



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

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

SPECIAL TOPIC

The Essence of Shavu'os

Celebrate With a Seudah

Shavu'os is when we received the Torah, and it is a very special day. There is a *minhag* to treat Shavu'os night very specially. The Arizal said (and is so quoted in the *Ba'er Heitev* commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*¹) that someone who stays up learning all night on Shavu'os is guaranteed that he will not be harmed all year long. This shows that a person's very life depends on what he does this night, because this is when we received the Torah.

It is surely a very important thing to learn Torah on the day the Torah was given. And many people learn with great energy and excitement. This itself is a very important thing. But it seems that the awesomeness of Shavu'os actually stems from a different point, which *Chazal* say is the central point of the holiday. Practically speaking, whether a person attains lofty spiritual levels or misses out on them depends on this point.

Said R. Elazar: According to all views, on Shavu'os we also need **לכנס**. What is the reason? It is the day the Torah was given.²

There is a disagreement among the *Tanna'im* regarding other holidays, whether there is an obligation to have a festive *Yom Tov* meal or not. One view holds that a person may make the day **כולו לה'**, devoted solely to spiritual matters, to Torah learning and *tefilah*, and there is no need to have a *se'udah*. But on Shavu'os, everyone agrees that besides the spiritual *avodah* of the day, there is also a *mitzvah* to have a festive *Yom Tov* meal. Why? Because on this day we received the Torah.

The same section of *Gemara* continues as follows:

Rav Yosef would say on Shavu'os, "Cook for me a choice calf!" He would explain, "If not for what this day did for me, there are lots of 'Yosefs' in the street."³

1 *Orach Chayim* 494:7.

2 *Pesachim* 68b.

3 *Ibid.*

Rav Yosef went out of his way to celebrate Shavu'os with a festive meal because Torah made him what he was. If not for Shavu'os, the day when the Torah was given, he would be just another "Yosef" with nothing special about him.

We should not belittle *minhagim* of the Jewish people such as staying up to learn on Shavu'os night. Such things are very important. But we see from the *Gemara* that the real *mitzvah* of the day is the festive meal, the *se'udah*, in which we rejoice and celebrate that we received the Torah.

Now we will explain on a simple level why this is the central point of Shavu'os.

Just Be Happy

It is said in the name of the *Vilna Gaon* that the reason everyone agrees a festive meal must be held is because Shavu'os is different from other holidays, each of which has a special *mitzvah* to do. Pesach has *matzah*, Rosh Hashanah has *shofar*, and so forth. But Shavu'os has no special *mitzvah* to do on that day. The only thing we need to do on Shavu'os is to be happy, to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*, which is expressed by holding a festive meal. This why all views concur that a *se'udah* must be held on Shavu'os.

And why doesn't Shavu'os have a special *mitzvah*? The simple explanation is because it is merely a continuation of the days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. We count the *Omer* for forty-nine days, and the fiftieth day is the holiday of Shavu'os.

Sefiras Ha'Omer is all about building ourselves in preparation to receive the Torah on Shavu'os. This is the very form and shape of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. We

build one row on top of another, seven and then another seven, until the person is completely built when Shavu'os comes. Counting the *Omer* and the holiday of Shavu'os at its conclusion are a matter of *תחילתו השתדלות וסופו מתנה*. It starts with our own efforts, and ends with a gift from Heaven. During the days of the *Sefirah*, a person builds himself. But Shavu'os itself is a matter of *וירד ה' על הר סיני* – *Hashem* opens the gates of heaven and comes to give us His Torah as a gift.

Shavu'os could not possibly be anything other than the receiving of a gift. On Shavu'os we get the Torah, and regarding Torah, we pray in the *Shemoneh Esreh*: *חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל* – "Grace us with knowledge, understanding and comprehension." The word *חננו*, "Grace us," derives from *מתנת חנם*, an undeserved gift.

There are things you can't buy with money. Let's say we see someone wearing a nice watch. We might ask him where he bought it, because its value looks like something in his general price range, so it is reasonable to assume that he purchased it himself. But if we see poor *kollel* man holding a diamond worth five million dollars, we don't ask him, "Where did you buy it?" We rather ask him who gifted him with this diamond, because he could not possibly have bought it himself.

The *Torah Hakedoshah* contains within it such wondrous closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that even if a person would put all his effort and strength into fulfilling *mitzvos* and doing *ma'asim tovim*, there is no way he could thereby acquire Torah. A Jew is not capable on his own of understanding and knowing what it says in the Torah. Even *Moshe Rabbeinu* couldn't do it.



Said R. Abahu, for all the forty days that Moshe was in heaven, he learned Torah and forgot it. He said, “Master of the World, I have forty days and I don’t know anything.” What did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* do? When the forty days were over, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave him the Torah as a gift, as it says, ויתן אל משה – “He gave to Moshe.”⁴⁵

Even *Moshe Rabbeinu* received the Torah as a gift, not as something he earned by means of his deeds.

We see this idea emphasized in the wording of the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer. Before we ask for Torah, before we say וְהַשְׁכֵּל דְעָה בִּינָה וְהַשְׁכֵּל, “Grace us with knowledge, understanding and comprehension,” we preface it by saying אַתָּה חוֹנֵן – “You graciously bestow knowledge upon human beings.” There is no such preface when we ask for forgiveness (סְלַח לָנוּ) or healing (רַפְּאוּנוּ ה') or sustenance (בְּרַךְ עָלֵינוּ). But we do say it before asking for Torah, because asking for Torah is asking for *Hashem* Himself. Thus, we first offer a praise of *Hashem*, without which we would be lacking the requisite merit to even ask for such a thing. The giving of Torah is always as an undeserved gift, מִתְּנָם חִינָם.

Shavu'os is the day we received the Torah, and like it was back then at *Har Sinai*, so it is every year. *Hashem* opens the gates of heaven and pours out a great flow of Torah, completely independent of our deeds. Therefore, we were not commanded to perform any *mitzvah* on this day.

In order to leave Egypt, the Jewish people needed to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* though the blood of *korban Pesach* and the blood of *milah*. So every year, on Pesach, we have certain *mitzvos* to do, which are related to this. But to merit receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people did nothing. The Torah was given as gift.

I Want Torah

Although the Torah is given to us totally as a gift and we don't need to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* in order to receive it, there is one thing that is required of the recipient of a gift, and that is to want the gift. This is a necessary precondition for the gifting to take place.

When were the nations of the world disqualified by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? From the time that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave the Torah at Sinai. He went around to all the nations, offering them to receive the Torah, and they didn't want, as it says, ה' מְסִינֵי בָא – “*Hashem* came from Sinai.”

He said to the people of Eisav, “Will you accept My Torah?” They replied, “What is written in it?” He answered, “You shall not kill.” They said to Him, “That is what we rely on...” And so He said to the people of Yishmael, “Will you accept My Torah?” They replied, “What is written in it?” He answered, “You shall not steal.” They said, “That is what we rely on... we will not accept it. Give it to Your people, as it says, ה' עוֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן – “*Hashem* gives strength [i.e., Torah] to His people.”

Hashem said to them, “Those who accept My Torah are the ones I will bless with peace, as it says, ה' יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם – “*Hashem* will bless His people with peace.”⁶

The only thing the Jewish people did to receive the Torah was want it and desire it. Moshe led the people out of the camp toward *Hashem* to receive the Torah, and they went.⁷ Since they really desired the Torah, they received it.

The same is true today. Unlike Pesach, where the main *avodah* is connected to *matzah*, the *avodah*

4 *Shemos* 31:18.

5 *Shemos Rabbah* 41:6.

6 *Devarim Rabbah*, Parshas Ekev.

7 *Shemos* 19:17.

on Shavu'os is just to want the gift of Torah and to value it. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is waiting to see, so to speak, what we will do with His holy Torah.

This may be compared to someone who wants to give his friend a precious diamond. But he will give it to him only if he knows that his friend will guard it well and appreciate its value. If he sees that

the recipient of the diamond is going to play with it in the sandbox, there is no way he will give it to him.

Similarly, on Shavu'os we don't have to do any special *mitzvos*. We just have to want the *Torah Hakadoshah*, that's all. This is the main *avodah* of the day. ●

SPECIAL TOPIC

The Royal Rus (Part 2)

Lifting her Spirits

Now that we have described Rus, let's move on to another key figure in the story, and that's Boaz.

As we said, Boaz was the *Gedol Hador* back then. He was a judge and a leader, he had a large family, and he was also very wealthy and owned a lot of fields.

And one day, a Moabite woman goes into his fields. As we explained, Jews back then looked down on Moavim and detested them. But he noticed that she is honest and modest.

He went up to her and said to her:

הַגִּדְּהַגְד לִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת חַמּוֹתַי אַחֲרַי
מוֹת אִישׁוֹ וַתַּעֲזְבִי אֶבְיָהּ וְאֶמְךָ וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ
וַתֵּלְכִי אֶל עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ תְּמוּל שְׁלוֹשׁ.
יְשִׁלֵּם ה' פְּעֻלְךָ וְתִהְיֶה מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלֵמָה
מֵעַם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּאת לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת
כְּנָפָיו – It was surely told to me all that you
did for your mother-in-law after the death
of your husband, that you left your father
and mother and homeland, and went to
a people that you didn't know previously.
May *Hashem* repay your good deeds,
and may your reward be complete from
Hashem the G-d of Yisrael, as you have
come to shelter under His wings.¹

1 Rus 2:11-12.

Boaz's message to her was that he knows she left her parents and family and royal riches behind, in order to be close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He told her that she is a wonderful woman and is going in the footsteps of the *Imahos*, and *Hashem* will help her.

For the first time, she heard words that lifted her spirits.

Rus was very moved:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֲמָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךָ אֲדֹנָי כִּי נִחַמְתָּנִי וְכִי
דְּבַרְתָּ עָלַי לֵב שִׁפְחוֹתְךָ – She said, “May I find
favor in your eyes, my master, for you have
consoled me, and you have spoken kind
words to the heart of your maidservant.”²

This was her message to him: Do you know who you are talking to? A Moabite woman. I never heard words like that. I only got put down. And all of the sudden, the *Gedol Hador* has no one to talk to other than a lowly person like myself!

He then told her to let him know if anyone mistreats her, and he will stick up for her. And she is invited to eat at his table, too.

As if that wasn't enough, he told his workers to show her special consideration and let her glean ears

2 *Ibid* v. 13.

of grain where it normally was not allowed, and they should also leave a little extra lying around for her to take.

What a wonderful personality Boaz was. He went out of his way to uplift her. He was not so sure yet whether she was actually allowed to marry a Jew, as she was a Moabite, but he spoke nicely to her and made her happy and helped her out as much as he could.

A Marriage Proposal

Now we come to a very deep point.

If a person passes away, and he has children, the children are his continuation. But if a person dies without children, this is a big tragedy. The Rambam wrote³ that a person doesn't stop fearing death until he gets married. Because if he is married, from now on, he has continuation. If he didn't marry, one day he is liable to die without any continuation. However, if he is a *talmid chacham*, and he has *talmidim*, that is his continuation. But naturally speaking, children are a person's continuation.

And the Torah taught us that there is a way to establish and preserve the name of a deceased person who had no children, and thereby do a great *chesed* for his soul. This is by fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *yibum*, which entails marrying the widow of the deceased.

In principle, the best *yibum* is when it is performed by the deceased person's closest relative, which is his father. So, in principle, the father should marry his son's wife. But the Torah forbid this and placed the *mitzvah* on the brother of the deceased. In any case, it is a great thing for one of the relatives of the deceased to marry the widow and thereby establish and preserve the name of the deceased in the world.

Machlon and Kilyon, the deceased husbands of Rus and Orpah, had no children. So Rus was eligible for *yibum*. *Halachically* speaking, it was not possible to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *yibum*, because there were no remaining brothers. Yet, Naomi proposed that Boaz

should marry Rus, because she felt that spiritually speaking, it was the right thing to do, and would save the *neshamah* of her deceased son, who was a great man.

Naomi was of the opinion that if one of the relatives of Machlon, whether it be a cousin or even a second cousin, would marry Rus, this would be a great *chesed* for Machlon's soul, although there was no *Halachic* obligation to do this. So she told Rus: I can't command you to do this. I can only propose it as an idea. Boaz is our second cousin. I know that he is pretty old already, but if you marry him, it will be a great *chesed* for the soul of my son, and I know that your greatest aspiration is to be close to *Hashem*.

Naturally speaking, Rus should have told her that she doesn't want to marry a second cousin who is well into his eighties, as she has no obligation to do so. She was still young and hoped to build a home. It would make much more sense for Boaz to help find her a *shidduch* with a man her age, so she could have a future ahead of her.

But Rus didn't think about anything. She just told Naomi that she will do whatever she says.

This was the wonderful personality named Rus. She was ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of a Jew. This is why she merited becoming the mother of the *malchus* of the Jewish people.

And What does Boaz Say?

After Rus agreed to the idea, Naomi proceeded to arrange the *shidduch* between Rus and Boaz.

They couldn't do it the normal way, and send a *shadchan* to Boaz to offer him Rus as a potential marriage partner, because no one in his right mind would go to Boaz, the *Gedol Hador* of the Jewish people, and suggest that he marry a impoverished young lady who is a widow, and a Moabite on top of it. It would be an insult just to make such an offer.

The only way was to go straight to Boaz himself, because he was a great man, and surely knew how to appreciate the special personality that Rus possessed. If she will approach him directly, he will

³ Collected Writings of the Rambam, *Pirkei Hahatzlacha*.

already know what to do.

So Naomi says to Rus: Boaz is in the middle of the harvest, and will be sleeping in the barn tonight. Go to him, and he will tell you what you need to do.

Now let's get back to Boaz. He was an elderly man, a leader of the Jewish people. Yesterday he saw this woman gleaning in his field, and since he noticed that she behaves modestly, he spoke to her words of encouragement, but he didn't really know so much about her at this point. Now all the sudden, in the middle of the night, he sees her lying at his feet in the barn.

What would be the expected reaction, the normal reaction, in such a scenario? He would yell at her: What do you think you are doing here? Disgusting! Get out of here!! Now I know you are just like the lowly Moabites you come from.

If he would have said this, *David Hamelech* would not have come to the world, and neither would *Mashiach*.

But Boaz was a such a wonderful personality. He restrained his outrage. He didn't get angry. He just turned to her with a question: מִי אַתְּ – “Who are you?”⁴ In other words: Please explain to me what this is all about and what you are doing here.

She answered that she came to save a *neshamah*. The *neshamah* of her dear deceased husband. Boaz heard that, and was very moved:

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַה' בְּתִי הַיְטִבְתָּ חֶסֶדְךָ
הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן – He said, “You are
blessed to *Hashem*, my daughter! Your
latter *chesed* is greater than the former.”⁵

He told her that what she is doing now is more beautiful than everything she did up until this point.

Boaz's reaction went way beyond anything that could be expected. You could say it was miraculous.

David Hamelech declares in *Tehillim*:

4 Rus 3:9.

5 *Ibid* v. 10.

חֲצוֹת לַיְלָה אָקוּם לְךָ עַל מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ
צִדְקָךָ – At midnight I will rise to give thanks
to You for Your righteous judgments.⁶

What are these “righteous judgments” that *David Hamelech* got up in the middle of the night to thank *Hashem* for?

The “judgments” that You brought on the Ammonites and Moabites, and the “righteous” kindnesses that you performed with my grandfather and my grandmother. Because if Boaz would have quickly responded to her with a single curse, where would I have come from? And not only did he not curse her, he even blessed her, as it says, “You are blessed to *Hashem*, my daughter!”⁷⁸

David Hamelech rose at midnight to thank *Hashem* for the fact that his grandfather Boaz didn't say a single harsh word to his grandmother when she came to him in the barn. It was a miraculous event. Only a person as great as Boaz would be able to behave in such a manner.

And the dedication that Rus had to *Hashem* was so incredibly great, too. If Naomi had not sent her, there is no way in the world she would have done such a thing. She would have rather died than do something like that. But Naomi told her that she has a mission to accomplish. She needs to go and save a Jewish soul.

This was a very high-risk undertaking. Rus knew that if Boaz would curse her, she would be lost forever. Imagine that the Chofetz Chayim would curse someone. And Boaz was a *navi*, and the greatest Torah sage of his generation. If he would say even one word of curse to her, she's finished. But she was not to be deterred by anything, because Naomi sent her.

6 *Tehillim* 119:62.

7 *Ibid* v. 9.

8 *Rus Rabbah* 6:1.

From two uplifted people like this comes *David Hamelech*.

It's Not Over Yet

The next day, Naomi sends Rus back to Boaz, this time publicly and openly. Rus repeats her request that Boaz marry her.

Obviously, she could just as well get married to a young man her age, not an elderly gentleman well into his eighties. What does she stand to gain from marrying Boaz, of all people? Why is this a good marriage match?

We would expect Boaz to respond something like, “Well, okay, I heard your request. I will think about it.”

But Boaz didn't waste any time. Right that same day, he gathered the elders of the generation, of whom he was the greatest, and told them what transpired with Naomi and Rus, and how it is necessary to build the family. There was another figure there, Ploni Almoni, who was actually a closer relative to Rus than Boaz was. Boaz suggested that he buy the field, so it will remain on the name of the family. However, this would necessitate marrying Rus.

Ploni Almoni, the closest relative, the *goel*, wasn't interested. He was not sure it was even permitted to marry a Moabite woman, as the *Halachah* regarding this case had not yet been ruled. He was concerned that at some future point, people might say the marriage was illegitimate, and that would affect the status of any children he would have from her.

But Boaz knew that according to *Halachah*, a Moabite woman may marry a Jewish man. The Torah only forbids a Moabite man marrying a Jewish woman. So he took the risk. He didn't worry that people might try to raise an objection at some later point. And he took his step in order to do a *chesed* to a Jewish soul, as explained above.

When he decided to marry Rus, he didn't wait a single day. It's a *mitzvah*, and as such, it should be

performed right away, without delay.

The *chuppah* was held that evening. They got married, and before morning came, Boaz passed away. If he would have waited another day, if he would have said, “Okay, it's a *mitzvah*, but I don't have to rush into it, there are other *mitzvos* too,” then there would be no *David Hamelech*.

When Rus saw that Boaz passed away, we might expect her to raise her eyes to Heaven and say: *Ribono shel Olam!* Is this what I deserve? I was a princess, I lived in royal luxury, but I gave up everything. I walked to this country by foot, even though I could have traveled in a carriage. And when I arrived here, I just got the cold shoulder from everybody. But I didn't care. The main thing is to be close to the Jewish people. And Naomi, who is my master and teacher, told me that I should marry this elderly Jew, for the sake of her deceased son, because this is the only way to save his *neshamah*. So I did that, too. I married an old man, and now he died. Is this what I deserve, *Hashem*?

But she didn't complain. She accepted everything with love. And when her son was born, she took the little baby to Naomi her mother-in-law and said: My dear mother-in-law, this child who was born has the *neshamah* of your son, of my deceased husband. *Baruch Hashem*, we did the *mitzvah* completely.

And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave her full reward. *Chazal* say that her son was the greatest *tzaddik* of all generations, and his grandson was *David Hamelech*.

She merited seeing with her own eyes not just *David Hamelech* but also his son Shlomo and the *Beis Hamikdash* as well.

Rus the Moabite saw the grandson of her grandson, who was Shlomo, ruling as king, as it says **וַיִּשֶׂם כְּסֵא לְאִם הַמֶּלֶךְ** – “Shlomo set up a throne for the mother of the king,”⁹ and R. Elazar says that this means for the matriarch of the royal dynasty.¹⁰

9 I *Melachim* 2:19.

10 *Bava Basra* 91b.

After all the suffering Rus went through, after her wondrous devotion to *Hashem* and His Torah, she saw such great satisfaction and *nachas*. She even lived to see the *Beis Hamikdash* built by her great grandchild Shlomo, and the magnificent kingdom of Yisrael that he ruled over.

So What do We Learn from This?

This story has a lesson. There are a lot of different kinds of *chesed* that a person can do. But the true *chesed*, the pure *chesed*, is like Rus did. It is a *chesed* that the one who does it has no future to look forward to, no one to appreciate what he or she did. This is the special *chesed* for the Jewish people.

And there's another lesson here: Rus demonstrated to the Jewish people that the true quality of the Jewish people is not necessarily something that you inherit. She hailed from Moav, yet she acquired this quality in the fullest way.

This shows that you don't necessarily have to learn it from your parents. If a person acquires on his own the trait of *chesed* in its fullest, he can become the parent of the *Mashiach*.

Most of us were indeed born as Jews. But some among us might feel limited or disadvantaged by the fact that we were not born and raised in a Torah-observant home, or were not privileged to study in the best Torah educational institutions, and so forth. However, if a person has the proper devotion and motivation, if he attaches himself to a *tzaddik* and learns from him and sticks with him because he has a fierce desire to be connected to *Hashem*, like Rus did with Naomi, there are no limits on the greatness he can achieve.

Hashem doesn't forget the devotion we show in dark times. In the end, there will be so much light and illumination, so much beauty and so much *nachas*, like it was with Rus, who merited becoming

the matriarch of the Jewish kingdom.

And from Boaz, we should learn how great it is not to be quick to anger. We should learn how to control ourselves and be careful not to step on people, not to hurt their feelings.

As an example, I will tell you a personal story. I got married shortly before Pesach, and for our first Pesach, we were by my father-in-law. Nowadays, there are all sorts of techniques to check the lettuce to be used for *Maror* from bugs, but in those days, you would just sit and examine each leaf individually, and even after that, you wouldn't be sure that it is a hundred percent clean from bugs. So in my home, we would eat only the stems of the lettuce, not the leaves, so we could fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Maror* in the best possible way without taking any chances of ingesting bugs.

On *Seder* night, after *Maariv*, I came to the home of my father-in-law. I walked into the kitchen, and to my surprise and consternation, I saw all the lettuce leaves nicely arranged, and all the stems thrown in the garbage.

All I needed to do was yell, "Oh no, oh no, the stems are all in the garbage! No *Maror* tonight!!" and it would have ruined the whole atmosphere of the *Seder*.

That would be exactly the wrong thing to do. We need to maintain control over ourselves, and not just react, not just blurt out exactly the wrong thing to say. There are people around us, and they have feelings. *Maror* is a wonderful *mitzvah*. But with one word, you can "kill" someone.

On the wonderful day of Shavu'os, when the heavens open up and Divine plenty descends to the world, let's all remember the important things we learn from Rus and from Boaz, from whom come *Melech Hamashiach*, may he redeem us soon. ●