



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

Light is Dark

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. (שמות י, כב)

Moshe stretched out his arm over the heavens, and there was gloomy darkness in all the land of Egypt. (*Shemos* 10:22)

Where did this darkness come from? R. Yehudah says it was from the darkness of above, as it says סָתַר סִבְיֻתָּיו סָתַר חֹשֶׁךְ – “He placed darkness to be His hidden place; His *sukkah* was around Him.”¹ (*Shemos Rabbah* 14:2)

¹ *Tehillim* 18:12.

This is a surprising *Midrash*. It says that the darkness that enveloped Egypt in *makas choshech* came from the darkness of above, the darkness that is in heaven. But how does that make sense? Is there darkness in heaven? On the contrary, it says:

וְנֹהָרָא עִמָּה שְׂרָא – Light is in His presence.²

² *Daniel* 2:22.

Above, in heaven, there is only light and joy. How can a plague of darkness come from there?

The answer lies in the following *pasuk*:

וְנִגְף ה' אֶת מִצְרַיִם נִגְף וְרִפּוּא – *Hashem* will smite Egypt by smiting and healing.³

This means, as *Chazal* say, that the darkness with which *Hashem* plagues Egypt is itself light for the

³ *Yeshayahu* 19:22.

Jewish people.

And the converse is also true. The light for the Jewish people is itself the darkness that plagues the Egyptians.

It says in the commentary *Sifsei Kohen* on the Torah that the “darkness” *Hashem* brought on Egypt was in fact the brilliantly gleaming light of heaven. There is no darkness in heaven, but the light up there is so intensely bright that it “darkens” the eyes of the *resha'im*. They are not capable of beholding such wondrous light, so when it shines, they see total darkness.

This is why the very next *pasuk* says:

– וְלֹכֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֵתָם
And to all the Jews, there was light in their dwelling places.⁴

The darkness for the Egyptians and the light for the Jews was really the same exact thing. That which the *tzaddikim* experienced as a wondrous, great light was experienced by the wicked Egyptians as awful darkness, as black as *Gehinom*.

This is why the light that the Jews experienced was not just in the land of Goshen, where they lived, but everywhere a Jew went. When a Jew entered any “dwelling place,” he could see what the Egyptians had stashed away in all sorts of hiding places, even though the Egyptians there were paralyzed by darkness. This is indicated by the extra

word *מושבותם* in the verse.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought down the light of *kedushah* from heaven, which is the *kedushah* of Torah and *mitzvos*, and for the Egyptians it was a ghastly darkness. This is an awesome message for every generation, including our own, when the Jewish people is threatened by enemies sworn to destroy it. שְׂבָכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ.

The more we increase Torah and *mitzvos*, it creates great darkness and *Gehinom* for the enemies of the Jewish people. Just as it was in *makas choshech* back then, when standing Egyptians were unable to sit, and the sitting were unable to stand, so it is today. Our Torah, *mitzvos* and *tefilos* will paralyze all our enemies and they will find themselves unable to lift a finger against us.

The *Midrash* goes on to say that also in the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is destined to bring a darkness that will cover the earth and cast a black gloom over the nations, and *Hashem* will shine for the Jewish people: כִּי הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶּה אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֶּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלִיָּה.⁵

This needs to be our preparation for the *Geulah*: to increase the light of Torah. It will put our enemies in the dark, it will blind their eyes, at the same time that it sheds brilliant illumination for the Jewish people. We will see and rejoice when the imminent *Geulah* arrives, may it be soon, *amein*. ●

4 Shemos 10:23.

5 Yeshayahu 60:2.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורגר זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נרבת נבדיהם ~ עשרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

Learn with the Children

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ. (שמות יג, ח)

You shall tell to your son. (*Shemos* 13:8)

When a Jew goes to *shul* in order to *daven*, or learn, he feels that he used this time for a *mitzvah*, and he fulfilled *Hashem's* Will. But when this Jew sits and learns with his son for half an hour, for instance by going over the chapter of *Eilu Metzios* with him, he has the feeling that he sacrificed half an hour of his life for his child, that he forfeited this time that he could have used for himself.

Sometimes a father learning with his son looks like a jack-in-a-box, a puppet on a spring, that when the box opens, the puppet shoots out. The “poor” father was asked by his wife to learn with the child for a little while, and he does it because he has to (he doesn't feel like it's real “learning” because the child obviously isn't on his level), and he is looking at his watch to see when they will finish and he can get back to what he wants to learn.

This is feeling is coming from false premises. *Mitzvos* take time, and just like a person doesn't look at his watch when he is in the middle of *Kerias Shema* to see when it will be over already, or how long the *Shabbos seudah* is taking, it should be the same when he is learning with his son. Because this, too, is one of the *mitzvos* that devolve upon him to fulfill.

There are actually a few points that many people don't properly understand regarding this matter. R. Yisrael Salanter taught us a basic rule of *Yiddishkeit*: *Medarf tan, nisht oftan* – “You need to do, not ‘get it done.’” This means that a Jew needs to actually do and build things, but he is not like a contractor who gets nothing until he finishes the job.

We all know that a child needs daily care to grow up physically healthy. If his parents don't make sure to feed him healthy, nutritious food, and just let him eat junk all the time, the child will not show immediate signs of malnutrition, but it is quite

possible that later on in life, he will suffer from certain health problems. And every time the child eats right, it contributes to his long-term health.

The same is true with the child's spiritual nutrition. The father needs to make sure his son is eating rights, that he is feeding his soul. He should not say to himself that a quarter-hour of learning or the lack thereof is not going to make any difference for the child.

When a father learns with his son daily, or at least at regular *time*, such as Friday, Shabbos afternoon, or when school is not in session, he causes his child to grow up healthily from a spiritual perspective. It is just like eating good, nutritious food instead of candies.

Besides this, learning with the children is a *segulah* for success. It is a special type of Torah. It is Torah of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *לבינך ושיננתם*.

In the beginning, someone who had a father, his father taught him Torah, and someone who didn't have a father, didn't learn Torah.... Until Yehoshua ben Gamla came and enacted that teachers of children should be set up in every state and town.¹

They used to not have schools for children. There was no *cheder*. The fathers did home-schooling for their own children and that was it. Most children had fathers who taught them. We need to understand that there is no replacement for the Torah taught by the father. It has a different *kedushah*. It is Torah connected up to *Har Sinai*.

We should feel, when learning with the children, that it is not “wasted” time. Their education is an integral part of our *avodas Hashem*. ●

1 Bava Basra 21a.

וְהָיָה לָךְ לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וּלְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ. (שמות יג, ט)

It shall be a sign for you on your arm and a reminder between your eyes. (Shemos 13:9)

There are two main types of *tefillin*: those made according to the view of Rashi, and those made according to the view of Rabbeinu Tam. In *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam, the letter *heh* is before the letter *vav*. We are going to delve into what makes *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam special. First we will look at the *Halachic* aspect, and then go a little deeper.

Tefillin contain four Torah passages. There is a disagreement among the *Rishonim* how to interpret the *Gemara's* statement about this. According to Rashi, the four passages are to be in the following order:

שמע ישראל / והיה אם שמוע / קדש לי כל בכור / והיה כי יביאך

Whereas according to Rabbeinu Tam the order is like this:

שמע ישראל / והיה אם שמוע / והיה כי יביאך / קדש לי כל בכור

According to Rabbeinu Tam, the two passages that begin with the word *והיה* are in the middle. This is what the *Rishonim* call *באמצע*.

This alludes to a profound matter.

Early Torah sources say that the four passages in *tefillin* correspond to the four letters of *Hashem's* Name. *Parshas Shema* corresponds to the letter *yud*, *Parshas V'hayah im shamoa* corresponds to the letter *heh*, *Parshas Kadeish* corresponds to the letter *vav*, and *Parshas V'hayah ki yevi'acha* corresponds to the second letter *heh*.

And we know that the letters of *Hashem's* Name divide into two groups. The first group is *yud heh*, and the second group is *vav heh*. The first group always stays the same. The difference between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam is only in the second group, in the *vav heh*. According to Rashi, the order is *vav heh*, and according to Rabbeinu Tam, it is *heh vav*.

What does this signify?

When you set out to build something, there is a certain order that must be followed. First you make up the plan with the architect, and then you go and build it. You can't do it the other way around. The process needs to follow a certain order, and only then will the building get built.

In *Hashem's* Name, the order is always *vav* and then *heh*. This is because the letter *vav* represents the six *midos* of *Hashem*, which are *Gedulah*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferes*, *Netzach*, *Hod* and the last *midah* of *כי כל* *בשמים ובארץ*, which "unifies heaven and earth."¹ After you have the complete building plan, so to speak, then comes the final letter *heh*, which is the building itself.

But in *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam, it's in reverse order. The final *heh*, which represents the actual building, comes before the building plan.

How can that be?

All in One Moment

I will tell you two stories. One is from the *Midrash*, and the second is a story I heard from a reliable Jew who heard it from the person who saw it with his own eyes.

It is written about *Yaakov Avinu*:

וַיִּרַח אֶת רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו – He smelled the fragrance of his garments.²

On a simple level, this *pasuk* speaks of how Yitzchak smelled the pleasant field-fragrance of Yaakov. This fragrance came from Eisav's garments, which Yaakov was wearing at the time he came to

1 Zohar Chadash 3:257a.

2 Bereishis 27:27.

be blessed. This is the simple meaning of the *pasuk*. However, the *Midrash* interprets בגדי, “garments,” as בוגדי, “traitors”:

Don’t read it “his garments,” rather read it: “his traitors.”³

The *Midrash* is saying that even the traitors among the Jewish people have an exquisite fragrance. The virtue of the Jewish people is found even in the “traitors” who seem to be far from *Hashem*. Even they have the fragrance of *neshamah*, they have something good in them.

The *Midrash* then brings a striking example to illustrate the point:

For instance, Yosef Meshisa. When the enemies wished to enter *Har Habayis*, they said, “Let one of them [the Jews] go in first.” [Yosef Meshisa volunteered.] They said to him, “Go in, and whatever you bring out [first] will be yours.”

He went in and brought out the golden *Menorah* [whose value was immense]. They said to him, “This is not something for commoners. Go in again, and what you bring out will be yours.”

He didn’t agree. They offered to release him from taxes for three years. He didn’t agree, and said, “Isn’t it enough that I angered my G-d once? Shall I anger Him another time?!”

What did they do to him? They put him on a carpenters’ beam and sawed him, as he was screaming, “Woe to me, for I angered my Creator!”⁴

Yosef Meshisa walked into *Beis Hamikdash* and grabbed for himself the *Menorah*. What a traitor. What a low life. Nobody would do something like that, not even an idol-worshipping Gentile.

But in a single moment, he changed from one extreme to the other, and that’s the point. When he

was put to the test, and he was promised great profit if he goes in another time to desecrate *Beis Hamikdash* – and he was obviously the kind of person who would do anything for money – he refused.

He was not willing to anger *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* another time, even at the pain of death. As he died, he did not focus on the great physical pain he was undergoing, but rather on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. “He was screaming, ‘Woe to me, for I angered my Creator!’” He willingly gave up his life for the sake of *Hashem*, like R. Akiva and the *Asarah Harugei Malchus* did.

That was one story. The second story is one that happened in the Holocaust.

In a certain concentration camp, *treif* meat was distributed, and there was a Jew there who refused to eat. The Nazi called out to him and said, “Eat or I will kill you!” He unknowingly came upon a secular Jew who had been eating *treif* his whole life. But now, surprisingly enough, this Jew absolutely refused, and responded, “No, I won’t eat!” The Nazi beat him almost to death, but the Jew remained resolute, heroically refusing to eat *treif* no matter what.

Later, his friends asked him, “What was that all about? You ate *treif* your whole life!” He answered that at that moment, he realized how terrible it is to eat *treif*.

What’s in these stories?

It All Suddenly Comes Out

Many people, when they are reciting *Shema*, and they come to the words בכל לבבך, they are willing to give up their lives for the sake of *Hashem*. If an idol-worshipping Gentile would come up to them and try to force them to bow down to a false god, they would gladly die *al kiddush Hashem*. This is actually the happiest moment that a person can attain.

But they got to this lofty place by following a certain order. When they were children, they went to *cheder*, learned *Chumash*, grew up in an authentic Jewish environment, understood what *mesirus nefesh* is, and then reached this *madreigah*. First they went through the stages of *Gedulah* and *Gevurah* and *Tiferes*, etc, and then the final building was built.

But in the two stories I just told, the order was

³ Bereishis Rabbah 65:18.

⁴ Ibid.

reversed. Yosef Meshisa lived an anti-Torah life all along, and even now, he dared to enter *Beis Hamikdash* and grab the *Menorah* for himself. Even the idol-worshipping Romans were afraid to do so. That's why they sent him in first. And then, in one moment, he went through a radical transformation and was ready to suffer and die for the sanctification of *Hashem's* Name.

It's the same in the second story. A Jew who couldn't care less about Torah, who ate *treif* his whole life, who did not build any spiritual base for himself – and suddenly, in one moment, something exploded inside him, and he was willing to take a severe beating at the hands of a heartless Nazi, just in order not to put *treif* food in his mouth.

For the rest of us, things develop little by little. Another *pasuk* of *Chumash*, another *daf* of *Gemara*, another Rosh Hashanah and another Yom Kippur. The cumulate result is that if we would be put to the test, we would surely give up our lives for the sake of *Hashem*, because our Jewish *neshamah* is out in the open, it is revealed. But the two stories I told are about people whose *neshamos* were quite hidden, and revealed themselves suddenly. Early Torah sources call this the "*Tefillin* of *Olam Haba*." It's a different order of things.

Our world is built like a chain. One link connects to the next link and enters its space. So in the period of *Ikvesa d'Meshicha*, there is a level that is similar to *Yemos Hamashiach*. This is because the next link in the chain of time, *Yemos Hamashiach*, enters the space of the present link, that of *Ikvesa d'Meshicha*.

Thus we see *baalei teshuvah* sprouting up. We see people who suddenly, as if out of nowhere, return to authentic Torah Judaism. This has the aspect of *tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam. The *heb* is before the *vav*. These are people who never learned Torah in their lives. They never worked on themselves to develop their *Yiddishkeit* at all. Yet, spiritual greatness

revealed itself suddenly.

Tefillin of Rashi go according to proper order. To learn, to delve into the depths, and then to arrive at the goal. We say in *Tefilah Zakah* (recited right before *Kol Nidrei*): יֵצֶחַק וְיַעֲקֹב: – "Because I, too, am among the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov." We all know this, but for it to express itself in daily life, that the beauty and greatness of the Jewish soul should shine in its full glory, and there will not be partitions separating heaven from earth, it will take a long time until we reach this greatness.

Tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam are just the opposite. A person hears an inspiring *vort*, and gets excited, and then makes a sudden and unexpected decision to learn Torah and achieve understanding of it.

Tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam teach us that the order can be changed. This is a wonderful idea about how to achieve things, especially in our times, the generation of *Ikvesa d'Meshicha*, which is the lowliest time that ever was, and it is hard to do things in such a time. If we go step by step, we will never get to the goal. We need to cause an inner explosion, to make bold and far-reaching decisions, to put things into practice, and afterward we will see how beautiful our decisions were.

אִם תִּעֲרִירוּ וְאִם תִּעֲוֲרוּ אֶת הָאֱהָבָה עַד
שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ – "If you awaken and if you arouse
the love until it so desires."⁵

The Ramban explains this verse as follows. אִם תִּעֲרִירוּ – If there is an awakening, עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ – Make an "object" (חפץ) out of it. If you are grabbed by that sudden inspiration, do something tangible, something that you can get a hold on. Don't leave your inspiration as a philosophical idea. A person needs to place an obligation on himself, to go and build an edifice of Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. ●

⁵ Shir Hashirim 2:7.