



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

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Tefilah Child

וַיַּעֲתֹר יִצְחָק לֵה' לְנֶכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָהּ (בראשית כה, כא)

Yitzchak prayed copiously to *Hashem*, across from his wife, because she was barren.
(*Bereishis* 25:21)

Chazal say that the *Imahos* were barren at first because *Hashem* desires the prayers of *tzaddikim*.¹ On a simple level this means *Hashem* made them barren so they would pray more intensely.

On a deeper level, that fact that *Hashem* desires the prayers of *tzaddikim* caused their children to be born by means of *tefilah*. There is something especially precious about a child whose birth was the result of prolonged prayers.

We see this also from the story of Channah and her son Shmuel. It says in the *Gemara*² that Eli Hakohen offered to Channah, Shmuel's mother, that he will pray to *Hashem* for her to have a son even greater than Shmuel. Channah declined the offer, saying, "I prayed for *this* child." She received

this child through *tefilah*. She prayed for him over the course of many long, childless years. This child meant more to her than another possibly could.

– כִּי ה' יִתֵּן חֲכָמָה מִפִּי דַעַת וְתְבוּנָה
"Hashem will grant wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding."³ The *Midrash* explains this with a parable about a wealthy man whose son came home from school and found his father sitting with a pot of food in front of him. The father took a piece and gave it to him. The son said, "I want only what is in your mouth," and the father gave it to him. Because the father loved the son so much, he gave him what was in his own mouth. Similarly, "*Hashem* will grant wisdom," however, to the person that *Hashem* loves especially, "From His mouth come knowledge and understanding."

¹ *Yevamos* 64a.

² *Berachos* 31b.

³ *Mishlei* 2:6.

This parable is about Torah, which was given from *Hashem's* mouth. But the Ramchal writes that the same applies to *parnassah* and other needs. There is regular *parnassah*, which, of course, comes from

Hashem, but there is a special kind of *parnassah* that results from *tefilah*. If it comes through *tefilah*, it is truly from *Hashem's* hand, and is especially precious.

You Decide

וַיִּתְרַצְּצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ (בראשית כה, כב)

The children were running within her. (*Bereishis* 19:29)

“Were running” – *Chazal* interpret that when Rivkah would pass by the entrances to the places of Torah of Shem and Ever, Yaakov would run and squiggle to get out. When she passed by the entrances of places of idol worship, Eisav squiggled to get out. (*Rashi*)

We see from this teaching of *Chazal* that Yaakov and Eisav had different characters even when they were still in their mother's womb. If so, how could we expect Eisav to be anything other than wicked? We see it was ingrained in his nature.

This question brings us to a basic principle that we all need to know. Everyone sometimes finds himself in a situation that is spiritually challenging. When this happens, people often feel it is not fair they were put into such a situation.

But we need to know that no situation is intrinsically good or bad. It all depends on what the person does with it, and this is what makes it good or bad.

For instance, let's say a person has a poor head. His memory is terrible. It's difficult for him to

think things through. Is this a blessing or a curse? It depends what he does with this head that he has.

Let's say he works hard, again and again, putting in great effort to understand a few lines of *Gemara*, until in the end, he grasps the *sugya*. He should thank *Hashem* every day for making him so untalented, and nevertheless granting him the ability to become a *masmid*, and be connected to *Hashem*, and accept upon himself the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Let's say he doesn't try to toil in Torah. He decides that it is too hard for him to learn, and he has no chance to succeed, and he might as well give up already. Then his poor head is a curse.

Either way, it's not his poor head itself that is good or bad. He decides what he is going to do with

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

גדלת נדידם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

his head, how he is going to handle the situation, and this determines whether it is a blessing or a curse.

Here's another example. Somebody lives his life among people who are distant from Torah. His home is in an area where observant Jews are few and far between. Is this a blessing or a curse? Good or bad? I know people who lived in neighborhoods like this, and it actually caused their children to grow up into fine Jews and outstanding *talmidei chachamim*. Because the parents watched over them carefully and learned with them all the time. They invested greatly in their children, and as a result, their children came out diamonds.

But someone else who lives in such a neighborhood might have children who hang out in the street with bad friends and just end up wasting their lives.

So, is a neighborhood like that good or bad? A blessing or a curse? It all depends on what a person does with it. He can make the situation either positive or negative, but on its own, it is neither.

Some people wish they were born two hundred and fifty years ago, and lived next to the Vilna Gaon. They think that then, everything would have been different.

Who says it's better to be born and grow up next door to the Vilna Gaon? Maybe yes and maybe no. It might be better to grow up in Nebraska. It depends what you do with it. If it makes you become a fine Jew and a real *talmid chacham*, it is the greatest blessing you could possibly get.

There is a wonderful allusion to this principle in the teaching of *Chazal* that says when a person is created, *Hashem* decrees in advance whether he will be smart or stupid, strong or weak, rich or poor. But *Hashem* does not determine whether he will be *tzaddik* or *rasha*.¹ That part is left up to the

person himself.

Some people have a hard time with this idea. They think that if *Hashem* decided they will be poor, stupid and weak, the probable outcome is they will also be *rasha*. But this is a mistake. A person can take his stupidity, his poverty and his weakness, and make himself into a greater *tzaddik* than if he had been born with every positive quality.

This answers the question we posed regarding Yaakov and Eisav. We asked if Yaakov had a predilection to the *beis midrash* before he was even born, and Eisav had the same but for *avodah zarah*, how is that fair? Isn't the outcome predetermined?

The answer is each of them definitely started from a different point. But Eisav, with his negative traits, could have grown to be many times greater, if he had so desired.

And Yaakov's innate *kedushah* could have tripped him up. Someone else in his place, on his *madreigah*, might not have felt a drive to learn fourteen hours straight when he came to the *beis midrash* of Shem and Ever, to give up sleep, to sweat and toil over Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*. Why should he, when he is naturally a genius and endowed with all positive character traits? What's so terrible if he sleeps a little? Will he turn into a *rasha* because of that? He already knows the entire Torah, which he learned from his father Yitzchak!

But no. Yaakov used his situation to grow further. He toiled and toiled until he grew to be one of the *Avos Hakedoshim*. Until he became the pillar of Torah.

Nothing determines whether a person will be *tzaddik* or *rasha*, good or bad. It all depends on what a person makes out of his situation. ●

¹ *Niddah* 16b.

Yaakov's Truth

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי זֶה פַעַמִּים אֶת בְּכֹרְתִי לָקַח וְהִנֵּה עָתָה לָקַח בְּרִכְתִּי.
(בראשית כז, לו)

He said, “Is it because his name is Yaakov that he tricked me twice? He took my rights as the firstborn, and now he took my blessing.” (Bereishis 27:37)

Anyone who pays attention to what is going on in these *parshiyos*, which tell us about the life and times of *Yaakov Avinu*, sees right away that there is a sort of contradiction. Yaakov represents the trait of *emes*, as it says, תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לַיַּעֲקֹב — Give truth to Yaakov.¹ However, we see numerous instances in which he seems to act with deceptiveness.

First of all, Yaakov's very name connotes deceptiveness. This is what the word means, as we see from the following *pasuk*: אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ הַשְׁמֵרוּ וְעַל כָּל אָח עֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב וְכָל רֵעַ רֵכִיל כָּל אָח אֶל תִּבְטְחוּ כִּי כָל אָח עֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב — “Let each man beware of his friend; do not trust any relatives! For every relative acts deceptively (עֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב), and every friend spreads evil gossip.”²

Now, we might answer that Yaakov acted deceptively with Eisav and Lavan only because that is the proper and straight way to deal with such people. As it says, וְעַם עָקֹשׁ תִּתְּפַתֵּל — “With the crooked, act deviously.”³ But this does not really solve the problem. If his deceptiveness was not part of his nature, why was he named “Yaakov”?

This was, in fact, Eisav's claim. After Yaakov took the blessings, Eisav exclaimed: “Is it because his name is Yaakov that he deceived me twice?” Eisav claimed that Yaakov's name fits him well: he is indeed an untruthful and deceitful person.

So how do we answer Eisav's claim? And why wasn't Yaakov given a name that connotes truthfulness and honesty, if that is his core trait?

The difficulties do not stop with Yaakov's name; they involve his deeds as well. After all, he did get the blessings from his father Yitzchak in a way that seems patently dishonest. We all know Rashi's explanation of Yaakov's famous words אֲנֹכִי עֹשֵׂו בְּכֹרֶךָ — “I am Eisav your firstborn.”⁴ According to Rashi, Yaakov meant: “‘I’ am bringing you the food. ‘Eisav is your firstborn.’” Now, how would you explain that to a child? Is that what we would expect from the paragon of honesty?

The same questions may be raised regarding how Yaakov handled Lavan. In fact, Yaakov himself says to Rachel אָחִי אַבְיָה הוּא — He is Lavan's brother, i.e., his equal, in the trait of deception.⁵ In other words, Yaakov says about himself that he is exceptionally skilled in trickery. It seems that Yaakov expressed a novel idea at this point, as his wife-to-be, *Rachel Imeinu*, did not think that *tzaddikim* are allowed to be deceptive in any circumstances.⁶ This shows it is not so simple to say that the straight thing to do is to treat crooked people deceptively. Because *Rachel Imeinu* was puzzled: how could it be permitted to act in such a way?

All this needs to be explained.

1 Michah 7:20.

2 Yirmeyahu 9:3.

3 Tehillim 18:27.

4 Ibid. 27:19.

5 Ibid. 29:12, Rashi ad loc.

6 See Megillah 13b.

Emes V'Yatziv Versus Emes V'Emunah

In the morning, after *Keri'as Shema* we recite the blessing of *emes v'yatziv*. At night, the blessing is *emes v'emunah*. The reason for this difference comes from the verse **לְהַגִּיד בְּבֹקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאַמּוּנָתְךָ בַּלַּיְלוֹת** – “To proclaim Your kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights.”⁷ In the morning, when there is light, we see the truth. We see *Hashem's* kindness and we speak about it. There will come a time when all the people of the world will live with the truth. But at night, when there is darkness, we do not see the truth. Then we live with the truth of *emunah*, faith. This is *emes v'emunah*. On its simplest level, *emunah* refers to something we cannot see clearly with our eyes, but we nevertheless believe it is true.

The Brisker Rov was once asked about the mitzvah of *emunah*, of believing in *Hashem*. The question went like this: when *Mashiach* comes, **כִּי מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ דְּעָה אֶת ה' כַּמַּיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים** – “The earth will be filled with knowledge of *Hashem* like water covers the sea.”⁸ Everyone will know the truth and recognize *Hashem*. If so, how will we then fulfill the mitzvah of *emunah*?

He answered: There will always be room for *emunah*. This is because *Hashem* is infinite. As much as we will understand and perceive Him, there will always be higher aspects that we do not understand and perceive. Regarding these aspects we will have the mitzvah of *emunah*. (This can also explain how *Bnei Yisrael* were able to fulfill the mitzvah of *emunah* after the giving of the Torah, regarding which *Hashem* declared **אֲתֵם רְאִיתֶם כִּי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם** – “You saw that I spoke with you from Heaven” (*Shemos* 20:19). What was left to believe at that point? The answer is as we just stated: there is always a higher, hidden part of *Hashem* that we believe but don't perceive.)

It comes out that there are two “truths,” so to speak. There is *emes v'yatziv*, the truth that stands

out (*nitzav*) in front of us, truth that is capable of being perceived. This represents the world of light in which we see the truth with our own eyes. And there is *emes v'emunah*. This is the truth of faith. We don't see the truth but we believe it is there.

תָּשֶׁת חֹשֶׁךְ וַיְהִי לַיְלָה – “You bring on darkness and it becomes night.”⁹ This refers to this world, which resembles night.¹⁰

Here *Chazal* tell us that the true nature of this world is darkness. In this world, which is completely dark, we go around with our eyes open and “see” very many things. A person goes through 120 years of life and sees millions upon millions of things. But *Chazal* inform us: Know that you are living in darkness! Whatever you “see,” that is not the truth. The truth can be attained only by *emunah*. Whatever we know to be true through *emunah*, that is the truth about the world. Therefore, a person lacking *emunah* sees absolutely nothing true.

The World's Truth

Now let's answer the question we asked about Yaakov. Why did he trick and deceive his brother Eisav?

The Rambam says something that sheds light on the subject:

The foundation of all foundations, and the pillar of all wisdoms, is to know that there is a first Being Who brought all of reality into existence. And all of reality — from heaven to earth and whatever is in between — came into existence only by means of His true reality.¹¹

The Rambam is speaking here about belief in *Hashem's* existence. He says this *emunah* is not just “the foundation of all foundations,” but is also “the pillar of all wisdoms.” If a person does not live with the realization that “brought all of reality into

7 *Tehillim* 92:3.

8 *Yeshayah* 11:9.

9 *Tehillim* 104:20.

10 *Bava Metz'ia* 83b.

11 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 1:10.

existence,” he lacks all wisdom and understanding. He does not understand things even a little. He is totally insane!

Hashem is the soul of the world, so to speak. He grants existence to everything, and He is everything. In other words, if the world is real — if there is a ceiling and a floor, there is light, there is time, there is you and me, there is oxygen in the air, etc. — then it all comes from *Hashem*. He is the Source of reality.

Since *Hashem* is the Source of all reality, He also is the Source of all truth. This is because *Hashem* creates and defines reality. Let’s say a person asks himself, “Do I truly exist? Am I real?” The answer is that he exists only as much, and only as long, as *Hashem* wills him to exist. A person has no independent existence and reality. Only *Hashem* does.

Now, truth is something that is valued by all of humanity. Everyone recognizes that truth is a virtue. Let’s say Reuven is driving his car through an unfamiliar neighborhood, trying to find a certain street. He rolls down his window, sees a scary-looking guy walking around and asks him cautiously, “How do I get to such-and-such street?”

The man answers, “Go straight and take the second right.”

What does Reuven do? He goes straight and takes the second right, just like he was told. But why? Maybe the man was lying? Isn’t it obvious that this man is of questionable character?

The answer is human beings naturally have respect for truth. They will not lie for no reason. This adherence to truth is because a person’s soul comes from *Hashem*. His very life comes from *Hashem*. And *Hashem* is Truth; there is nothing else true and real besides Him.

So whatever *Hashem* wills, that is truth — in the simplest sense of the word. And whatever is against *Hashem*’s will is falsehood. We, however, live in a world of darkness, and we “see” things differently. This is why it is necessary to give truth a special name: *emes v’emunah*. This is the truth that is based

on *emunah*. The truth based on *emunah* is true, and whatever is not based on *emunah* is false.

We go around in the world with our eyes opened, but we don’t know what we are seeing.

Chazal recount:

R. Yosef son of R. Yehoshua ben Levi fell ill, and expired. When he regained consciousness, his father asked him, “What did you see there?” He answered, “I saw an upside-down world. The prominent people were on the bottom, and the lowly people were on the top.” His father replied, “My son, you saw a clear world.”¹²

What we see in this world is upside-down, far from the true reality. Truth has only one name: *emunah*. Someone who lives with *emunah*, lives with the truth.

This is the kind of person that *Yaakov Avinu* was. He lived with the truth. He lived with *emes v’emunah*. And this is why he is called “איש תם – A man of wholesomeness.”¹³ What was his “wholesomeness,” his *temimus*? “יושב אהלים – He dwelled in tents.”¹⁴ In other words, he was in the *beis midrash*.¹⁵ His entire outlook, all his thoughts, came from the *Chumash*. There will be a day when *Yaakov Avinu* will live the truth of *emes v’yatziv*. But here in this world, he lived the truth of *emes v’emunah*, which indeed is the truth.

Yaakov Avinu — Man of Truth

Getting back to the question: why does *Yaakov Avinu* bear a name that connotes deception and falsehood?

The key to the answer lies in the *melaveh malkah* meal held on *Motza’ei Shabbos*. The *Rishonim* tell us¹⁶

¹² *Pesachim* 50a.

¹³ *Bereishis* 25:27.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ *Rashi, ibid*.

¹⁶ See *Taz, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 300:1; *Pri Megadim ad loc*.

that we have a tiny, indestructible bone in our body, called the *luz*, which does not derive benefit from any of the food we eat, other than that of *melaveh malkah*. Through this bone, we will come alive again in the time of *techiyas hameisim*. In the *Zohar*, this bone is called *rama'ah*, “the deceptive one.” It is compared to לבן הארמי – “Lavan the deceptive one.”¹⁷ This is what the *Zohar* says about it:

R. Shimon said: Out of all the bones, why does this bone remain intact? Because it is the deceptive one. Unlike the other bones, it cannot tolerate the taste of people's food. For this reason it is stronger than all the bones. This is the main bone, since the body will be built from. As it says, “*Lavan Ha'arami*.”¹⁸

We see that eating does not necessarily bring strength. The Rambam tells us that eating a lot of healthy food does not make us healthy and strong: “Most of the illnesses that come upon a person are only because he fills his stomach and overeats, even if it is healthy food.”¹⁹

A family member once recounted to me that the doctor put him on a very strict diet. He complained to the doctor that a person could die from eating so little food. The doctor responded, “You should know that no one has yet died from eating too little, only from eating too much.”

This little bone called *luz* does not take sustenance from what a person eats all week long, it is sustained only from the *melaveh malkah* meal. We would think that it should be the first to decompose, because it hardly eats. It fasts from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*; it must

be weak and puny! But in truth this is not so. It is the only bone that stays intact forever, and the person's body will be built from it at *techiyas hameisim*.

This little bone manages to fool everyone. That is why it is called “the deceptive one,” and is compared to *Lavan Ha'arami*. The *luz* bone knows that eating makes one weak, while fasting makes one strong, contrary to what everyone else says.

This sheds light on the meaning of deceptiveness. You are deceptive if your life is such that you consider true what others consider false, and you consider false what others consider true.

What is *Yaakov Avinu's* name in this world? יעקב – the deceptive one. Because he fools everyone. He deceives the whole world since his truth is different from the “truth” that everyone is accustomed to. He does not live according to what the eye “sees” in this world of darkness. He lives in a completely different world. He lives with *emes v'emunah*.

To *Yaakov*, two plus two makes four only as long as *Hashem* so wills it. This is because *Hashem's* will creates and defines reality. This is *emes v'emunah*.

To *Yaakov*, it makes no difference whether he says, “I am *Yaakov*,” or he says, “I am *Eisav*.” It all depends on which statement is in accordance with *Hashem's* will: if my words are in accordance with *Hashem's* will, they are true. If my words are contrary to *Hashem's* will, they are false and deceptive.

Since *Yaakov's* values are different from those of other people, he is called יעקב in this world. This is because he is the biggest “liar” around. What all other people in this world say is true, *Yaakov* says is false. What everyone else says is false, *Yaakov* says is true. He lives according to a completely different truth and sees all of reality from a completely different outlook. ●

¹⁷ Lit., “Lavan the Aramaean.” The word “Lavan” also means “white,” the color of bone.

¹⁸ *Midrash HaNe'elam* I, Toldos 137a.

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchos De'os 4:15.