



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

Ups and Downs

וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ פָּרָה אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה. (במדבר יט, ב)

They shall take to you an unblemished red cow. (*Bemidbar* 19:2)

The *Parah Adumah* purifies those who are impure, and renders impure those who are pure. A state of purity carries a propensity to contract impurity. And a state of impurity is the opportunity to become pure.

There is a general principle in *avodah ruchanis* that the times most conducive to spiritual growth are also the times when it is easiest to fall. Similarly, at a time of decline, there is all the *siyata d'Shmaya* for strengthening oneself and ascending.

In *Sefer HaYashar*, attributed to Rabbeinu Tam, it says that every person has “days of love and days of hate.” There are periods of spiritual ascent, of excitement in Torah learning and *mitzvah* observance. These are the “days of love.” But it is very easy to fall during these days.

And there are days of descent, which cause a person to feel lazy and sad, and to be inactive. This is

the time to grow, to reach higher, to turn the descent into ascent, to take advantage of the hidden power of these days.

This may be compared to a person who is wearing a white garment, but as time went on, it picked up a stain here and a stain there. The garment can still be worn, because the stains are not so noticeable.

Then the person decided he wants his garment to be completely clean. He wants to improve it. So he began cleaning the dirty spots. He collected mud and various stains from all over the garment, and took a big clump of mud from under the collar, and while he was busy finishing up the cleaning job, the piece of mud fell in just the wrong place and spoiled the whole garment. He tried to purify, but instead brought impurity.

During the course of the year, the “stains” – the little shortcomings – are not so noticeable. But at

a time of purity, when we want to clean the stains and improve ourselves, every stain becomes an issue. Those little spots of dirt are not ignorable anymore. They become a reality we must deal with.

This is why it is so easy for a person to fall when he is involved with ascent, with removing his shortcomings. A person must be very careful at such a time. Although he has good intentions, there exists the danger of rendering impure that which is pure.

The Three Weeks are approaching. They are a time of strict judgment.

What does this mean?

The rest of the year, and especially on holidays, *Hashem* runs His world with an expression of *chesed* and *rachamim*. It is a time of Divine mercy and we don't focus on the *Churban*.

But during time of mourning over the *Churban*, the Divine trait of judgment dominates how *Hashem* runs His world. Exile and destruction are in full force. At this time of spiritual decline, our shortcomings stand out. They are right there, front and center, in full force.

This is the time to fix those shortcomings. As we said above, the descent itself can propel our ascent. ●

Hidden Greatness

וְתַמַּת שָׁם מִרְיָם. (במדבר כ, א)

Miriam died there. (*Bemidbar* 20:1)

Everyone knows that Moshe and Aharon passed away through *misas neshikah*, a “kiss” of *Hashem*. In the Torah it says that Moshe and Aharon died על פי ה' – “Through the mouth of *Hashem*.” But *Chazal* reveal to us the secret that Miriam, too, passed away through *misas neshikah*. (If so, why doesn't the *pasuk* say about her, “Through the mouth of *Hashem*”? Because it would not be proper for the Torah to write about *Hashem* that He gave her a “kiss”.¹)

1 Moed Katan 28a

Miriam had the same tremendous *dveikus* to *Hashem* as did Moshe and Aharon. But this fact is not publicly known. The Torah does not state it openly.

Moshe, Aharon and Miriam were the three great pillars of the Jewish people in the Wilderness. *Chazal* teach us:

The Jewish people had three good leaders; they are Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. And three goodly gifts were

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 מעגלו ע"ה

נדבת משפחת מרדכי דויטש

given through them; they are the Well, the Cloud and the Manna. The Well was in the merit of Miriam, the Pillar of Cloud was in the merit of Aharon, and the Manna was in the merit of Moshe.²

Everyone knows about Moshe and Aharon. But Miriam's greatness, although equal to theirs, was hidden. It was quiet and modest.

This amazing matter applies to us as well. When a *yeshiva* boy thinks about his future he is full of aspirations. He strives to know all of *Shas* by heart, to learn day and night non-stop, to achieve *gadlus*.

2 Taanis 9a

These aspirations support him and keep him going all his life.

And what *gadlus* does a woman aspire to? What keeps her going? No one knows of her aspirations! Moshe, Aharon and Miriam all had the same *gadlus*. But Miriam's *misas neshikah* is not publicly known. Women, too, have great aspirations. They strive and hope for a *gadlus* no less than that of the famous *Gedolim* and *Tzaddikim*, but no one knows about it.

A woman's greatness is internal. It does not express itself externally, even in her deeds. There is no way to discern the greatness a woman, even if one were to follow her around twenty-four hours a day, because it is inner and hidden. ●

PARSHA TOPIC

Cheshbon Hanefesh

על פני יאמרו המשלים באו חשבון. (במדבר כא, כז)

The rulers therefore say, "Come to Cheshbon." (*Bemidbar* 21:21)

R. Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yochanan: What is meant by the verse, "The rulers therefore say, 'Come to Cheshbon'?" These "rulers" refer to those who rule over their own *yetzer hara*. They say: "Come and make an accounting — let us weigh the loss of a *mitzvah* against its reward, and the gain of a sin against its loss." (*Bava Basra* 78b)

Big Business

Chazal teach that we should make a frequent *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of our spiritual state. This is so we will know where we are standing in our *avodas Hashem*.

The *Mesilas Yeshtarim* expanded on this idea and explained it:

This is the principle: A person must examine all his deeds and pay attention to all his ways, so he won't allow himself a bad habit or negative character trait, and certainly not a sin or iniquity.

I see a need for a person to check and weigh his ways every single day, like great merchants who continually check all their business dealings so they won't go bad. A person should set specific times for this, so his accounting won't be incidental but rather very regular and fixed, because its consequences are immense.

Chazal expressly taught us the necessity of making this accounting: "So say those who rule over their evil impulse, "Come and make the accounting of eternal

significance. Consider the loss involved in doing a *mitzvah* against the reward, and the gain of a sin against its cost.”

This is because a truly effective methodology cannot be given, and cannot even be seen, by anyone other than those who have already broken free of their evil inclination and gained control over it. For as long as a person is still imprisoned by his evil inclination, he is incapable of even seeing this truth. He cannot recognize it. Because the evil inclination actually blinds him. He is like someone walking in the dark, before whom there are obstacles that he cannot see.¹

The Ramchal taught us here that *cheshbon hanefesh*, soul-accounting, is an amazing method to follow. Only a perfected person can even know about it.

And indeed, *Chazal* use the phrase “a master of account-making.” This refers to someone who makes a *cheshbon nefesh* for himself every day before he goes to sleep. He considers where he is holding in the world of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. There are several reasons for doing this.

One reason is what the *Mesilas Yesharim* described in his analogy of great merchants. These merchants are constantly reviewing their accounts, checking and rechecking, so they don’t suffer a loss in their business. The reason is simple: they care how their business is doing.

At first glance, it seems that when a merchant sits in his shop and works at his business, he is bringing in profit. He is being productive. Whereas if he spends time going over his accounts, it looks like wasted time. No profit came in. Similarly, Torah learning is productive. You can point to a finished *daf* of *Gemara*. But to sit quietly and reflect on yourself? To just sit and examine your spiritual state? It seems

like wasting time.

But only a small storeowner could think this way, someone who doesn’t have the correct outlook on how to really get ahead in business. He might think it’s a waste, so he doesn’t spend his time on it.

But big businessmen understand how crucial it is.

There is a saying that everyone is smart when it comes to his own affairs. If a person has a business, if he cares about the money he invested, he knows that the secret is making an accounting. It is the right strategy. It is a secret, it’s not so obvious, because it looks like a waste of time, but if you have a business, you will discover the secret. You will realize how very beneficial it is to check the inventory and the balance and your profit margin on a daily basis.

If You Care, Hashem Cares

There is another key point involved with weighing one’s deeds. It shows that you care. And this is very important, because all your *siyata dishmaya* depends on it. And all your success comes from that *siyata dishmaya*. We need to know that *siyata dishmaya* is granted mainly to those who care about their spiritual actions.

As *Chazal* say, “The Heavenly kingdom is like the earthly kingdom,”² meaning that what happens up above in Heaven, and down here below, has a strong correspondence. Now, there is nothing that brings hearts closer to one another than showing that you care, and sharing in another’s pain. We all know that in interpersonal relations, and in family life, the most important thing is caring about the other, caring about the home and how things are going in it. Indifference is the most aggravating and alienating thing.

Let’s say a person falls down and gets hurt, and his or her spouse is indifferent, doesn’t even care that the person is in pain. This is very alienating and destructive to a relationship.

¹ *Mesilas Yesharim* ch. 3.

² *Berachos* 58a.

When a person sits and reflects on his spiritual deeds, the first thing is that he thereby shows *Hashem* that he cares about the “business” of Torah and *mitzvos*. It is his “business,” and like in any business, he wants to know what’s going on. How it’s running, whether he’s losing or gaining and what’s the picture. And if he sees he’s losing, he looks for strategies to turn the situation around. That’s how you run a business you care about.

Indifference, not caring about things, is the root of a person’s downfall. The very first thing is he needs to care. It needs to hurt him. When a person suffers, even if it is physical suffering, will find a solution to the problem. He will be motivated.

As far as *siyata d’Shmaya* is concerned, when a person cares about *ruchniyus*, and his spiritual state pains him, when he cares about the fact that he doesn’t *daven* properly, and doesn’t learn enough Torah, then he has a relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And this will bring him *siyata d’Shmaya*.

There is a concept called *נושא בעול עם חבירו* – sharing a friend’s burden. When a person cares about his friend, it expresses itself in times of joy, but even more in times of trouble. In happy times, the caring is a lot more superficial. Everyone dances at a *chasunah*. But sharing in a friend’s pain shows much deeper relationship.

When we come to the days of *bein hametzarim*, we talk about this phenomenon. At a wedding, you can’t tell who the groom’s relatives are just by looking at who dances. Because even casual acquaintances dance at a wedding. But at a funeral, only relatives cry. Caring in a time of sorrow shows true closeness, true relationship.

When a person cares about his spiritual state, and checks himself, and wants to know what is happening with himself, that is of course an effective

method of improving himself, as the Ramchal says, but it is more than that. It is a tremendous and wondrous *segulah*, and surely brings down *siyata d’Shmaya*.

The *Zohar* emphasizes what a great matter this is, to be a *מריה דחושבנא*, a “master of account-making.” When a person thinks about what happened during the course of the day, he thereby shows that he cares where he is standing in his *ruchniyus*. Just sitting and thinking about it shows that his heart is close to *Hashem*, and this itself is a powerful *segulah* to bring *siyata d’Shmaya*.

It’s not a waste of time at all. It is a demonstration of wondrous closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. When a person sits down to learn a *Mussar sefer* because he has a certain problem, he often doesn’t see the benefit from this learning. People claim that learning *Mussar* doesn’t help. Even if this were true, the very fact that a person cares, and does something about it, makes an effort – even if what he does is futile, practically speaking, it brings wondrous *siyata d’Shmaya*. “One who comes to purify himself is assisted by Heaven.”³ It is a very simple thing. Someone who is indifferent will be left to be just like he is. Someone who cares will be helped from Heaven.

This is one of the answers to those who claim that learning *Mussar* doesn’t help them. It’s no different from *tefillah*. There are times when a person *davens* and feels like it’s not helping. But the truth is that if you *daven*, *Hashem* will certainly answer. You just don’t always know exactly how the answer will come.

The same is true with learning *Mussar*. If you learn *Mussar*, and try to battle the *Yetzer Hara*, your efforts will bring you *siyata d’Shmaya* in other areas. ●

3 Yoma 38b.