



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

Stop Explaining Everything

וְנָתַתָּה אֶת הַבְּרָכָה עַל הָר גֶּרִיזִים וְאֶת הַקְּלָלָה עַל הָר עִיבָל. (דברים יא, כט)

You shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eval.
(*Devarim* 11:29)

There are people who seek to explain current events according to teachings of *Chazal* or other Torah sources. Whatever takes place, they have the answers. They can tell you what it is and why it happened.

This whole approach is based on a mistake.

Let's first talk about how to understand Torah itself. We can't interpret and explain the *pesukim* of the Torah without the teachings of *Chazal* to guide us and enlighten us, and added to that, we also need the commentaries of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*. And there are understandings that are passed down from *rav* to *talmid*. We can't just open up a *Chumash* and expect to make sense out of the *pesukim* all on our own. We need the chain of tradition to lead us to a correct understanding.

It is the same with everything *Hashem* does in the world. An act of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the world is like a verse in *Chumash*. We can't just go and interpret it on our own, according to whatever teaching of *Chazal* seems to fit, because we don't have the benefit of a chain of traditional Torah teachings on it.

Furthermore, we don't know how to properly define and identify phenomena in the world. The *pasuk* or teaching of *Chazal* that we want to apply to a certain event might be speaking of a completely different phenomenon.

An example of this is the pronouncement of the blessings and curses on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval. When we read this *parshah* in the Torah, we might picture two big, impressive mountains, on one of which the blessings were affixed, and on the

other, the curses. But *Tosafos* says,¹ citing the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, that they were just two lumps of earth. They were not mountains and not even hills. We simply have no idea what physical phenomena the *pesukim* are describing without the chain of tradition to explain it to us.

Now let's apply this example to the war of *Gog uMagog*. A lot of people talk about *Gog uMagog*. They say that this person and nation is *Gog uMagog*,

1 *Sotah* 33b s.v. *Mul*.

or that person and nation is *Gog uMagog*. But there is no one among us who can possibly know these things. We think that *Gog uMagog* is talking about a big war with a powerful nation, etc etc. But it might not even be talking about an event that we would call a war. It might be an event that we would see as insignificant, but it is actually the war of *Gog uMagog*.

We can't figure everything out. We don't have the ability to know how the Torah would interpret current events. It's beyond us. ●

Children at the Top

בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. (דברים יד, א)

You are children to Hashem your G-d. (*Devarim* 14:1)

Human beings have different levels:

Human beings are beloved, for they were created in the image [of G-d]. But it is by a special love that they were informed that they were created in His image, as it says: – כי בצלם אלקים עשה את האדם – “For He made man in the image of G-d.”¹

The Jewish people are beloved, for they are called *Hashem's* “children.” But it is by a special love that they were informed that they are called *Hashem's* “children,”

as it says: – בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם – “You are children to *Hashem* your G-d.”²

The Jewish people are beloved, for they were given a precious instrument; but it is by a special love that they were informed that they were given a precious instrument, with which the world was created. As it says: – כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו – “For I have given you a good teaching; do not abandon My Torah.”^{3,4}

1 *Bereishis* 9:6.

2 *Devarim* 14:1.

3 *Mishlei* 4:2.

4 *Avos* 3:14.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל
ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נדידהם ~ עשרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

The first level is the *tzelem Elokim* that a Jew has. The second is to be *Hashem's* "children." [The third is "that they were given a *kli chemdah*," a precious instrument, which refers to the Torah, but we are not focusing on that point in this piece.]

The *Mishnah* doesn't just list these three levels. It says, "But it is by a special love that they were informed...." This is usually explained to mean that the person is aware of the special quality he was granted. For instance, he is aware that he was created in G-d's image. Because if a person doesn't know that he has a *tzelem Elokim*, he is playing with fire, [since it grants him enormous powers that could be destructive].

It is like putting a child in front of the central electricity panel of an entire country, and the child is playing with the buttons. He doesn't know what the buttons are, and he is liable to cut off an entire city from the electric grid just when critical operations are being performed in the hospital. This is why it is "by a special love" that a person is informed that he was created with a *tzelem Elokim* [by virtue of which his actions have profound influence on the upper and lower worlds]. It is like telling a person, "You should know that you have special powers."

Now let's talk about a higher level mentioned in the above-quoted *Mishnah*: The Jewish people are beloved, for they are called *Hashem's* "children." Imagine to yourself that the king's son needs the assistance of the king, but he doesn't know that the king is actually his own father. There is a long line of people waiting for an audience with the king. There are thousands of people on the waiting list. Now the son joins at the end of the line.

If they knew who he was, they would say to him: Come on, don't be foolish! You are the king's son. Why are you waiting at the end of the line? Just walk right into the palace, go into the royal chamber, and jump up and down and say, "Dad! I'm over here!" Because all the gates are open for the king's son.

But he doesn't know all this. He thinks he is just another one of the kingdom's citizens. That's why the *Mishnah* tells us, "It is by a special love that they were informed that they are called *Hashem's* 'children,' as it says, 'You are children to *Hashem* your G-d.'" You should know that He is your Father!

We are *Hashem's* children, and the greatest case of unconditional love is a parent's love for his children. Because even the love between husband and wife is conditional. There is such a thing as divorce. But when it comes to a child, even if the child is ill, and the parent gets no benefit or enjoyment from him, the parent might spend millions of dollars on him, and stay by his bed day and night, showing an unreasonable and disproportional degree of concern for him.

Why?

Because it's his child. If the parent gave birth to him, he loves him and is willing to make sacrifices for him.

We find a deeper explanation of being *Hashem's* children in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*. There it is explained that *tzelem Elokim* relates to the Divine Name *Elokim*, which expresses the concept that G-d possesses all the powers and faculties and forces that exist. When we say that a Jew has *tzelem Elokim*, we mean that G-d has tremendous power, and also human beings have tremendous power, G-dly power, so to speak. G-d creates worlds, and also human beings have the ability to create worlds.

But there is something even loftier than this: being *Hashem's* children. The *pasuk* does not say בָּנִים *בְּנֵי* אֱלֹהִים but rather אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לְבָנָיו. The level of being *Hashem's* children relates to the Divine Name *Yud Keh Vav Keh*. Being in *Hashem's* image relates us to the Name *Elokim*, but being *Hashem's* children goes even higher than that, and relates us to the Name *Yud Keh Vav Keh*. This is a completely different relationship, above and beyond the Name *Elokim*. ●

לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן. (דברים טז, ז)

Do not harden your heart and do not close your hand from your impoverished brother. (*Devarim* 16:7)

Tzedakah Connects

Money is the most material thing in the world. The whole world revolves around money. Everyone works for money and looks for money. Money expresses strength and power. With money you can't buy intelligence and health, neither can you buy a *daf Gemara*. But when it comes to material matters, money is the way to get them. As said *Shlomo Hamelech*, the wisest of men:

וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת הַכֹּל – Money is the answer to everything.¹

Money is also the great enemy of *kedushah*. It has the ability to disconnect us from *Hashem*, as it says:

פֶּן אֲשַׁבֵּעַ וְכַחֲשֵׁי וְאֶמְרֵי מִי ה' – Lest I be satiated and deny and say, "Who is *Hashem*?"²

Hashem is found where there is poverty and suffering, not where there is lots of wealth. *Hashem* is with a person who suffers.

עִמּוֹ אֲנִכִּי בְצָרָה – I am with him in his trouble.³

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is with the lowly and the oppressed.

When we take that which is farthest from *ruchniyus*, which is money, and we use it for

tzedakah, we are connecting up two opposing forces. We are bridging between heaven and earth; linking physicality with spirituality.

Tzedakah is the thing that connects most strongly between the physical world and the spiritual world.

Tzedakah Does Not Depend on Anything

With all other *mitzvos*, their reward depends on the person who performs the *mitzvah* act and the degree to which he is worthy of reward. Let's take the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents. The Torah promises a long life to someone who fulfills this *mitzvah*. But if he sins, he is liable to lose this reward.

It may be compared to a doctor who promises his patient that if he takes his medicine he will get better. But if the patient decides to swallow poison or jump off the roof, he can lodge no complaint against the doctor. The doctor's promise regarding the results of the medication is good only as long as the patient doesn't do things that are damaging to his health.

So it is when the Torah promises length of days to someone who honors his father and mother. This promise is good and reliable and capable of granting longevity. But it depends on the person refraining from other acts that shorten his life.

The *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is not like this. *Tzedakah* is like a respirator that gives life. A respirator doesn't give health, it doesn't heal illness, but it keeps a person alive. It doesn't let the soul leave the body.

1 *Kohes* 10:19.

2 *Mishlei* 30:9.

3 *Tehillim* 91:15.

וְצִדְקָה תַּצִּיל מִמּוֹת – *Tzedakah* saves from death.⁴

Regarding all other *mitzvos*, we are not allowed to test *Hashem*.

לֹא תִנְסֶה אֶת ה' – You shall not test *Hashem*.⁵

We do not have enough understanding to test *Hashem* regarding His promises. Who are we; do we comprehend the profound calculations of Heaven? Who knows if we have not forfeited our reward due to bad deeds? But there is one *mitzvah* by which we may test *Hashem*.

הָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וּגְוִי וּבְחֲנוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת וּגְוִי אִם לֹא אֶפְתָּח לָכֶם אֶת אֲרֻבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם – Bring all the tithes to the treasury... and test Me through this... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven....⁶

We can test this and see for ourselves. If we give *tzedakah*, we will not lose out. Because this *mitzvah* doesn't depend on anything. It directly infuses life. Why? Because when we give *tzedakah*, we connect directly to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to the Source.

America

An example of how *tzedakah* saves from death is the United States of America. America is not such a kosher country. Spiritually speaking, it is sunk deep, deep in the mud. But the people there live and enjoy all the pleasures of life. They are wealthy, they have houses, children, good lives. True, there are also problems, but generally speaking, life in America is good.

R. Baruch Ber Leibowitz once noted that America

never fought a war on its own soil against a foreign country. It fought wars in other places, but not on American soil. And this is in the merit of *tzedakah*, because this country donates a lot.

However, we need to know that *tzedakah* only grants the right to life in this world. Here, they have it good, they have wealth and happiness, but when they depart to the world of truth, they will find out their true spiritual state. There, they might be surprised to find out how “impoverished” they really are.

The worst thing that can happen to a sick person is for the thermometer to break. If a person doesn't know how ill he is, if he doesn't have pains or other signs that something is wrong with him, he is in bad shape. He may walk around smiling and happy, but the day will come when his illness will surface, and it might be too late.

Pains, troubles and difficulties are like a traffic sign that tell a person to stop and take account of himself. When a person doesn't have a traffic sign, if he doesn't have tools that enable him to examine his true state of affairs, he is likely to end up at the gates of death.

This is an extreme example. But it illustrates the idea that *tzedakah* is a special *mitzvah* with special powers in this world. Its results do not depend on other factors.

Tzedakah is Practical

It says in the *Mishnah Berurah*⁷ that when we say the words וְאַתָּה מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל in the *Vayvarech David* passage of *Pesukei d'Zimra*, we should give *tzedakah*, thus fulfilling the idea conveyed in the verse:

אֲנִי בְּצִדֶּק אֶחְזֶה פָּנֶיךָ – Through *tzedakah*, I will see Your face.⁸

⁴ *Mishlei* 10:2.

⁵ *Devarim* 6:16.

⁶ *Malachi* 3:10.

⁷ 51:19.

⁸ *Tehillim* 17:15.

We will now explain what this means.

There is a *midah* of *Hashem* called *Malchus*. It signifies the actualization of all those matters that heretofore existed only in potential.

I once saw with my own eyes an incident that is a poignant illustration of this concept. A gathering of very wealthy Jews was once held to raise money for a certain worthy purpose. One of the participants, who was exceptionally wealthy, spoke with great emotion. He urged everyone to donate generously to this lofty cause. After someone gave a significant donation, the exceptionally wealthy man got up and said, "I propose that each person here should double that amount!"

It is embarrassing to tell the end of story, but even though during the speeches and *divrei Torah*, this wealthy man seemed full of *yiras Shamayim* and desire to help, when it eventually came time for him to make an actual donation, when he needed to take out his checkbook, he was unable to part even with a cent. As far as I know, he still has not sent in his portion to the campaign.

This is something awesome to contemplate. He was the one who warmed everyone up to sign. He got every participant so excited about the campaign that they doubled the sum. He brought about such a *kiddush shem Shamayim*. He said that this will be a gathering like never was, never was so much money raised for a holy goal such as this. And everyone gave – except for him!

He couldn't. He was simply unable. He didn't know how to write a check. Suddenly he forgot everything he said.

Let's get back to our subject. Before we come before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in prayer, to see His face, so to speak, we need to take a few coins out of our pocket and put them in the *pushka*. We need to give some money, which is the thing most precious to a person. *Tzedakah* for the poor. Otherwise, there is no value to all the songs and praises that we sang to *Hashem* until now.

Tzedakah is a practical expression. It's not the few coins we give that will make us into *tzaddikim*. But it expresses something practically and actually. It shows that we have a real connection to *tzidkus*. We express this connection by giving what is hard for us to part with, and that is money. "Through *tzedakah*, I will see Your face."

When we take a coin or a bill and stretch out our hand to a poor person, this is *yichud Havayah*. We connect to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The giver's hand has five fingers. This corresponds to the *gematriya* of the letter *beh* of *Hashem's* Name. The five fingers of the poor person's hand represent another *beh*, as *Hashem's* Name has the letter *beh* twice. The outstretched arm of the giver represents the shape of the letter *vav*, and the little coin represents the small letter *yud*. This makes up the four letters of *Hashem's* Name.

When we perform this *mitzvah* we form a connection to the upper worlds, and this connection is not dependent on other factors, as we explained above. We bind ourselves to worlds of *kedushah* and *taharah*. ●