



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

Kiss of an Elder

וַיִּכַּחַם יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּבָדוֹ מִזֶּקֶן לֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת וַיִּגֹּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו וַיִּשָּׂק לָהֶם וַיַּחֲבֹק לָהֶם (בראשית
מח, י)

**Yisrael's eyes dimmed from old age; he was unable to see. He brought them to him,
and he kissed to them and embraced to them. (Bereishis 48:10)**

The dimming of Yaakov's eyes seems linked to his blessing of Yosef's children. *Ohr HaChayim* asks how these two matters are connected, and he also asks why the verse says he kissed "to them" (להם) and not just "them" (אותם)?

Ohr HaChayim answers the second question by saying that Yaakov couldn't see, so he embraced them not in the usual place, and kissed them not in the usual place. And he adds that this needs to be understood.

Now, if *Ohr HaChayim* writes that this apparently simple point needs to be understood, there must be something deeper to it. However, we will explain it according to *peshat*.

In the beginning of *Shir HaShirim* it says יִשְׁקֵנִי – "May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth," and Rashi explains that in some

locations, people kiss on the back of the hand, and in other locations, on the shoulder, whereas in *Shir Hashirim* we are asking *Hashem* to kiss us on the mouth.

When one person's mouth kisses another person's mouth, this actually constitutes two kisses. Each gives a kiss to the other and receives a corresponding kiss from him. (Perhaps this is why it says "kisses" of His mouth," in the plural.) This reciprocal "kiss" took place at *Matan Torah*, where the Jewish people said *Na'aseh v'nishma*, and *Hashem* correspondingly gave them the Torah. Two kisses.

Getting back to our *parshah*, in the beginning it says, "Yisrael saw the sons of Yosef, and said, 'Who are they?'" Rashi explains that he wished to bless Ephraim and Menasheh, but the *Shechinah* left him because Yeravam and Achav were destined to

descend from Efraim, and Yehu and his sons from Menasheh. Thus Yaakov asked, “Who are they?” Where did those people come from, the ones who are not worthy of blessing? In other words, Yaakov saw that unworthy descendants were going to come from Yosef’s sons, so why should he kiss them and embrace them? They will not reciprocate with a kiss, but with just the opposite! This is why he did not wish to bless them, until Yosef prayed for it.

But afterwards it says, “Yisrael’s eyes dimmed from old age; he was unable to see.” And as a result, “He brought them to him, and he kissed to them and embraced to them.” Due to old age, a stage in life that is characterized by kindness and forbearance, Yaakov no longer “saw” those descendants who

were unworthy of blessing. He thus agreed to bless Yosef’s sons, although he knew they are not going to reciprocate in kind.

Kissing and embracing in the usual place means that the giver will also receive a kiss and embrace in return. Here, *Yaakov Avinu* demonstrated a new level of affection: kissing not in the usual place. Even if the recipient will not show love in return, we still kiss them and embrace them. We still give them love and blessing.

This is what *Ohr HaChayim* meant when he said that Yaakov embraced them not in the usual place. Even though they were not worthy of a blessing, of receiving an embrace and a kiss, because they will not return the love, he blessed them anyway. ●

True Rest

וַיֵּרָא מִנְחָה כִּי טוֹב וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ כִּי נְעִמָּה וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לְסִבָּל. (בראשית מט, טו)

He saw rest that it is good, and the land that it is pleasant, and he bent his shoulder to bear the burden. (*Bereishis* 49:15)

A superficial look at this *pasuk* reveals a glaring contradiction. First it says that he saw rest is good, and then it says he bent his shoulder to bear the burden of hard work. This doesn’t seem to make sense, because someone who loves rest and seeks the pleasant life doesn’t go looking for hard work to do. Such a person sits in an easy chair, drinks a cup of coffee and reads an interesting book. That’s what rest looks like, more or less. Bearing heavy burdens on one’s shoulder doesn’t fit the picture.

Or does it?

This *pasuk* is speaking of the tribe of Yissachar, who excelled in their devotion to Torah learning. They were heads of *Sanhedrin*.

Chazal explain that the “rest” referred to in the *pasuk* is Torah learning. But this just begs the same question. Why would Torah learning be described as “rest”? Torah understanding comes through effort and hard work. *Pirkei Avos* lists decreasing

לעילוי נשמות

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

נדבת נדריהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

one's sleep and pleasures among the ways to acquire Torah, which seems to run counter to seeking rest. What could *Chazal* possibly have meant when they said that "rest" is Torah learning?

There are deep explanations why the Torah is called *menuchah*, "rest," but I want to bring out the simple meaning. And indeed, it is totally correct to describe Torah as "rest." In fact, "rest" is only for those who are ready to work hard for it. I will illustrate this with an example from real life.

Reuven, after half a day of hard work, decides to go home early to rest a little. When he gets home, he asks his wife if she could make something for him to eat and put some cold water on the table for him. In the meantime, he sits down in the easy chair to read something interesting. One of the children brings him a plate of food, he makes a *berachah*, and starts to eat.

He notices that the food is not as tasty as he had hoped. It needs salt. He interrupts his rest to call out to whoever might hear, "Please bring me salt." No one is close enough to hear. He raises his voice a little more and says, "Please bring salt..." No one seems to notice. With no other alternative, he again interrupts his rest to get up from his chair and enter the kitchen himself, to get salt. Then he comes back, sits down again, and starts chewing his food.

It still doesn't taste quite right. So he gets up again to fetch some mustard for himself.

Now he gets back to the easy chair, starts eating again, but begins to feel thirsty. And they forgot to bring him water. So he goes back to the kitchen to make himself some lemonade.

Now the food and drink are pretty good, but the book he is reading is sort of boring. He gets up a fourth time and starts rummaging around the house for something to read. He can't find anything good. But he is not lazy; he puts on his jacket and goes out to buy some interesting reading material.

He goes out to the street only to discover that a family member has taken the car... no problem, he walks briskly by foot down to the nearby shopping center, he is starting to huff and puff a little (what won't one do for a little "rest") and he finds some interesting reading material to buy.

He gets back home and sits down again. But the easy chair isn't comfortable. It's actually pretty dilapidated. The springs are poking him.

But it's okay, because he came home from work early today, and the stores are still open. He already decided a couple months ago that it's about time for a new easy chair...

Now he's back at the shopping center. He goes from store to store looking for a good easy chair. He finds one he likes, bends his shoulder to pick it up and carry it back home – this brings to his mind the *pasuk*, "He bent his shoulder to bear the burden" – and finally plunks it down in the living room. Perfect!

He then remembers that he needs to do something, so he goes out for a few moments, and then comes back home.

But in the meantime, the children came back from school, and they discovered the new easy chair in the living room. Some are jumping up and down on it, others are screaming, "It's my turn!" and the house is a pandemonium. You can already imagine for yourself the next segment of this story about "rest."

True rest doesn't just come by itself. You need to work for it. It takes time and effort until you get there.

So that's the answer to our question. The Torah said, "He saw rest that it is good, and... bent his shoulder to bear the burden." Only someone who is willing to bear a little effort and hard work, only someone who is willing to dedicate himself to Torah study, will acquire for himself true rest and tranquility. ●



Shovavim

There is a Jewish practice called *Shovavim*. The name שובבי"ם is an abbreviation made up of the first letters of the *parshiyos* of שמות וארא בא בשלח יתרו משפטים. The practice of *Shovavim* has its roots in the Kabbalistic writings of the Arizal, which say that a person should make special efforts to do *teshuvah* for certain *aveiros* during these weeks.

In earlier generations there were people who fasted and made a big deal of *Shovavim*. When I grew up I did not see a special atmosphere during these weeks even among *bnei Torah*. According to *Kabbalah*, one should try to fast eighty-four times. But there is a shortcut, which is to fast two days straight. I know someone who fasted two days straight, and he did it three times. He did this every year, together with other *talmidei chachamim*. They recited *selichos* and did *teshuvah*. He got up one time at midnight and simply fainted. I ran over to him to tell him to stop fasting, but he did not want to listen to me.

There are still people in our generation who make a big deal out of *Shovavim*. I want to tell you an easy way by which we can connect to this matter of *Shovavim*, which was practiced by Jews throughout the generations.

It is very interesting that great *tzaddikim* would tremble before *yom hadin*, and simple people were not as worried about it. Most of us feel that we are neither super great, spiritually speaking, nor super terrible. We tend to feel that we are not perfect but we are not in such bad shape either. We live a Jewish lifestyle. We don't do big *aveiros*.

On the other hand, there are *tzaddikim* whose *kedushah* and *taharah* cannot even be described. When *yom hadin* approaches they weep to Hashem and beg of Him to grant them purity: לב טהור ברא לי אלקים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי. They seek ways to

attain atonement for their sins.

Shovavim is a special opportunity to be cleansed, to gain purity and atonement.

The Torah describes the exile in Egypt as *kur habarzel*, the "iron crucible." Hashem put the Jewish people in *Mitzrayim* to cleanse them in preparation for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. When we read these *parshiyos* we try to connect to this process of purification and refinement that is in the air at this time due to the *parshiyos* of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

Do I Need This?

The question in our minds at such a time probably goes this: Do I actually need this cleansing process? Is my *neshamah* so stained?

As an introduction to the answer, let's talk in general about the subject of educating our children.

Chazal say regarding the first Torah subject that children should study:

Let those who are pure come and occupy themselves with *taharos*, with that which is pure.¹

Children are pure. And they are to learn *taharos*, "that which is pure," meaning *korbanos*. The offerings in *Beis Hamikdash* were maintained on the highest level of purity. *Korbanos* are traditionally the first Torah subject that Jewish children learn. We will explain why.

Let's say a person has a rash on his skin that doesn't go away. He pays a visit to the doctor and expects to get a skin cream. But the doctor sends him to the pharmacy with a prescription for a tablet that he needs to take every few hours.

¹ See *Shach* on *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 245:8.

The patient is surprised. He doesn't understand what a tablet will help him. The doctor explains that the problem is not a superficial skin condition. It's something internal, in his blood. The rash is caused by a bacterial infection. Rubbing a cream on it might make it go away in that particular place on the skin, but it will reappear somewhere else. Whereas if the infection itself is treated, the skin will heal and become as clear as a baby's skin.

Sometimes treating a problem superficially is not the right approach. We need to dig deeper and get to the source of the problem.

Now let's apply this to a different type of problem, to *chinuch*. Let's say you have a child who just can't sit still. He jumps around all the time, he bothers his brothers and sisters, when he is put in the chair to eat he jumps out of the seat a second later. What should you do? Buy glue to fasten him to his seat? That won't help. He will jump with the seat. So what's the solution – bolt his seat down to the floor? Obviously that is not the solution either. Because the problem is not the jumping itself. The problem is deeper. Perhaps there is an emotional issue or a neurological issue. Gluing him down or bolting his chair is not treating the problem.

Now let's say a child speaks up rudely to his parents and teachers. Some teachers will just tell him to sit down and keep his mouth shut. That is like gluing the hyperactive child to his chair. The problem is not that the child gets up and rudely opens his mouth. The problem is deeper than that.

Or let's say a child steals. What should you do – tie his hands? Nowadays in our "enlightened" era, when theft becomes too prevalent they put more police officers on duty. So what happens? The phenomenon develops that police officers themselves steal. We don't solve the problem by increasing police presence.

These problems are not superficial; they are rooted in the *neshamah*. Who knows and understands souls? *Hashem* does. אלקי נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא – "My G-d, the soul that you placed within me is pure." This *neshamah* needs nourishment. It needs purity. *Hashem* tells us that when a young child

jumps and is overactive, he needs *Chumash Vayikra*, he needs to learn *korbanos*.

I will give you a different allegory to illustrate the point. Someone buys a new luxury car. He turns the key and nothing happens. He goes back to the car dealer and says, "What did you sell me? The car doesn't work."

The dealer says, "Did you put gas in the tank?"

He says, "What's that?"

The dealer goes and brings a gas cannister, and the customer starts shouting, "You're going to put that stuff in my fancy car?!"

The dealer says, "Please understand. We work with the manufacturer of this car. We are the official dealers and we know how it works. And I am telling you, without gas in the tank, your car won't work."

Hashem says to us, so to speak: I manufactured this child. I created him. He has a *neshamah* that needs *Chumash Vayikra*, and the story of Yosef and his brothers. It may not sound logical to you, but that is what it needs. If you give the *neshamah* what it needs, you will see how this works wonders.

This is the basis of Jewish education. We learn Torah and keep *mitzvos* in order to penetrate deep in, to the *neshamah*, and solve the problems of the child and of the adult alike.

I remember when I was a child that my uncle R. Yaakov Weinberg, *rosh yeshivah* in Baltimore, would come to visit us. Every time he came he would start to talk in learning with my father, and within five minutes they started to shout, and then they chased one another around the table. If you go into a *yeshivah* you hear shouting. Why are they shouting? Because we want the *kedushah* to go really deep in, all the way to the *neshamah*.

Mitzvos Reach Deep

Now let's return to the subject of *Shovavim*.

Mitzvos have a much deeper effect that we tend to think. It says in the *Zohar* that *matzah* is called *nahama d'mehmnusa*, "the bread of faithfulness," because eating *matzah* gives us the spiritual strength of *emunah*, just as eating regular bread gives us physical strength. *Matzah* is also called *nahamah*

d'asusa, “the bread of healing,” because it heals all our spiritual and emotional problems.

It's the same with *aveiros*. If a person commits a sin it puts a stain on his *neshamah* that goes a lot deeper than we tend to think. An *aveirah* causes impurity to penetrate deep down to the *neshamah*. But I don't want to talk about *aveiros* right now.

X-Ray of the Soul

Let us focus on our generation and try to evaluate whether *Shovavim* is for us or not.

My maternal grandfather was a great *tzaddik*. He came over from Europe, and in America he never ate meat that came from the butcher shop. He would take a live chicken over to a *shochet* that he knew personally because otherwise he did not feel that he could rely on the *shechitah*. He would remark that every American Jew (of that time) has a little pig in his stomach, because a person eats a candy that has a *treif* ingredient, and then he eats another something with another questionable ingredient, and over the years it adds up to become “a little *chazir*.”

We go down the street and see improper things, we hear improper things on the bus or the train or in the shopping center, and so forth. Do you realize what this does to our *neshamah*? Someone once told me, “You know why I stopped smoking? I was there at a lung operation one time, and I saw how the lung had turned completely black from cigarette smoke. I never imagined that smoking does such immense damage!”

As we mentioned before, the *mitzvos* we do have a deep effect on us that reaches all the way down to our very *neshamos*. And the same is true with negative things we encounter. They have a deep effect.

Just think what our *neshamah* looks like after everything we have taken in. You know what color it is? You know how many layers of filth it has?

We are covered by filth on top of filth, and then we open a *Gemara* and don't understand why it doesn't penetrate us, why it doesn't get in. Why don't we understand? *Hashem* says שנתת בי טהורה – He put a pure and clean soul into us. But do you know how many layers have accumulated on it?

If a person is able to clean himself up, he should do so.

Cleaning Instructions for a Neshamah

How do you clean up a *neshamah*? There are people who fast, do *teshuvah*, weep to *Hashem*. This is a wonderful thing. But what I suggest for people like us is a little different. We, too, have a way that we can do it.

וְעַל כָּל פְּשָׁעִים תִּכְסֶּה אֱהָבָה – Love will cover up all sins.²

This is a very important idea. Love of *Hashem* has the power to cover up all sins. To become cleansed by means of *teshuvah* and *maasim tovim* is the method of *yiras Shamayim*. It is a kind of purifying fire. But there is another type of fire: love. Love of *Hashem*, which is called שְׁלֵהֶבֶת יְיָ, “the flame of *Hashem*.” This fire of love has a special power. If a person loves *Hashem*, the love cleans up his *neshamah*.

What is love? *Matan Torah* was an expression of love. Love has two parts. וְיִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ – “May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.”³ This kiss was the Giving of the Torah. The *Vilna Gaon* asks why is the word “kisses” in the plural?

When husband and wife have a loving relationship, it stands on two foundations. The first is that the wife is faithful to her husband and doesn't look to other men. The second is that the wife loves her husband.

“The kisses of His mouth” expresses these two foundations. It expresses the two fundamental commandments of לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי – “You shall not have other gods beside Me.” And it expresses אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – “I am *Hashem* your G-d.” The first means we are faithful to *Hashem* and don't look to other gods. The second means that *Hashem* is ours. We love him. “I am *Hashem* your G-d.”

This is what a loving relationship is based on. And a love relationship requires privacy.

What we need to do, at least, is to love *Hashem*.

² *Mishlei* 10:12.

³ *Shir Hashirim* 1:2.

To make *Hashem* the focus. To get the other stuff out of our lives.

Today on the El Al planes they have a new thing. Everyone has his own private screen on which he can watch whatever movie he wants. I fly a lot. Once, recently, I was very tired, but I didn't sleep all night on that flight. I noticed that there is an animated movie of "Bugs Bunny" and I said to myself that three minutes of Bugs Bunny won't make me into a *goy*.

I want to tell you that it killed me. It grabbed my heart. For days afterward when I was *davening* the *Shemoneh Esreh*, all I saw was Bugs Bunny. It was worth it to make this mistake in order to learn a lesson, to learn what an idiot I was for watching that movie.

What sin did I commit? I didn't see any forbidden sights. Indeed, as far as matters of *yiras Shamayim* are concerned, it really wasn't so terrible.

But what about love? If a person needs to eat, he is allowed to enjoy the food. We need to eat in order to be healthy. But connecting to *avodah zarah* is not consistent with love of *Hashem*. Let's say a *chasan* and *kallah* are sitting in the *cheder yichud* and a non-Jewish woman walks in and says, "It's okay, I'm not trying to disturb you."

But it's a *cheder yichud*. It's supposed to be private. If someone else comes in, that's not privacy.

If we want to have a loving relationship with *Hashem* we need to get all the other stuff out. This is the meaning of the kiss of "You shall not have other gods beside Me." If we want to focus our lives on *Hashem*, we can still have a family, we can still have a business. But if we start looking to the side, if we look in other directions, it's not love.

Believe It

Believe what *Hashem* said: "Love will cover up all sins." Getting all the "*avodah zarah*" – all the other stuff – out of our lives is the first step in love. If we take the first step, the love will start to burn. *Hashem*

will do His part and clean up our *neshamah*, and the layers of filth on our soul will fall away.

The second "kiss" is *אנכי ה' אלקיך*, "I am *Hashem* your G-d." This is the actual closeness to *Hashem*. In my opinion, fulfilling "I am *Hashem* your G-d" means reciting a hundred blessings a day. What is this *mitzvah* of *me'ah berachos*? It means talking to *Hashem*. Not just in the three fixed prayers, but all through the day.

However, if a person just rattles off *berachos* without paying attention to what he is saying, that's not much of a relationship. That's not really thanking *Hashem* for all the beautiful things we have. *Baruch Hashem* we have eyes, we have a mind, we have children. We have so much from *Hashem*.

This *Shabbos* when I recited *berachos* here, there was so much food on the table, so many colors, so much grace, so much *chesed*. We have so many fruits and vegetables, plentiful food, drinks. I began to say *הזן את העולם כולו בחן, בחסד* – saying thanks to *Hashem* expresses love. Saying the words *אשר יצר את האדם ברחמים* – what a wonder it is that we are healthy and our bodies function properly. *Hashem* gives us health, He gives us children, you come home and your child jumps on you. Be happy, say thanks to *Hashem*. *ברוך אתה ה' פוקח עורים, מלביש ערומים, מתיר אסורים* – you can move your arms and legs!

In my opinion, we don't have a choice in our generation, because our *neshamah* is covered with layers of soot even without doing a single *aveirah*. Every *mitzvah* we do has an effect on us. Why do we eat *matzah*? To be a *tzaddik gamur*? No, but it packs *kedushah* into our heart. And so it is with every *mitzvah*.

We might not find ourselves immediately aflame with love for *Hashem*, but we can at least try. *Hashem* will surely do His part, if we do ours, and will clean up our *neshamah* so we can feel love for Him.

And there is no better feeling in the world. ●