

# 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 Holy Place

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ. (שמות כה, ח)

### They shall make a Sanctuary for Me. (*Shemos* 25:8)

The *parshah* talks about building *Beis Hamikdash*. And *Chazal* say, based on the verse וַאֲהִי לָהֶם לְמִקְדָּשׁ מֵעַט – “I will be a small sanctuary for them”<sup>1</sup> – that in our times, the *shuls* and *batei midrash* stand in place of *Beis Hamikdash*.<sup>2</sup>

This is not just a mere allusion. It is a full-fledged *halachah d'oraysa*. The Chofetz Chayim quotes<sup>3</sup> *Sefer Yere'im*<sup>4</sup> regarding this. It says in *Sefer Yere'im* that the *mitzvah* of *mora Midkash*, which means being in fear and awe of Heaven's glory that rests in *Beis Hamikdash*, and behaving respectfully there: this *mitzvah* is a Biblical obligation even in our times, and it applies in our *shuls* and *batei midrash*.

For this reason, we may not behave frivolously in *shul* or *beis midrash*. We may not joke around or

engage in idle talk. We surely may not speak *lashon hara* or other forbidden forms of speech there. And it says that, as this would seem as if one is rebelling against the King in His own Home, right in front of Him.

And we may not go into a *shul* or *beis midrash* just in order to get out of the rain, or to talk to someone, or to take a shortcut to somewhere else. But if one stays there a short while, and learns or *davens* a little, it is permitted.

There is also a Biblical prohibition on destroying anything of the *shul* or *beis midrash*, including its equipment. Because it says:

וּנְתַצְתֶּם אֶת מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם וְשִׁבְרֵתֶם אֶת מִצְבְּתֵיהֶם וְאַשְׂרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ וּפְסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן וְאַבְדֵּתֶם אֶת שְׁמֵם מִן הַמְּקוֹם הַהוּא. לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן – “You shall smash their altars and shatter their idolatrous pillars... and destroy their name from that place.

1 *Yechezkel* 11:16.

2 *Megilah* 29a.

3 *Sefer Chofetz Chayim, Pesichah, Asin* 7.

4 Ch. 324.

You shall not do so to *Hashem* your G-d.”<sup>5</sup>

For this reason, we should take care not to scratch up the tables, benches or walls of the *shul*. This would be a Biblical prohibition. And mainly, we need to warn the children not to do so.

All these *mitzvos* show how careful we should be about the *kedushah* of *shuls* and *batei midrash*, and to show them proper respect.

We see in the *parshah* that the Jewish people showed honor to the House of *Hashem*, and were very, very excited about beautifying it, in order to magnify and glorify the House of our G-d. They thus donated gold, silver, jewels and all kinds of precious materials in order to make it magnificent.

In all generations, Jews went out of their way to show their affection for the *shul* and make it beautiful. And today, in our generation, like every matter of *kedushah*, there is much less excitement over this *mitzvah*.

5 *Devarim* 12:3-4.

One of the reasons for this is because our simple, pure faith in *Hashem* has weakened greatly. Someone who has full, living *emunah* in the Torah and the teachings of *Chazal* will know that these matters are to be taken literally. The *shul* and *beis midrash* are the home, so to speak, of the *Borei Olam*. Our life, *parnassah*, health and everything else are from Him. Someone who knows this will surely not be lax about honoring and glorifying this great house. He will treat it at least as carefully as he treats his own home.

Even dignified people need not be concerned about their personal honor in this regard. They should lend a hand themselves to caring for the *shul* and *beis midrash* so it is nice and orderly and well taken care of. As *Shlomo Hamelech* said, אַל תִּתְהַדָּר, לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ – “Don’t be concerned about your own dignity when you are before a king.”<sup>6</sup>

Caring for the *shul* is a sign of the purity of one’s *emunah* and love of *Hashem*, and these are very lofty traits, and the source of all blessings. ●

6 *Mishlei* 25:6.



## The Keruvim are Equal!

וַעֲשִׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מִקָּשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם. (שמות כה, יח)

**You shall make two golden cherubim; you shall make them of one piece. (*Shemos* 25:18)**

The fact that G-d exists is not a uniquely Jewish concept. Knowledge of the Creator of the World is not our exclusive possession.

the rising of the sun to its setting, My Name is great among the nations.<sup>1</sup>

כי מִמְזֶרַח שֶׁמֶשׁ וְעַד מְבוֹאוֹ גָדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם – From

1 *Malachi* 1:11.



The nations of the world are well aware of the fact that the world has a Creator. On every American dollar bill it says, "In G-d we trust." Any intelligent person, if he just opens his eyes and looks around, can see the wonders of the Creator in every detail of the world.

However, the Jewish people did introduce to the world a wonderfully unique idea. In order to appreciate it, we need to know that there is an ancient and very profound philosophical question about how there could exist communication and connection between the Creator of the world, Who is infinitely lofty and undefinable, and His limited, mortal creatures down here on earth. How such a relationship could exist is a wonder that escapes easy comprehension.

This is indeed a difficult philosophical question that the nations of the world have historically pondered on. And this issue is the dividing point between Jews and others, as well as between *tzaddikim* and *resha'im*.

The non-Jew, as well as the *rasha*, may well recognize the fact that G-d created the world. But in their opinion, G-d is somewhere up in the highest heavens, far beyond us, and we have no personal connection to Him.

The *tzaddik* knows that besides the mere fact that *Hashem* created the world, He is also with him always, in his heart, and he can create a relationship with Him, and even turn to Him and speak to Him by means of *teflah*, *berachos* and Torah learning.

Not only that, but *Hashem* loves His people Yisrael with a great and eternal love, to the point that they can be described as a couple, and their relationship can be allegorized by marriage.

This is what the two *keruvim* on top of the *Aron Hakodesh* symbolized. One *keruv* represents *Hashem*, and the other one represents the Jewish people. This may still be comprehensible, but the really astounding thing is that the *keruvim* were equal to one another! The *Midrash* says that *Hashem* calls the Jewish people His "twin sister,"<sup>2</sup> so to speak,

based on the verse אחותי יונתי תמתי – "My sister, My dove, My perfect one."<sup>3</sup>

We can understand this by means of a parable. Let's imagine a great *Rav*, such as the *Ben Ish Chai*, who was a great *ga'on* and was supremely holy, and expert in *Kabbalah*, coming home. His little child says to him, "Daddy, please give me this thing and that thing." He answers, "First we need to ask Mommy."

He is an outstanding *ga'on*, he knows the entire Torah backwards and forwards, he fasts forty years straight. And his wife, with all due respect, is not like that. But he needs to ask her, because since she is married to him, she is therefore the mistress of the home, and she is like his "twin sister," so to speak.

What connects them? What makes this a relationship of equals? The factor that creates this relationship is love. This is why it says in the *shtar tanna'im* that "they will live together in love and affection, and control their possessions equally."

This is what *Chazal* meant when they described the relationship between us and the Creator as one of twins.

There are well-known stories about people who came to *Gedolim* with the request that they should be *zocheh* to children, after many childless years of marriage. And the *Gedolim* blessed them, and even promised them in certain cases that they would have children within a year, and by the end of the year, they indeed had a child.

Now, we know that *Hashem* is omnipotent. He can do anything and everything. And we know that human beings are not like that. Nevertheless, He granted the *tzaddikim* the ability to determine certain things in the world, like the Creator Himself does, so to speak. "Even if *Hashem* makes a decree, a *tzaddik* can annul it."<sup>4</sup>

If you think about these matters, you will realize that the relationship between *Hashem* and the Jewish people is the greatest miracle there is in the world. ●

2 *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:2.

3 *Shir Hashirim* 5:2.

4 *Shabbos* 63a.

וַעֲשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שֹׁטִים אֲמַתִּים וְחֲצֵי אַרְכּוֹ וְאֲמָה וְחֲצֵי רַחְבּוֹ וְאֲמָה וְחֲצֵי קִמְתּוֹ... וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁלֶחַן עֲצֵי שֹׁטִים אֲמַתִּים אַרְכּוֹ וְאֲמָה רַחְבּוֹ וְאֲמָה וְחֲצֵי קִמְתּוֹ... וְעָשִׂיתָ מְנֹרֶת זָהָב טָהוֹר מִקְשָׁה תִיעָשֶׂה הַמְנוֹרָה. (כה, י-לא)

**They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half *amos* long, an *amah* and a half wide and an *amah* and a half tall... You shall make a table of acacia wood, two and a half *amos* long, an *amah* wide and an *amah* and a half tall... You shall make a candelabrum of pure gold; the candelabrum shall be made by beating. (25:10-31)**

There were four items inside the *Mishkan* itself: *Aron*, *Shulchan*, *Menorah* and *Mizbach Haketores*. Each one had different dimensions.

The dimensions of the *Aron* were all in fractions. “two and a half *amos* long, an *amah* and a half wide and an *amah* and a half tall.” The *Shulchan* had whole numbers for its dimensions of length and width. It was two *amos* by one *amah*. But its height was an *amah* and a half. The *Mizbach Haketores* had whole numbers for all its dimensions. It was an *amah* by an *amah*, and two *amos* high.

The *Menorah* did not have any specific dimensions at all. They made it three *amos* high, but this measurement is not stated in the Torah, and the *Menorah* would be valid if it was made with different dimensions. The mitzvah is to make a *Menorah*, and even a very small *Menorah* could serve the purpose.

What is the message in these different sorts of measurements?

The *Baal Haturim* wrote about the *Aron* as follows:

All of its dimensions were “broken,” i.e., in fractions. They were in half *amos*. This teaches us that someone who learns Torah needs to “break” and humble himself.

The *Aron* symbolizes Torah, and this is why all its dimensions were fractions. A Torah learner needs to humble himself. This is an important principle to

keep in mind.

However, the dimensions of the *Shulchan* had fractions only in the height, not in length and width. And the *Mizbach Haketores* had only whole measurements, no halves at all. All this requires explanation.

### Who Completes the Half?

Further on, in *Parshas Ki Sisa*, we have the mitzvah to bring *Machatzis Hashekel*. Here, too, it is a fraction, a half *shekel*.

The concept of half always implies partnership, connection. One half joins with another half, making them connected, partners. Whenever the Torah mentions a “half” this implies connection and relationship with *Hashem*. [The idea is explained at length in connection with *Machatzis Hashekel*.]

Furthermore, we need to know that length, width and height are not the same concepts. Each represents something different. Length represents quantity, width represents quality, and height represents spiritual height.

### Aron

The *Aron*, as mentioned above, had fractions in every one of its measurements. Its length, width and height all come in halves. And the *Aron*, as mentioned, represents Torah. The message of all these fractions is that the entire Torah, no

matter which part of it, provides connection and relationship to *Hashem*. Because, as explained above, the concept of “half” implies connection and partnership with the other “half.”

There are several types of Torah learning. There is the type of “length and width,” which entails learning and understanding the Torah’s laws on a simple level, and learning *halachos* to know how to conduct oneself practically – how to get up in the morning and what do during the rest of the day. There is also learning of the “height” type, which is study of the Torah’s hidden teachings, study of *Sod*.

We might think that only “height” learning has the quality of “half,” of connection to *Hashem*, but when we learn subjects such as monetary laws, how to buy and sell a field, how much to pay if a bull gores a cow, and so forth, this is ordinary study that does not connect us to the Giver of the Torah.

However, the Torah is saying right here that this is not true at all. Also the length and width of the *Aron*, not only its height, come in halves. They all provide connection and relationship to *Hashem*.

But we do see a difference between the length and the width of the *Aron*. The length was two and a half *amos*, while the width was only one *amah* and a half. If we take into account only whole numbers, the length is twice the width.

Length represents the quantity of learning, and width represents its quality. The *avodah* of “quality” in learning, gaining profound understanding, needs to be only half as much as the *avodah* of “quantity” in learning. This is in accordance with *Chazal’s* teaching:

A person should first know the text and then understand it.<sup>1</sup>

First we should acquire knowledge of a lot of *Shas* and *Poskim*, and only then try to understand things more profoundly. Sometimes a person gets stuck in the middle of learning and doesn’t understand

a certain point. It’s not so terrible. Just go on. You don’t have to understand everything, but you do need to keep moving forward, to learn more and more *dapim* of *Gemara*. A person needs to acquire more knowledge than understanding.

Someone came to the famed Rogachover and said, “*Rebbe*, I have a *kasheh* on *Tosfos* and I’m stuck, I can’t move on. The Rogachover said to him, “Look in the *Tosfos* in such-and-such a *masechta*, on such-and-such a *daf*, the third *Tosfos* down on the page. He went, opened the *Gemara* to the place that the Rogachover said, sweated over the *Tosfos* that the Rogachover pointed him to, and found there no answer at all to his *kasheh*.

He went back to the Rogachover and reported that he couldn’t see any connection at all between that *Tosfos* and the *kasheh* that bothers him.

The Rogachover replied, “And how does that *Tosfos* go? *Tosfos* asks a *kasheh* and doesn’t answer it. And what comes after it? Another *Tosfos*. This is the answer to your *kasheh*. If *Tosfos* asks a *kasheh* and doesn’t answer it, and just goes on, then you, too, can have an unanswered *kasheh* and still go on.”

This idea is alluded to by the fact that the length of the *Aron* is twice its width. A person needs to acquire extensive knowledge of Torah. Sometimes we find a person who learned only one *masechta* and he already wants to understand it in depth and even say *chiddushim* in it and write a *sefer*. This is a mistake. First of all, you need to acquire a lot of knowledge, and only then delve as much as you can into depth of understanding.

This is the message of the length and width of the *Aron*: knowledge and understanding of Torah.

The height of the *Aron* expresses how much *kedushah* is in the learning. Here, too, the height of the *Aron* was only an *amah* and a half, much less than its length. Because if a person will spend all day on matters of *kedushah*, he won’t be able to learn Torah. A person needs to cover a lot of *dapim* of *Gemara*, a lot of *halachos*, and if he is always *davening*, always with his head in heaven, he will not manage to learn enough.

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1 *Shabbos* 62a.

## Shulchan

The *Shulchan* represents the physical act of eating. A table is for eating. The length and width of the *Shulchan* were, respectively, two *amos* and one *amah*, without halves, because these dimensions express the this-worldly matter of eating food. A person naturally eats because he wants to eat, and when a person eats in such a way, he is not connected to *Hashem*.

The connection to *Hashem* is alluded to in the dimension of the *Shulchan* from bottom up: an *amah* and a half. (The half represents connection, as explained before.) If a person turns his gaze up, if he eats *l'sheim Shamayim*, this creates a connection to *Hashem* when he is eating. But the act of eating in and of itself does not connect him to *Hashem*.

And what do the measurements themselves, two *amos* in length and one *amah* in width, come to teach us?

As we said, the *Shulchan* is about eating. Its length expresses the quantity of the food and its width expresses the quality, i.e., the taste of the food. The length here is twice the width. This signifies that we need to eat a lot. Every morning, afternoon and night. But the food doesn't always need to be so tasty.

Let's say a man comes home Sunday evening and opens the fridge. He sees fish left over from *Shabbos*, as well as leftover chicken and meat. In the bottom drawer he finds various veggies, and on the shelf above that are dairy products of various types. The fridge is chock-full of all kinds of good foods. So full, there isn't even room in there for another pot.

He looks it all over and declares, "There's nothing to eat!" and goes out to pick up some fast food for supper.

When the Torah states that the length of the *Shulchan* is two *amos*, it is telling us: You need to eat, you can't just fast all day. But the width of the *Shulchan* is only one *amah*. This tells us that the food will be tasty sometimes, but the width doesn't have to equal the length. Even if the food is not exactly according to our taste, we need to eat.

And how high was the *Shulchan*? Only an *amah* and a half.

Sometimes a person fasts for reasons of *kedushah*. This is indeed a praiseworthy thing. But he shouldn't treat his health lightly. The height of the *Shulchan* – its spiritual aspect – was only an *amah* and half, not two *amos*, because who can reach a spiritual *madreigah* twice as great as his physical state?

In any case, a person's eating should have a height of an *amah* and half. Besides the quantity of the food and its taste, his eating should have an aspect of spirituality. He needs to connect to *Hashem* when he is eating, as expressed by the half *amah*.

## Menorah

The *Menorah* represents wisdom, and here we find no specific dimensions at all.

This is the main thing for a Jew: to learn Torah and toil in Torah with all his strength. But how much wisdom does he need to have? There is no specific measurement for this. Some do more, some do less, and the main thing is to have *l'sheim Shamayim* intentions.

It is indeed true that we should make an effort for the *Menorah* to be tall, golden, decorated with buttons and flowers, and so forth. That's all true. But even without all this, the *Menorah* is a *Menorah*, and that's the main thing. ●