

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

Carry Them on Your Heart

וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּחֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט עַל לְבוֹ בְּבָאוּ אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי
ה' תָּמִיד: (שמות כח, כט)

**Aharon will carry the names of the people of Yisrael in the *Choshen Hamishpat* on his heart when he enters the holy place, as a constant remembrance before *Hashem*.
(*Shemos* 28:29)**

Our *parshah* speaks about the holy and splendid garments that the *Kohen Gadol* wore when he performed his service in *Beis Hamikdash*. These special articles of clothing have rich symbolism. They teach us profound lessons about the nature of the human soul.

A person's clothing naturally tells about who he is. For instance, if he dresses like a *talmid chacham*, we can assume that Torah learning is probably the main thing in his life. By contrast, a person who just hangs out and engages in empty pleasures will probably dress in a way that reflects this.

What about the garments a *kohen* wears when he serves *Hashem* in *Beis Hamikdash*? They reflect the

qualities of a perfected human being who serves his Creator. In fact, all Jews are called "*kohanim*," as it says:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמֻלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ
You shall be for Me a kingdom of *kohanim*
and a holy nation.¹

We can thus learn from the *Bigdei Kehunah* a lot of important lessons about ourselves and our *avodah*. Let's look at a couple points.

There are two places where the names of the Twelve Tribes were engraved on the garments of the *Kohen Gadol*. And both places teach us really

¹ *Shemos* 19:6.

amazing ideas.

The Torah says that the names of the Children of Yisrael were engraved on the *Choshen Hamishpat*. And Aharon carried these names on his heart when he served in *Beis Hamikdash*. This shows that every individual can carry the entire Jewish people on his heart. He does this by loving and caring for all of *Am Yisrael*.

And also on the shoulder straps of the *Eifod*, the names of all *Bnei Yisrael* were engraved:

וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת שְׁתֵּי אֲבְנֵי שֹהַם וּפְתַחְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם
שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – You shall take two
shoham stones and engrave upon them the
names of the people of Yisrael.²

So we see that a person can also carry the whole Jewish people on his shoulders. He does this by holding up all of *Am Yisrael* through his greatness in Torah. This is what the giants of our people did. About Rashi it is said that without him, the Torah would have been forgotten by the Jewish people. Also the Rif, the Rambam and the *Gedolim* of every generation carried the whole Jewish people in their hearts and on their shoulders.

But there is a difference. The names of the people of Yisrael as carried on the heart were engraved on twelve separate stones, one stone for the name of each tribe. Whereas the names carried on Aharon's shoulders were grouped together on only two stones, six names on each stone. What does this teach us?

When we bring spiritual benefit to the public

by teaching them Torah and *yiras Shamayim*, this generally relates to the public as a whole. It includes all the individuals together. But when it comes to loving our fellow Jew, it is not sufficient to just love the Jewish nation. We need to love each person individually, as he is.

This latter point is brought out by the twelve individual stones on the *Choshen Mishpat*. Each represented one of the Twelve Tribes. And each of the Tribes was considered in many aspects to be a people on its own.³ Just as the different nations in the world have significantly different qualities and characteristics, which engenders hatred and war between them, so the Twelve Tribes of the Jewish people had different natures, which led to fights and conflicts between the Tribes.

Hashem commanded for each tribe to have its own unique holy stone. Each tribe was represented on the *Choshen* by a different kind of gem or precious stone, each with its own color and characteristics. And the *Kohen Gadol* bore all the stones together on his heart because one must love each individual Jew, as he is, with his own unique nature, with the practices that characterize his community and the *minhagim* he inherited from his family and ancestors, with all the differences that exist between various Jewish communities and places of origin.

And then, when we love our fellow Jew in this way, all of *Am Yisrael* will be remembered before *Hashem*, and Heaven will open to bestow a flood of blessings upon us, forever. ●

2 Ibid 28:9.

3 See *Bereishis* 35:12 and Rashi's commentary ad loc.



Pleasing Fragrance

וְהִקְטִיר עָלָיו אֶהָרֵן קֶטֶרֶת סַמִּים. (שמות ל, ז)

Aharon shall burn incense of fragrant spices upon it. (*Shemos* 30:7)

The *Ketores* of *Beis Hamikdash* had a special *segulah* of bringing wealth to he who offered it. Because it says יְשִׁמוּ קֶטֶרָה בְּאַפָּךְ – “They shall place incense in Your nostrils,”¹ and right afterward it says בָּרַךְ ה' חֵילוֹ – “May *Hashem* bless his wealth.”²

When the daily lotteries were held in *Beis Hamikdash* to decide which *kohanim* would do what, only those *kohanim* who never got to offer *Ketores* were allowed to participate in that particular lottery. This way, every *kohen* would get an opportunity to do this special *avodah* at least once in his life, as it carried a special *segulah* for wealth.

But why did the *Ketores* have this special power?

The following allegory brings out the point. Let's say someone goes into a jewelry shop to buy an expensive gold watch as a gift. After he pays, the salesperson packs up the watch in a fancy box and wraps it with nice wrapping paper. The customer asks, “How much do I need to pay for the nice packaging?” The salesperson says, “You don't need to pay. The packaging is for free.” And before the customer leaves the store, the salesperson gives him another few fancy boxes and whatnot so he will have them at home in case he might need them.

There was bystander in the store who saw the generous salesperson giving out fancy packaging for free. He goes up to the counter and asks for a few of those fancy boxes for himself. The salesperson says, “Sure, no problem, but they cost \$15 each.”

The bystander says, “But wait a minute, you just gave that other guy for free. Why do I have to pay

full price?”

The salesperson says, “Well, you know, he just bought a really expensive item, and paid a high price for it. That's why he gets the packaging for free. But you want only the boxes, so you need to pay what they cost.”

That's how it is with *avodas Hashem*. Wealth is really just a shiny external packaging, compared to earnest and excited *avodas Hashem* that comes from within.

However, there are two kinds of *avodah*. There is the main *avodah*, which is fulfilling *mitzvos* with all of one's limbs and organs, and that is represented by the service performed on the *Mizbeach Hachitzon*, the “external” Altar, on which burnt offerings were placed. And then there is the *avodah* that is performed with zest and excitement within one's own heart. This is represented by the *Mizbeach Hapenimi*, the “inner” Altar, on which the incense was burned.

If a person's service of *Hashem* is only external, it is hard for him to merit wealth through this. He would be fortunate if it is enough for him and his family just to merit a modest *parnassah* and to stay healthy. Such a person needs to really exert himself in *tefilos* and *bakashos* to merit wealth as well.

A person who offers *Ketores* is different. It represents a fine inner *avodah* that brings before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* the pleasing fragrance of truly heartfelt feelings. This is such a precious “item” that it naturally comes along with nice “packaging”; *Hashem* blesses him with wealth. It's not because he “deserves” the fancy package, because for an expensive piece of jewelry, the pretty box is free, and you get more to go. ●

1 *Devarim* 33:1.

2 *Ibid* v. 2

Utterly Opposite

On Purim, we fulfill four *mitzvos*: we read the *Megillah*, we send food to friends, we give money to the poor and we hold a festive banquet. Let's understand what makes these *mitzvos* tick.

It is emphasized on Purim that ונהפוך הוא – everything turned around to the opposite. This is a key point, and *Yitzchak Avinu* illustrates it.

Rivkah first saw Yitzchak when he went out to the field towards evening time,¹ and Rivkah was astounded by his appearance.² What was Yitzchak doing out in the field, and what was so astounding about his appearance?

The common explanation is that he went out to the field to pray the *Minchah* prayer. But there is another *Midrash* that says Yitzchak went for a walk in *Gan Eden*. And when Rivkah lifted up her eyes, she saw him come out of *Gan Eden*.³ Why did she lean downwards from the camel on which she was riding? Because when people come out of *Gan Eden*, their feet are up and their heads are down.⁴ Thus she leaned downward to see him from the right angle.

We are not going into here what took place between Yitzchak and Rivkah, but the point is that Yitzchak exemplified ונהפוך הוא, everything turned around to the opposite, because this is how a person exits *Gan Eden*. His feet are up and his head is down, the opposite of the regular position. Yitzchak's very name alludes to this point. His name means "laughter." When we understand what makes people laugh, we will see that his name is quite appropriate.

¹ Bereishis 24:63.

² Rashi on Bereishis 24:64, citing the *Midrash*.

³ See *Yalkut Shimoni*, Bereishis 109.

⁴ See *Midrash Tanchuma*, Emor 2.

R. Akiva Laughs

R. Akiva was known to laugh.

Rabban Gamliel and R. Elazar ben Azaria and R. Yehoshua and R. Akiva entered the city of Rome and heard the sound of its multitudes from Potlialus to a distance of 120 *mil*. They started crying, but R. Akiva laughed.

They said to him, "Akiva, we are crying and you are laughing?!"

He answered, "And as for you, why are you crying?"

They replied, "Why shouldn't we cry? The non-Jews serve idolatry... and dwell in security, peace and tranquility. And the [Temple, the] footstool of our G-d was burned by fire and became a den for wild animals. Shouldn't we cry?"

He said to them, "This is why I am laughing. If this is how well those who anger *Hashem* are treated, surely it will be so with those who do His Will."⁵

Later on, the same *Midrash* tells another story about R. Akiva laughing.

Another time, they were ascending to *Yerushalayim*. When they got to *Tzofim* [from where they could see the ruins of *Yerushalayim*] they tore their clothes. Then they got to *Har Habayis* and saw a fox going out of the place of the *Kodesh Kodoshim*, and started crying. But R. Akiva laughed.

They said to him, "Akiva, you always surprise us. We are crying, and you are laughing?!"

⁵ *Midrash Eichah Rabbasi* 5:18.

He answered, “And as for you, why are you crying?”

They replied, “Why shouldn’t we cry? This is the place about which it written והזר יומת הקרב – “The stranger who draws close shall be put to death.” And a fox is coming out of it, fulfilling the verse על הר ציון ששמים שועלים הלכו בו – “For Mount Zion which is desolate; foxes walk about on it.”

He said to them, “That is why I am laughing...”⁶

R. Akiva explains to them that a fox coming out of the place of the *Kodesh Kodoshim* is actually a consoling sight. The *Midrash* concludes by saying:

They said to him as follows: “Akiva, you have consoled us. May you be consoled by greeting the harbinger [of the *Geulah*].”⁷

Similarly, when R. Eliezer fell ill, everyone present cried, and R. Akiva laughed.⁸

These are three occasions on which R. Akiva is noted to have laughed. Why is behind R. Akiva’s laughter?

Two Takes on Natural Events

The focal point of Purim, and the inner essence of all the holidays and in fact the entire Torah, is the relationship between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the Jewish people. But there is a significant barrier to this relationship. It is nature.

Here’s a simple example that demonstrates the point. In front of every person’s nostrils there is a great gift. It is called air. Without air, a person would die. So why aren’t people all excited about this gift? Why aren’t we all yelling, “Thank you, *Hashem*, for air!!”

It’s because everyone has air, not just you and me. *Hashem* gives air to the entire world, and along with everyone else, we, too, get air. It’s natural. It’s the same when a person discovers in the morning that he has bread in his home. He doesn’t feel that it is such a special gift, because everyone else has bread, too. It’s natural.

It’s like someone entering a home and seeing a platter full of cookies on the table. There are two ways to relate to the platter of cookies. Maybe the host put out twenty cookies for twenty people, and the guest who just came in is one of them. But it could also be that the host put out a special cookie for this guest, and he added a lot of other cookies around it, so the guest won’t feel uncomfortable.

It’s exactly the same way when a person breathes air. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created a portion of air special for him, but He has a reason for wanting to hide the powerfulness of His *chesed*, so He adds a few hundred billion more portions of air around it. However, a person should know that this *chesed* of air was done specially for him.

Here’s another example. A person goes into the corner grocery and buys a carton of milk. How does he relate to this carton of milk? He probably thinks that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* put 500 cartons of milk into the store for all the people who live in the area, and he happens to be one of them. But the truth is that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* lovingly put a carton of milk in the store specifically for his family. Since we live in a world of darkness, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* hid this act of kindness in the dark, by putting another 499 cartons of milk around it, so no one will notice what’s going on.

This is what Purim is all about. On Purim, we discover the truth about reality. We realize that we need to turn upside down our whole way of looking at natural events. ונהפוך הוא. If the person in the corner grocery thought until now that there are 500 cartons of milk lying there, on Purim he realizes that it’s not so. He should think, “There is one carton of milk here, which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* lovingly prepared just for me.”

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Sanhedrin* 101a.

A Megillah Reveals

Purim has four *mitzvos*, and we will explain them one by one. The first *mitzvah* is reading the *Megillah*. The word מגילה comes from the word מגלה, which means “revealing.”

All the holidays teach us what *Yiddishkeit* is, what *mitzvos* are, and we rise above nature. But Purim is completely different. Purim teaches us about nature. It reveals to us what nature really is, that inherent in every natural event, in every instance of nature, there is the power of our relationship of love with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This is the focal point of the whole story recounted in the *Megillah*.

For instance, the beginning of the *Megillah* tells us כְּשֶׁבַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ עַל כֶּסֶּא מְלָכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה – “When King Achashveirosh ascended his royal throne that was in Shushan the capital.”⁹ Why did Achashveirosh decide to set up his throne in Shushan, when all previous kings ruled the empire from Bavel? Because he wanted to sit on the throne of *Shlomo Hamelech*, but he knew that if he tries to climb up on the throne, he will be smitten by the animals.

So Achashveirosh decided to build for himself a throne similar to Shlomo’s. He sent an order to the craftsmen in Persia to build him such a throne, which they did. But it was so heavy that they could not transport it to Bavel. So Achashveirosh got up and moved the capital of the empire to Shushan, instead of Bavel, and it was all so he could sit on this special throne.¹⁰

What was behind all this? Why did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* cause this to transpire? Because Mordechai lived in Shushan. Even when we have just started reading the *Megillah*, and we hear the words עַל כֶּסֶּא מְלָכוּתוֹ, we already know that the whole world revolves around *Mordechai Hatzaddik*. This is

why the *Megillah* is called *Megillah*. It reveals, מגלה, the true nature of reality.

No Names

This is the reason that no name of *Hashem* is mentioned anywhere in the *Megillah*. Because if *Hashem’s* Name would be written openly, this would represent leaving the natural world and entering the sphere of the supernatural. Which would be what Pesach is all about. But Purim reveals to us that everything that takes place naturally in this dark world is the peak of *Hashem’s* love for us. וְנִהְיֶה הוּא: whatever you observe in the natural world is really the greatest Divine love.

We all have our “feet down.” Where do we think human beings come from? The earth. And where do we aspire to? Heaven. But Yitzchak was set in the opposite position. Rivkah saw him leaving *Gan Eden*, as stated in the above-mentioned *Midrash*, with his feet up and his head down. He came from Heaven and his goal was to find *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* here in this natural world.

This is why Yitzchak is named after laughter, *tzechok*. He laughs, so to speak, at how most people look at the world. Because everyone thinks the opposite, but Yitzchak knows that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is here, in every breath a person takes. And when things turn out to be the opposite of how they appear, it elicits laughter.

This is how we should look at the natural world and the natural events that take place in it. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wanted to hide Himself, so He gave air to another 500 people around each individual. But the truth is that each individual should feel that the gift is intended for him. וְעַל כָּל נְשִׁימָה וְנִשְׁמָה תְּהִלָּה – “For each and every breath, praise *Hashem*.”¹¹ ●

To be continued next week.

⁹ Esther 1:2.

¹⁰ See *Esther Rabbah* 1:12.

¹¹ *Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9.