



# 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

## You Can't Leave

ימן המקדש לא יצא. (ויקרא כא, יב)

### He shall not exit the *Mikdash*. (*Vayikra* 21:12)

Did you know the *Kohen Gadol* had an apartment inside *Beis Hamikdash*?

The Rambam writes:

He [the *Kohen Gadol*] shall have a home ready for him in the *Mikdash*, and it is called the chamber of the *Kohel Gadol*. It is his honor and glory that he should dwell in the *Mikdash* all day, and not leave, other than to his home at night, or for an hour or two during the day. And his home should be in *Yerushalayim*, and he should not leave that place.<sup>1</sup>

We see that the *Kohen Gadol* was very restricted in movement. He needs to spend all day in *Beis Hamikdash*, and may not leave *Yerushalayim*. Naturally speaking, it is very unpleasant to be so tied down. It's akin to being imprisoned, which, as we know, is a big punishment. A person doesn't want

to be in jail. Even if the conditions there are good, even if he eats like a king, it's worth nothing to him. He just wants to get out because he can't stand the torture of being imprisoned.

A person might happen to stay at home for an extended period and be perfectly happy, but if he is forced to be at home, if he is locked up and not allowed to leave, he can't stand it. He will do anything to get out.

### A Heavenly Prison

We see this from the story of Shlomo and Shimi ben Geira.

Before *David HaMelech's* death, he instructed his son Shlomo how to handle Shimi ben Gera, who had cursed and stoned him when he fled from Avshalom's uprising:

Behold, with you is Shimi ben Gera son of the Benjaminite, from Bachurim. He

<sup>1</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Klei Hamikdash* 5:6.

cursed me with a vehement curse on the day I went to Machanayim. He came down to greet me at the Jordan River, and I swore to him by *Hashem* [that I will not kill him], saying, “Lest I kill you by the sword.”

But now, do not treat him as innocent. For you are a wise man and you know what to do with him. You shall bring his hoary head down to the grave in blood.<sup>2</sup>

How, in fact, did Shlomo handle Shimi ben Geira?

The King [Shlomo] sent and called for Shimi. He said to him, “Build for yourself a house in Jerusalem. Dwell there, and do not go out from there to this place and that. And it will be, on the day you go out and pass the Kidron Stream, that you will surely know that you must die. Your blood will be on your own head.”<sup>3</sup>

Three years went by, and Shimi did not leave *Yerushalayim*. But then two of his slaves ran away, and he went out after them to get them back. This gave *Shlomo Hamelech* a reason to put Shimi ben Geira to death, and so he did.

Now, why did Shimi feel compelled to go out, at the risk of his life, using his runaway slaves as an excuse? Is there a city more beautiful than *Yerushalayim*? Is *Yerushalayim* a prison?

R. Chayim Shmuelevitz explains that a person cannot tolerate being confined to his place, no matter what that place is.

*David Hamelech*, before his death, commanded his son Shlomo, “Do not treat him as innocent.”

2 *I Melachim* 2:8–9.

3 *Ibid*, vs 36–46.

Shlomo needs to find a way, a legal justification, by which to put Shimi ben Geira to death.

Shlomo in his wisdom knew that if he forbids Shimi to leave *Yerushalayim*, sooner or later he will leave. Because that is human nature. People cannot tolerate being limited. If a person has no limitations put on him, he can live happily in *Yerushalayim* for the rest of his life, and have no reason to leave. But if he is locked up, his nature pushes him to break out. So explains R. Chayim Shmuelevitz.

Why are people this way?

## Want to Stretch Out

*Chazal* say<sup>4</sup> that when *Adam Harishon* was created, his size was “from one end of the heavens to the other end.” However, they disagree whether Adam reached from one side of the world to the other, i.e., from east to west, or whether he reached from earth to the heavens. The *Gemara* concludes by stating that they are actually the same measurement. In other words, it is the same essential definition of man’s nature, either way you measure it.

When *Adam Harishon* sinned, the *Gemara* says that *Hashem* “placed His hand upon him,”<sup>5</sup> and diminished his size. Man no longer reached across the world or up to the sky; he was now a mere hundred *amos* (approx. 150 feet). With every subsequent generation he shrunk more, until he reached the dimensions we are familiar with today.

We may not see ourselves as being tall as the sky or as reaching all the way around the world, but that was *Adam’s* original form, and this is our essential nature, too, because our true nature remains the same forever. It’s not that *Hashem* chopped some pieces

4 *Chagigah* 12a.

5 *Tehillim* 139:5; *Chagigah* *ibid*.



out of *Adam Harishon* to get him down to size. Rather, the quality of “from one end of the heavens to the other end” was concentrated and compressed into a smaller physical stature. So as soon as a person gets the chance, he expands and spreads out, because being confined to a small space goes against his nature and causes him a lot of distress.

We see that people really enjoy traveling far distances and seeing new sites around the world. Even little children, who are usually jumpy and restless, can sit quietly in a car for hours on end just looking out the window and seeing new sites. This is because stretching around the world is man’s natural state. Seeing and knowing about things grants a person a certain amount of control over them, so the more a person sees and knows about the world, the more he is returning to his original state of “from one end of the heavens to the other end,” and this gives him immense pleasure.

## Stand Up

This brings us to an important caveat. Indeed, *Adam Harishon* reached from one end of the world to the other, or his height was from earth to heaven, and it is actually the same measurement, as stated in the *Gemara* we quoted above. And these dimensions are part of human nature, as we explained. But you can’t have it both ways.

We need to choose whether we want to stretch around the world, or up to heaven, because we can’t do both. It’s not possible.

*Hashem* gives us everything we require. All our needs are naturally provided for, and this includes the need to reach from one end of the world to the other. Our bodies are not that big, or course, but we can do it by the power of thought, which is man’s unique and essential quality.

In our generation, people reach around the world by phone, by plane, by the newspaper. They know what’s happening all over the globe.

*Hashem* granted this to our generation because reaching around the world is a human need. We can’t live closed up in a cage like an animal.

But what about all the previous generations? How did they live this way?

They didn’t. In past generations, people didn’t stretch around the world; they stretched up to heaven. This was surely true of Jews. A Jew’s head was always in heaven, connected to the *Kisei Hakavod*. But even non-Jews were deeply involved in the sublime wisdom of the hierarchy of the angels and the constellations of the Zodiac.

Then people changed. Instead of standing on their feet with their heads in heaven, they fell down on the ground, so to speak, and sprawled out from one end of the world to the other.

## The Vertical Kohen Gadol

Let’s get back to the *Kohen Gadol*. He is supposed to stay in *Beis Hamikdash* all day long, and never leave *Yerushalayim*. וּמִן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא יֵצֵא – “He shall not exit the *Mikdash*.”

How does this make him feel?

At first glance, we might have pity on the poor *Kohen Gadol* who is locked up in his *Mikdash* apartment and can’t travel out of the city. But the Rambam writes that “It is his honor and glory.”

It is human dignity to stand on one’s feet with one’s head above, and not sprawl out with one’s face in the ground like an animal. This is why it is the *Kohen Gadol’s* honor and glory to remain in the *Mikdash* and in *Yerushalayim*.

If a person is tempted to join in the frenzy of modern humanity, to know everything that is happening in the world, he needs to decide which position he prefers. Does he want to lie sprawled out on the ground and look all around the world, and know what is happening in Russia and China and South Africa, and embrace the whole wide world?

Or does he want to stand on his feet with his head in heaven, attached to the *Kisei Hakavod*, hearing the song of the *malachim* and learning Torah from *Hashem’s* mouth?

Because you can’t do both. It just doesn’t work that way. It is a contradiction in terms. ●

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

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

*Sefiras Ha'Omer* is a time of preparation and purification for *Matan Torah*. It is a time of clarification for every Jew: is he fitting to receive the Torah? This is why the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva died at this time, as they did not treat each other with sufficient respect.

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.<sup>1</sup>

This imperfection in the area of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, in the way they conducted their interpersonal relationships, impinged on their very right to live. דרך קדמה לתורה – “Proper behavior precedes Torah,” therefore, someone who is lacking in proper behavior toward his fellow Jews is not fitting to come to the time of *Matan Torah*.

It is likely that at other times of year, too, Rabbi Akiva's *talmidim* did not show sufficient respect to one another, and were held responsible for it, but it did not cause their death. In *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, which is a time of preparation, a time of increasingly intense clarification, their lacking in this area stood out more, and had a greater effect, so much so that they were punished with death.

The more that a time of year is suited to high levels of spirituality, the greater is the responsibility for one's failures and lackings during that time. When we are preparing to receive the Torah, every person is examined extra carefully if he is fitting for the Torah. This is why the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva died at this time.

## Torah Atones

R. Chaim of Volozhin explains<sup>2</sup> that Torah learning

has the power to atone for all sins. One who occupies himself with Torah study does not need the *korbanos* to atone for him because the power of Torah will atone for him and bring forgiveness for all his transgressions.

Occupying oneself with Torah study atones for all the transgressions of the sinning soul.... We can see how great the power of Torah study is from the fact that it purifies the transgressors of the Jewish people when they do *teshuvah*, even if they were guilty of idolatry.... If a person occupies himself with Torah study for its own sake – even if he previously sullied himself with tremendous sins and transgressions and sunk deep in the mud and filth of the depths of evil, *chas v'shalom* – by means of Torah learning he can still count on the light of Torah to bring him back to the good.<sup>3</sup>

We find the same idea expressed by *Rabbeinu Yonah*, who detailed the various categories of atonement for the various types of sins.<sup>4</sup> He explains that some sins are atoned by means of lashing, some by the death penalty, and some through *kares*, dying young. The severity of the sin determines its form of atonement.

*Rabbeinu Yonah* states there in article 16 that if a person is guilty of desecrating *Hashem's* Name, then undergoing suffering is not sufficient to atone for his sin. However, he writes:

He can attain atonement by means of constant Torah study and toiling in Torah, as *Chazal* say,<sup>5</sup> “אם יתכפר עון בית עלי” – “The House of Eli shall not be atoned for by animal offerings and grain offerings.”<sup>6</sup> By animal offerings and grain offerings they cannot attain atonement,

1 *Yevamos* 62b.

2 *Nefesh Hachayim* 4:31.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4.

5 *Rosh Hashanah* 18a.

6 *I Shmuel* 3:14.

but they may attain atonement by words of Torah.” ...Thus we see that Torah study heals even the most grievous of wounds. Therefore it says מרפא לשון עץ חיים – “The healing of the tongue is the Tree of Life.”<sup>7,8</sup>

Torah learning transcends the whole system. It is above and beyond the regular spiritual rules. It is the underlying reality of life and of the world, so Torah has the power to atone for all of a person’s sins, even those that *korbanos* cannot atone.

This is why R. Chaim of Volozhin wrote that a person can, by occupying himself with Torah study, purify his soul from even the deepest and filthiest evil. As *Rabbeinu Yonah* said, “Torah study heals even the most grievous of wounds.” It even atones for *chilul Hashem*.

## The Superhuman Ben Torah

*Hashem’s* world is composed of mineral, vegetable, animal and human. To truly reach the level of “human” it is not enough to just walk around on two legs. A truly “human” being is a Jew who properly learns Torah and carefully keeps *mitzvos* and perfects his character traits. The whole purpose of man’s creation was for him to perfect his character traits according to Torah and *mitzvos*, to live his life according to the Torah’s ways. His deeds of *chesed* and proper performance of *mitzvos* are the glorious expression of his humanity.

But there is a level even higher than that of “human.” There is the level of the *ben Torah*. A *ben Torah’s* learning of Torah is different and loftier than that of an ordinary person. His character traits and performance of *mitzvos* are different. They are not a matter of shape and order; rather, his entire being is attached to *Hashem* and Torah.

<sup>7</sup> *Mishlei* 15:4.

<sup>8</sup> *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:16.

Someone who sacrifices sleep for another look at the *sugya* is a *ben Torah*. Only he whose constancy in Torah learning is not limited to the regular, scheduled study sessions is living in a place above the physical world.

A lot more is expected of a *ben Torah* when it comes to his behavior toward other people. A *ben Torah* needs to display kindness and compassion at all times and in every situation. There is no such thing as a person or a type of behavior that he can’t stand. So during the period of preparing and clarifying before *Matan Torah*, he needs to conduct his interpersonal relations in a loftier way. His *bein adam l’chaveiro* needs to be on a higher level.

This was the time of year when Rabbi Akiva’s *talmidim* were held to account for not treating each other with sufficient respect. In order for the world to continue to exist properly, the place of Torah needs to be as it should. Lack of respect for others damages a person’s own right to exist. And when they died, “the world was desolate,” as *Chazal* say. This indicates that the world cannot exist, there is no life, without *bnei Torah*.

It is hard to maintain this high level of connection to Torah, *mitzvos* and *midos tovos*, but it is important for us to know the truth. The way to reach the level of *ben Torah* is in stages. *Deveikus* to Torah study, or proper devotion to *Tefilah*, working on one’s *midos*, or on enhancing one’s *mitzvah* performance. Each person according to what is most relevant to him can connect to the level of being a *ben Torah*. This is a level that lifts a person above the world, a level that not dependent of one’s scheduled learning periods and is not limited to the days and times of year when *yeshivah* is in session.

Just as the Torah enables the world to exist, so the *ben Torah* bears on his shoulders the world’s existence. He is the perfected human being whose deeds keep the world going. This is an unlimited, unending *chesed* that encompasses the entire world. ●