

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

Seven Building Years

וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיְהִיוּ בְּעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֶחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ: (בראשית כט, כ)

Yaakov worked for Rachel seven years, and they were to him like a few days because he so loved her. (*Bereishis 29:20*)

R. Aharon Kotler wrote a well-known article about study of *Tanach* in which he brings many examples of how Torah narratives cannot be explained superficially.

One example is our *pasuk*.

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." 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.¹

To illustrate the point, let's say a man is in desperate need of a million dollars. If he hears that a hundred days from now he will receive a million dollars, he

¹ R. Aharon Kotler, *Essay on Learning Chumash*.

This week's publication is dedicated to our dear friend
החתן המופלג ברוך זאב שיחיה מרדכי דויטש שליט"א ומשפחתו
in honor of the engagement of their son זאב שיחיה מרדכי דויטש שליט"א ומשפחתו
to his fine *kallah* of משפחת האומים שתחיה from Lakewood.
May it be Hashem's Will that their *zivug* should continue wonderfully
and that they should build a בית נאמן בישראל as befits the *choshuv*
families from which they hail, to the great benefit of Am Yisrael.



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 **יחוד** **הוא ושכינתיה** **קודשא בריך הוא** 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." ●



Naming a Child

וּתְקַרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאָה ה' בְּעִנְיִי. (בראשית כט, לב)

She called his name "Reuven," because she said, "Since *Hashem* has seen my affliction." (*Bereishis* 29:32)

Just a simple reading of the *parshah* reveals amazing things.

When *Leah Imeinu* gave names to her children when they were born, she did not think about the child, about his intrinsic nature and what he will grow up to be, and then give him an according name. No, that's not how she did it at all.

All the names she gave related to herself, to her

own experiences. The first son was so named "Since *Hashem* has seen my affliction." The second, Shimon, **כי שמע ה' כי שנואה אנכי** – "Because *Hashem* heard that I am disliked." The third, Levi, **עתה הפעם ילוה** – "This time my husband will accompany me." The fourth, Yehudah, **הפעם אודה את ה'** – "This time I will thank *Hashem*." And so it was with Yissachar and Zevulun, too.



But how does this make sense? *Leah Imeinu* was thinking the whole time only about herself? How could she not think about her child when choosing a name?!

Let's take Levi, for instance. He is the pillar of *avodas Hashem*. From him come all *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* honored him with the twenty-four *matnos kehunah*, the various gifts that Jews give to the *kohanim*, such as *terumah*. He is a very important figure in the Jewish people! So what does his mother call him? "Levi." Why Levi? Because "This time my husband will accompany me." Couldn't she have given the child a name more appropriate to his station in life?

To answer this question, we need to understand what goes on inside a *tzaddik's* heart.

The Torah tells us that Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, when he came to the well looking for a wife for Yitzchak, prayed as follows:

ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם הִקְרָה נָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם
– "Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham,
please make it chance before me today."¹

And sure enough, Rivkah came along. But when he told the story to Besuel and Lavan, he rephrased it. He reported:

אָנִי טָרַם אֲכַלְהָ לְדַבֵּר אֶל לִבִּי
– Before I
finished speaking to my heart...²

He says that Rivkah came along while he was still speaking to his own heart, i.e., himself.

What a minute, was Eliezer speaking to himself, or to *Hashem*?

The answer is:

צוּר לִבִּי וְחֶלְקִי אֱלֹקִים לְעוֹלָם
– The Rock
of my heart and my portion is G-d forever.³

Hashem is inside the hearts of the *tzaddikim*. He is the very Rock, the solid foundation, of their hearts. In other words, their personal self is nothing

but the Will of *Hashem*.

This is hard for us to understand because we are so far from this *madreigah*. But the great *tzaddikim* had nothing self-oriented at all in their daily lives. Their entire self was the *Shechinah* that dwelt within them. They themselves were a *merkavah*, a vehicle for the *Shechinah*. Their whole being and everything they did was in order to bring satisfaction to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, so much so that *Hashem's* Will expressed itself in their very lives. Aside from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, they had no sense of self at all.

This is how it was with the great *tzaddikim* of the earlier generations. For the sages of the Jewish people, their personal self was the *Shechinah* that dwelt within them. *Chazal* were truly holy people and they did not see themselves at all as an independent personalities that figure into the equation.

Every person by nature has a personality and a sense of self that encompasses, among other things, desires and *yetzer haras*. We experience our individual personality as us, as our life in this world. This is actually the great barrier that stands between us and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Our sense of self encompasses our whole being. It takes up our whole lives, and separates us from *Hashem*.

It was not that way with *Chazal*. For them, evil was external to them. It was not part of themselves. The natural *nisyonos* of envy, lust and pursuit of honor were for them a little bit like the state of *Adam Harishon* before he sinned, when evil was an external force and was not incorporated into his being. *Chazal's* sense of "self," their "personality" with which they lived twenty-four hours a day, was actually the *kedushah* within them.

All their aspirations, all their feelings, of each one of them – what am I living for, what am I eating for, what am I sleeping for – it was all for the sake of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who dwelled within them.

So when *Leah Imeinu* gave names to her children, she was expressing her feelings which were actually *Hashem's* Will on the highest level. ●

1 Bereishis 24:12.

2 Ibid v. 45.

3 Tehillim 73:26.

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהָיָה הוּא לְאֵה. (בראשית כט, כה)

And in the morning she turned out to be Leah. (*Bereishis* 29:25)

But at night, it was not Leah [to the best of Yaakov's knowledge]. This is because Yaakov gave signs to Rachel [by which to identify herself], and when Rachel saw that they are bringing Leah to him, she said, "Now my sister will be humiliated!" So she went and gave her those signs. (*Rashi*)

Silence is Golden

Rachel kept quiet when Leah was being married off, instead of her, to Yaakov. Let's talk a little about the virtue of silence.

One of the Torah's principles, about which people have been speaking a lot lately, is the prohibition on *lashon hara*. The truth is that since the Chofetz Chayim revolutionized our awareness of this important matter, people pay a lot of attention to it, and try hard to avoid transgressing this prohibition. The Chofetz Chayim changed the world for the better.

We know that *lashon hara* is a serious sin, and this is true. But we need to know that besides the prohibition itself to speak bad about people, there is more to silence than this. Silence is a general trait. The virtue of keeping silent is not just when there is some *lashon hara* that could be said.

There is an amazing story about the Rebbe of Rozhin, one of the great Chassidic leaders of about 150 years ago. It was his custom that at the *tisch* he held with his Chassidim, he would not speak *divrei Torah*. He would just sit in silence.

It is recounted that a non-Jew once entered the Rozhiner's *beis midrash* on *Shabbos* night and found them sitting there at the *tisch*. After he walked out, he was queried regarding what he had seen there. He replied, "I saw a long table with Jews sitting on both sides. At the head of the table was an old man. He was silent, and everyone was listening..."

This is a wonderful description. The beautiful word that was spoken at the *tisch* was... silence!

Song of Silence

It is written:

תִּלְהָ אֶרֶץ עַל בְּלִימָה – *Hashem* keeps the world up on nothing.¹

There is nothing that holds the world up; it is suspended in space, on nothing. However, *Chazal* interpret this verse *Midrashically* and associate the word *בלימה* with *בולם*, which means to shut. Thus, they say that the world keeps up its existence thanks to those who "shut" their mouths at the time of a quarrel.²

Hashem keeps the world going in the merit of someone who keeps silent. This is the foundation of the whole world.

A person can acquire greatness in an unexpected way. He is not toiling in Torah and *mitzvos*. He just keeps quiet at the time of a quarrel. He doesn't even do anything. This is in accordance with *Chazal's* teaching:

Whoever refrains from committing a sin is granted reward as if he did a *mitzvah*.³

We know that the angels sing songs of praise to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. They sing, "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh... Baruch kevod Hashem...*" But there are other angels, *chayos hakodesh*, who are called *chashmal*.⁴ The Vilna Gaon explains that the word *chashmal* is a combination of the two words *חש מל*. *Chash* means keeping silent, and *mal* means speaking. Sometimes

1 *Iyov* 26:7.

2 *Yalkut Shimoni, Vezos Haberachah* 964.

3 *Makos* 23b.

4 *Yechezkel* 1:4.

the *chayos* are silent, and sometimes they speak.⁵ The Vilna Gaon goes on to say that this is the significance of *chazaras hashatz*.

How so?

When we praise *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, we need to reach the level of song in its fullness, which is speech together with silence. The *Amidah* recited by the *chazan* is song, and the silence of the congregation is song, and together it makes a very special song: *chash mal*.

There are two ways to sing to *Hashem*. There is the song of “*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh... Baruch kevod Hashem...*” and there is the song of silence. Silence is not just refraining from doing *aveiros*. Silence is also song.

Rachel's Silence

When a person speaks, he has the ability to say forbidden things and he has the ability to say permitted things. But he has another ability altogether: to remain silent. In fact, the most beautiful deeds ever done were deeds of silence.

This can be seen from the *Midrash* that explains how *Rachel Imeinu* will redeem us from our long, bitter *galus*:

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: When *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, Avraham came before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*...He said, “O Master of the World! Why did You exile my children and deliver them into the hands of the nations who kill them cruelly, and You destroyed *Beis Hamikdash* which is the place where I placed my son Yitzchak on the altar as an offering to You?”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu answered him, “Your children sinned and transgressed the whole Torah...”

Immediately Avraham began to speak before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and said, “O Master of the World! I was a hundred years old when You gave me a son. And when he came of age, and was a young man of thirty-seven, You told me to bring him as an offering to You. I made myself unfeeling towards him, and did not have mercy on him. I even bound him on the altar myself. Will You not remember this for my sake, and have mercy on

my children?”

Yitzchak began to speak and said, “O Master of the World! When my father said to me, ‘G-d will choose for Himself the lamb for the offering; it is my son,’ I did not oppose Your words. Rather, I willingly allowed myself to be bound on the altar and I stretched out my neck under the knife. Will You not remember this for my sake, and have mercy on my children?”

Yaakov began to speak and said, “O Master of the World! Was I not in the house of Lavan for twenty years? And when I left his house, the evil Eisav met up with me and sought to kill my children, and I risked my very life to protect them... I raised them as one raises baby chickens. I suffered over them the pain of child-rearing; the majority of my days were spent in great pain for their sake. And now, will You not remember this for my sake, to have mercy on my children?”

Moshe began to speak and said, “O Master of the World! Was I not Yisrael's faithful shepherd for forty years? I ran like a horse before them in the Wilderness. And when the time came for them to enter the Land, You decreed upon me that my bones should fall in the Wilderness. And now that they have been exiled, You have sent for me to eulogize them and cry for them...”

At that time, Rachel jumped up before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and said, “O Master of the World! You know very well that Your servant Yaakov loved me greatly and worked for my father for seven years for me, and when the seven years were up and the time came for me to marry my husband, my father made a plan to switch me with my sister and give her to my husband.

“This was very hard for me to bear, for I found out about the plan, and I informed my husband and I gave him a sign by which to distinguish between me and my sister, so my father would not be able to switch me. Afterward I reconsidered, and I renounced my desire, and I had mercy on my sister, lest she end up disgraced.

“In the evening they switched me and gave my

⁵ *Chagigah* 13b.

sister to my husband, and I gave to my sister all the signs that I had given to my husband, so that he would think she is Rachel. I did *chesed* to my sister and I did not envy her and I did not cause her to end up in disgrace...

“I am just flesh and blood, dust and ashes, yet I was not jealous of the woman who married my husband, and I did not cause her to end up in embarrassment and disgrace. Whereas You are the living and enduring King, the Merciful One. Why were You jealous of the empty idols they worshipped, and exiled my children to be slain by the sword, and let their enemies do with them as they please?”

The mercy of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* was immediately aroused, and He said, “For you, Rachel, I will bring Yisrael back to their place.” Thus it is written, “So said *Hashem*: ‘A voice has been heard in a high place, lamenting, a bitter wailing, Rachel crying over her children; she has refused to be consoled for her children, for they are gone.’” And it is written: “So said *Hashem*, ‘Withhold your voice from crying and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your deed... and there is hope for your final destiny, so speaks *Hashem* – the children will return to their borders.’”⁶

Let us understand what happened. Avraham came before *Hashem* and argued: Did I go through ten trials for naught? *Hashem* answered: But on the other hand, the Jewish People committed very many sins. Yitzchak came and said: Was it for naught that I stretched out my neck to be slaughtered? And *Hashem* gave the same answer. And so it was with Yaakov and with Moshe. None of them succeeded in saving the Jewish People.

Until *Rachel Imeinu* spoke up. What was her great deed, by which merit the Jewish people was saved from

⁶ *Eichah Rabbah, Pesichta 24.*

destruction and brought back from exile? What great act did she do? The answer is that she remained silent. She did not tell Yaakov. And the power of this silence reverberates until the end of time.

It is true that Rachel did other wonderful things, but the main thing she did was simply remain silent.

Every person has this wonderful, amazing ability: he can restrain himself.

Every driver knows the first rule of driving: if there is no power of restraint (i.e., brakes), then don't get in the driver's seat in the first place! This is because restraint, the power to stop, is the most important thing in a car — as it is in other areas of life as well.

I wish to emphasize that I am not speaking about *lashon hara*. I am speaking generally about a person's ability to remain silent. Sometimes it is necessary to remain silent even when no *lashon hara* or other prohibition is involved.

To demonstrate this point, let's imagine that Rachel, instead of keeping quiet, would have told Yaakov that her father was trying to sneak Leah in, and said, “Watch out!”

What sin would this be? Would it be *lashon hara*? On the contrary, she would be doing a *mitzvah*. Yaakov wanted Rachel to have private signs between her and him so that he would marry the woman of his choice. She would only be honoring her promise and saving Yaakov from anguish by telling him what he needed to know.

(Parenthetically, Rachel did not lose out in the end, for it was from her that *Klal Yisrael* was built. *Rachel Imeinu* was the *akeres habayis*, the mainstay of the home. Everything was due to her, because she brought in Leah, and also Bilhah and Zilpah. She built Yaakov's entire household.)

Getting back to the point: Since Rachel would have transgressed no prohibition by telling Yaakov, why didn't she tell? Because her sister would end up being embarrassed. Rachel knew how to use the “brakes.” She knew how to remain silent at times when other people would feel the need to speak up and react. ●