



# 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

## Names and Numbers

בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת. (במדבר א, ב)

**By the number of the names. (*Bemidbar* 1:2)**

We know that *Hashem* oversees His world. This is called *Hashgachah*, Divine Providence. However, the *Rishonim* say there are actually two kinds of *Hashgachah*: there is *Hashgachah Klalis*, general Providence, and there is *Hashgachah Pratis*, individualized Providence.

The following metaphor brings out the difference. Someone is constructing a building and he sets a brick into the wall. This brick is very important to him. If he takes it out, the wall will fall down. But the single brick on its own is not the point. It is not the purpose. Rather, each one of the bricks needs to be in place because of its role in forming the wall as a whole. This is a metaphor for *Hashgachah Klalis*.

However, for Jews there is *Hashgachah Pratis*. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* loves each individual Jew personally, like a parent loves a child. Even if a parent has ten children, his love for each one is not because that child helps create the total number of family members, but because the child himself is beloved

and important to the parent.

Here the Torah says *Bnei Yisrael* were counted by “the number of the names.” This sounds like two contradictory concepts.

A number is usually employed to describe a generality, a group. When a commander sends a thousand soldiers out to war, he doesn’t know each one individually. Neither does each individual soldier have the ability to win the war. But together, as a thousand soldiers, they can prevail on the battlefield. The value of the individual is in joining together with others to form the greater group. He is needed to add up to the requisite number.

A name is just the opposite. It defines each person individually by his own personal name. In an army, each soldier is assigned a number, whereas in a family, a father will not say, “Number three, get up for *davening*!” He will rather say, “Yankeleh, get up for *davening*!”

Both names and numbers have a certain special

quality. If we need a certain number of soldiers to perform a military operation, or a certain number of bricks to put up a wall, if one is missing, the operation cannot be performed, and the wall cannot be constructed. But if there are ten family members living in the home, although each is a world unto him or herself, they don't go by number. If one is missing, *chas v'shalom*, it's still a family, because there was no reason in the first place that the family needed to be composed of a specific number of members.

So when the *pasuk* says, "The number of the names," it is expressing two different matters at once. When it says "number," it is saying that each member of the Jewish people was important and needed to make up the requisite number of *Klal Yisrael* for the *Shechinah* to rest upon. If one would be missing, the needed number would not be reached, and the goal would not be achieved. It's all or nothing.

And when it says "names," it is saying that besides each individual being necessary for the sake of the whole, each is important on a personal basis, each is loved personally. Each is unique, with his own name

and nature, a whole world on its own.

This teaches that every Jew in every generation has double significance: number and name.

When the Torah counts *Bnei Yisrael*, it is saying not just that the nation needs to be composed of such and such individuals, and if one is missing, only that one individual is missing. It is also saying that the number itself is needed. If one individual is missing, the totality of *Klal Yisrael* doesn't exist. Each one is absolutely necessary. It's all or nothing. This is the tremendous importance of the count.

This is what *Chazal* meant when they said:

Said R. Shimon bar Yochai: How do we know that if the Jewish people would have been missing even one person, the *Shechinah* would not have revealed itself over them? Because it says **כִּי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יֵרֵד ה' לְעֵינֵי כָל הָעָם עַל הַר סִינַי** – "On the third day, Hashem will descend before the eyes of all the people on Mount Sinai."<sup>1,2</sup>

1 Shemos 19:11.

2 Devarim Rabbah 7:8.

## SPECIAL TOPIC

## Time for Torah

Every Jewish holiday has the power to draw down from Heaven its own special quality. The yearly cycle brings a person back to the same spiritual place that existed once upon a time, when the

miracle occurred, when the special event took place that gave rise to the holiday. Pesach is thus *zeman cheiruseinu*, the time of our freedom. When Pesach comes, the quality of freedom renews itself, and we

### לעילוי נשמת

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

ומרת אסתר רויזא בת אברהם יחיאל דויטש ע"ה

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

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

ומוה"ר שמעון בן צבי דב ע"ה ומרת בלומא בת אפרים מעגל ע"ה

נרבת משפחת מרדכי דויטש

go once again from slavery to freedom.

Shavu'os is *zeman matan Toraseinu*. The time when our Torah was given. So we would expect that just like on Pesach, when the quality of freedom renews itself, so on Shavu'os, the quality of the Giving of the Torah renews itself. But it's not so. Because regarding giving Torah, every Jew who sits and learns is receiving it at that very moment from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

So what's special about Shavu'os, then?

Shavu'os is when we acquire the ability to do it all year long. It enables us to receive Torah from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* whenever we sit and learn.

ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה – *Hashem* gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

*Chazal* explain this *pasuk* to mean that whenever a person learns Torah, the *Shechinah* is across from him. When a Jew sits and learns, he receives Torah from *Hashem's* mouth. This is why we say, in the blessing over Torah learning, המלמד תורה לעמו – “He teaches Torah to His people Yisrael.” *Hashem* is actually teaching it to each and every Jew who studies it. If it weren't that *Hashem* was the Teacher, we would not succeed in understanding and knowing the Torah of *Hashem*. Because Torah is not like other fields of knowledge, which any studious person can learn and understand. The *Torah Hakadoshah* is above human comprehension. Only because *Hashem* Himself is teaching it to us are we able to understand it.

*Chazal* recount that R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua were at the *bris* of Elisha ben Avuyah, and they engaged in Torah learning. They went from *Chumash* to *Neviim*, and from *Neviim* to *Kesuvim*, and the words were joyous like when they were given at Sinai, and fire came down from Heaven and encompassed the house. Avuyah, the father, was afraid they would burn down his house. They answered that just as the Torah was given in fire,

thunder and lightning at *Har Sinai*, so it is any time when a person engages in proper Torah study, it's like *Har Sinai* all over again, with holy fire from Heaven. That's how Torah learning is; it won't burn down the house.

Anyone who engages in Torah learning with *deveikus* and pleasantness can make the thunder and lightning come back, with all the power of *Maamad Har Sinai*.

## Rise Above Limitations

We need to understand why it is this way. Why did *Hashem* make Torah to be above and beyond human understanding, and only by Him coming and teaching it every time we sit and learn, are we able to grasp it? Why not just give the Torah completely to the Jewish people, once and for all, so they can learn it and understand it without the need for it to be given and taught again at every moment by *Hashem*? Why not just make Torah available and accessible?

If we think about it, we will realize that it's not like this just with Torah. It's the same way with a person's battle with the *Yetzer Hara*.

צוֹפֵה רָשָׁע לְצַדִּיק וּמִבְקֵשׁ לְהַמִּיתוֹ, ה' – לא יַעֲזֹבֵנוּ בְיָדוֹ – The evil one looks at the righteous one and seeks to kill him; *Hashem* will not abandon the righteous one to his hand.<sup>2</sup>

*Chazal* say<sup>3</sup> that this *pasuk* is talking about the *Yetzer Hara*. It wants to get the *tzaddik*, to make him stumble into sin. And not just one sin, but to turn him into a *rasha* – “to kill him.” And if it weren't that *Hashem* helps the *tzaddik*, the *tzaddik* could not prevail over the *Yetzer Hara*. The spiritual powers even of a *tzaddik gamur* are not sufficient to hold up against the *Yetzer Yara*. Without help from Heaven, a person won't be able to stand up to the pressure.

<sup>1</sup> Mishlei 2:6.

<sup>2</sup> Tehillim 37:32.

<sup>3</sup> Sukkah 52b.

This shows that the spiritual state of every Jew is dependent on *Hashem's* help. Hashem teaches us Torah, and He also assists us in the morning to *daven* and put on *tefillin*. Without *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, we would not understand what we learn, and we would not succeed in even getting out of bed in the morning, because of the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Why didn't *Hashem* create the powers of good and evil evenly balanced, so we are drawn equally to good and to evil, thus enabling every person to stand up to his *Yetzer Yara*? Why were we placed in a situation where we stand no chance to win, where we are unable to succeed, and only with help from *Hashem* can we be rescued from the *Yetzer*?

Simply speaking, it's because *Hashem* is the Master of the World. He runs everything. Torah and *mitzvos* belong to *Hashem*. They are His, and He gives a person the ability to learn Torah and keep it.

But there is more to it. Since we constantly need *Hashem's* help, we are always engaging with *Hashem's* Torah, with its greatness, depth and quality. It's not human-size Torah, dumbed down to our level of comprehension. It's Torah from *Hashem*. Only He can teach such a subject and enable us to grasp it.

If the Torah would be totally given to us, we would only be able to understand it according to our limited, human capacity. This is why the Torah did not descend to our level. Instead, we raise ourselves up to it, and learn *Hashem's* Torah from the mouth of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the Heavenly Teacher.

## Also Mitzvos

It works this way also with *mitzvos*. When we do a *mitzvah*, we recite the blessing *אשר קדשנו במצותיו* – “He sanctified us with His *mitzvos* and commanded us...” The *mitzvos* belong to *Hashem*; they are “His *mitzvos*.” They have His quality, so to speak. In order for it to be like this, *Hashem* set it up such that we can keep *mitzvos* and avoid *aveiros* only with His help and power.

## In His Hands

The idea of everything being in Heaven's hands is not just regarding Torah and *mitzvos*. It is also in *parnassah*. Everyone wants *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to grant him abundant *parnassah*. Everyone wants to feed and support his family and supply all their needs. So why do so many people, especially those who devote themselves to Torah study, need to break their heads to figure out how to just get through the month, and can't imagine any possible way to marry off their children?

*Parnassah* is something that *Hashem* retains control over. Every month, a new miracle is performed, and drops of *parnassah* drip into the world. It is as we say in *Birkas Hamazon*: ונא אל – תצריכנו לא לידי מתנת בשר ודם – “Please don't make us dependent on the gifts of flesh and blood.” What we are saying in this line, on a deeper level, is that we don't want to receive our *parnassah* by means of people, and not just because of the shame it might engender, but also as regards ourselves, personally. We, too, are “flesh and blood,” and we ask *Hashem* that we should not need to receive gifts even from ourselves.

We want to depend only on *כי אם לידך* – “Your hand alone.” Just like the generation of the *Midbar* was privileged to eat *Man* that fell fresh from Heaven every day, straight from *Hashem's* hand, so we want to receive our *parnassah* in a similar way, from *הפתוחה הקדושה והרחבה* – “Your open and expansive holy hand.” We want *parnassah* from Heaven. Not limited human income, but income in *Hashem's* terms, in *Hashem's* ways.

Every month, *Hashem* opens His hand and provides sustenance. Every marriage of a child, we feel that we are not marrying them off, but *Hashem* is marrying them off, it is from His hand. This is why “poverty is befitting to Jews.” It's so they will feel *Hashem's* closeness and His open hand providing and sustaining at every moment.

This makes a big difference. Since we receive Torah, *mitzvos* and *parnassah* only from *Hashem's* hand, and, so to speak, it is with His quality,

therefore we need to make only a certain *hishtadlus* to attain our *parnassah*. There is only so much we need to do. Similarly, in Torah and *mitzvos*, we only do what we are able to do. And if we do that, we will receive endlessly from *Hashem's* hands.

## Shavu'os Night

Every year, when Shavu'os night comes, people stay up and learn Torah. Some delve into a *sugya*, some cover a few *blat* of *Gemara*. Some follow the ancient *minhag* to recite *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os*.

The *Tikkun* is arranged so that you say three verses from the beginning of each *parshah* in the Torah, and three verses from the end of the *parshah*. And so with *Neviim* and *Kesuvim*. And according to the *Shlah Hakadosh*, one recites also the beginning and end in the six orders of the *Mishnah*, and recites also the list of the 613 *mitzvos*.

The idea of the *Tikkun*, with the *pesukim* so arranged, is to make us feel that we are asking *Hashem* to give us Torah according His qualities and abilities. If we would be in charge of *Kabbalas Hatorah*, we would receive according to our own abilities. But the proper way is to ask *Hashem* to give us Torah according to His standards and qualifications, so to speak. We ask to be granted *Hashem's* entire Torah from beginning to end.

*Hashem* is able to place the whole Jewish people, 600,000 of them, in the space between the two poles of the *Aron Hakodesh*, thus putting a lot into a little. In the same way, He Who can do anything is able to put the entire giant Torah, which is longer than the land and wider than the sea, into our heads. אתה חונן לאדם דעת – “You grant knowledge to people.” *Hashem* can grant knowledge even to a human being made from soil. He can freely bestow on him the gift of knowledge.

*Matan Torah* is thus not limited by our abilities. It is from *Hashem's* unlimited hands.

We pray ותן בלבנו להבין ולהשכיל, לשמוע ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות, את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה – “Place in our hearts to understand and conceptualize, to grasp and learn and teach and

observe and keep, all the words of Your Torah, with love.” We don't make do with just asking for a modest amount of Torah knowledge. We want to attain full depth of understanding of the entire Torah. And it's not a prayer in vain, but rather a *tefilah* for *Matan Torah* according to the ability of He Who can do anything.

This is why *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os* was instituted. By reciting it, a person expresses his inability to learn the whole Torah. All he can do is recite three *pesukim* from every *parshah*. On the other hand, he is thereby expressing his great aspiration to learn and know the entire Torah, all the 613 *mitzvos*, and all the hidden secrets of the Torah as well (the *Tikkun* contains selected texts also from that).

By reciting *Tikkun*, we plant little seeds, and the power of growth bestowed on them by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* can bring out a great harvest of Torah knowledge. Every farmer needs a good portion of *emunah*. והיה אמונת – “The faith of” – refers to *Seder Zera'im*, the order of the *Mishnah* that deals with agricultural *halachos*. These words relate to this order of the *Mishnah* because the farmer “believes in the Life of the Worlds, and sows his seeds.”<sup>4</sup> Without *emunah*, the farmer would not waste all those seeds by casting them in the ground.

In the same way, someone who engages in Torah learning needs a good amount of *emunah*. He needs to believe in his ability to attain knowledge of all the Torah, above and beyond his limited powers of comprehension. On Shavu'os night we sow seeds. It's not a regular learning session like during the rest of the year. This night tests the aspirations of the learner.

Each person needs to arouse within himself a tremendous aspiration to know the entire Torah from beginning to end. To believe that if we do our part and try to the best of our abilities, the Giver of the Torah will assist us. The One Who teaches Torah to His people Yisrael will open His generous hands and give it to us. ●

<sup>4</sup> *Shabbos* 31a, *Tosafos* ad loc citing the *Yerushalmi*.

# Minhagim of Shavu'os

Shavu'os is different from other holidays because it doesn't have any practical *mitzvos* that are special to the day. But there are many customs, many *minhagim* of the Jewish people, the first of which is reciting *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os*. This is like the seed of a tree. Planting the seed is the beginning of the tree's subsequent sprouting and growth. Later it will need to be fertilized, watered and otherwise cared for, but its growth depends primarily on being planting. We know the tree could grow to be very big, and we hope it will, so we don't plant it in a constricted space that won't leave room for a tall tree.

The Arizal said that the whole year depends on Shavu'os night.<sup>1</sup> By learning Torah properly in depth, or by the concentrated "seed" of reciting the *Tikkun*, this causes the tree of Torah, the *Etz Chaim*, to sprout and grow throughout the year.

If a person doesn't plant the seed on Shavu'os, all the work and effort of the year will be in vain, because there is nothing there to sprout. The *avodah* of Shavu'os night is to plant great aspirations, to express our inner desire to devote our energy to Torah learning. Praying for and aspiring to greatness in Torah is in fact attachment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

There is a custom based on *Kabbalah* to immerse oneself in a *mikveh* at the end of Shavu'os night. Going under water is like dying, because a person cannot survive without air to breathe. Coming up from the water is an ascent like *Techiyas Hameisim*. Similar to a *ger*, whose conversion is completed by immersion in the *mikveh*, every Jew is renewed by immersing himself in the *mikveh*. He comes out a new person.

We need to work extra hard on the *tefilos* of Shavu'os, not to doze off at this *eis ratzon*, at this special opportunity for our prayers to be answered. It

says in Torah sources that *Tefilas Musaf* of Shavu'os is an *eis ratzon*. It is like *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur and like *Minchah* on Shabbos. These three "*Ne'ilos*" draw down from Above great *siyata d'Shmaya* in spiritual matters.

It is customary to eat dairy and honey foods on Shavu'os. One of the reasons for this *minhag* is that Torah is compared to milk and honey. The goal of eating such foods is that we should taste the sweetness and pleasantness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. חֶבֶדוּ מִמֶּתְקִים וְכָלוּ מִחֲמַדִּים – "His cheeks are sweet and He is all pleasantness."<sup>2</sup> He who tastes the "honey" of Torah is so fortunate and has such great enjoyment!

The joy of *Yom Tov*, which we celebrate with a festive meal, expresses the feeling exclaimed by Rav Yosef:

Rav Yosef would say on Shavu'os, "Cook for me a choice calf!" He would explain, "If not for what this day did for me, there are lots of 'Yosefs' in the street."<sup>3</sup>

Rav Yosef went out of his way to celebrate Shavu'os with a festive meal because Torah made him what he was. If not for Shavu'os, the day when the Torah was given, he would be just another "Yosef," with nothing special about him.

This expresses the happiness of every Jew who lovingly receives the Torah. Through the Torah he is spiritually uplifted and can grow in Torah and *mitzvos* and live a life of attachment and *deveikus* to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

May we merit that this year and its curses will come to an end, and a new, blessed year will begin,<sup>4</sup> with the blessing of Torah, which brings goodness and blessing, life and peace, to all who wholeheartedly learn it and support it. ●

<sup>2</sup> Shir Hashirim 5:16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See Megilah 31b.

<sup>1</sup> See Mishnah Berurah 494:1.

