

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

Beis Hamikdash is a Ladder

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ. (שמות כה, ח)

They shall make a Sanctuary for Me. (*Shemos* 25:8)

Beis Hamikdash was a bridge, a ladder, that connected between heaven and earth, between the upper world of *kedushah* and our mundane world. It was a most wondrous place.

On the one hand, a person who entered *Beis Hamikdash* might think he is in a totally mundane place. If we would film what took place there, what would we see? *Kohanim* going to and fro up to their ankles in blood. We would see them running from place to place with knives and bowls in order to slaughter animals and collect their blood, and then they burn the fat on the *Mizbeach*. After that, they go and eat large amounts of meat in a sitting. And so forth. (I often think of this on *Pesach* night, when we are all sitting around the *Seder* table and hurriedly swallowing the requisite amounts of *matzah*, which can be large. If a non-Jew would look in the window at that moment, what would he see? It would surely look like a very mundane affair to him.)

On the other hand, in *Beis Hamikdash* there were

occurrences that any observer would know that this place does not belong to this world.

Ten miracles took place on a regular basis. And in the *Kodesh Kodoshim* was the *Aron Kodesh*, which took up no physical space at all.¹ The width of the *Aron* was two-and-a-half *amos*, and the *Kodesh Kodoshim* had a total width of twenty *amos*. If someone would go in there with a tape measure, he would find that on one side of the *Aron* there was ten *amos* of free space, and also on the other side was ten *amos* of free space. Where did the two-and-a-half *amos* of the *Aron's* width go? The answer is that the *Aron* simply took up no space. *Beis Hamikdash* was literally not a place of this world.

It was like a ladder. One end entered the world of *kedushah*, the world above, and the other end entered the mundane world that we live in.

If *Beis Hamikdash* would have been a totally

¹ *Megilah* 10b.

heavenly place, with nothing but miracles and angels, it would not have had any connection to our world. Ordinary people like us would not have been able to go there and benefit from it.

This is why someone who went to *Beis Hamikdash* would at first see just *Kohanim*, *Leviim* and *Yisraelim* doing ostensibly mundane things. But the further in he went, he would be climbing up the ladder of *kedushah*, until he reached the point where *Beis Hamikdash* touched the world of *kedushah* above. This was in the *Kodesh Kodoshim*.

When the *Kohen Gadol* would enter the *Kodesh Kodoshim* on Yom Kippur, no person was allowed to be in the Sanctuary, as it says in *Vayikra* 16:17. On this, *Chazal* comment:

Said R. Abahu: But wasn't the *Kohen Gadol* himself a person? Rather, it is as R. Pinchas said: When the spirit of holiness

rested on him, his face burned like torches, as it says **כִּי שִׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דַעַת וְגו'** **כִּי מִלֶּאֱךָ ה' צִבְאוֹת הוּא** – “The lips of the *kohen* guard knowledge... because he is an angel of *Hashem Tzava'os*.”³

This means that on Yom Kippur, when the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh Kodoshim* to atone for the Jewish people, it was forbidden for any human being to be there, including the *Kohen Gadol* himself, if he would have been a human being. But he was transformed at that time into an angel!

Beis Hamikdash was a ladder standing on the ground and reaching up to heaven. It touched the mundane world on one end, and the infinite world of *kedushah* on the other end. ●

2 *Malachi* 2:7.

3 *Vayikra Rabbah* 21:12.

Living Face to Face

וְהָיוּ הַכְרֻבִּים וְגו' וּפָנִיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו. (שמות כה, כ)

The *Keruvim* shall be facing one another. (*Shemos* 25:20)

When the Jewish people went up [to Yerushalayim] for the pilgrimage festivals, the *Kohanim* would draw the *Paroches* aside for them, and show them the *Keruvim*, who were intertwined. And the *Kohanim* would say to them, “See how much *Hashem* loves you!”¹

This means that the Jewish people would see the

keruvim turned toward one another, standing face to face.

This signifies the proper way to relate to *Hashem*: face to face. We should find all we need and want in life within our relationship with *Hashem*, within the radiance of His countenance, which is the source of every blessing. **כִּי בָאוֹר פָּנֶיךָ נָתַתָּ לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ תוֹרָה** – “For with the radiance of Your countenance, You have

1 *Yoma* 54a.

לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמָה

מוֹחַ"ד מִשְׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְּבֹרָךְ זצ"ל

וּמוֹחַ"ד בְּרוֹךְ זֶאֱב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קִדְאוֹס זצ"ל

נִדְבַת נְדִידָה ~ עֲסֻדַת זְקִינִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְתַפְאֶרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

granted us... a living Torah and gracious love, and charity and blessing, and life and peace.”² We should be very careful not to look aside at the world around us. If we look aside even just a little bit, it damages the face-to-face state of “See how much *Hashem* loves you.”

Even at the time of the *Churban* itself, the *Keruvim* were positioned face to face, and that is how the invaders found them when they entered the Sanctuary.³

The question is: Why were the *Keruvim* face to face at that time? They only stood that way when the Jewish people were doing *Hashem's* will, which was not the case at the time of the *Churban*.

One answer is that by the time of destruction arrived, the miracle of the turning of the *Keruvim* had already ceased, and they were permanently fixed in the position of when they were first formed. But there is a difficulty with this answer, because when Shlomo made the *Keruvim*, they were not directly facing one another; they were turned partially to the side.⁴

I heard a different answer: The *Keruvim* were face

to face at the time of the *Churban* to signify *Hashem's* “departing kiss” to the Jewish people before they went into *galus*. This is how people take leave of one another.

I would explain it in yet a different way: It signified *Hashem's* “last words” to the Jewish people before they went into *galus*. While they were still living in *Eretz Yisrael*, it was possible to live even in a state of “turned partially to the side” from *Hashem*. But now that they are going into exile among the nations of the world, the mouth of *Gehinom* would be open underneath them, threatening to suck them in. They needed to know that the only way to survive in *galus* is by living all the time with *Hashem* in a position of face to face.

Living face to face with *Hashem* entails that our private homes should be like *Beis Hamikdash*. Whatever a sane person would not bring into the *beis midrash*, should not be brought into the home either. And even when we go on a trip, we should take the *beis midrash* with us, so to speak.

כַּאֲשֶׁר יֵחָנוּ כֵּן יִסְעוּ – As they encamp, so shall they travel.⁵

Even when we travel, *Hashem* goes along with us, in the sacred place called the “Jewish home.” ●

² Amidah prayer for Shacharis.

³ Ibid., 54b.

⁴ Bava Basra 99a.

⁵ Bemidbar 2:17.

PARSHA TOPIC

The Mishkan and You

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכָם: (שמות כה, ח)

You shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them. (*Shemos* 25:8)

Sefer Nefesh Hachayim describes the *Mishkan* as follows:

The *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash* contained within them all the forces and all the worlds and all the orders of

kedushah. All its rooms, storage places, attics and chambers, and all the holy objects in it, were all in the image of that which is above. They had the image and likeness and form of the holy worlds and

the orders of the *Merkavah*. They were established by David and Shmuel the Prophet. All the construction was done according to *Ruach Hakodesh*.¹

Chazal say also that the location chosen for *Beis Hamikdash*, which is called “the beauty of the world,” has a source in the Torah.²

Sefer Nefesh Hachayim goes on to say:

Chazal say in *Midrash Tanchuma*, in the beginning of *Parshas Pekudei*, that the *Mishkan* corresponds to the creation of the world. The *Midrash* enumerates the whole list of things that were in Creation and were also in the *Mishkan*.

This is why the Torah said about Betzalel [who constructed the *Mishkan*]: וַאֲמַלֵּא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת – “I filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, and understanding and knowledge.”³ Because the worlds were created with these three things, as it says, וַיֵּצֵא אֶת הָאָרֶץ – “*Hashem* established the earth by wisdom.”⁴ This is why *Chazal* said,⁵ “Betzalel knew how to combine the letters by which heaven and earth were created.”

A Jew, a member of the holy people, who also contains within him all the orders of Creation and the orders of the *Merkavah*, the entire world – he therefore has also the image and form of the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash* and all the objects in it. There is correspondence to the order of the various segments of his body and how

they connect to one another, and to all his faculties. The *Zohar* also breaks down the whole form of the *Mishkan* and the objects in it, explaining how they are all alluded to in the human being, with one-to-one correspondence according to their order.⁶

So explains R. Chaim Volozhiner in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*. Now we will explore the significance of this.

Hashem's Preferred Dwelling Place

Hashem created a world. Heavens and earth, trees and rocks, and millions of other details. The world as a whole has a certain shape and plan. It was planned out according to the purpose for which it was created.

What is the purpose of the world?

Chazal say:

When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world, He desired to have a dwelling place in the lower realms, just as He has in the upper realms.⁷

Hashem desired to make for Himself a house, a place for the *Shechinah* to rest. To this purpose, He built for Himself two places to live in, so to speak. One is the heavens above. But this “house” is of secondary importance to Him. The place where *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* prefers to dwell, to place His Presence, is the lower realms, our lowly world. This was *Hashem's* primary goal in creating the world.

Further on we will explain why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* prefers to dwell below. But for now, it suffices to know that this is His Will, and that He created the world with this aim in mind. The entire world, with all its qualities and details, was deliberately planned

1 *Nefesh Hachayim* 1:4.

2 *Zevachim* 54b.

3 *Shemos* 31:3.

4 *Mishlei* 3:19.

5 *Berachos* 55a.

6 *Nefesh Hachaim* *ibid*.

7 *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Naso* 24.

so it will be a suitable place for the *Shechinah's* presence.

The upper realm, even though it is not *Hashem's* preferred place to dwell, is nevertheless fitting for His dwelling. It, too, is suitable to serve as *Hashem's* "house." So we must say that the upper worlds are built according to the same basic blueprint as the lower realm.

Our human eyes have a hard time seeing the similarity between the upper realm and the lower realm. Heaven seems to us so different from earth. But *Chazal* tell us a number of points of similarity between them.

The matter may be compared to a tractor and a car. They are both motor vehicles. Nevertheless, a superficial look at a passenger car and a tractor will not find much in common between them. Their shape is very different.

But the truth is they are basically the same thing. The key components are the same in both. They both have wheels, they both have a motor, they both have a gas pedal and brakes, they both have seats for passengers.

There are some specific features that differ between them. A car has small wheels because it drives only on roads, whereas a tractor has big, wide wheels because sometimes it goes over dirt paths and through muddy puddles. But the basic blueprint of both types of vehicles is the same, because they have the same purpose, which is to move and drive.

Now let's apply this to Heaven and earth. Although we perceive a tremendous difference and distance between the upper realm and the lower one, nevertheless they both serve the same

goal. And that purpose is to provide a place for the *Shechinah* to dwell. So on a deeper level, both the upper worlds and the lower worlds have the same characteristics.

This applies to the *Mishkan* too. It has exactly the same goal. It is a place for the *Shechinah* to dwell, as it says, "You shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them." So the same basic blueprint that the upper worlds follow is that which the *Mishkan* follows.

And is true also of the form of the Jewish person. Why, basically, did *Hashem* create human beings? So that He may bring His *Shechinah* to rest within them, as it says:

הַיִּכָּל ה' הַיִּכָּל ה' – They are the sanctuary of *Hashem*, the sanctuary of *Hashem*.⁸

This is also why it says וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם – "You shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within **them**." The *Shechinah* is meant to dwell within the Jewish people themselves.

So we have six things that are basically identical in their essential form. They are the human being, the *Mishkan*, *Beis Hamikdash*, the upper worlds, the lower worlds, and also the Torah. (*Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* explained at length in another place how the Torah, too, has this characteristic.) All these six things have the same basic nature.

They look to us as if they have different forms, but these external differences are not important. Their true form is their fundamental nature, which, as we explained, is the same for them all. ●

⁸ *Yirmeyahu* 7:4.