

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.

PEARLS OF WISDOM
FROM THE PARSHAH

Those Little Fights

וַיַּעֲלוּ מֵעַל מִשְׁכַּן קִרְחָ וְאַבְיָרָם וְדָתָן וְאַבְיָרָם מִסָּבִיב וְגו' וְנִשְׂיָהֶם וּבְנֵיהֶם וְטַפָּם: (במדבר טז, כז)

They moved away from the dwellings of Korach, Dasan and Aviram all around... and their wives and children and infants. (*Bemidbar 16:26*)

“Their wives and children and infants” – This shows how destructive quarrelling is. The earthly court of justice punishes only from the age of puberty, and the Heavenly court of justice only from the age of twenty. But here, even sucklings perished. (*Rashi*)

It is well known by all, and particularly by Jews, that quarreling is a bad thing. It is deplorable and damaging. It can destroy entire towns, communities and families, may *Hashem* protect us.

The Torah recounts how the fire of *machlokes* devours old and young alike, both the evil and the righteous. So unfortunate is the place, the community, the *shul* or the family in which a fight breaks out! Because once it breaks out, it's very hard to stop. It is like a fierce wildfire that is insatiable. It sweeps up more and more, and leaves behind just ruin, destruction and tragedy.

לְכֵן הַמְּשַׁכֵּל בְּעֵת הַהֵיא יָדָם – “Therefore, the intelligent person will remain silent at that time.”¹

When there is a quarrel, the most important thing is to keep quiet. Sometimes a person is sure he is right, and is so indignant about the injustice that was done to him by the other party. The desire builds up inside him to answer back tit-for-tat, as if a fire is building up within him. But if he keeps himself under control and holds his quiet, about him it is written:

For every single moment that a person closes his mouth, he merits the hidden light that no angel or creature can even imagine.²

Not only that, but the entire world's existence is in his merit:

1 Amos 5:13.

2 Letter of Vilna Ga'on, citing a *Midrash*.

The world continues to exist only for he who stops (בולם) his mouth at a time of quarrel, as it says³, על בלימה⁴.

Although people know a big *machlokes* is bad, they aren't as concerned about little arguments and squabbles at home. They tend to think it isn't really such a big deal.

The truth is that every *machlokes*, even the smallest, is potentially disastrous. We see in the Torah passage about the *sotah* that *Hashem* allows His holy Name, inscribed with proper sanctity on parchment, to be dissolved in water, in order to bring peace between husband and wife. If there isn't domestic harmony, it is worse than erasing *Hashem's* holy Name.

The rule is that "the earthly kingdom resembles the Heavenly kingdom."⁵ In other words, *Hashem* acts toward us as we act ourselves. Let's say you would be

invited as a guest in a certain home and when you got there you found out that they are embroiled in petty fights and quarrels. This would be so hard to endure. You would wish you never came there in the first place and would just be waiting for a chance to leave. So it is with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He doesn't want to dwell in a home where there is fighting, and He takes His *Shechinah* away from such a place right away.

The converse is true as well. If your spouse speaks sharply to you at home, but you keep quiet and let it go by, and afterward you don't mentally dwell on the incident but simply forget about it – this causes the *Shechinah* to dwell in the world in general and in your home especially.

Just as engaging in *machlokes* brings curse, so avoiding *machlokes* brings blessing, life and health to a person and his family. All the gates of *berachah* and good fortune open up for him.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu found no more fitting vessel to hold blessing for the Jewish people than peace.⁶

⁶ Devarim Rabbah 5:15.

³ Iyov 26:7.

⁴ Chulin 89a.

⁵ Berachos 58a.

No One is 100% Right

ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו. (במדבר יז, ה)

One should not be like Korach and like his congregation. (*Bemidbar* 17:5)

Due to a certain incident that took place, I offered an innovative interpretation of this *pasuk*. ולא יהיה – "It is not going to be" like Korach and his congregation.

In other words, a case like the controversy of Korach is not going to repeat itself. That was a unique event in history. The *machlokes* of Korach was black and white. *Moshe Rabbeinu* was 100.00%

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורגר ז"ל
ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס ז"ל

נדבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

right and Korach was 0.00% right. There was not even a tiny fraction of truth to Korach's claims.

This type of *machlokes* happened only once in history. With every other disagreement from then until now, there is never one side that is 100% right. Neither side has the absolute truth. It is always a matter of which is more right.

If we keep this in mind, if we remember that even our adversary has a point, that there is no absolute truth, many fights will just dissolve.

We need to know that the main thing in Judaism is keeping the laws of the Torah. When two *bnei Torah* meet, two people who serve *Hashem* and are looking for the truth, but who were raised on different schools of thought regarding *avodas*

Hashem, they need to pay attention to the fact that despite their divergent approaches and conflicting opinions, they actually agree on all the fundamental points of *Yiddishkeit* and have no disagreement regarding them.

When uncertainties arise, each person should decide them according to the *derech* he received from his rabbis and teachers. But this doesn't mean something is wrong with his friend who was taught a different *derech*.

The abundance of views and approaches that exists regarding Torah issues is actually the beauty of the Torah. Together with all the truth, each has his own hue, his own approach and his own understanding. ●

PARSHA TOPIC

Just Like it Always Was

כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כָּלָם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהַל ה' (במדבר טז, ג)

The whole congregation are all holy, and *Hashem* is in their midst, so why do you lord it over the congregation of *Hashem*? (*Bemidbar* 17:5)

The Crown of Crowns

We are going to talk about Korach, but first, some background.

Pirkei Avos speaks of *kesarim*, crowns. But it's not clear how many there are.

There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of kingship, and the crown of a good name goes on top of them.¹

So how many crowns are there, three or four?

¹ *Pirkei Avos* 4:13.

First it says three, but then it mentions another one, the crown of *shem tov*, a good name.

The common explanation is that the crown of a good name is not really a crown on its own. It rather adorns the other three crowns. There is a crown of Torah that is adorned by also having a good name, and there is a crown of Torah that is not adorned by a good name. There is a crown of *malchus* with a good name, and one without. This is what it means that the crown of a good name "goes on top of them." It adorns the other three crowns.

I am not so sure this is really the simple meaning of the statement in *Pirkei Avos*. I think it means

that there really are four crowns. But the crown of a good name is so high that it is not counted along with the other three. It is on a completely different *madreigah*.

What is this *keser shem tov*, this crown of a good name?

טוב שם משמן טוב – A name is better than good oil.²

The *Midrash* tells us in what ways a good name is better than good oil:

Good oil goes down, while a good name goes up. Good oil is temporary, while a good name is forever. Good oil runs out, while a good name does not run out. Good oil costs money, while a good name is for free. Good oil is only for the living, while a good name is for the living and for the dead. Good oil is for the wealthy, while a good name is for the poor and the wealthy.

[The scent of] good oil goes from the side room to the main room, while a good name goes all around the world. Good oil dissipates when it falls on water, and a good name does not dissipate when it falls on water. Good oil burns up when it falls into fire, while a good name does not burn up when it falls into fire.³

Now let's take it a step further. The *Midrash* goes on to apply the idea in a different way:

Said R. Yehudah son of R. Simon: We see that people of good oil went into the place of the living, and came out burnt, whereas people of good name went into the place of the dead, and came out alive.

Nadav and Avihu went into the place of the living, and died. Chananyah, Mishael and Azariah went into a fiery furnace, and

came out alive. For this it says, "A name is better than good oil."⁴

Now we see that "good oil" is not just a physical object. It refers also to Nadav and Avihu, who were the greatest people alive at the time of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. They represented the peak of Torah. But it was Torah without a good name, and therefore it had the qualities mentioned in the first part of the *Midrash*. It goes down, it runs out, it dissipates in water, etc. Whereas Torah with a good name is exactly the opposite. It does not go down, it does not get burnt up, etc.

The Self-Made Name

What's really the point here? What's so important about a name?

A name defines a person's essence. *Adam Harishon's* wisdom surpassed that of the angels because he was able to give names to all the animals.⁵ This is a very great wisdom, because naming something is defining its essence.

There is a certain level in *avodas Hashem* where a person finds his *ruchniyus* inside himself. It is internal. The classic example is *Avraham Avinu*, who "learned Torah from himself."⁶ There is also a level where a person learns Torah, but his Torah is not from himself, it is not from his innate person.

When a person "has a good name," this means the virtue, the *madreigah* he attained, is his. It comes from himself. But "good oil" means his *madreigah*, however high it may be, came to him from an external source. In such a case, it has the qualities of physical oil. It goes down, it runs out, etc.

The difference between *Avraham Avinu* and Noach was that Noach needed external support from *Hashem*, as it says את האלקים התהלך נח – "Noach walked with G-d."⁷ Now, there is nothing wrong with "walking with G-d." It's actually a very

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Bereishis Rabbah* 17:4.

6 *Ibid* 96:3.

7 *Bereishis* 6:9.

2 *Koheles* 7:1.

3 *Koheles Rabbah* 7:1.

high *madreigah*. If only we were on that *madreigah*. But it's still not the high level that *Avraham Avinu* attained. About Avraham it says הַתְּהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וְהָיָה תְּמִים – Walk before Me, and be perfected.”⁸ This implies that he walked on his own.

Now we come to a very interesting explanation of the well-known *pasuk* ה' וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה' – “And He called him by *Hashem's* Name.”⁹ The Ibn Ezra explains that the one calling the name is *Hashem* Himself. Why? Because only *Hashem* can call a name. “Don't be surprised that *Hashem* is calling the name, because He alone knows and is knowledge and is known. This is a very deep matter.”¹⁰

This expresses *Hashem's* perfection, because “name” represents essence, it implies self-sufficiency, it means non-dependence on external sources. As the Ibn Ezra said, “This is a very deep matter.”

R. Yerucham of Mir wrote on this subject and commented that we should try to emulate this trait. Just as *Hashem* talks with Himself and about Himself, He is singular and unique, and is involved only with Himself and from Himself, so a person should always talk with himself and to himself. R. Yerucham concluded by saying, “This matter is truly very deep and awesome.”

If a person wants to know where he is really holding, what kind of a person he is, how much his *tzelem Elokim* is expressing itself, then he needs to find his *Yiddishkeit* and his Torah when he is alone, with no one but himself there. Then he talks with himself, to himself, like *Hashem* does, so to speak.

This is *shem tov*, a good name. It means that a person finds his own life, his own *hasmadah*, his own *tefilah*. He finds everything in and of himself.

By contrast, there is a person of “good oil.” This is a wonderful *madreigah*. But if such a person were to be asked, “What is your name?” he would not mention his personal name. He would say something like, “I am a *bachur* from such-and-such

a *yeshivah*.” In other words, that's how he identifies. His *ruchniyus* is not in and of himself. It is from his environment. However, that's not what a “name” is. A name is a person's own self.

If someone like that would find himself all on his own, without any supportive environment or defining framework, he might be embarrassed to discover the sorry *madreigah* he is truly on.

This is why “a good name is better than good oil.”

The Korach Mistake

This is what Korach got wrong.

He argued that “the entire congregation is holy and *Hashem* is in their midst.” It did not make sense to him that there should be only one leader of the Jewish people, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, through whom everyone else will receive the Torah. Why should there be only one *Kohen Gadol* and one *Navi*?

Korach wanted everyone to be spiritually great. He wanted everyone to be equal. But that's not the way it works.

In a certain way, he was right. The crown of Torah is indeed intended for every Jew.

The crown of Torah is sitting and waiting, available to all Jews, as it says תּוֹרָה צוּה לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה – “Moshe commanded us Torah, which is a heritage for [all] the congregation of Yaakov.”¹¹ Whoever who wishes can come and take it.¹²

But Korach could not accept the fact that there is a *shaliach tzibbur* for everyone. He wanted the whole congregation to do it, because they are all equally holy.

Korach didn't know that when *Hashem* gave the Torah through *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the Torah retained the same *kedushah* and clarity that it had when it was spoken from *Hashem's* mouth.

Aharon and his sons were happy and joyous to hear words of Torah and receive

8 *Ibid* 17:1.

9 *Shemos* 34:5.

10 *Ibn Ezra, Shemos* 34:5.

11 *Devarim* 33:4.

12 *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:1.

them from the mouth of Moshe as they would be to hear them from the mouth of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.¹³

This idea is explained at length in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*. It is actually one of the deepest points in the whole *sefer*.

The *kedushah* of the Torah is even greater and more awesome than that of the spiritual worlds above. Although the lofty worlds above have very great *kedushah*, when they devolve and descend, they go down in tremendous steps. Indeed, each world is stamped with the form of all the patterns of the world above it, in the same likeness and image, as is known. Nevertheless, its level of *kedushah* and light bears no comparison to that of the world above it.

The holy Torah, too, descended and devolved, level after level, from its upper holy root and source, and it transversed countless stages from one world to another and from one level to another. Nevertheless, it retains its original *kedushah* just like in its original holy root and source. Even in this world, it is just as it originally was above. It is completely holy and one may not treat it as mundane, *chas v'shalom*... because it always retains its original *kedushah*.

This is also what *Chazal* meant when they said in the *Zohar* that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Torah are one. Although the worlds descend and devolve level after level, and change greatly in the degree of their *kedushah*, all this is true

¹³ *Yalkut Shimoni, Tzav 519.*

only from our side. But from *Hashem's* side, there is no difference and change of places, *chas v'shalom*.

This is as it is written: **אני ה' לא שניתתי** – “I, *Hashem*, have not changed.”¹⁴ His *kedushah* doesn't change. And so it is with the holy Torah. Even though it descended and devolved over a course of many tremendous steps, it has not changed in its *kedushah* at all. It retains its original *kedushah* even in this lowest of worlds, just as it was when it was with *Hashem* in its source and root. No difference and change in place affects this at all.¹⁵

So we see that the Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu* has the very same level of *kedushah* it possessed when it was spoken from *Hashem's* mouth.

Korach didn't know this. He didn't realize that when we learn Torah, it's straight from *Hashem*. **כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה** – “*Hashem* gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.”¹⁶

Each person, when he learns Torah from his *rebbe*, it is exactly like learning it straight from the mouth of *Hashem*, with no difference.

Korach thought that Torah has its full *kedushah* and clarity only if you learn it directly from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. But when you receive Torah from Moshe, it passed through a conduit of flesh and blood, and it's not the same thing anymore.

But we know that Torah never changes. ●

¹⁴ *Malachi 3:6.*

¹⁵ *Nefesh Hachayim 4:27.*

¹⁶ *Mishlei 2:6.*