



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

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Two Sides to Life

מִזָּה וּמִזָּה הֵם כְּתוּבִים. (שמות לב, טו)

They are written on this side and that side. (Shemos 32:15)

When Esther sent a message from the palace out to Mordechai, asking why he is dressed in sackcloth and ashes, and crying out bitterly, she phrased her question as follows:

לְדַעַת מָה זֶה וְעַל מָה זֶה – To know what is this and why is this.¹

The *Midrash* says that she was really asking the following question:

זֶה אֱ-לֹהֵי וְאֵנֹכִי – “This’ is my G-d and I will glorify Him”? Or perhaps they denied the *Luchos* [given at Sinai], about which it says מִזָּה וּמִזָּה הֵם כְּתוּבִים – “They are written on ‘this’ side and that side”?²

Let’s try to understand why Esther was so concerned about זֶה אֱ-לֹהֵי וְאֵנֹכִי – “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him”. Why did she ask about this? Why not about the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael*, which is more basic? Maybe they denied that!

Also, what is so significant about the *Luchos* being written on both sides, that Esther asked specifically about this?

There are a lot of *madreigos* and a lot of lofty perceptions and spiritual understandings. But there is a simple concept called זֶה אֱ-לֹהֵי וְאֵנֹכִי – “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him.” When the Jewish people saw the *Shechinah* at *Kri’as Yam Suf*, that’s what they said.³

This is what Esther was asking about. Perhaps

¹ Esther 4:5.

² Esther Rabbah 8:4.

³ Rashi, Shemos 15:2.

they denied the simple relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And what is this “simple relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*”? It is the reality of *אנוכי ה' אלקיך* – “I am *Hashem* your G-d,” as written on the *Luchos Habris*. It is the understanding that we are *Hashem's* beloved children. It is saying to *Hashem*, “You are my Father.”

With this relationship, any decree can be overcome, because it cuts through the whole system of upper and lower worlds, and goes straight to the point, straight to *זה א-לי ואנוהו* – “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him.” It is one's personal connection with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Then Esther asked whether they might have denied the *Luchos*, which were written on both sides. There are a lot of different situations in life. Sometimes a person really sees how *Hashem* exists, and is with him, and sometimes one's faith is put to the test.

In whatever situation, there are basically two “sides.” On Pesach we say *Hallel*, but if they would have drowned in *Yam Suf*, we would not say *Hallel*. There were two sides when they stood at the shore of the Sea of Reeds. One side is they will go through safely and be saved from the pursuing Egyptian army, and the other side is they will drown in the Sea.

And so it is with Shavu'os. We accepted the Torah when *Hashem* offered it to us, but we could also not have accepted the Torah.

However, there is a position that does away with these two sides. This is the position of *גם כי אלך בגיא*

– “Even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil.”⁴

Why won't I fear?

Because *אתה עמדי* – “You are with me.”⁵ *Hashem* is with a Jew everywhere and in every situation. When we take this position, are no two sides.

This is what the *Luchos* teach us. They had a miraculous aspect that whatever side you looked at them from, you saw *אנוכי ה' אלקיך* – “I am *Hashem* your G-d,” all the time, without any change. This is why the *Luchos* represent freedom from the Angel of Death and from all situations. Because always, no matter what, you continue to see before your eyes the great truth of *אנוכי ה' אלקיך* – “I am *Hashem* your G-d.” The simple fact of your relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Some people came out of the Holocaust as great *tzaddikim*, and some came out quite differently. There are a lot of people who keep *Shabbos*, and if you ask them why they keep it, they will answer that they have a number of reasons. But what will happen if these reasons fail?

We need to always remember what we saw in the *Luchos*. There are not two different sides. *מזה ומזה הם כתובים* – “They are written on this side and that side.” This is the position to take. However you look at it, from all angles and every side, you see the same: *אנוכי ה' אלקיך* – “I am *Hashem* your G-d.” ●

4 Tehillim 23:4.

5 Ibid.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

גדבת נדריהם ~ עשרת ימים בנינים והפארת בנינים אבותם

Be Stubborn

כִּי לֹא אֶעֱלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ כִּי עִם קֹשֶׁה עֵרָךְ אֶתָּה. (שמות לג, ג)

I will not go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked people. (*Shemos* 33:3)

We know that one of the basic traits of the Jewish people, which kept us going throughout the generations, is stubbornness and tenacity. We are a “stiff-necked people,” but in a positive sense.

The Torah usually uses the term “stiff-necked” to describe how the Jews are stubborn and won’t change their minds and are not amenable to mending their ways. However, the *Mefarshim* say that despite it being a fault, it is also a Jewish virtue. If not for the stubbornness of Jews, if not for their unbreakable spirits, they would not have been able to survive all the exiles they went through, with all the attendant troubles and *nisyonos*, for two thousand years.

On the one hand, we have already demonstrated our stubbornness and tenacity for the sake of *Hashem* and His Torah throughout the generations. A Jew would rather die than deny. All the exiles, all the suffering, and in recent years, *Haskalah* and Zionism have tried as hard as they can to tear out the last bit of genuine Jewishness from us, to no avail.

However, it seems that there is another kind of *nisayon* that Jews in general and *bnei Torah* in particular need to undergo. We need to show stubbornness and tenacity even when no one is trying to force us to transgress the laws of the Torah. Even when things are good, when we lack nothing, and we can do as we please – even then we need to tenaciously uphold our principles.

Once when speaking to a group of thoroughly secularized Jews in Israel, I said to them, “I will show you a trick how I can make all of you into *Shabbos* observers, and you will tell me whether I am right or not.”

“What do you mean?” they asked.

So I explained.

“If I would explain to you very well why you need to keep *Shabbos*, and how pleasant and sweet it is to keep *Shabbos*, etc etc, you would not keep *Shabbos*. Even if I proved to you that there is *Gan Eden* and *Gehinom*, you still would not keep *Shabbos*.

“But if an Arab dictator would get control of Israel, and would announce that anyone who keeps *Shabbos* shall be put to death, in other words, he is forcing you to desecrate *Shabbos*, you would all start keeping *Shabbos*.

“Am I right or not?”

They said, “Yes, you are right. We admit it. If we would be forced to transgress the Torah, we would do the opposite.”

This is Jewish pride.

So why, when no one is forcing them to desecrate *Shabbos*, do so many people disregard *Shabbos* observance?

In a certain way, it is much harder to keep the Torah when no one is forcing you to do otherwise. This is the great *nisayon* of our generation. I am not downplaying previous generations in any way, far be it from me. They showed greatness of spirit and soul. In supreme holiness, they gave up their lives for the sake of the Torah. But also we, in our generation, need to show our faithfulness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as Jews and as *bnei Torah*, and to this purpose, we have been placed in a new kind of *nisayon*.

A few decades ago, a Jew who kept up Torah and *yiras Shamayim* did so *lishmah*, for its own sake. Anyone whose *emunah* was not deeply rooted, anyone who did not have *l’sheim Shamayim* planted firmly in his heart, quickly gravitated in other

directions. Many *yeshivah bachurim* left Torah and *Yiddishkeit* in those days.

Today we live in a different generation. Many people are part of the Torah world only for the simple reason that they have nothing better to do... The street culture is not a very attractive alternative,

and neither is serving in the Israeli army. People are where they are because that's where they are, without any special reason.

This is why we must put content into our *avodas Hashem* and keep well-aware of the true goal in life. ●

SPECIAL TOPIC



Divinely Natural (Part II)

Purim is a Lottery

The name for Purim comes from *pur*, which is the ancient Persian word for “lot,” as in “casting lots.” This tells us a lot about the nature of Purim.

Deciding something by casting lots would seem to be a totally natural thing. You cast lots by putting a bunch of slips of paper in a container, and each slip has something written on it, and one of those slips is blindly selected. This looks like a decision based on chance alone, because one of the lots in the container will inevitably be selected, and it's up to chance which one it will be.

However, there are several places in the Torah and *Tanach* where we see that casting lots is quite the opposite. It is actually a way for a decision to be made by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* himself.

Eretz Yisrael was divided up between the Twelve Tribes on the basis of lots. This is how they decided who will get the territory by the seashore, and so forth. Each tribe naturally wanted the best territory for itself, so they put it up to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to decide. This was done by means of casting lots.¹

Lots were also employed on Yom Kippur to decide which of two identical goats would go to *Hashem* as a *korban chatas*, and which would go to *Azazel*. No *kohen* can select a goat and send it to *Eisav*. That would be *avodah zarah*. Only *Hakadosh*

Baruch Hu can do that, which is why casting lots was the method employed.

And then there is the story in *Sefer Yehoshua* about someone who took consecrated goods for himself in the battle against the city of Ai, and they didn't know who it was. The lot fell on Achan. Achan argued that everyone's name was put into the container, and someone's name had to be chosen, and he was just the unlucky one. But Yehoshua requested of him to “show honor to *Hashem*, the G-d of Yisrael,”² and admit to the truth that he was really the one who committed the crime, so as not to malign the casting of lots. Because the casting of lots is the word of *Hashem*.³

All this shows that an action of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, when it is expressed within the natural order, is by casting lots.

This tells us about Purim. It is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* acting within the natural order. And this is why we read the *Megilah*, which, as we explained before, “reveals” the truth about the world and what happens in it. The Maharal says that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sealed the decree of annihilation against the Jewish people, it was considered as if they actually died. Then He created a new people through the new acceptance of the Torah that they made at that time.

² Yehoshua 7:19.

³ See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 23:6.

¹ See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 21:9 and *Meiri on Mishlei* 18:18.

Purim reveals to us not just *Hashem's* great love that was aroused at the time of danger, but also about the nature of the whole world. It reveals to us what we should be thinking when we drink a glass of water and make a *shehakol*.

The *Megillah* reveals the great closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that exists in the natural world. Purim's power is in nature itself.

Food to Friends and Gifts to the Poor

The basic *mitzvah* on Purim is reading the *Megillah*, which is words of Torah that open our minds. But that realization and the love of *Hashem* that it engenders need to be put into action. We need to perform practical *mitzvos* in that spirit, which is *Mishloach Manos* and *Matanos l'Evyonim*.

The *Megillah* teaches us to emphasize the love of *Hashem* that is aroused within us, by means of deeds. So after reading the *Megillah*, we go and do three practical *mitzvos*. The most profound of them is the *Purim Seudah*. The *Megillah* taught us how much of *Hashem's* love there is in Purim. Suddenly we discover that this love is the fundamental reality of the whole world.

One of the ways people express love is by giving gifts. But there are two kinds of gifts. The first kind is, for instance, I notice that my friend needs a pen, so I go and buy him one as a gift. This gift greatly strengthens the friendship. But the whole purpose of the gift was just to supply what the recipient lacked. He needed a pen, and he got a pen.

The second kind of gift is giving something that the recipient did not lack in the first place. The very act of gifting is the point, because it expresses love. For instance, a man buys a flower bouquet for his wife. She is not a flower fanatic and she doesn't feel that her home is lacking if there are no fresh-cut flowers sitting on the table in a vase. The whole idea of giving the bouquet is to express their love for one another.

So what about *Matanos l'Evyonim* and *Mishloach Manos*?

They express these two types of giving. *Matanos l'Evyonim* is when the recipient lacks something, and the gift fills his lack. But *Mishloach Manos* is not about filling a lack. The recipient might be a very wealthy neighbor who has plenty of everything, but there still is a *mitzvah* to send him portions of food. It's not about filling a lack but rather a pure expression of love.

This is why *Mishloach Manos* only needs to be sent to one person, but you need to give *Matanos l'Evyonim* to a minimum of two paupers. *Mishloach Manos* more represents an act of gifting performed out of love. And if you distribute gifts to everyone, this dilutes the expression of love. Whereas *Matanos l'Evyonim* is to fill the lack of the recipient, so the more people whose lacks get filled, the better.

Also *Hashem's chesed* and giving to us has these two types. Sometimes it is to give us what we lack, and sometimes it is simply to express His love for us. Let's take clothing for example. *Hashem* gives a person a shirt to wear, and this is something the person actually needs. He can't get by without shirts. He needs them. But when *Hashem* gives him a necktie, it's different. The person can get by just fine without another tie; it's not something he lacks. So when *Hashem* gives him a tie, this is a real expression of love. So to speak, the shirt is *Matanos l'Evyonim*, and the tie is *Mishloach Manos*.

This is why we fulfill these two *mitzvos* after reading the *Megillah*. As we said, the *Megillah* reveals the truth about the world and how much *Hashem* loves us and gives to us. And the relationship of love that we have with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as revealed in the *Megillah*, makes us want to give gifts. If we could, we would give these gifts to *Hashem*. But you can't give *Hashem* gifts, so we give them, out of our very love for *Hashem*, to our fellow Jews, who are *Hashem's* beloved children. ●