

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

Dear Doctor

וְרָפָא יִרְפָּא. (שמות כא, יט)

He shall surely heal. (*Shemos* 21:19)

How should you treat the doctor?

Honor your doctor before you need his services.¹

We know it is a *mitzvah* of the Torah to honor one's father and mother, and the *Chayei Adam*² cites *Sefer Charedim* as saying that honoring one's parents is a *mitzvah* that we fulfill primarily in our hearts. A person should think of his parents as being great and highly respected people. This is learned from a criticism leveled by the *Navi*:

יֵעַן כִּי נִגַּשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה בִּפְּיוֹ וּבִשְׂפֵתוֹ
– “Since this people
approaches Me with its mouth and lips, yet

its heart is far from Me.³

From here we learn that just saying something with your mouth is not proper respect. Only respect in one's heart is true respect. This applies not only toward *Hashem* but also toward one's parents.

So if *Chazal* tell us to honor the doctor, the same principle should apply. We need to honor him in our hearts, because we might come to need his services, and if we don't put our trust in him, we won't come to him when we need to. There were many cases of people who didn't place credence in doctors, and ended up endangering their lives.

Now let's talk about the idea that a person should think of his parents as being great and highly respected people. What is a person supposed to do if his father is just the opposite? Does he need to twist

¹ *Yerushalmi, Taanis* 3:6.

² *Chayei Adam* 67:19.

³ *Yeshayahu* 29:13.

his mind inside out?

The answer emerges from the following example. Two people are walking down the street and see someone who looks like a bum, sitting at a street corner and doing nothing. Everything about him says he has nothing going for him at all. One person whispers to the other, "You see that guy sitting over there? He has 20 million dollars in the bank!"

Now the guy sitting at the street corner looks totally different. He is viewed in a more flattering light. The new information didn't turn the guy into a *gadol batorah*, but it sure did make him seem a lot more respectable than before. He is no bum at all.

So it is with honoring one's father and mother. The very fact that they are your parents requires you to see them as people possessing great qualities and worth, because they brought you into this world and they are partners with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in creating you.

The same applies to the doctor. *Chazal* said to honor him. The very fact that his business involves matters of life and death, and he was a good *shaliach* to heal many people, and you assumedly heard that he has a good reputation – otherwise you wouldn't go to him – this *zechus* and this mission from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is a very great and lofty thing, and a heavenly angel accompanies him always. Even if you happen to know some uncomplimentary things about him as well, you should see him as a person well worthy of honor.

Why did *Chazal* tell us to show him respect?

Not because it is a *mitzvah* like honoring one's parents is, not because it is *Hashem's* true Will, but rather as good advice. Because you might find yourself in need of his services, and if you think

the doc is no good, you might endanger yourself by failing to seek medical assistance.

Nowadays, when you go to the family doctor, the most common treatment they prescribe is antibiotics. There are people who are against antibiotics and claim it does harm to the body. This brings them to disrespect doctors in general and regard them as if they don't really help us.

This is the wrong approach.

Come and see how the way of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is not like the way of human beings. The way of human beings is that when he prescribes a medication to a person, it is good for this and bad for that. But it is not so with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. He gave the Torah to Yisrael, and it is a medicine of life for the entire body, as it says *ולכל בשרו מרפא* – "It is healing for all his flesh"^{4,5}

What does it mean that "it is good for this and bad for that"? Rashi explains that it is good for the eyes and bad for the heart. Based on this, the Brisker Rov would say, *A refuah vas shat nisht, helft nisht* – "A medical treatment that doesn't hurt, doesn't help."

Such is the nature of healing performed by human beings. It helps for one thing even though it is bad for something else.

So it doesn't mean that today's doctors don't know what they are doing and can't help a person get better. It's rather because such is the nature of human healing as *Hashem* created it. Nothing is

4 *Mishlei* 4:22.

5 *Erwin* 54a.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורגר זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נרבת נבדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

purely beneficial with no negative side effects. On the contrary, if the medicine has a certain negative effect, this is a sign that it is a good medicine that really does something.

There's another big complaint that people have against modern doctors. In olden times, doctors would mainly analyze a case mentally and think about it, whereas today, everything is technical and mechanical. You don't see doctors nowadays sitting there and mentally thinking over the case, like you see *talmidei chacham* sitting in the *beis midrash* and thinking through the *sugya*. Thus, people claim that there isn't much wisdom in modern medicine, because you can't attain wisdom without thinking deeply, which doctors don't do.

This, too, is a mistake. You could lodge the same complaint against today's Torah sages. Why don't we have towering *Gedolei Torah* of the type that used to be? It's actually the fault of the *talmidim*, not the *rebbeim*. The *Shechinah* comes to rest upon the prophets and the sages only when the Jewish people are worthy of it.

The same is true in the outside world. This is a generation where nobody thinks. People behave like machines, without heads and without hearts. So the same is true of their "wise men," the doctors. It's not because the doctors are dummies; it's because that's the way our whole generation is. It's our fault. We get the doctors that are fitting to us. There is a principle that you have only the Torah sage who lives in your age. *Lehavidil*, you have only the doctor who lives in your age, and he has *Hashem's* permission to practice healing.

Although we should respect doctors, there is another *halachah* about respect that we should know:

Every person should always be in your eyes as if he is a robber, but you should respect him as you would Rabban Gamliel.⁶

"Respect him as you would Rabban Gamliel" means in your heart, as we explained, and that does not contradict suspecting him "as if he is a robber." ●

6 Kallah Rabbasi 9:1.

Who to Turn To?

אִם עָנָה תְּעֲנֶנָּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשָׁמַע צָעָקְתּוֹ: (שְׁמוֹת כב, כב)

If you will oppress him, and he will cry out to Me, I will hear his cry. (*Shemos* 22:22)

There is a very important principle of *Tefilah* to learn from this *pasuk*.

When a person is in trouble, for instance, he urgently needs a sum of money, what does he do? He might run from one person to another, go to get *berachos* from *tzaddikim*, and also *daven* and beg of *Hashem* to help him.

Or let's say a family member is sick. He does all the *hishtadlus*, he goes to the doctor, he does medical

tests, he picks up prescription medicine from the pharmacy, and he also *davens* fervently to *Hashem* as part of his *hishtadlus*.

This approach is like a pauper knocking on doors around town. He seeks assistance from many different sources. Among them, he also beseeches a particular householder for help, who, in such a case, is obligated to give him only a modest donation because he is just one donor among many.

The same *halachah* applies in *Tefilah*. When a person does many different types of *hishtadlus*, and among them, he also prays and beseeches *Hashem* for help, he is granted a “modest donation.” *Hashem* will give him a little *siyata d’Shtmaya*, in accordance with the requirements of *Halachah*:

It is forbidden to turn away the pauper empty-handed if he asks for help. However, it is sufficient to give him a dried fig, as it says, “The impoverished man should not come back humiliated.”¹

There is no obligation to give him more than a small amount, because he has other sources of help, and can manage on his own.

This idea is not hard to understand. Let’s say a very poor man comes and asks for a large sum, and the donor sends him away with a small amount. What was the donor thinking to himself? “He will manage; he will get by without me. He is not going to die of starvation.”

And what does the stingy man think to himself when he slams the door on the pauper? He doesn’t think, “Let him die of starvation, I don’t care.” He rather thinks, “Why does he have to come to me? Let him go to someone else!” But if he would know for a fact that the pauper has no one else in the world to turn to, he would have to be exceptionally cruel to close the door on him.

So it is when we turn to *Hashem*. If a person figuratively throws himself down on the ground before Him, begging Him to have mercy on him because he has no one else to turn to, and if *Hashem* doesn’t have mercy on him, he will never get out of trouble, *Hashem* will immediately show mercy on him and grant him what he needs.

This is the form of *Tefilah* called *nipul*, figuratively throwing oneself down on the ground before *Hashem*

in utter self-negation, with the attitude that *Hashem* and only *Hashem* can help, and besides Him, there is no one and nothing that can help. This is like *Esther Hamalkah* who threw herself down on the ground before the king, because he is the king and no one else can annul the decree other than him.

Simply speaking, this was also the way that *Choni Ham’agel* prayed. He drew a circle around himself and stood inside it, and said, “*Ribono shel Olam*, I swear by Your great Name that I am not moving from here until You have mercy on Your children.”² He made it absolutely clear that he is not like a pauper knocking on every door in town; he has only *Hashem* to turn to. So *Hashem* showed him mercy.

The Commentators explain, along these lines, why *Hashem* especially hears the cry of orphans and widows. They cry out only to *Hashem* because they have no one else to turn to. So *Hashem* hears them and answers them.

This can explain why the *pasuk* repeats the word “cry out” and says יָצַעַק יָצַעַק. Usually, a person doesn’t cry out twice, because after he cries out to *Hashem* once and *Hashem* still doesn’t help him, he goes and looks for another way to solve his problems. But orphans and widows don’t have anyone else to turn to, so they cry out and then cry out again, and *Hashem* answers them.

It is the same with anyone who makes himself like the orphans and widows, as it says: אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי – “My father and mother abandoned me, but *Hashem* will take me in.”³ This expresses the cry of someone who has no one to turn to other than *Hashem*. He doesn’t cry out and then go looking for other solutions, he rather cries out and then cries out again. *Hashem* will surely answer his prayer. ●

¹ Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Matnos Aniym 7:7.

² Taanis 19a.

³ Tehillim 27:10.

Listen to Torah

כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע. (שמות כד, ז)

Everything that *Hashem* spoke we will do and listen to. (*Shemos* 24:7)

Kisses from Hashem

In the *Kedushah* of the *Musaf* prayer on *Shabbos*, we pray for the *Geulah Sheleimah* to come soon. We say *והוא ישמיענו ברחמיו שנית לעיני כל חי* – “May *Hashem* let us hear again, in His mercy, in view of all living beings....”

Note that it says “again.” In other words, we are asking that the coming *Geulah* should be like the one that was.

The first time *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* revealed His tremendous love to us was at *Har Sinai*. We ask and pray that He show us that love again.

This request is found also in *Shir Hashirim*:

יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִידְךָ מִיַּיִן
– May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, because Your love is better than wine.¹

Rashi explains that this is a prayer said in *galus*. It is Kenesses Yisrael speaking to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

We pray that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should, so to speak, kiss us on the mouth again, as He did at *Har Sinai*, when we stood face-to-face with the *Shechinah*, and *Hashem* spoke to us.

The Giving of the Torah at Sinai was a “kiss on the mouth” that *Hashem* gave to the Jewish people.

This is also the type of kiss that we will receive from *Hashem* in the future, when the *Geulah* comes.

But why does the verse say *נשיקות פיהו*, “the kisses of His mouth”? The word “kisses” is in the plural. And a plural refers to a minimum of two. So we say it means two kisses. Why two kisses?

The Vilna Gaon explains that when a person gives a kiss on the shoulder, as was often done in former times, it is only one kiss. The kisser gives a kiss but does not get one in return. However, when it is a kiss on the mouth, the kisser gives a kiss and also receives one.

At *Har Sinai* we gave a kiss to *Hashem* and received a kiss in return from *Hashem*. The Jewish people gave a kiss when they said *כל אשר דיבר ה'* – “Everything that *Hashem* spoke we will do and listen to.” And *Hashem* gave us a kiss. He said *אנכי ה' אלקיך* – “I am *Hashem* your G-d.”

When a person gives someone, for instance, a Torah sage, a kiss on the hand, he is expressing his love for the Torah sage whose hand he kissed. But the love and devotion he is thus expressing to the Torah sage is limited. It involves the hand, which is only one part. However, a kiss on the mouth means mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, ears to ears. It lines up all of one's limbs and organs with all the other's limbs and organs. This is love without limit.

All of Shas

As we said, the kiss we gave to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* at *Har Sinai* was when we said, “Everything that

¹ *Shir Hashirim* 1:2.

Hashem spoke we will do and listen to.” Now let’s understand what this verse means. It expresses a certain promise that we made to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* prior to receiving the Torah at *Har Sinai*.

Chazal say that “do” refers to keeping *mitzvos* and “listen” refers to learning Torah.²

But what is the meaning of the word כל, “everything”?

Rabbeinu Yonah wrote in *Shaarei Teshuvah* as follows:

Let’s say a person doesn’t exercise care to avoid a certain matter known to be a sin. He doesn’t commit himself to avoiding it. Even if it is a light sin, and even if he is careful not to commit all other sins forbidden by the Torah, the Sages of Yisrael call him a *mumar l’davar echad*, “an apostate as regards one matter.”

He is among the transgressors, and his iniquity is unbearably great. Because if a servant says to his master, “Everything you tell me, I will do, except for one thing,” he is thereby breaking off himself the yoke of subservience to his master. He does what he sees fit.³

A person might love keeping *Shabbos*. “What a beautiful *mitzvah*!” he says. Or he might be lovingly devoted to putting on *tefillin* every day. He has his *mitzvos* that are meaningful to him, for whatever reason, and he keeps them.

But he has one “little” problem with his religious observance: he doesn’t like keeping kosher. “He is thereby breaking off himself the yoke of subservience to his master.”

This is נעשה, “We will do.” We promised the Creator that we will do everything He spoke. This includes *tefillin*, keeping kosher, *Shabbos*, *mezuzah*

and everything else. We will not break the yoke of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* off ourselves even in one matter.

But it isn’t just about doing *mitzvos* that we said we will fulfill everything. We said it also about נשמע, “We will listen.” This is Torah learning. We took upon ourselves to fulfill “Everything that *Hashem* spoke we will... listen to.”

So it’s not enough to just learn a *perek* of *Mishnayos* or one *daf Gemara*. We are going to learn the whole Torah! And when we see nowadays that, *baruch Hashem*, not just outstanding *talmidei chachamim* but also ordinary Jews sit and learn *Shas*, one *daf* after another, thus learning the whole Torah, this is keeping the promise we made to the *Borei Olam*!

This is the kiss we gave *Hashem* at *Har Sinai*. And we are giving the same kiss today, when we come and learn ““Everything that *Hashem* spoke.”

What does it mean to learn “everything”? Can a person really exhaust the entire Torah and say he learned “everything”? How does this make sense?

The Torah is endless. It is “longer than the earth and wider than the sea.”⁴ Nevertheless, it has a certain framework. This is the concept of *Talmud Bavli*. Regarding its quality, it’s not just that it contains *divrei Torah* with the quality of *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*, it’s the fact that it is a complete work, it is the very tradition of the Oral Torah that was given at Sinai.

R. Zundel Salant writes like this:

I heard myself from the holy mouth of the leader of the entire Jewish people, R. Chayim [of Volozhin] ז”ל, that if one word of the *Gemara* were to be taken away, the whole world would have to be destroyed.⁵

Let’s understand what this means. As we know,

² Zohar Chadash, Acharei Mos 77a.

³ 1:6.

⁴ Iyov 11:9.

⁵ Ohr Yisrael 25, Toldos 217, letter 3.

the *Chumash* from the first word through to the last, and the books of the *Tanach*, form a complete whole, which is the Written Torah that was given to Moshe at Sinai.

The same is true with *Shas*. It is a whole, it is a complete and self-contained work, and every word in it is part of this complete whole. If a word would be missing, the Torah would not be complete, and the world would be destroyed!

We see the special virtue of learning all of *Shas* in the story that when Rav Ashi, who, together with Ravina, put together the collection of teachings we have in the *Gemara* today, finished arranging the *Talmud Bavli*, fire came down from heaven and surrounded the *beis midrash*. This was a kiss of *Hashem* spoke, we will do and listen to.” This is why fire came down from heaven for Rav Ashi, like it did at *Har Sinai*.

Three Thousand Years of Listening

We have been keeping this promise of learning the entire Torah, of “Everything that *Hashem* spoke, we will... listen to,” for over three thousand years, since *Har Sinai*. In all the generations, Jews learned the whole Torah.

The Chofetz Chayim recounted that in his youth, he remembered a case when someone made a *shidduch* for his daughter with a fourteen-year-old *bachur* about whom he was told that the boy knows all of *Shas*. Accordingly, he promised a big dowry. But in the end, it turned out that the *bachur* was actually fifteen. So the father cancelled the *shidduch*. He broke it off because for a fifteen-year-old, knowing all of *Shas* is not such a big deal. So it was in those times.

In prewar Europe, up until the Holocaust, there

were still working men, people who held down a job to support their family, but they would get up at 4:00 AM and learn for four or five hours. They would keep on learning and learning that way until they finished all of *Shas*. However, in the last sixty years, knowing all of *Shas* has not been such a common thing among us. There are even many big *talmidei chachamim* who didn't finish *Shas* yet.

So when we see Jews who sit and learn *Daf Hayomi*, *blat* after *blat*, going through all of *Shas*, this is the light of *Mashiach*.

The promise we made of learning the entire Torah, of “Everything that *Hashem* spoke, we will... listen to,” is not just for *Gedolei Yisrael*. It is for every Jew, wherever he is holding. And in our generation, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sent us a special *siyata d'Shmaya*. He sent us the concept of *Daf Hayomi*. Everywhere in the world, people are learning *Shas*. And every Jew can keep this promise.

Let's say a person learns on a one-off basis. He learns, for instance, even an entire chapter of *Mishnayos*. However great a thing this may be, it doesn't reach the level of someone who keeps up the learning day after day with *mesirus nefesh*. And it isn't just his personal *mesirus nefesh*; it is the *mesirus nefesh* of the whole family. It's not just the husband, the father, who is sitting and learning, it is the *mesirus nefesh* of the whole family. He goes on night after night, sitting and learning another *daf* and another *daf*, and it is something that belongs to the whole Jewish people.

When Jews come and give *Hashem* the kiss of *Hashem* spoke, we will do and listen to,” of learning the whole Torah, this is the light of *Mashiach* that is emerging. We can already see on the horizon the reciprocal kiss of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. ●