

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

Bigger Than Just You

אתם נצבים היום בלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם וגוי כל איש ישראל: (דברים כט, ט)

You are standing today, all of you, before *Hashem* your G-d... every Jewish person.
(*Devarim* 28:13)

It is a special *zechus* for a Jew to be part of the *klal*, to be part of the community of a *shul* or *yeshivah* or *kollel*. This is כל איש ישראל, "every Jewish person," standing together.

Let's focus on learning frameworks. Being part of such a framework and adjusting one's life to fit into it benefits a person greatly, even if he sometimes feels constricted and held back from personal growth. He will gain more from being part of the *tzibbur* than by doing his learning and *avodah* on his own.

One of the great pluses of being part of a such a community is the support that surrounds a person for the positive things he is doing. This support could be compared to crutches. This alone makes it worth it to be part of a *tzibbur*. True, we don't always need crutches, but when we do need them, we can't make it without.

I have been around for many years now, and time after time, I have seen *bachurim* and *youngermen* who wanted to do their *avodah* on their own, without a community framework. They indeed had some good periods of a half a year or a year.

But in the end, the world is a whirlwind and blows people off track. People go through hard times. They experience crises.

If it is a *yeshivah bachur*, he comes to the age of *shidduchim*, and if it is a *youngerman*, he is faced by some difficulty in life, such as a sick family member or financial difficulties. There are many other kinds of crises as well.

If a person learns in a *Kollel*, despite all the difficulties he is going through, he knows that he still needs to get to *kollel*, and the community holds him

up and pulls him along. His head may bespinning, but he survives, and in the end, he pulls through the crisis and continues moving forward. He continues growing.

But when as a crisis hits a loner, he gets knocked over and can't get back on his feet because there is no one there to help him up.

The world is like a wild whirlwind. A person finds himself in all sorts of unexpected situations. When he has a community around him, when he has a *chavrusa*, a *shiur*, a *kollel*, *sedarim*, notes and *chiddushim* he is writing down, then even when his head is not working right, the train keeps on chugging and he is carried along with it.

But if he gets off the train and starts to run on his own, he might surpass the train for a while, but after a few miles he is liable to fall into a pit or get stuck in a ditch and there will be no one there to pull him out. When that happens, he will just stay there.

Shlomo Hamelech taught us:

אם רוח המושל תעלה עליך מקומך אל תנח – If the spirit of the ruler [i.e., the *Yetzer Hara*] comes upon you, do not leave your place.¹

My rabbi and teacher R. Leib Malin *zt"l* would always say: “Be a *yachid* within the *tzibbur*,” be an individual within the community.

This is a profound *eitzah* and I want to explain what he meant and then offer some ways to do it, practically speaking.

The point is that you should not give up on your individuality and your unique *avodas Hashem*. You

should rather integrate it with the *tzibbur*. The *yachid* and the *tzibbur* are not in opposition but rather complement one another.

A person who wishes to grow spiritually should do it within the framework of the *tzibbur*. Between the regular learning sessions of the *yeshivah*, review what you learned. At night, dedicate a half hour to learn *Halachah* or go over *dapim* of *Gemara*.

But the main thing is, “Do not leave your place.” Don't break the framework that was set up for you, because this framework is critical for your success. You don't know what will be tomorrow.

True, a person whose whole life is only what his learning framework dictates cannot grow spiritually, because the framework was set for the needs of the *tzibbur*, and the *tzibbur* is composed of people on various levels. Someone who aspires to be special must do *avodah* on his own, as well.

To be an individual within the community means that if others arrive every morning to learning at 9:10 AM, ten minutes after the time, you should come on time and take advantage of those ten minutes. In this way you will be special. And don't speak about anything during the learning *seder* except for the learning.

There are all kinds of points like these where a person can be special while at the same time being part of the *tzibbur*.

We need to stick with the framework, and work within it, to find greatness. On Friday afternoon, on *Shabbos* night and *Shabbos* afternoon, and other times such as these, take full advantage to learn and ascend spiritually on your own.

This is what makes a person grow and become a *gadol*. ●

1 *Koheles* 10:4.



A Big Choice

וּבְחִירַת בְּחִיִּים. (דברים ל, יט)

You shall choose life. (*Devarim 30:19*)

People think that free choice, *bechirah*, is a matter of choosing between yes and no. For instance, should I learn Torah right now, or should I go do something empty and unimportant? This is indeed part of the concept of free choice. But there is a lot more depth to it than that. In the *Seforim Hakedoshim*, free choice is called *daas* or *bachra'ah*.

There is a choice to be made that is much deeper than just deciding between yes and no, and that deeper point is the true *bechirah*.

In the blessing over the *Haftarah* we recite אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנְבִיאִים טוֹבִים – “He chose good prophets....” The word “chose” is employed. What does it mean that *Hashem* “chose” good prophets?

Of course it doesn't mean that *Hashem* was in doubt whether to place His *Shechinah* upon good prophets or bad prophets, and in the end, He chose the good ones. Similarly, it says in our *Yom Tov* prayers: אַתָּה בָּחַרְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – “You chose us from among all the nations.” This doesn't mean that *Hashem* was deliberating whether to choose the Jews or the Chinese, and in the end, He decided to take the Jews. Rather, *Hashem* chose good prophets, and He chose Yisrael, absolutely and resolutely. It's a different kind of choice.

In the same way, a human being has the power of free choice. He can choose absolutely what he is and what he wants in life. We will explain.

Nowadays, if a child exhibits violent behavior, the mother hurries to take him for psychological evaluation and perhaps treatment. She wants the psychologist to diagnose why her child behaves that way. What do modern psychologists often say? “The child is not to blame. When he was young, he was treated in a manner that caused him to develop a violent personality. The emotional damage that was done to him in his earlier childhood is exhibiting

itself in his present behavior.”

Then the mother says, “So I am to blame?” The psychologist replies, “No, you are not to blame, either. It's your parents....”

According to this approach, no one is ever to blame, because a person's behavior is just a link in a chain of reactions, and every reaction has a cause, and every cause has another cause that preceded it, and the buck stops nowhere. Accordingly, a person is not responsible for his actions and cannot be blamed for them. Human beings are like computers whose output is determined by the data that was fed in.

This is the prevalent approach today. It is part of the outlook that human beings are animals with greater intelligence.

What does the Torah say?

There is such a thing as a chain reaction in human behavior, but there is a starting point of absolute free choice that has no prior cause. This starting point is a totally fresh beginning that is not determined by prior conditions.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us the ability to choose, and we choose between good and evil. We cannot conceptualize this or understand it, because this starting point of absolute choice is a Divine point. A person makes this choice without a prior cause. It is a kind of *yesh me'ayin*. It is not a chain reaction but rather the point where we make a true choice.

And we have two options to choose between: We can choose *Hashem*, or we can choose the alternative, which is *avodah zarah*. We know what it means to choose *Hashem*. But what does it mean to choose *avodah zarah*? How is idolatry even relevant in our day and age?

Let's ask a simple person what life is all about. What does he want in life? He is likely to say that he wants a comfortable life, pain-free, no suffering or unpleasant

financial pressures. He wants satisfaction from the children. He wants to live a good and peaceful life.

What's wrong with that? Is he asking for anything *asur*?

However, *Chazal* say:

לא יהיה בקך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נֶכֶר
 – “There shall not be in you a strange god,
 and you shall not prostrate yourself to a
 foreign god.”¹ What is the “strange god”
 that is inside a person? It is the *Yetzer Hara*.²

In other words, if a person's life is all about seeking pleasures, even if they are kosher pleasures, this is

avodah zarah. He is worshipping a “strange god.” This is because the person's “I” is his *Yetzer*. If he is seeking pleasure in life, he is actually worshipping himself.

The proper choice to make is attachment to *Hashem. Deveikus*. And the point that is responsible for making this choice is up in the head, in the brain, which is the place that *tefillin* rest on. The *tefillin* are placed high up on a person's head, where his brain is. This hints that a person's essence is attachment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. [Because the essence of a human being is his fundamental power of choice, and this choice takes place in the brain. The *tefillin*, which rest above the brain, represent connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.]

This is a person's essence: to connect this fundamental point, his fundamental life-choice, to *Hashem*. ●

1 *Tehillim* 81:10.

2 *Shabbos* 105b.

PARASHA TOPIC

Thirst

לִמְעַן סְפוֹת הַרְוָה אֶת הַצְּמָאָה. לֹא יֵאבֶה ה' סִלַּח לוֹ. (דברים כט, יח-יט)

In order to connect the sated to the thirsty. Hashem will not wish to forgive him.
(Devarim 29:18-19)

Jews are Thirsty

This *pasuk* speaks of those who are thirsty, and of their opposite, those who are sated. *Chazal* learn an important principle from this:

Said Rav Yehudah, said Rav: Regarding someone who returns a lost object to a non-Jew, the Torah says, “In order to connect the sated to the thirsty. *Hashem* will not wish to forgive him.”¹

Rashi explains that non-Jews are called “sated.” They feel they have had enough already and they are not thirsty for their Creator. Jews are called “thirsty” because they thirst and desire to fear their Creator and keep His *mitzvos*. When a person returns a lost object to a non-Jew, he is in effect “connecting” and equating non-Jews to Jews.

And what exactly is the problem with returning a lost object to a non-Jew?

When a person returns a lost object to non-Jews, although there is no *mitzvah* to do so, he is treating them the same as he treats Jews, to whom there is

1 *Sanhedrin* 76b.

indeed a *mitzvah* to return a lost object. This shows that in his eyes, returning an object is not a *mitzvah* of his Creator.

So explains Rashi.

Here we see the difference between a non-Jew and a Jew. A Jew is “thirsty” and a non-Jew is sated. The non-Jew might not always be sated, but for him, there is such a state. If he has a house and home, if he has everything he needs, that’s it. He is relaxed and at peace with life.

A Jew is always “thirsty.” He is always looking for “water.” He is never truly relaxed and at peace with life.

It’s that way also in *gashmiyus*. A friend of mine told me that he stayed in a hotel in Europe. The owner, a non-Jew with a chain of hotels around the world, said to him as follows: every person in the world, if you give him good service, he will be satisfied. But not a Jew. No matter how hard you try, he is never satisfied. He always has complaints. Whatever you give him, he will always want something else, something better.

My friend replied to the hotel owner that this is because a Jew is always searching for something greater.

I would offer a different explanation. A Jew does not just search for *ruchmiyus*. He also despises all *gashmiyus*. Material things cannot satisfy him.

In any case, the principle we learn from the above-quoted *pasuk* is that a Jew is thirsty by nature. He never feels sated. He cannot be satisfied by the pleasures of this world because this is not our world. And this is something every Jew needs to know.

Doing Mitzvos is Who We Are

The Ramchal teaches us a principle in *Sefer Mesilas Yesharim*:

A person’s essential being in this world is only to keep *mitzvos* and serve *Hashem* and withstand trials. Regarding worldly pleasures, it is fitting for a person to partake of them only as a help and assistance so he will be settled and clear-minded, so he can focus on

the *avodah* he must perform.²

It is not for enjoyment and pleasure that we came here, to this world. There is no moment that a Jew can say that right now he doesn’t need to learn Torah, or that right now he can’t learn because he is restless for something else, after all, he needs to live life, too... this goes against the true Jewish feeling toward life and its purpose.

Many of us don’t understand this. We realize that our main purpose in this world is Torah and *mitzvos*. We know this is the most important thing of all. But many of us think that after all, life is life. A human being is a human being. And this world is a world, too. Sometimes you need to rest a little, you deserve a break....

There is a story about a *schmorrer* who went to the US to collect money. When he got off the plane he saw a dollar bill on the floor. Someone said to him, “Nu, pick it up!” he replied, “I didn’t start working yet.”

We are taught that we need to do *mitzvos* at every moment. That we need to collect every *mitzvah* that we can get ahold of. But we feel like replying, “First let me rest a little, then I will start to work. In two weeks, I will travel back to the *yeshivah*, and when I get there, I will learn and *daven* like I should. But right now, I am on vacation (or I am between *sedarim*). Let me live!”

The Ramchal taught us in the above-quoted principle that according to true Jewish outlook, there is no such thing as that. Even when it comes to material enjoyments, for instance, a person picks out for himself a new suit or a nice tie, it is not because he has a right to “live life.” Such a thing is against the whole Jewish *hashkafah*! It’s because if you wear a nice tie, it will make you feel good, and then you can learn with more zest and energy. But without this goal, it goes against your whole being as a Jew, both generally and personally.

On the practical level, it is obvious that not everyone is able to live with such tension. A person is permitted to take enjoyments so he will feel settled and be clear-minded. But we can’t forget what we are

² *Mesilas Yesharim* ch. 1.

here for. A person needs to keep in mind מה חובתו בעולמו, as the *Sefer Mesilas Yesharim* calls it. This is a matter of *hashkafah*, of feeling, of believing that only for Torah and *mitzvos* did we come to this world.

Charedim

Unfortunately, there are Jews who don't look at it this way.

This is what sets true *bnei Torah* apart from those who vaguely describe themselves as "religious" or "Orthodox." It is this feeling. It is in fact quite appropriate that in Israel, the community of which *bnei Torah* form the core is called "*Charedim*." This term implies total care and concern for Torah and *mitzvos*. Literally, it denotes those who shake from fear of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Because this is what our whole being is supposed to be.

We should be in fear twenty-four hours a day. We should not be relaxed and comfortable. We should not be at rest at all; we should be constantly seeking to serve *Hashem* more and better.

This is what sets true *bnei Torah* apart. Those who vaguely describe themselves as religious Jews do indeed have religion in their lifestyle, but they are not in constant fear and trembling over Torah and *mitzvos*. They learn, they go to *shul*, but they also live their lives.

This goes against the true Torah *hashkafah*. To a *ben Torah*, the world means nothing. It has no significance, and neither does this-worldly pleasure and enjoyment. A wealthy man who once visited the home of the Chofetz Chayim asked him, "Where is the furniture?" Why don't you have any furniture to speak of in your home? The Chofetz Chayim answered that he is in the middle of a journey from one place to another. He didn't get where he is going yet, so he doesn't have furniture while on the road.

This world is not our place. We have no rest here.

This is true Jewish *hashkafah*. We don't have a home because we are travelling; we are on the road. We grab a bite to eat here and there so we can keep going. We are not settled down in this world, not even for a moment.

It is a matter of *hashkafah*, of knowing the truth. A person needs to know that this world is nothing but a place to prepare and get ready for what comes next. Every moment, we are at work. We need to live in the world, but we need to always remember that this is not our world. There is a world that is ours, and when we get there, we will rest. These short seventy years are like a train ride. We are constantly in motion, traveling toward our true destination.

Practically Speaking

So far, we have talked about the theory of the matter, the *hashkafah*.

How do you practice this *hashkafah* in real life, in daily life?

Do all your deeds for the sake of Heaven.³

What we have been talking about is a tremendous subject. Being connected to it is the peak of human greatness. But it needs to be divided into two.

The first part is to know clearly what you are doing here. When people feel tense, they often get themselves something sweet to eat. The person feels that he is on a break right now, or he is on vacation, and he wants to relax.

But we need to know that in *hashkafah*, there is no such thing as, "I am on vacation right now." We can do it, we can get ourselves something tasty to eat, because it calms us down. But when we do this, it needs to be with the clear understanding that we are eating so we will be able to continue on with renewed energy. ●

³ *Pirkei Avos* 2:12.