

NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF **RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l**

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

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

What's Down the Road

וַיִּרְגְּמוּהוּ כָּל אֲנָשֵׁי עִירוֹ בָּאֲבָנִים וָמָת. (דברים כא, כא)

All the people of his town shall stone him with stones, and he shall die. (*Devarim* 21:21)

The *ben sorer umoreh*, the wayward and rebellious son, is liable to be stoned. He is punished like those who commit the most serious *aveiros* in the Torah, such as desecrating *Shabbos*.

Why is this young man treated with such severity?

R. Yosi Hagelili says: Is it really because he ate a *tartimar* of meat and drank half a *log* of Italian wine that the Torah said he should be taken to *beis din* for stoning?!

Rather, the Torah foresaw what kind of a state the *ben sorer umoreh* will end up in. He will eventually finish off his father's financial assets, and will wish to continue living as he is accustomed to, but he will not find the means to do so. He will then go out to the crossroads and become a

highway robber.

So the Torah said it is better for him to die while he is still innocent, and not die after becoming guilty of sin.¹

The way the Torah treats him is puzzling, because the general rule is that a person is not given the death penalty unless we are absolutely sure he is deserving of it. ספק נפשות להקל.

If there was even the slightest chance that the *ben sorer umoreh* will not turn into a highway robber in order to maintain his indulgence in meat and wine, then it is obvious that the Torah would not have him put to death. We must say that it is a hundred percent sure that he will reach such depths of depravity.

¹ *Sanhedrin* 72a.

And how old is the boy?

R. Kruspedai said: The whole period in which one may become a *ben sorer umoreh* is only three months long.²

Once a boy turns thirteen, he can become a *ben sorer umoreh*. But the period in which this applies is very limited. It is only for the next three months. Once three months have passed, it is no longer possible for him to fall into the category of *ben sorer umoreh*, and he is not liable to be stoned..

If during the first three months after turning *bar mitzvah*, a boy sets out on the path of eating and drinking, indulging himself in gluttony and

² Ibid 69a.

drunkenness, we can be sure that at the end of the road, he will become morally and spiritually corrupted to the point where he will become a highway robber just to finance his excessive consumption of meat and indulgence in strong wine.

On the other hand, we know that Divine goodness is greater than Divine punishment.³ The good side is always greater than the bad side. So if a boy turns *bar mitzvah*, and during the first three months, he sets himself to live a life of *kedushah*, a life of Torah, we can be sure that he will grow to be a *gadol b'Yisrael*. ●

³ Ibid 100b.

You Can't Ignore This

לא תראה את שור אחיך או את שיו נדחים והתעלמת מהם השב תשיבם לא אחיך וגו'
לא תוכל להתעלם. (דברים כב, א-ג)

You shall not see the ox of your brother, or his sheep, getting lost, and ignore them. You shall surely return them to your brother... you cannot not ignore them.
(*Devarim* 22:1-3)

Here we have the *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah*, returning lost objects. If you see something belonging to your neighbor that got lost or is getting lost, you need to safeguard it and return it to its owner. And

this doesn't apply just to your neighbor's property, but also to your neighbor himself.

What is the source for the *mitzvah* of

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ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

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returning him to himself? It says וְהָשִׁבְתּוֹ לֹ – “You shall return him to himself.”²

The *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah* is more than just returning lost property. It applies also to saving someone from bodily damage and loss. If you see that a person is about to get hurt, and you can save him from it, or he fell ill and you can call a doctor or provide some other assistance to restore his health to him, this too is included in the *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah*.

We are similarly commanded to fulfill the *mitzvah* of וְלֹא תֵעָמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֲךָ אֲנִי ה' – “You shall not stand idly by when the blood of your friend is being spilled; I am Hashem.”³

If a person is threatened by loss of life or property, or damage to his body, we must do all we can to help and save him.

This obligation obviously applies even more if we see that our friend went off the Torah way and is wandering around like a lost sheep in the darkness. We have a *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah*. We need to return his soul to the path of life, to Torah and *mitzvos*.

There is actually a *remez* to this in the *parshah*, because it says right before:

וְכִי יִהְיֶה בְּאִישׁ חֲטָא מִשְׁפָּט מוֹת וְהוּמָת
– If a person will have a sin liable for the death penalty, and is put to death.⁴

This verse immediately precedes the *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah*, to teach us that this person came to commit such a severe sin only because there was no one there to do the *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveidah*. Had there been someone to return him to

his Owner and Master, he never would have fallen so far.

Especially regarding this *mitzvah*, the Torah exhorts us, “You cannot ignore them.” You are not allowed to look the other way and pretend that you didn’t see, as Rashi explains.

Similarly, regarding the *mitzvah* not to stand idly by while the blood of our neighbor is being spilled, the verse concludes אֲנִי ה' – “I am Hashem.” Hashem sees all and knows all, so we can’t pretend that we were unaware of the sorry state our neighbor was in.

There are actually two points here: Sometimes a person makes as if he doesn’t see and doesn’t know, and sometimes he makes himself as if he can’t do anything about the situation. Both are not allowed.

It is striking that the *pasuk* says לֹא תוּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם – “You **cannot** ignore them.” This implies that you will not succeed in your attempt to ignore and fail to see. You won’t be able to remain ignorant of your friend’s troubles and fail to feel for him. You won’t manage to do it. To Hashem, everything is revealed and known, and He doesn’t judge it as a mere lack of awareness but as flagrantly disregarding the troubles of your neighbor.

There is another allusion to this in the Torah. Hashem is called our “brother” and our “friend,” as it says, פָּתַחְתִּי לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעִיָּתִי – “Open for Me, My sister, My friend,”⁵ and as it says, וְאַתָּן צֹאֲנִי צֹאֵן מִרְעִיתִי – “You are My flock, the flock that I shepherd.”⁶ We cannot see one of our Friend’s children going off the path and ignore it. We cannot see a lost member of Hashem’s flock and fail to return it. We know that Hashem is greatly pained over His lost child, He wants His lost sheep back in the flock, He is looking for him. We are obligated to return him. We cannot ignore. ●

1 Devarim 22:2.

2 Sanhedrin 73a.

3 Vayikra 19:16.

4 Devarim 21:22.

5 Shir Hashirim 5:2.

6 Yechezkel 34:31.

Get Ready for Tishri

Elul is essentially a preparation for Tishri. But this doesn't mean just getting ready for the judgment of Rosh Hashanah, because if that were the case, a person who is already a *tzaddik gamur* would not really need Elul. We need Elul also in order to prepare the *keilim*, the receptacles in which to receive the awesome influx that will come down in Tishri between Rosh Hashanah and Shemini Atzeres.

Let's understand the purpose of the month of Tishri. Tishri is not a means by which to attain a good and blessed new year. It is when we coronate *Hashem* as King over the new world that He just created. We ascend step after step in the levels of *yirah* and *ahavah* and go much, much higher than would be necessary to just merit living out the coming year, which itself is no small matter. In Elul we prepare the foundation on which this awesome spiritual edifice stands.

All the holidays and special times of the year are not just to generally strengthen ourselves in Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, but also to perform the special *avodas Hashem* particular to that holiday. This applies to Elul as well. Besides generally strengthening ourselves in *teshuvah*, *tefilah* and *tzedakah*, there is an *avodah* special to this time.

It is very important to know what this special *avodah* is, because if we don't even know what we are trying to do, we won't gain the true benefit of these special days.

The special *avodah* of Elul is connected to Tishri, and this is the essential nature of Elul. It is preparation for Rosh Hashanah. In order to understand the special *avodah* of Elul, we first need to define, in very general terms, the main goal and *avodah* of Tishri. This will enable us to understand the special character of Elul.

We can define the month of Tishri and its *Yamim Nora'im* by focusing on two basic points.

The first is that Tishri is all about bringing the Jewish people and *Hashem* to a state of closeness in which they stand face to face. It starts by means of shofar, as it says:

אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם יָדְעִי תְרוּעָה ה' בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ יִהְלֹכוּ
– “Fortunate is the people that knows the blast of the shofar; *Hashem*, they will walk in the radiance of Your face.”¹

Although Tishri is a time of *teshuvah*, we in fact need to do the main *teshuvah* of repentance for sins before Rosh Hashanah even comes. We can see for ourselves that it is so, because if *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* were the time to repent for misdeeds, then it doesn't make sense that the Divine Judgment begins before we do *teshuvah*. On the contrary, we need to repent for our sins before *Hashem* judges us. It makes no sense to first pass judgment on our deeds and then follow this with nine days of repenting for them.

The main time to do *teshuvah* for sins is Elul. And not just Elul but all year long we have a perpetual obligation to repent for our sins and cleanse ourselves of misdeeds.

The goal of Tishri is for us to be judged after we did *teshuvah*, after we examined ourselves through *selichos* and *viduyim* whether we are fitting to enter the new world of love and affection and stand face-to-face with *Hashem*.

All this will be explained more at length when we get closer to Rosh Hashanah. Right now, we are just setting down the main idea of the *Yamim Nora'im* as it pertains to Elul. The main *avodah* of Elul is to do *teshuvah* and repent for our sins in preparation for the Divine Judgment that will begin on Rosh Hashanah. We are thus preparing the receptacles to receive the awesome influx that descends from Heaven in Tishri. However,

¹ Tehillim 89:16.

as we are preparing these receptacles, we need to know the special form and shape that our *avodas Hashem* should take, and what we are preparing ourselves for.

The main goal of Rosh Hashanah and the days following it is to awaken Divine love and affection, to attain “the radiance of Your face,” as mentioned above. And our *teshuvah* in Elul should reflect this. This is why the month is named Elul, אֱלּוּל, which stands for אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי – “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” This is the goal of it all. We want to get to a state of deep love and great affection and standing face-to-face with *Hashem*.

We need to think about our end goal right at the beginning of the way. We want to arrive at a state of loving *Hashem* and being loved by Him in the *Yamim Nora'im*. We prepare the *keilim* for this during Elul.

A New World

The second point on which Rosh Hashanah stands is the creation of the world anew.

On Rosh Hashanah, *Hashem* creates the world all over again. It is totally new. The newness of it all carries incomparable power. When something is in its original state and form as when it was created, it is *Hashem's* handiwork and has unparalleled beauty and perfection.

Chazal speak of the tremendous beauty of Adam and Chavah:

Said R. Banaah: I looked at the two heels [of *Adam Harishon*] and they were like two orbs of the sun. Everyone else as compared to Sarah looks like a monkey compared to a person, and Sarah as compared to Chavah looks like a monkey compared to a person.²

And so it is with Rosh Hashanah. The rest of the year as compared to Rosh Hashanah is like a monkey as compared to a person, because this is when Man returns

to being the handiwork of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

This is why Rosh Hashanah is the first of the days of *teshuvah*, of return. It is when everything returns to its source and regains its original form and shape as when it was created.

This is why Elul, when we prepare the *keilim* for this *avodah*, has the Zodiacal sign of Virgo, i.e., the virgin maiden. The opposite of a virgin maiden is not a sinful woman but a married woman. A married woman may well be completely sinless, but her state lacks the excitement that accompanied the beginning.

We are to see the Torah every day as new. The Torah is compared to a gazelle of love. We are to learn Torah with zest and excitement as if we received it from Sinai just today.

In Elul, we pour freshness and newness into all our *avodah* and all our *mitzvos* so they will be like this. We *daven* as if it was the first time we stood before *Hashem*. We give *tzedakah* as if it was the first time we merited resembling *Hashem* by supporting the world. And so it is with *tefillin* and *tzitzis* and all the *mitzvos*.

It makes sense to say that the *kedushah* of Elul stems from Tishri. Because the rule is that when you have a list of things that come one after another, they are connected like the links of a chain. In a chain, one link enters the space of the adjacent link. Before Friday ends, the *kedushah* of *Shabbos* begins. And *Shabbos* enters the realm of the weekdays both before and after.

So it is with Elul and Tishri. Even before the year ends, the light of the new year begins to shine, and *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* enter the realm of the time preceding them and following them. They penetrate into Elul and Sukkos.

This is where the *kedushah* of Elul comes from. It has tremendous *siyata d'Shmaya* like that of the *Yamim Nora'im* themselves. Elul is the gateway to the *Yamim Nora'im*, and the *avodah* of Elul needs to be like the *Yamim Nora'im* themselves. ●

² *Baba Basra* 58.

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