one, My dove, My perfect one, for My head is full of dew, and my locks, the heavy raindrops of night”.... The guardians who patrol the city found me; they beat me and injured me. The guards of the walls removed my fine jewelry from me.

I adjure you, daughters of *Yerushalayim*: If you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick.

“Why is your Beloved special, you most beautiful of women? Why is your Beloved special, that you have so adjured us?”

“My Beloved is white and red, He is surrounded by myriads [of warriors]... His abdomen is like ivory adorned with sapphires. His thighs are pillars of marble standing on bases of fine gold... His palate is sweetness; He is all delight. This is my Beloved, this is my Dear One.”²

Hashem came and “knocked” on our doors, saying, “Open for me, My sister, My dear one, My dove, My perfect one.” He wished to bestow upon us an abundance of blessing. “My head is full of dew, and my locks, the heavy raindrops of night” – this means that when *Hashem* came to the Jewish people He was bearing rain, dew, and the other worldly blessings.

Since we did not open for Him at that time, there was an immediate result: “They beat me and injured me.” The Jewish people was wounded all over: the destruction of the first *Beis Hamikdash*, the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, and after that, innumerable destructions and tribulations throughout all the generations.

The reaction of *Klal Yisrael* to all those oppressors and persecutors was always: “I adjure you, daughters of *Yerushalayim*: If you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick!”

2 *Shir HaShirim*, ch. 5.

This was always our impassioned outcry.

We don’t ask them to tell *Hashem* about suffering and slaughters and massacres. To us, all this pales in comparison to the greatest pain of all: “I am lovesick.” The worst tragedy of everything that happened to us is that the *Shechinah* is no longer with us. This alone is what pains us and brings on our sickness.

We are lacking the wonderful feeling of “May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Your love is better than wine”³ — the heartfelt joy we experienced at *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah* in *Beis Hamikdash*, when we rejoiced for seven days and nights without stop, and drew from there *Ruach Hakodesh*.

Everyone knows how to draw water. You take a bucket and go to the pump or the well. But how does one draw *Ruach Hakodesh*? We don’t know how to do it, but they did.

“On my bed at night I sought the One my soul loves.”⁴ The *Churban* was such a painful reality: just yesterday we were wealthy, and today we are destitute. Yesterday we had children; today we buried them. It is normal to toss and turn at night under such frightful conditions. Yet what was it that disturbed their sleep?

“I sought the One my soul loves.”

This Is My Beloved

When the nations of the world heard us speaking this way, they were startled. They asked: “Why is your Beloved special, you most beautiful of women?”⁵ They wanted to know what *Hashem* is like, the One we so love.

We started to explain to them what we lost when we went into *Galus*.

“My Beloved is white and red.”⁶ *Hashem’s* face as it relates to us is white, as pure as snow. When

3 *Shir HaShirim* 1:2.

4 *Ibid.*, 3:1.

5 *Ibid.*, 5:9.

6 *Ibid.*, v. 10.

Beis Hamikdash was standing and the *Shechinah* dwelled among the Jewish people, we had a wondrous clarity of *Emunah*. We knew our task in this world, and *Hashem's* great kindness was evident to all. Someone who did a *mitzvah* saw an immediate effect. He sensed *siyata di'Shemaya* enveloping him. And someone who did an *aveirah* was punished on the spot. A Jew (even if he was the king) who entered the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* would immediately perish. Because of the spiritual awareness that was so prevalent, the *tzaddikim* were the leaders in those days, and *resha'im* were considered the lowest of the low.

In this way, Jews would be clean from all stain of sin when they reached the end of their lives, because they had been punished for every sin right away.

Once, we had *nevi'im* who would show us the path to success and growth in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Now they are no more; thus, years go by and we still stand bewildered, trying to figure out the right way to act. We are in the dark. We don't know what *Hashem* requires of us, and whether our deeds are pleasing to Him or not. A person can devote himself to a certain goal for a lifetime, and in the end find out he was going down the wrong path.

Not only that, but "my Beloved" is also דגול מרבבה – "unique in tens of thousands."⁷ He is the One and Only, Who is known in the myriads of levels of depth of understanding that are found in the Torah. As the *Vilna Gaon* explains, there are seventy facets to the Torah, and each facet has 600,000 interpretations. It comes out that every *sevara* that expresses the Torah's true meaning is a wondrous distillation of all those various and

⁷ Ibid.

wonderful interpretations. When *Hashem* taught the Torah to *Moshe Rabbeinu*, it was a Torah that contained vast amounts of *peirushim* and *chiddushim*.

Chazal tell us:

From the time of Moshe until *Rabban Gamliel*, people would learn Torah while standing. From the time *Rabban Gamliel* died, sickness came into the world, and people would learn Torah while sitting. Thus it was taught, "From the time that *Rabban Gamliel* died, the honor of Torah ceased."⁸

We see that until the destruction of *Beis Hamikdash* – which was in the generation of *Rabban Gamliel* – Torah study had the same form as it did in *Moshe Rabbeinu's* time. People would derive pleasure from true Torah *sevaros*, which are world-encompassing, as the *Vilna Gaon* explains.

True, we are not capable of fathoming this wondrous spiritual light that once shone. Nevertheless, even a child born in a dark cellar, who never saw the light of the sun and is thus unable to comprehend what it is – if there would be a tiny crack in the wall through which some light filtered in, he could mentally multiply this light millions of times and thereby arrive at some understanding of the sun's radiance.

So it is with us. When we delve deeply into Torah study and merit even just once to grasp the depth of a Torah *sevara*, and we experience the enormous pleasure inherent in this understanding, we have thereby glimpsed a reflection of a reflection of one of the 600,000 interpretations that are contained within a true *sevara* of Torah. ●

⁸ *Megillah* 21a.