



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

## PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

## My Sword and My Bow

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי בְּחַרְבִּי וּבִקְשָׁתִּי (בראשית מח, כב)

...Which I took from the Amorite with my sword and my bow. (*Bereishis* 48:22)

Onkelos translates “my sword and my bow” as “my prayer and my supplication.” And so it is explained in *Bava Basra* 123b.

*Mesbech Chochmah* explains that the “sword” of prayer refers to our regular daily *Tefilos*, authored by *Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah*. This is because a sword’s power depends primarily on how sharp it is. This refers to the regular, fixed *Tefilos*, which have their own intrinsic power, even if we don’t put in so much *kavanah*. It is sufficient to pay attention to the meaning of the words of the first *berachah*, and the prayer is acceptable.

But the “bow” of supplication is different. An arrow loaded on a bow can’t do much on its own. Its power depends of the strength of the archer. The more strength the archer puts in, the more power the arrow has. So it is with a person’s personal supplications to *Hashem*. Their power depends on the *kavanah* he puts into them.

Let us continue along this line of thought. Even

a sword can’t cause any damage on its own. The sharpness of a knife can be tested by running the flesh and nail of one’s finger over it,<sup>1</sup> and the person who does so will not be hurt by the blade. This is because a certain amount of pressure must be applied, in addition to the intrinsic sharpness of the knife or the sword. As R. Chaim Brisker wrote,<sup>2</sup> that there is a type of *kavanah* that we must have throughout the whole *Amidah* prayer. It is to be aware that we are standing in front of the King. Without this basic *kavanah*, we have not fulfilled our obligation to pray.

This is why prayer is compared to a sword. The primary power of a sword is its intrinsic sharpness, but we still have to put in a little strength in order to make it work.

Regarding the Torah, we have a different metaphor:

1 *Chulin* 17a.

2 *R. Chaim al HaRambam, Hilchos Tefilah* 4:31.

ה' – הלוא כה דברי קאש נאם ה' – “My words are like fire,” says *Hashem*.<sup>3</sup>

The Torah is more like fire than like a sword. A sword needs a little external strength, but fire penetrates and burns everything around it, all by itself. You don't have to stand there and push the flames.

So it is with Torah. If a person engages in Torah study, even if he has no *kavanah* at all, even if he does so for ulterior motives – for instance, he seeks to be called “Rabbi,” which is a detracting *kavanah* – the Torah on its own will penetrate deep within him and have a positive effect on him.

Now let us examine Rashi's interpretation of

the *pasuk*. He explains that “sword” refers to Torah, not to *Tefilah*. Although Torah is compared to fire, which, as we said, works all by itself, unlike a sword, which requires a certain amount of pressure to be applied, there are actually two parts to Torah. There is the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. The Written Torah is like fire. If a person recites the words of the Written Torah, even with no understanding, he is considered to be engaging in Torah learning. But when it comes to the Oral Torah, a person needs to at least understand what the words mean.

The Written Torah is like fire. All you have to do is touch it, and it burns. But the Oral Torah is like a sword. It won't cut unless the person wielding it puts in a little effort. ●

<sup>3</sup> *Yirmeyahu* 23:29.

## PARSHA TOPIC

# Yaakov Avinu's Krias Shema

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הַאֲסֹפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָכֶם. (בראשית מט, א)

Yaakov called to his sons and said, “Gather, and I will tell you.” (*Bereishis* 41:1)

Yaakov wanted to reveal the end of days to his sons, but the *Shechinah* departed from him. He said, “Perhaps there is some invalidity among my offspring?” ...His sons replied, “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*.” They explained, “Just as there is only One in your heart, so there is only One in our hearts.” At that moment, *Yaakov Avinu* declared, “*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso l'olam va'ed*.” ...The Sages thus enacted that we should recite it in a whisper. (*Pesachim* 56a)

### Why We Whisper It

Judaism stands on *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*. With this *pasuk* we fulfill,

twice daily, the Biblical *mitzvah* of accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven's kingdom. Every Jew hopes and prays that when he leaves this world and goes to meet *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, it will be as he is

### לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורגר ז"ל  
ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס ז"ל

נדבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

reciting these wonderful words.

After we finish the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael*, we whisper “*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso l’olam va’ed.*” Then we continue on with “*V’eahavta*” in a regular voice.

The passage of *Shema Yisrael* is written in *Parshas Va’es’chanan*, and the second passage of *Shema* is in *Parshas Ekev*, and the third passage, that of *tzitzis*, is in *Parshas Shelach*.

Where is the verse of *Baruch Shem* written? It is not really a *pasuk*. It doesn’t appear anywhere in the *Tanach*. But there is an ancient Jewish custom to recite it as part of *Shema*. It is the wonderful praise of *Hashem* that tradition passed down to us from *Yaakov Avinu*. As the Rambam writes:

Why do we recite [*Krias Shema*] this way?

We have it on tradition that when *Yaakov Avinu* gathered his sons in Egypt at the time of his death, he commanded them and exhorted them regarding the Oneness of *Hashem*, and regarding the way of *Hashem*, which Avraham and Yitzchak his father followed.

He asked them, saying, “My sons, perhaps there is some invalidity among you? Maybe there is someone who does not stand together with me regarding *Hashem’s* Oneness?” This is similar to what *Moshe Rabbeinu* said: פֶּן יֵשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה – “Lest there be among you a man or a woman....”<sup>1,2</sup>

*Yaakov Avinu* had twelve sons. Each one of them was a personality unto himself, a *shevet* on his own. *Yaakov* saw that the *Shechinah* departed from him when he wished to reveal to them the end of days, and this deprived him of the power of prophecy, so he thought it might be because one of his sons does not share his belief in the Oneness of *Hashem* but is rather in discord with *Hashem* and His ways.

This does not mean *Yaakov* thought one of his sons might be an *apikoros*. His suspicion was far

from that. Rather, he thought it is possible that one of his sons has a certain complaint against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*: why did He do such and such to me? Why didn’t He give me what He gave my brothers?

Maybe *Yissachar* begrudged the fact that he was not born with the *kedushah* of his brother *Levi*, from whom *Moshe* and *Aharon* and all the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* will descend. Maybe *Levi* was disappointed that he was not born with the wealth of *Zevulun*. And so forth. Holding complaints against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not a good thing at all. We should check our hearts to see if we might be harboring a complaint against *Hashem*.

“His sons replied, ‘*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad.*’” They meant to say: Listen to us, our father *Yisrael*, *Hashem* is our G-d and *Hashem* is One. Just as you believe in His absolute Oneness, so do we. We are all united in our love of *Hashem*. Our hearts are full of love and fear of *Hashem*.

“*Yaakov Avinu* declared, ‘*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso l’olam va’ed.*’” Because *Yaakov* praised *Hashem* in this way, all Jews do likewise. Reciting *Baruch Shem* was how *Yaakov Avinu* thanked *Hashem* for hearing all his sons say together the wonderful words of “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad.*” The words of *Baruch Shem* are not written in the Torah. They are the personal words of *Yaakov Avinu*.

So explains the Rambam.

We recite *Baruch Shem* in a whisper to mark the difference between the verse of *Shema Yisrael*, which is written in the Torah, and the verse of *Baruch Shem*, which is not.

## Tasty But Inelegant

The *Gemara* offers a different reason why *Baruch Shem* is recited in a whisper.

This may be compared to a princess who smelled a whiff of mincemeat [which is a tasty but undignified sweet]. Should she say [that she wants it]? It would be a disgrace. Should she not say anything? She will suffer. Her servants took initiative and brought it to her quietly.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Devarim* 17:17.

2 *Mishneh Torah, HIlchos Krias Shema* 1:4.

3 *Pesachim* 56a.

A princess is a very dignified personage, and when she eats, there are VIPs around her. Elegant gourmet food is served on her table. Fancy breads, fine meats, etc. But the princess caught a whiff of a spicy, sweet-tasting gooey mess called *tzikei kedeirah*, [which could be translated as “mincemeat,” a pie filling made of a combination of chopped dried fruits, spices, sugar, nuts, distilled spirits and beef suet]. It smelled really good, and she wanted to eat some.

What should they do with the young lady? If the servants walk in with the pot of mincemeat, it will look undignified. It goes against royal etiquette. But if they don't give her any, she will be very disappointed. Her servants thus “brought it to her quietly,” so it won't be noticed, in order to save face.

This is *Chazal's* allegory to explain why we recite *Baruch Shem* quietly.

This is how R. Chaim Volozhiner in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* explains the point:

*Hashem's* Oneness as expressed by “*Shema Yisrael... Hashem echad*” is that *Hashem* is the Master and He is one and alone in all the worlds. All the creatures are completely and literally one. Everything is considered as nothingness, and there is absolutely nothing else besides Him.<sup>4</sup>

*Shema Yisrael* expresses the ultimate truth: *Hashem* is One. He is everything. There is nothing else at all. All the worlds fade away as if they don't even exist in face of *Hashem's* total Oneness.

So what does *Baruch Shem* mean?

*Baruch*, ברוך, signifies בריכה, a “reservoir.” A reservoir is to spread and distribute water to the whole area. Accordingly, *Baruch* signifies that *Hashem's* Name should be spread in the world and become known to all.

*Shem* means “name,” and the purpose of a name is to relate to others. Let's say someone found himself on a deserted island and lived there for many years, and as time went on, he forgot his name. How can a person forget his own name? Because if you are on a

desert island, you don't need a name and you don't use a name. A name is only when others are involved. Other people call you by your name.

So when *Hashem's* “Name” is spread in the world and becomes known, when His awesome greatness is expressed in our world and becomes visible, this is *Baruch Shem*.

Now let's talk about *Kevod Malchuso*. It continues the same idea.

Imagine a great *tzaddik*, someone with an impressive mastery of Torah knowledge. He knows the entire Torah, and he is also a *tzaddik* and a *kadosh*. He comes into the *beis midrash*, sits in a corner, and *davens Minchah*. Whether people know who he is or not, whether they accord him honor or not, he is still the same *tzaddik*.

*Kavod* means that which is inside now reveals itself to the outside world. In terms of our metaphor, *kavod* means people say, “Here's a great *tzaddik*.”

*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso* thus means that *Hashem's* Name is accorded honor in the world. That everyone recognizes Who He is and feels closeness to Him.

It is not enough for *Hashem* just to be One. That itself is a wonderful thing, of course, but a lot of people don't know it. We hope and pray that *Hashem's* Name should become recognized and honored in the world, that everyone should know Who *Hashem* is and appreciate His greatness and love Him and fear Him.

*L'olam va'ed*. That all this should extend infinitely in all directions of the earth. (This includes in the direction of the person himself.) When we say the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael*, we are declaring *Hashem* as King over all the worlds. Over the seven firmaments and to all four directions.

(A person could lose perspective, and start to think that *Shema Yisrael* is for everything in the universe, but forget about himself.

We need to know that we, too, are part of the world, and we are the most important part of it, as far as we are concerned.)

*Baruch Shem* is thus compared to *tzikei kedeirah*, “mincemeat,” because it a lowly praise as compared

<sup>4</sup> *Nefesh HaChaim* 3:6.

to the lofty idea expressed in *Shema Yisrael*. From the perspective of *Shema Yisrael*, all the worlds have no significance. But it is not such a great praise to say that *Hashem* rules over our world, as conveyed by *Baruch Shem*, as it is like praising a great and lofty king for ruling over a hundred million ants.

So explains R. Chayim Volozhiner.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we see that there are two explanations for why *Baruch Shem* is recited in a whisper. The first explanation, the Rambam's, is that it is not written expressly in the Torah, unlike the rest of *Krias Shema*.

The second explanation is that of *Nefesh Hachayim*. We say *Baruch Shem* because it is a very sweet praise. We don't want to skip it, even though it is not so dignified as compared to *Shema Yisrael*, so we say it in a whisper.

## No, It's Higher.

But there is yet another explanation, that of the Maharal. He explains the matter completely differently:

In truth, only for Yaakov is it fitting to recite *Baruch Shem*. This is because Yaakov is the holy one of *Hashem*. Only he who is separated and disconnected from the material can bless Hashem's Name [i.e., to recite *Baruch Shem*], since His Name expresses His nature. Therefore, this blessing of *Baruch Shem* is fitting for the angels, who are sanctified and above material physicality.<sup>6</sup>

We don't recite *Baruch Shem* out loud because we are not on the proper *madreigah* for that. Only someone who really understands *Hashem's* greatness can properly praise Him. Let's say a totally ignorant man is told that so-and-so is the *gedol hador*. He thinks it means that so-and-so is the tallest person

alive today. That's how small his concept of *gadol* is.

According to the Maharal, we say *Baruch Shem* in a whisper because it is a much loftier praise than is *Shema Yisrael*. *Baruch Shem* is so profound that we cannot say it out loud in this world. We have to whisper it, except on Yom Kippur.

## Bring it Down to Earth

In truth, R. Chaim Volozhiner and the Maharal are in agreement. It just depends on which perspective we look at it from. Surely, *Shema Yisrael* expresses a much loftier praise of *Hashem*. It conveys the ultimate truth, that *Hashem* is so magnificent that He makes everything else into nothingness, as R. Chaim Volozhiner explains.

But when it comes to our connection to *Hashem*, it is not enough to just praise Him without mentioning how we fit into the picture. And which is a greater expression of our connection to *Hashem* – *Shema Yisrael* or *Baruch Shem*? Surely it is *Baruch Shem*. This is why the Maharal says that *Baruch Shem* is greater.

Although *Shema Yisrael* expresses the absolute truth that *Hashem* is One, and nothing else exists besides Him, we cannot live our lives completely on the level of this truth because it pertains to a reality beyond our level of comprehension. It is something we can relate to as a principle of faith, we can perhaps have a faint notion of it, but it does not impact our daily life so strongly. This is why we close our eyes when we say *Shema Yisrael*. It is above and beyond the world we live in.

The Maharal says that *Baruch Shem* is thus greater than *Shema Yisrael*. Entertaining deep thoughts about the true nature of G-d does not grant a Jew his special greatness. Only *Baruch Shem* makes a Jew great. What really matters is expressing *Hashem's* greatness in this world, the world we live in. ●

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 3:11, subtext.

<sup>6</sup> *Netzach Yisrael*, chap. 44.