



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

Your Most Important Tool

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחַי בָּהֶם. (ויקרא יח, ה)

Which a person should do them and live through them. (*Vayikra* 18:5)

What is the source that saving a life takes precedence over keeping *Shabbos*? ...Said Rav Yehudah, said Shmuel: If I was there, I would have said my source is better than yours: "And live through them" – implying, and not die through them. (*Yoma* 85b)

The Torah teaches us in this verse that *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, pushes aside *Shabbos* observance, and in fact, almost every *mitzvah* in the Torah. Aside from the big three, we can transgress any prohibition to save a life.

Let's understand why.

Chazal and early Torah sources¹ tell us not only that all the upper worlds are reflected here, in the world of physical actions, but that their very existence and functioning and channeling of Divine goodness is all decided here.

Our physical world could be compared to a

control box in a building. It has buttons that control a tremendous system of machines, engines and other powerful things. Let's say the whole system is worth a hundred million dollars. The actual buttons in the box are actually worth very little. They could be replaced for fifty or sixty bucks. But they control the whole system.

These buttons hold within them all the things that can be done in the building. One button turns on the electricity in a certain wing, another button in the next wing, the third button turns on the engine of the machines, etc. This is where you have control over the whole tremendous system, and it all depends on pressing these buttons.

Pikuach nefesh means saving the body, because

¹ See *Nefesh Hachayim* 1:3.

everything depends on the body.

Everything goes according to the amount of action.²

If the body passes away, there are no more “buttons.” You can’t run anything. When a person dies, *rachamana litzlan*, what seems to happen? The *nefesh* is still there, the *ruach* is still there, the *neshamah* is still there, and so the higher parts of the soul. Everything is there. But what’s the problem? There’s no “button.” There is no one to run the whole system. In such a case, everything comes to naught.

So are all the upper worlds tied to a person’s body. When the body ascends, they ascend with it, and when it falls, *chas v’shalom*, they fall too.

Even in *Tefilah*, which is service of the heart, we

² Pirkei Avos 3:15.

need the participation of the body. It’s not enough for the mouth to speak, because *Tefilah* needs כל עצמותי תאמרנה – “All my bones shall say.”³ This is why there is a *minhag* to sway when *davening*. And when we recite the *Kedushah*, we jump up a little. We get the body involved in the *Tefilah*.

When we recite the *Kedushah*, we are, so to speak, in the world of the angels, and ostensibly, the right thing to do is be silent and stand motionless. Even so, the body jumps and elevates itself. It thereby elevates everything, because the body is a tremendous tool that everything depends on.

The body can grant a person unparalleled spiritual power. It can also drag him down to the depths of depravity.

It is thus so important that protecting the body takes precedence over the whole Torah. ●

³ Tehillim 35:10.

Emotional Judgment

בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ. (ויקרא יט, טו)

You shall judge your fellow justly. (*Vayikra* 19:15)

This *pasuk* speaks of the *mitzvah* of לכה זכות, viewing every person favorably. *Igeres Haramban* goes even further and says that a person should consider all those around him to be better than him.

This outlook is hard to grasp. Does it mean a person should delude himself?

R. Yisrael Salanter explained that this *mitzvah* is not about how we view others intellectually. It is

לעילוי נשמת

אמינו מרת חיה זיסל עלקא בת ר' שמעון דויטש ע"ה

ומרת אסתר רויזא בת אברהם יחיאל דויטש ע"ה

ומה"ר משה בן אליעזר ע"ה ומרת חוה בת דוד האמבורגער ע"ה

ומה"ר ברוך זאב בן נפתלי ע"ה ומרת גיטל צביה בת מרדכי קראוס ע"ה

ומה"ר שמעון בן צבי דב ע"ה ומרת בלומא בת אפרים מעגלו ע"ה

נדבת משפחת מרדכי דויטש

about how we view others emotionally, similar to how a person views himself.

What does this mean?

A person knows himself. He knows his weak areas, his *aveiros* and his improper thoughts. If he would know that his fellow has all these negative qualities, he would distance himself from him and consider him a thoroughly evil person. However, even though he has all these negative qualities himself, he does not see himself as a *rasha*. He has an excuse for every one of his lackings and an explanation for each one of his sins.

For instance, a person who learns Torah most of the time feels confident that he is a true *masmid*. Although he speaks idle talk here and there, he doesn't attribute importance to those moments. But when his *masmid* friend starts talking for a moment, he immediately strikes him off the "*masmid*" list.

Or he sees his fellow all wrapped up in *tefilah*, swaying kind of unusually, and looks at him critically, saying to himself, "O come on, is that how you stand before a king?" He doesn't remember that yesterday when he had a sick family member, he looked exactly the same when he was praying, and

considered it totally fine and correct.

It's all because "a person is his own relative"¹ and loves himself. His emotions overpower his intellect and explain away every fault he may have. (This phenomenon is actually one of *Hashem's* kindnesses, because otherwise a person would constantly be miserable over his true state, and would not be able to live with himself.)

The forgiving eye we have for ourselves is how we should look upon others. We should have love and emotion for them, rather than cold, intellectual judging.

We don't know what is in the mind of the other person or understand why he behaves the way he does. Let's say you see that Reuven or Shimon or Yehudah hardly learns Torah, and doesn't *daven* properly either. But you don't know why. Because of your lack of true knowledge in this area, all those things happening in the world are not pertinent to you. It's not your job to judge them. The only thing in the world that is pertinent to you is your own self, because you know yourself. The only person you should be evaluating is you. ●

¹ Yevamos 25b.

PARSHA TOPIC

Love and Prayer

וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ. (ויקרא יט, יח)

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (*Vayikra* 19:18)

Loving Others is Part of Tefilah

The Arizal is quoted as follows:

Before a person recites his order of prayer in *shul*, from *Parshas Ha'akeidah*

and on, he needs to accept upon himself to fulfill the *mitzvah* of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He should have in mind to love each member of the Jewish people as he loves himself, because

by means of this, his prayer will ascend, included in all the prayers of the Jewish people, and will thus be able to rise to Heaven and bear fruit.

Here we see that fulfilling the *mitzvah* of loving others, before *davening*, is not just a good idea. It is an essential part of *tefilah* itself. “Because by means of this, his prayer will ascend, included in all the prayers of the Jewish people.”

How did love for other Jews get to be an essential part of *tefilah*? What’s the connection? The simple explanation is based on the following. The Rambam writes:

Teshuvah is such great virtue! Yesterday this person was separated from *Hashem*, G-d of Yisrael, as it says, “Your sins separated between you and your G-d.” He cried out to *Hashem* and was not answered, as it says, “Even if you pray a lot...” He did *mitzvos* and they were ripped up in front of him, as it says, “Who asked this of you, to trample My courtyards?” And today he is attached to the *Shechinah*.¹

This tells us something important about *tefilah*. A person could pray but not be answered. On the contrary, his *mitzvah* could be ripped up in front of him. In truth, every prayer will ascend, but it doesn’t necessarily happen right away. One’s prayer could be detained somewhere until its time comes to rise to Heaven.

We should not take it for granted that our prayers will ascend to the Divine Throne of Glory, and if they get detained on their way up, that’s not a good thing. However, the Arizal offered us an awesome and amazing *eitzah* for our prayers to ascend to Heaven. This means of uplifting our prayers can be understood in several different ways.

One way is as follows: it is similar to the power of *davening* with the *tzibbur*. The *Gemara* says that

prayer recited in public bears the promise of *הן א-ל ימאס*, *כביר ולא ימאס*, “The mighty G-d will not reject it.”² When we *daven* with the *tzibbur*, the prayer of the whole congregation together is one complete entity, and *Hashem* will never reject such a prayer. As Rashi explains, “In public, their prayer is heard, even though not everyone’s heart is fully in it.”

The Arizal’s innovation was to apply this principle even if one’s prayer was not actually recited with the congregation. If one is connected to the *tzibbur* by loving all fellow Jews, and especially if he is involved with them by teaching them Torah, he thereby acquires connection to *Hashem*. This wields a tremendous power to cause his prayer to be accepted.

Another way to understand it is along the lines of *midah k’neged midah*. If you love (others), you are loved (by *Hashem*). If there is a single person in the world that you have something against, this is very damaging to your soul. It affects your very relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

If you have something against a certain Jew, then you have something against *Hashem*’s only child, so to speak, because every Jew is like *Hashem*’s only child. This is not good, because if you have a problem with someone’s beloved only child, you have a problem with the father, too. It is very hard for a parent to maintain a good relationship with someone who hates his beloved only child.

It All Boils Down to Faith

Now we will take it to a deeper level.

The *mitzvos* of *tefilah* and of loving one’s neighbor have a common root, and that is *emunah*. The power of our prayers derives from our *emunah*, from the fact that we pray because we believe in *Hashem* and rely on Him to take care of us. And the litmus test of how firmly we believe that *Hashem* is all-powerful and runs the world is the degree to which we love our neighbor. Proper fulfillment of this *mitzvah* is the greatest proof that we rely on

¹ Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 7:7.

² Iyov 36: 5; Taanis 8a.

Hashem to take care of everything in our lives, and real faith in *Hashem* empowers our prayers to be accepted by Him.

Why is it so hard for us to love our neighbor? We don't need to take everything we have and give it to him. We only need to love him as we love ourselves. That he should have what we have. What's so hard about that?

It all boils down to a lack of faith. For instance, let's say you are walking along and you see in front of you a Jew who doesn't make the impression of being a very nice guy at all. The wretched person in front of you looks like he has no connection to Torah or even to basic good manners. You look at him and ask yourself, "I know it is written that everyone should say, 'The world was created for me,' but did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* really create the whole world just for this guy?!"

However, the truth is that this Jew is *Hashem's* only child, so to speak. It is as if *Hashem* is saying: Right now, *Avraham Avinu* does not interest Me, nor does Yitzchak or Yaakov or the *Gedolim* of past generations. Only this sweet, lovable Jew interests Me. *Hashem* takes him, so to speak, and gives him a big hug.

It's true that human beings are not capable of behaving in this way, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has infinite *chesed*. With infinity, there is no such thing as going too far, so it is quite clear that this is how *Hashem* relates to every Jew – like a father's unending love for his beloved only child.

Tefilah depends on loving one's neighbor because someone who doesn't love every Jew is showing a lack of faith in *Hashem's* trait of *chesed*. When a person turns to *Hashem* in prayer and asks Him to take care of all his needs, this comes from a recognition of how much *Hashem* loves every Jew and wants the best for him. Just like *Hashem* loves me and wants to give me everything I need, He loves my neighbor the same. Since *Hashem* bestows infinite *chesed* and loves every Jew, my neighbor must be part of all this, too. Every single

Jew is therefore a *zisser yid*, a sweet Jew. Sweet as honey!

Seeing the Positive

This idea explains a story from the *Gemara* about an incident that happened to R. Elazar son of R. Shimon as he was traveling home from the *beis midrash* of his rabbi:

R. Elazar came upon a man who was exceedingly ugly. The man said to him, "*Shalom* to you, rabbi," and R. Elazar did not greet him in return. He rather said to him, "You worthless man, you are so ugly! Is everyone in your town as ugly as you?"

The man replied, "I don't know, but go and say to the Craftsman Who made me, 'The piece You made is so ugly!'"

When R. Elazar realized that he had sinned, he got off the donkey and prostrated himself before him and said to him, "I submit to you; forgive me!"

The man responded, "I won't forgive you until you go to the Craftsman Who made me and say to Him, 'The piece You made is so ugly'...."

R. Elazar and the people of his town begged the man very much to forgive him, and in the end, he forgave him.³

It's obvious that this story is not to be taken at face value. R. Elazar son of R. Shimon was an exceedingly holy and pious *Tanna*, and it doesn't make any sense that he would refuse to return a greeting, and instead make a really rude and insulting remark to a total stranger, just because he was ugly. What could possibly bring him to do such a thing?

The following story will help us understand the point *Chazal* were making. (I heard the following story from someone who heard it firsthand.) R. Issar Zalman Meltzer was once sitting in his *sukkah* on

3 *Taanis* 20b.

Chol Hamo'ed Sukkos, and asked R. Dovid Finkel to bring him a pen and paper. R. Dovid asked him, "But it's *chol hamo'ed*, isn't it forbidden to write?" R. Issar Zalman answered, "It's *pikuach nefesh*!"

After R. Dovid Finkel brought pen and paper, R. Issar Zalman wrote down a *pasuk*. He wrote, עֵינֶיךָ לִנְכַח וְעַפְעָפֶיךָ יִשְׁרוּ נֶגְדְךָ – "Your eyes should look right ahead; your eyes should focus their gaze straight in front of you."⁴

R. Dovid Finkel asked, "Why is this a matter of life and death?"

R. Issar Zalman answered, "I am sitting here in the *sukkah* and people come to visit me. Since I can recognize a person's whole character just by looking at him, I immediately notice the shortcomings of each of my visitors. I was sitting and thinking such thoughts about other people, and suddenly I caught myself and realized that it is not right to focus on criticizing others. Rather, 'Your eyes should focus their gaze straight in front of you.' [In other words, I should be minding my own business.]"

That's the story about R. Issar Zalman Meltzer. Now let's get back to R. Elazar son of R. Shimon.

R. Shimon saw the ugly man with a view that was not just superficial and external. He saw deep into the man's character and into his very soul. That is why he called him "worthless." R. Elazar perceived that he was ugly through and through, layer after layer, all the way down to the source of his *neshamah*. The man was not even deserving of the greeting "*Shalom*." R. Elazar discerned in him not a single beautiful point.

R. Elazar was so shocked by the corrupted state of this man that he asked him, "Is everyone in your town as ugly as you?" In other words, he thought that

maybe the man's location has a negative influence on those who live there.

R. Elazar had good intentions. Out of love for this wretched man, he sought to arouse him to better his ways and save his soul, for his own good in this world and the next. R. Elazar wanted the man to know that even if he does good deeds sometimes, his inner self is ugly, and this needs to be corrected.

The ugly man responded, "I don't know." This, too, needs to be explained. He should have known if his fellow townsmen are ugly, too.

The ugly man meant that he doesn't know how to look deeply into a person's *neshamah* to determine its ugliness or lack thereof, but if R. Elazar knows how to do that, if R. Elazar is such a lofty person, then he should know that that the *neshamah* is the point of connection and belonging to the Creator. "If my ugliness goes so deep," the man claimed, "then you should go to the Craftsman Who made me and ask Him to clean me up. I won't forgive you until you do so!"

R. Elazar realized that the ugly man was making a profound point. Since the *neshamah* is the point of connection and relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, this ugly man, who was a Jew, was surely connected to *Hashem* in the root of his soul no less than R. Elazar himself was. If so, he can't really be so ugly after all.

R. Elazar apparently suffered from a subtle spiritual imperfection that caused him to see only the man's ugliness and not his good side. That is why he said, "I submit to you; forgive me!" Rashi explains that R. Elazar was admitting that he had said more than he should have.

This is a lesson for us: the *mitzvah* of loving our neighbor requires us to look specifically at the positive points that surely exist in every single Jew, since every Jew is connected to *Hashem* and belongs to Him. ●

⁴ *Mishlei* 4:25.