

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

Shemittah

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר:

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ
שְׁבַת לַה': (ויקרא כה, א-ב)

Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Yisrael and say to them: When you come into the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest as a Sabbatical year for Hashem. (Vayikra 25:1-2)

Why is *Shemittah* mentioned in connection to Mt. Sinai? All the *mitzvos* were spoken at Mt. Sinai! It teaches that just as the general rules and the details of *Shemittah* were stated at Sinai, so the general rules and the details of all the *mitzvos* were stated at Mt. Sinai. (Rashi)

Parshas Behar has a very special *mitzvah*, which is the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*.

This *mitzvah* was a pretty challenging one for Jews in ancient times to fulfill. For a full year they could not work their fields, and they had to relinquish ownership of the fruits of their trees, and they needed to release all loans, too.

If a person's entire livelihood depends on agriculture, as was the case for most people back

then, keeping *Shemittah* meant giving up a lot.

So what was the point of this *mitzvah*?

Keeping *Shemittah* demonstrates that a person's *parnassah*, his whole life, is in Hashem's hands. We trust in Hashem and do His Will and put the pursuit of our livelihood aside.

Now let's try to apply this to life nowadays. Most of us are not farmers anymore. Yet, there is an important lesson for us, too, to learn from the

mitzvah of Shemitah.

The first *pasuk* of this week's *parshah* mentions *Har Sinai*. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר – “Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying.” We know that Hashem spoke to Moshe many, many times. The *pasuk* אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר is the most common one in the whole Torah. But here the Torah added the words בְּהַר סִינַי, emphasizing the connection to *Har Sinai*.

What's the message?

We received from Hashem all the detailed *halachos* of all the *mitzvos* at *Har Sinai*. This is learned from the *mitzvah* of *Shemitah*, as Rashi explains, and on a simple level, this is what the Torah is teaching us when it mentions *Shemitah* in connection with *Har Sinai*.

However, the comparison of all the *mitzvos* to the *mitzvah* of *Shemitah* teaches us that the message of *Shemitah* applies to all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, as will be explained.

In ancient times, the Jewish people dwelled in *Eretz Yisrael*, and they supported themselves mainly by agriculture, as we mentioned above. And we know that the Torah often tells us that if we keep the *mitzvos*, we will be granted rain and abundant produce of the field, as it indeed says in this week's *parshah*:

וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ
וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִיָו – I will grant your rains
in their time, and the land will give forth its
produce, and the trees of the field will give
forth their fruit.¹

The Jewish people did not make money from gold mines or factories or stocks and bonds. They

lived off the fine fields and vineyards of *Eretz Yisrael*.

To appreciate the point, first let's talk about *Shabbos* for a moment.

When *Shabbos* comes, and a person stops working, this expresses that he places himself in Hashem's hands. It shows that his life and his livelihood are from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. However, resting one day a week doesn't totally disrupt a person's means of earning a living. He can work six days, take a day off, and pick up on Sunday morning.

What if you had to stop working for a whole year? Without unemployment insurance or a paid sabbatical or a side job or anything?

That was *Shemitah*. You need to let all your fields lay fallow for an entire year. Naturally speaking, this is a disaster. According to the way of the world, it means you will go bankrupt. You even need to leave your fields open for anyone to walk through. Not only that, but if you had some money on the side, and you loaned it out, you may not collect it after *Shemitah*. Your money is gone.

All these details of the *mitzvah* express a tremendous connection to Hashem. They demonstrate how a person gives himself over totally into the hands of Hashem and His Torah.

And this reflects on the nature of all the *mitzvos* of the Torah, which are all compared to the *mitzvah* of *Shemitah* as we explained.

Let's say you would ask someone, “Why didn't you come yesterday to the *shiur*?” He answers, “Listen, I had an important meeting with someone in Manhattan.” If you ask him, “Why did you rush out of *shul* this morning before *davening* was over?” He answers, “I got up late and I was in a hurry because I had business to attend to.” And so forth. There is no lack of examples that show how some people place *mitzvos* as second priority and their

1 *Vayikra* 26:4.



parnassah as first priority.

This is why the Torah connects all the *mitzvos* to *Shemittah*. The *Shemittah* year, with all its laws and regulations, expresses connection to *Hashem* and giving oneself over totally to Him. That's how it should be with all the *mitzvos*. We need to realize that they are *Hashem's* commandments, and He is the One Who supports us. Our *parnassah* comes from Him, so we should prioritize His *mitzvos* over our work and business.

Regarding *Shemittah* it says:

וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מָה נֹאכַל בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נֶאֱסַף אֶת תְּבוּאָתֵינוּ. וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעָשִׂתָ אֶת הַתְּבוּאָה לְשֵׁלֶשׁ הַשָּׁנִים – If you will say, “What will we eat in the seventh year, if we don't plant and don't harvest our produce?” I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year.²

Contrary to conventional thinking, keeping the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* will bring us more blessing than would all the *mitzvos* of the Torah. If we place our work and business dealings in the hands of

² *Vayikra* 25:20-21.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu, He Himself will take care of us and make sure our households are plentifully blessed.

This applies to us nowadays as well. A person might feel his business matters take priority over his *shiurei Torah*, or might generally find it difficult to set aside time for Torah learning and other *mitzvos*, because he is concerned it will hurt his *parnassah*. However, by consistently and obstinately dedicating time to learning, *davening* and other *mitzvos*, he shows that he places his *parnassah* in the hands of *Hashem*.

And when we put our personal concerns aside, and leave it up to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, He will see to it that we will be greatly blessed.

What about scheduling that important meeting? What about putting in enough good hours of work on a steady basis to earn a proper livelihood?

If we stick tenaciously to the times of *Tefilah* and learning, and put our personal needs in the hands of *Hashem*, we will be blessed in all our endeavors, as shown by the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah*.

About this the Torah says, “I will command My blessing for you,” and you will see great *siyata d'Shemaya* in everything you do. ●



Material Blessings

וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ פְּרִיָּהּ וְאָכַלְתֶּם לְשָׂבַע. (ויקרא כה, יט)

The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satiety. (*Vayikra* 25:19)

Parshas Behar speaks of *berachos*. It tells us about the abundant produce that *Eretz Yisrael* will produce.

But why are the material *berachos* mentioned by the Torah so agricultural? Why only bumper crops? What's wrong with silver and gold and diamonds?

True, most people used to be farmers, but there is a more universal message as well.

A person blessed with silver and gold and jewels feels self-confident. His treasures are in the safe and he has a sense of security. Even if the whole country is struck by famine, he can just pack up his riches

and take them with him to somewhere else.

But a farmer depends on rain and other natural conditions beyond his control. He trusts in *Hashem* and constantly raises his eyes to Heaven in prayer.

This type of gift doesn't disconnect him from *Hashem*; it only strengthens the bond.

When *Hashem* blesses us with health, good

children, and life itself, these gifts depend on *siyata d'Shmaya*. Ultimately, even a salary that comes in every month depends on *Hashem* alone.

May our blessings only strengthen our *Emunah*. If we make sure our blessings draw us closer to *Hashem*, we will receive more and more of them. ●



Caring for Fellow Jews

לֹא תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עֲבֹדַת עֶבֶד. (ויקרא כה, לט)

Don't make him do slave work. (*Vayikra* 25:39)

Back when the whole Jewish people were living in their land, the laws of *eved ivri* applied. A Jew would sometimes sell himself as a slave.

Regarding this the Torah commands us וטוב עמך – “It shall be good for him with you” (*Devarim* 15:16). This teaches that the master must provide the slave with living conditions similar to his own. If the master eats fine bread and drinks aged wine and sleeps on a comfortable bed, he must provide the slave with the same. The slave eats the same cuisine, and sleeps with a bed and pillows and blankets no less comfortable than those of his master.

There are also restrictions on what type of work the master may ask his slave to do. It says, “Don't make him do slave work,” meaning that the master may not force his Jewish slave to do things that are demeaning, such as take off the master's shoes, or other demeaning forms of service that non-Jewish slaves would normally be asked to do.

We learn from all of this a number of important points regarding how to treat our fellow Jews.

Although these *halachos* are specific to the *eved ivri*, the Jewish slave, as they come to protect him from being overly degraded, we see from them how

concerned the Torah is with a Jew's honor, even of a Jew who fell to the ignoble state of selling himself as a slave.

This shows how careful we need to be about the honor and welfare of every Jew. Each member of our people is a son of the King and should be accorded princely honor.

When *Moshe Rabbeinu* said כה אמר ה' בני ישראל – “So said *Hashem*: ‘My firstborn son Yisrael...’” (*Shemos* 22:22), this declaration was not intended for the ears of Pharaoh alone. It was so each and every one of us will know how to relate to our fellow Jew, whether or not he is among our friends and relatives, and this includes members of our immediate family, such as our spouse and children. They all deserve the greatest respect.

It says in the Torah:

וּבְאַחֵיכֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו לֹא תִרְדֹּף
בוּ בְּפִרְךָ – Regarding your brethren, the
children of Yisrael, a man and his brother,
you shall not rule over him harshly.¹

Rabbeinu Yonah explains what we learn from this *pasuk*:

¹ *Vayikra* 25:45.

One should not subjugate his fellow Jews. If they are in fear of him, or they are ashamed to go against his word, he should not command them to do anything, big or small, unless they agree and it is for their good, even if it is just heating up a water kettle or going out to buy a loaf of bread.²

People are often not careful enough about this. Let's say you ask a neighbor's child to go do something for you. If he truly agrees on his own to do it, no problem. But sometimes he doesn't really

² *Shaarei Teshuvah* 3.

want to do it, and he is too embarrassed to refuse. If you send him out on such a mission, you are actually exploiting one of *Hashem's* beloved children, and this is not right.

We also need to concern ourselves with the honor and welfare of every Jew who is experiencing troubles or who is being taken advantage of. We need to take care of him and be compassionate to him. Anyone who shows compassion will be shown compassion by Heaven, as it says, וַנִּתֵּן לְךָ רַחֲמִים וְנִתַּן לְךָ רַחֲמֵי וְהִרְבֵּה – “He will show you compassion, and be kind with you and increase you.”³ ●

³ *Devarim* 13:18.

PARSHA TOPIC

Extra Respect

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת וְגו' שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת. (ויקרא כג, טו)

You shall count for yourselves, from the day after *Yom Tov*... seven weeks. (*Vayikra* 23:15)

Get Ready for Torah

Sefiras Ha'omer is a time of preparation and purification in advance of *Matan Torah*. It is a time of clarification for every Jew if he is fitting to receive the Torah. This is why the *talmidim* of *Rabbi Akiva* died during this period for not having treated each other with sufficient respect.

It was taught: *Rabbi Akiva* had twelve thousand pairs of *talmidim*, from Geves to Antifras, and they all died in one period, because they did not treat each other respectfully.¹

¹ *Yevamos* 62b.

This imperfection in their interpersonal relationships affected their very right to live. If a person does not behave properly, with the requisite *derech eretz*, he is not fitting to come to *Kabbalas Hatorah*.

What about at other times? Did these *talmidim* act respectfully to one another during the rest of the year?

It could be that also at other times, *Rabbi Akiva's talmidim* did not show enough respect to each other, and in Heaven it was held it against them, yet it did not cause their death. But at the time of preparation for Torah, in the period of clarification after clarification, *birur achar birur*, this imperfection was more blatant, and had a

greater effect, to the point that they were punished by death.

The more a period is suited to spiritual growth and elevation, the greater is the demand on a person to perfect himself. This was the time of preparing for *Matan Torah*. Each person was scrutinized more intensely to see if he was fitting for Torah. This is why *Rabbi Akiva's talmidim* died at this time.

Torah Atones

It says in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* that Torah learning has the power to atone all sins, and someone who occupies himself with Torah learning does not need the *korbanos* to atone for him. The power of Torah will make a *kaparah* for him and bring him forgiveness for all his sins:

Occupying himself with Torah learning atones all the iniquities of the person who sins.... Come and see how great the power of Torah learning is, for it purifies the sinners of the Jewish people, when they do *teshuvah*, even if they committed *avodah zarah*....

If a person occupies himself with Torah learning for its own sake, even if he previously sullied himself with tremendous sins and iniquities, and sunk deep into mud and filth and plunged to the depths of evil, nevertheless, by occupying himself with Torah he can be sure and confident that the light in the Torah will bring him back to the right path.²

Rabbeinu Yonah said a similar thing. He detailed the ways to attain atonement for the various sins. Some sins necessitate receiving lashes, and others are punishable by death at the hands of the Rabbinical court, or by *kareis*. The severity of the sin determines

2 *Nefesh Hachayim* 4:31.

the means by which it is atoned.³

Rabbeinu Yonah went on to say that if a person desecrated *Hashem's* Name, even suffering will not atone for it. Nevertheless, Torah atones.

He can find atonement by constantly learning Torah and toiling in it. *Hashem* swore אִם יִתְכַפֵּר עוֹן בַּיִת עָלַי בְּזֶבַח וּבְמִנְחָה – “The sin of the House of Eli shall not be atoned by animal offerings and grain offerings, forever.”⁴ And *Chazal* say that by “animal offerings and grain offerings” they will not be atoned, but they will be atoned by Torah learning.⁵ This shows that Torah learning heals even very grievous illness. Thus it is written about the Torah: מִרְפָּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים – “The healing of the tongue is the tree of life^{6,7}”

The power of Torah is so great that it atones for all sins, even for that of *chilul Hashem*.

Why is this so? How can Torah learning atone for ostensibly unforgivable *aveiros*?

Torah and Mitzvos

The world is run according to a system of Divine law and order. If people do this, the result is that. This orderly system of Divine rules relates to the *Mitzvos*. There are 613 *mitzvos*, corresponding to the 613 organs and limbs of a person. Every *mitzvah* corresponds to a certain part of the human body and establishes its place in the world. This is the spiritual-material setup that governs the world.

But Torah is not part of this system.

Torah is above all this law and order. It is the very essence of life and of the world. So Torah brings

3 *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4.

4 I *Shmuel* 3:14.

5 *Rosh Hashanah* 18a.

6 *Mishlei* 15:4.

7 *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:16.

kaparah for all a person's *aveiros*, even for things that *korbanos* can't atone. Torah is above the whole system.

This is what *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* was saying, that by occupying himself with Torah learning, a person can purify his soul even if he sank to the depths of filth and evil. And this is why *Rabbeinu Yonah* said that a person will attain atonement even for the sin of *chilul Hashem*, as "Torah learning heals even very grievous illness."

More than Human

There are two levels that a person can be on. He can be human, and he can be higher than human. The level of "human" is that of a Jew who properly learns Torah and observes *mitzvos* and corrects his character traits. The whole reason why human beings were created was so they will correct their character traits according to the directives of Torah and *mitzvos* and live their lives in a *Toradik* manner, such that their acts of *chesed* and careful *mitzvah* observance express their dignified humanity.

Higher than this is the *ben Torah*. The Torah learning of the *ben Torah* is different and more exalted than that of a regular Jew. His character traits and *mitzvah* acts are something else. They are not a matter of form and shape, of maintaining proper order. His very being is attached to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Torah.

Someone who deprives himself of sleep in order to examine the *sugya* yet another time is called a *ben Torah*. Only if a person's *hasmadah* in Torah is not limited to times and schedules does he live in a place that is above the world.

A *ben Torah* is held to a much higher standard

in his relations with others. In every situation and no matter what, he needs to act like a *ben Torah* and display *chesed* and *rachamim*. There is no such thing as a certain person or a certain behavior that he can't tolerate.

In this time of preparation and clarification before *Matan Torah*, a higher standard of *bein adam l'chaveiro* is expected of us.

It is specifically in this period of time that the *talmidim* of *Rabbi Akiva* were held to account for not treating each other with due respect. In order for the world to exist in a proper manner, the place of Torah needs to be like it should. Behavior that shows lack of respect has a negative impact on existence itself, and when they died, "the world was desolate," as *Chazal* say. This implies that the world has no existence and life without *bnei Torah*.

It is hard to maintain such a high level of connection to Torah, *mitzvos* and *midos tovos*. But we need to know the truth for what it is.

The way to get to the *madreigah* of *ben Torah* is in stages. Attachment to Torah learning or connection to *Tefilah*, working on *tikkun hamidos* or performing *mitzvos* in the best manner one can. Each person by doing what he has a personal connection to, can be on the *ben-Torah* level of relationship to *Hashem*, as his connection to it is not dependent on schedules and times, thus making him above the world.

Just as the Torah grants existence to the world, so the *ben Torah* bears on his shoulders the existence of the world. This is the *adam hashalem* whose deeds hold up all of Creation, and he is thus doing an endless and unlimited *chesed*. He is the place and the existence of the world. ●