



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

Private Service

וְכָל אָדָם לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד בְּבֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בְּקֹדֶשׁ. (ויקרא טז, יז)

No person shall be in the *Ohel Mo'ed* when he enters to atone in the holy place.
(*Vayikra* 16:17)

When the *Kohen Gadol* went into the *Kodesh Kodoshim* to perform his awesome *avodah*, he was alone. There was no one to see what he did.

This teaches us an important principle in *avodas Hashem*. The best *avodah* of all is the *avodah* done quietly and privately, as the *Navi* says:

וְהִצַּנְעַ לְכַת עִם אֱלֹקֶיךָ – You shall walk modestly with your G-d.¹

Many times, there is a lot to be gained from serving *Hashem* in public, in a group of people.

בְּרַב עִם הַדָּרַת מֶלֶךְ – A large public honors the king.²

The more people there are, the more honor it

accords *Hashem*. Furthermore, serving *Hashem* publicly causes others to see one's actions and follow suit. This is a *kiddush Hashem*.

But sometimes a person should choose the path of *הצנע לכת*, of serving *Hashem* modestly and privately, because this enables one's *avodah* to be for *Hashem* alone, free of all other agendas. When people don't see what you are doing, you are doing it only for *Hashem*. It shows true faithfulness to *Hashem* and inner love of Him.

This may be compared to boiling water in a pot on the fire. You can never get the temperature of the water to rise above boiling point. Even if you turn up the flame, the water won't get hotter. But if you boil water in a well-sealed pressure cooker, the temperature can go up and up.

It's the same with Torah and *mitzvos*. When a person does good deeds in front of everyone, it is

¹ *Michah* 6:8.

² *Mishlei* 14:28.

only human nature to take pleasure in the fact that his deeds are acknowledged, that people esteem him for it. This puts a limit on the *madreigah* he can reach. But if a person does his *avodah* privately and secretly, only *Hashem* knows about it, so the more *kedushah* he adds to his acts, the higher a level he can reach. There is no upper limit. This is because there is no personal gain or external considerations to cool off the *kedushah*.

The Rambam writes as follows:

Although it is a *mitzvah* to learn Torah at day and at night, a person learns most of his wisdom at night. Therefore, if a person wishes to attain the crown of Torah, he should be careful about all his nights, and not lose even one of them by just sleeping and eating and drinking and similar activities. Rather, he should utilize them for Torah study and words of wisdom.³

This is not the only awesome thing the Rambam has to say about learning Torah by night. He writes more about it in the same place.

What is so great about learning Torah specifically at night?

There are several reasons, and one is that at night, most people are asleep and don't see what you are doing. If you gather strength and learn Torah at this time, it is for *Hashem* alone, and the level of such learning is exceptionally great.

The same applied to the *Kohen Gadol* in *Beis*

Hamikdash. If people would see what he is doing, he would not be able to reach the tremendous level of *kedushah* required for what he did in there. Performing his service away from the public eye enabled him to rise to the right level. *Chazal* say about the *Kohen Gadol* when he entered the *Kodesh Kodoshim*:

When the spirit of holiness rested on him, his face burned like a torch [as if he was an angel].⁴

It is written:

כִּי שִׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקְשׁוּ
 – מִפִּיָּהּ כִּי מִלֶּאֱלֹהִים הִיא צְבָאוֹת הוּא
 The lips of the *kohen* guard knowledge, and people seek Torah from his mouth, because he is an angel of *Hashem Tzeva-os*.⁵

Here we see that Torah learning, too, grants this awesome quality of being like a *malach*. Let's say a Jew comes home after a hard day's work, and he also kept up his regular learning schedule. If he nevertheless gathers the strength to get up at night and learn Torah or recite *Tehillim*, thus fulfilling the verse *קוּמִי רְנִי בַלַּיְלָה* – “Arise and sing at night”⁶ – at that time, his face will truly burn like a torch, like one of the angels, and he will bring blessing upon himself, his family and all the Jewish people. ●

3 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13.

4 *Vayikra Rabbah* 21:12.

5 *Malachi* 2:7.

6 *Eichah* 2:19.



Mesirus Nefesh For Shabbos

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אַתֶּם הָאָדָם וְחַי בְּהֶם. (ויקרא יח, ה)

A person should do them and live by them. (*Vayikra* 18:5)

The Torah tells us to live by the *mitzvos*. On the one hand, this teaches us that preservation of human life supersedes the laws of *Shabbos*:

One should “live by them,” and not die by them.¹

On the other hand, we see from Jews of the previous generation who suffered in Nazi concentration camps and Soviet work camps how much it pained them to desecrate *Shabbos*, even if it was just to stay alive. There were individuals who went beyond the requirement of *Halachah* and put their lives on the line for *Shabbos* observance.

We will not discuss here how much beyond the requirement of *Halachah* one is permitted to go in such cases, but we do see that *mesirus nefesh* for *Shabbos* observance seems to be something special and praiseworthy.

There are three cardinal sins that one must rather die than transgress. Similarly, in a time of *shemad*, if an attempt is made to force Jews to abandon their religion, they must die rather than commit any sin in public, so as not to desecrate *Hashem's* Name. This is because a Jew's very soul depends on these matters, and we can't save our soul by cutting off our soul.

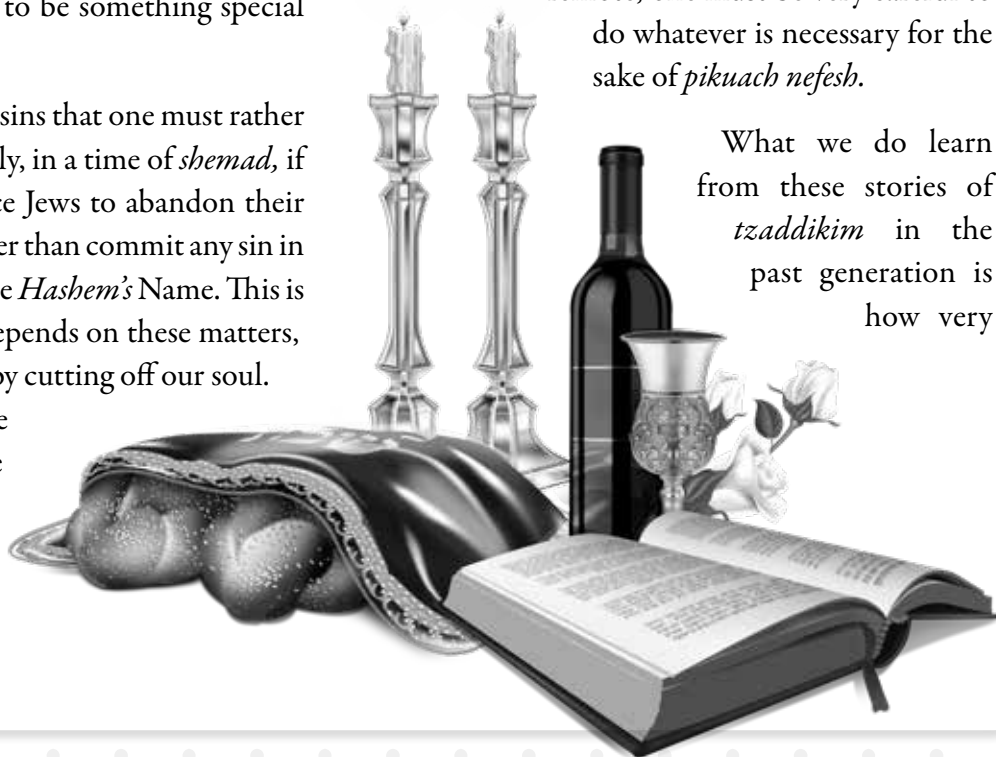
It would be like someone who fell into a pot on the fire, and “saved” himself by jumping out of the

pot and into the fire. A Jewish soul can't be saved by doing severe sins that cut off the soul.

This is how those righteous Jews felt when they were forced to desecrate *Shabbos*. Because *Shabbos* is our very connection with *Hashem*, our very attachment to the Source of life. Even though *Halachah* does not require giving up one's life for *Shabbos* observance, those *tzaddikim* felt that if they have to break *Shabbos*, even if it will save their soul, it would be better to give their soul back to its Creator for the sake of *Shabbos kodesh*, our most precious spiritual possession.

However, this does not apply in cases of illness and so forth. If one is ill enough that *Halachah* permits breaking *Shabbos*, according to all views it is a big *aveirah* to refrain from doing so. On the contrary, even if the danger to life is relatively remote, one must be very careful to do whatever is necessary for the sake of *pikuach nefesh*.

What we do learn from these stories of *tzaddikim* in the past generation is how very



¹ Yoma 85a.

important it is to keep *Shabbos*, especially in tough moments, such as when guests are on their way and it is very embarrassing that something important will be missing from the table, thus tempting the host to be lenient about matters that he normally would not consider doing.

The *nisayon* could also present itself in matters pertaining to speech, such as talking about business on *Shabbos*. A person might hear an important piece of information affecting his financial matters and feel a burning desire to discuss it with someone. All these are formidable *nisyonos*.

The *Chazon Ish* wrote something that can be applied to our topic:

There is a story about a certain Torah-observant individual of this type. A prominent guest came to his town, and the Torah-observant individual asked him to come and visit him at home. The guest promised to come for a visit on *Shabbos* night. The Torah-observant individual was very happy about this promise because it was an honor and a pleasure for him.

What did the Satan do? He made the Torah-observant individual forget to add kerosine to his lamp, and he lit the lamp before *Shabbos* with the small amount of kerosine remaining from Thursday night.

And it was a *Shabbos* night in the winter [when the nights are very long]. The guest didn't come yet, and the lamp started to die out.

The Torah-observant individual was unable to bear the shame of the guest coming and finding him sitting in the dark, so he added kerosine to the lamp on *Shabbos*.²

In this story of the *Chazon Ish*, it was truly a big *nisayon* that required a lot of dedication to pass, because *Chazal* say that undergoing serious embarrassment is almost like dying.

However, most Torah-observant people nowadays probably would not perform a Biblically forbidden form of work in order to save themselves from such an embarrassment. Nevertheless, we still need a lot of self-strengthening when it comes to matters that we are unsure whether they are forbidden, or the *issur* involved is not so severe.

In such moments we should recall those *tzaddikim* of the past generation who willingly went through a *Gehinom* of fire and ice rather than desecrate *Shabbos kodesh* in any way. This is because *chilul Shabbos* uproots a Jew from the Source of life. And *mesirus nefesh* for Sabbath observance attaches a Jew to the Source of life and the Source of blessing, forever. ●

2 *Sefer Emunah v'Bitachon* ch. 4.

