



# 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.

## PARSHA TOPIC

## Can't Stop Talking

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע. (ויקרא יד, ב)

**This shall be the procedure for the one smitten by *tzaraas*. (*Shemos* 14:2)**

**Said Reish Lakish: What is the meaning of, “This shall be the procedure for the one smitten by *tzaraas*”? This shall be the procedure for the one who slanders. (*Arachin* 15b)**

### Most Common and Most Serious

The disease of *tzaraas* would afflict people due to their having spoken *lashon hara*.

*Lashon Hara*, speaking ill of others, is a subject about which a lot has been said. There are some very important points here. On the one hand, it is a very serious *aveirah*. The Chofetz Chayim wrote a whole book about it. And the strongest comment *Chazal* ever made might well be what they said about *lashon hara*:

There are four things for which a person is punished in this world and the principal punishment is still there for him in the World to Come. They are idolatry, forbidden gender relationships, bloodshed, and *lashon hara* is equal to them all.<sup>1</sup>

What more could be said? If you take all the

worst things a Jew could possibly do, and put them all together, that's how bad *lashon hara* is. You can't get more serious than that.

On the other hand, it is among the most common sins of all. *Chazal* say about it something they don't say about other sins:

The majority of people commit theft, and the minority commit forbidden gender relationships, and everyone commits *lashon hara*.<sup>2</sup>

All of us, without exception, are guilty of *lashon hara*. This is an astounding statement.

Of course, *Chazal* immediately qualify this by clarifying that it refers to the “dust” of *lashon hara*. But it's for sure that when it comes to the “dust” of *lashon hara*, we are all guilty of it.

This presents a highly unusual picture. The

<sup>1</sup> Yerushalmi, Peah ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bava Basra 165a.

exceptional severity of the sin, and the fact that we are all guilty of it to a certain extent. It's inescapable.

That's one subject.

The second, which is also a very special one, is *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred. *Chazal* tell us that it caused the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. The big *Churban*.

The *Churban*, properly speaking, refers only to the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. Because the destruction of the first one was merely temporary. We were promised from the outset that after seventy years, it would be rebuilt. So the main destruction is that of the second *Beis Hamikdash*.

Also here, we find *Chazal* saying something similar to what they said about the severity of *lashon hara*:

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of the three things that existed then: idolatry, forbidden gender relationships and bloodshed. But the Second Temple, when they occupied themselves with Torah and mitzvos and acts of kindness, why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred. This teaches that baseless hatred is equal to the three sins of idolatry, forbidden gender relationships and bloodshed.<sup>3</sup>

*Chazal* then immediately pose a question about this. They ask whose sins were greater – those of the first *Beis Hamikdash* or those of the second? R. Elazar answers that we need only look to the Temple itself to know the answer. We see that the First Temple was merely destroyed temporarily, while the Second Temple's

destruction is enormously longer. The difference between *sinas chinam* and the three most severe sins is enormous. *Sinas chinam* is so very serious!

Again, the most severe *aveirah* is one that is really tough to avoid, and awfully common.

Let's take a deeper look at *lashon hara* and *sinas chinam*.

## A Jew is a Mirror

The true nature of a Jew is that he is a mirror of *Hashem*. What is reflected is not his individual personality but rather *Hashem* alone.

The proper definition of a Jew is a person who accepts upon himself Heaven's Kingship. It is the awareness that he doesn't go by a name. He is a nobody. He is nothing but a mirror through which the glory of Heaven is revealed in the world.

The Rambam, when he succinctly defines the whole *avodah* of human beings, says the following amazing words:

*Chazal* already summed up this whole matter succinctly in a few words that express this matter in a most complete way.... I am referring to *Chazal's* statement<sup>4</sup> that "All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven."<sup>5</sup>

This is the essence of a Jew: I am not in the picture; I am just mirroring *Hashem*. Some who looks at me sees what Torah is, what *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is. Just as a table is not a chunk of wood, but a table, so a Jew is not just a person. If you take a deep look at him you

3 Yoma 9b.

4 *Pirkei Avos* ch. 4.

5 *Shemoneh Perakim* ch. 5.

## לעילוי נשמת

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

ומרת אסתר רויזא בת אברהם יחיאל דויטש ע"ה

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

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

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

נדבת משפחת מרדכי דויטש

will see *Kevod Shemayim*. All his deeds, everything he does, is to reveal the glory of Heaven in the world.

Yehudah is so named because he admitted. יהודה = יהודה. It says יְהוּדָה אָתָּה יוֹדֵךְ אֶחָיֶךָ יָדָךְ – “Yehudah, to you your brothers will admit.”<sup>6</sup> *Chazal* say about this:

*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said to Yehudah,  
“You admitted to the incident with Tamar,  
and your brothers will admit to your being  
king over them.”<sup>7</sup>

Yehudah had the strength to admit what he did. And we are all called after him. The word “Jews” – *Yehudim* – comes from Yehudah.

Admitting to a bad or embarrassing deed is one of the hardest things in life. Let’s say someone spills a cup of water out the window, and a person happens to walk by on the sidewalk below at just that moment, and the water splashes all over him. The person who poured the water out instinctively jumps away from the window so the one below won’t know who did it. Maybe he will instead blame the neighbor one floor up...

It’s hard to admit to the truth.

It’s even harder when the *Gedolei Hador* have gathered, and one of them recounts that yesterday someone disturbed his sleep until late at night – maybe someone knows who it was? And now, in front of all the *Gedolei Hador*, the one who did it needs to admit and say, “It was me.” This is such a hard thing to do.

Now let’s look at what happened with Yehudah.

Yehudah was a great *navi*. He was the founder of one of the Twelve Tribes. Once, he was going on his way and he saw a woman by the roadside. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sent an angel who pushed him into it, and he thought he had committed an *aveirah*. This is how *Chazal* explain the story.

Now the day comes when Tamar is brought to *beis din*, before Yehudah, who was the head *dayan*. But he wasn’t there alone. *Yitzchak Avinu* was sitting with him.

Do you know who *Yitzchak Avinu* was? At the

*Akeidah*, *Yitzchak* saw the *Shechinah*, and since then he went blind, because his eyes were riveted on the *Shechinah*, and he no longer saw sky or earth, houses or trees. His eyes were fixed on the *Shechinah* alone.

Yehudah was sitting there with *Yaakov Avinu*, too. About him it says וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>8</sup> which *Chazal* explain to mean, “The G-d of Yisrael called him ‘E-l.’” He was imbued with G-dly sanctity.

Another person present was Reuven, the firstborn of Yisrael. And also Shimon, the teacher of children, about whom it says that he is “like eternal stars.” And Levi, who was called *Hashem’s* “friend.”

Now, in front of all these great personalities, Yehudah is standing, and when Tamar asks him to please recognize who the signet and the cords belong to,<sup>9</sup> hinting that he should admit to the deed he did, Yehudah overcomes the enormous shame and says, “She is right. It is from me.”<sup>10</sup>

When he said these words, his entire personality crumbled. There was nothing left of him. If an ounce of “I” had remained in him, he would not have been able to admit it.

This act of admittance showed that he had left his personality and personal identity behind him. He was no longer the individual he had been but rather a mirror of *Hashem*. And for ever and ever, he is called “Yehudah.” יהודה. This is the Name of *Hashem* with the addition of the letter *dalek*, which represents the word *dal*, “impoverished.” In other words, Yehudah’s name means: If you see this impoverished, non-existent person, you are actually seeing the Name of *Hashem*.

This is why we are all called *Yehudim*, Jews. This is our name forever, because a Jew deep down knows how to admit [and thereby transcend his personal identity].

## Hatred has a Name

Let’s get back to *sinas chinam* and figure out why it caused the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash*.

What is *sinas chinam*?

<sup>6</sup> Bereishis 49:8.

<sup>7</sup> Bereishis Rabbah 99:8.

<sup>8</sup> Bereishis 33:20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 38:25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid v. 26.

There's two people, Reuven and Shimon. They hate each other. Why? There is a certain reason. Perhaps Reuven disregarded Shimon, or the other way around. Maybe there was another incident between them. This is not *sinas chinam*.

*Sinas chinam* is like this: Reuven has an old, clunky car, and Shimon has a nice, new one. Reuven doesn't get it. Why does the old car have to be mine, and the new one his? Why not the other way around? The answer is because I am I and you are you. And this, as far as Reuven is concerned, is an outrageous chutzpah.

Here's another case: Reuven has in his pocket two thousand dollars, and Shimon has in his pocket a notice from the bank about a deficit of two thousand dollars.

Yet another: Shimon knows how to learn, and Reuven doesn't.

In all these cases, the one with less sees it as an outrageous chutzpah. What are those two thousand dollars doing specifically in Shimon's pocket? Does the money feel more comfortable there?

This is something that no person can avoid feeling. No one in the world is capable of freeing himself from *sinas chinam*.

That is, assuming he looks at it as I am Reuven and you are Shimon. If that's the outlook, *sinas chinam* is simply inevitable, because the aggravating feeling will always surface: Why should the better head be on Shimon's shoulders?! Why should the money be in Shimon's pocket?! Etc.

But if I am not Reuven and you are not Shimon, rather I am a Jew and you are a Jew, in other words, there's nothing personal involved, there's no Reuven and Shimon, because I am just serving *Hashem's* purposes in the world, I am one leg of the table and you are a second leg of the table, I am a tire of the car and you are the steering wheel, then things are different. I don't go by a name and you don't go by a name. So what does it even matter what each one has? The main thing is that the greater edifice of *kevod Shamayim* should be built up by all of us together.

The moment a person accepts upon himself Heaven's Kingship, that *Hashem* is King, and there's no Reuven and Shimon and Levi over here, then everyone is automatically at peace with each other. No *sinas chinam*. In such a situation, *Beis Hamikdash* can be built.

But when baseless hatred arose between Jews, when Reuven said, "I'm Reuven," and Shimon said, "I'm Shimon," this did away with the acceptance of Heaven's Kingship. And it has the potential to take apart the Jewish people. This is not where we want to be. This is *Churban*.

## Mesirus Nefesh Does It

It's very hard to avoid the sin of *sinas chinam*. It actually takes *mesirus nefesh* to save oneself from it.

Every place where we find the subject of accepting Heaven's Kingship, we find *mesirus nefesh* as well. For instance, *Krias Shema*. It's all about accepting upon oneself *Ohl Malchus Shamayim*, and it says in it ובכל נפשך – "With all your soul," which according to *Chazal* means, "Even if He takes your life." This is literal *mesirus nefesh*, full self-sacrifice.

The greatest acceptance of Heaven's Kingship is on Rosh Hashanah. What do we do on Rosh Hashanah? וַעֲשִׂיתֶם עֹלָה – "You shall make yourselves into a burnt offering." So *Chazal* explain the *pasuk*. This is total *mesirus nefesh*.

Thus *Malchus* is always built on *Avdus*. Kingship is built on servitude. Because it's not easy to just give up your personal identity before the overwhelming Majesty of Heaven. A person wants to remain "Reuven," he doesn't want to fade away into the collective anonymity of בשמך – "You called our name by Your Name." A person finds it hard to accept the fact that "You called upon us Your great and holy Name." This feels quite uncomfortable. What does this mean, that I am called by *Hashem's* Name? I want to be Reuven. My name is Reuven!

But being a Jew means getting rid of personal identity. This is *mesirus nefesh*. ●