



# 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

## Mesirus Nefesh For Shabbos

אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחִי בָהֶם. (ויקרא יח, ה)

**A person should do them and live by them. (Vayikra 18:5)**

The Torah tells us to live by the *mitzvos*. On the one hand, this teaches us that preservation of human life supersedes the laws of *Shabbos*:

One should “live by them,” and not die by them.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, we see from Jews of the previous generation who suffered in Nazi concentration camps and Soviet work camps how much it pained them to desecrate *Shabbos*, even in order to stay alive. There were individuals who went beyond the requirement of *Halachah* and put their lives on the line for *Shabbos* observance.

We will not discuss here how much beyond the requirement of *Halachah* one is permitted to go in such cases, but we do see that *mesirus nefesh* for *Shabbos* observance seems to be something special and praiseworthy.

There are three cardinal sins that one must rather die than transgress. Similarly, if an attempt is made to force Jews to abandon their religion, they must die rather than commit any sin in public, so as not to desecrate *Hashem's* Name. This is because a Jew's very soul depends on these matters, and we can't save our soul by cutting off our soul. It would be like someone who fell into a pot on the fire, and “saved” himself by jumping out of the pot and into the fire. A Jewish soul can't be saved by doing severe sins that cut off the soul.

This is how those righteous Jews felt when they were forced to desecrate *Shabbos*. Because *Shabbos* is our very connection with *Hashem*, our very attachment to the Source of life. Even though *Halachah* does not require giving up one's life for *Shabbos* observance, those *tzaddikim* felt that if they have to break *Shabbos*, even if it will save their soul, it would be better to give their soul back to its Creator

<sup>1</sup> Yoma 85a.

for the sake of *Shabbos kodesh*, which is our most precious spiritual possession.

However, this does not apply in cases of illness and so forth. If one is ill enough that *Halachah* permits breaking *Shabbos*, according to all views it is a big *aveirah* to refrain from doing so. On the contrary, even if the danger to life is relatively remote, one must be very careful to do whatever is necessary for the sake of *pikuach nefesh*.

What we do learn from these stories of *tzaddikim* in the past generation is how very important it is to keep *Shabbos*, especially in tough moments, such as when guests are on their way and it is very embarrassing that something important will be missing from the table, thus tempting the host to be lenient about matters that he normally would not even consider. The *nisayon* could also present itself in matters pertaining to speech, such as talking about business on *Shabbos*. A person might hear an important piece of information affecting his financial matters and feel a burning desire to discuss it with someone. All these are formidable *nisyonos*.

The Chazon Ish wrote something that may be applied to our topic:

There is a story about a certain Torah-observant individual of this type. A prominent guest came to his town, and the Torah-observant individual asked him to come and visit him at home. The guest promised to come for a visit on *Shabbos* night. The Torah-observant individual was very happy about this promise because it was an honor and a pleasure for him.

What did the Satan do? He made the Torah-observant individual forget to add kerosine to his lamp, and he lit the lamp before *Shabbos* with the small amount of kerosine remaining from Thursday night. And it was a *Shabbos* night in the winter [when the nights are very long]. The guest didn't come yet, and the lamp started to die out.

The Torah-observant individual was unable to bear the shame of the guest coming and finding him sitting in the dark, so he added kerosine to the lamp on *Shabbos*.<sup>2</sup>

In this story of the *Chazon Ish*, it was truly a big *nisayon* that required a lot of dedication to pass, for *Chazal* say that serious embarrassment is tantamount to death. However, it may be assumed that most Torah-observant people nowadays would not perform a Biblically forbidden form of work in order to save themselves from such an embarrassment. But we still need a lot of self-strengthening when it comes to matters that we are unsure whether they are forbidden, or their prohibition is not so severe.

In such moments we should recall those *tzaddikim* of the past generation who willingly went through a *Gehinom* of fire and ice rather than desecrate *Shabbos kodesh* in any way. This is because *chilul Shabbos* uproots a Jew from the Source of life. And *mesirus nefesh* for Sabbath observance attaches a Jew to the Source of life and the Source of blessing, forever. ●

2 *Sefer Emunah v'Bitachon* ch. 4.

## לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמוֹת

מִוִּהָרַד מִשָּׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְּבוֹרָח ז"ל

וּמִוִּהָרַד בְּרוּךְ זָאב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קָרְאוֹס ז"ל

נִדְבַת נִבְרִיהֶם ~ עֶשְׂרֵת זְקִנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְהַפָּאָרַת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

# Secret Service

וְכֹל אָדָם לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד בְּבֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בְּקֹדֶשׁ. (ויקרא טז, יז)

**No person shall be in the *Ohel Mo'ed* when he enters to atone in the holy place.**

**(*Vayikra* 16:17)**

When the *Kohen Gadol* went into the *Kodesh Kodoshim* to perform his awesome *avodah*, he was alone. There was no one to see what he did.

This teaches us an important principle in *avodas Hashem*. The best *avodah* of all is the *avodah* done quietly and privately.

וְהִצַּנְעַ לְכַת עִם אֱלֹקֶיךָ – You shall walk modestly with your G-d.<sup>1</sup>

Many times, there is a lot to be gained from serving *Hashem* in public, in a group of people.

בְּרַב עִם הַדֶּרֶת מְלֶךְ – A large public honors the king.<sup>2</sup>

The more people there are, the more honor it accords *Hashem*. Furthermore, serving *Hashem* publicly causes others to see one's actions and follow suit. This is a *kiddush Hashem*.

But sometimes a person should choose the path of *לכת*, of serving *Hashem* modestly and privately, because this enables one's *avodah* to be for *Hashem* alone, free of all other agendas. When people don't see what you are doing, you are doing it only for *Hashem*. It shows true faithfulness to *Hashem* and inner love of Him.

This may be compared to boiling water in a pot on the fire. You can never get the temperature of the water to rise above the boiling point. Even if you turn up the flame, the water won't get hotter. But if you boil water in a well-sealed pressure cooker, the temperature can go up and up.

It's the same with Torah and *mitzvos*. When a person does good deeds in front of everyone, it is only human nature to take pleasure in the fact that

his deeds are acknowledged, that people esteem him for it. This puts a limit on the *madreigah* he can reach. But if a person does his *avodah* privately and secretly, only *Hashem* knows about it, then the more *kedushah* he adds to his acts, the higher a level he can reach. There is no upper limit. This is because there is no personal gain or extraneous considerations to cool off the *kedushah*.

The Rambam writes as follows:

Although it is a *mitzvah* to learn Torah at day and at night, a person learns most of his wisdom at night. Therefore, if a person wishes to attain the crown of Torah, he should be careful about all his nights, and not lose even one of them by just sleeping and eating and drinking and similar activities. Rather, he should use them for Torah study and words of wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

This is not the only awesome thing the Rambam has to say about learning Torah by night. He writes more about it in the same place.

What is so great about learning Torah specifically at night?

There are several reasons for it, and one is the fact that at night, most people are asleep and don't see what you are doing. If you gather your strength and learn Torah at this time, it is for *Hashem* alone, and the level of such learning is exceptionally great.

The same applied to the *Kohen Gadol* in *Beis Hamikdash*. If people would see what he is doing, he would not be able to reach the tremendous level of *kedushah* required there. Performing his service away from the public eye enabled him to rise to the

1 *Michah* 6:8.

2 *Mishlei* 14:28.

3 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13.

right level. *Chazal* say about the *Kohen Gadol* when he entered the *Kodesh Kodoshim*:

When the spirit of holiness rested on him, his face burned like a torch [as if he was an angel].<sup>4</sup>

It is written:

כִּי שִׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקְשׂוּ  
מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מִלֶּאֱדָהּ ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא – The lips of the *kohen* guard knowledge, and people seek Torah from his mouth, because he is

4 *Vayikra Rabbah* 21:12.

an angel of *Hashem Tzeva-os*.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see that Torah learning, too, has this awesome quality. Let's say a Jew comes home after a hard day's work, and he also kept up his regular learning schedule. If he gathers the strength to get up at night and learn Torah or recite *Tehillim*, thus fulfilling the verse *קוּמִי רְנִי בַלַּיְלָה* – “Arise and sing at night”<sup>6</sup> – at that time, his face will truly burn like a torch, like one of the angels, and he will bring blessing upon himself, his family and all the Jewish people. ●

5 *Malachi* 2:7.

6 *Eichah* 2:19.

## PARSHAH TOPIC

### Mitzvos Have Reasons

All the *mitzvos* of the Torah carry a basic obligation to do them, but in addition to that, there are reasons for the *mitzvos*. There are lofty meanings and profound inner levels of understanding that go deeper and deeper. Nevertheless, each *mitzvah* has its simple meaning.

For instance, the Rambam writes about the *mitzvah* of *shofar*:

Although the blowing of *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a Scriptural decree, it contains an allusion. In other words, “Arouse from your sleep, those who are sleeping, and those who slumber, awake from your slumbering.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the meaning of *shofar* on a simple level. The same goes for the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah*. It, too, has meaning on a simple level, as it says in the

1 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4.

## Seven Complete Weeks

*Haggadah*:

מִצָּה זוֹ שֶׁאֵנּוּ אוֹכְלִין עַל שׁוּם מָה – This *matzah* that we eat, what is the reason? Because the dough of our forefathers did not have time to leaven...<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is a remembrance of the clouds of glory that accompanied us in the Wilderness. Also the *mitzvos* of *tefillin* and *tzitzis* have meanings on a simple, straightforward level. Even the *mitzvah* of *lulav* has its simple level: these are four species that we take in our hands at the time of year when we gather the summer's produce into storage, thus expressing our joy and thankfulness to *Hashem* for giving us this produce.

What about the *mitzvah* of *Sefiras Ha'omer*? This one is a little harder to explain on a simple level. But we will attempt it nonetheless.

The Torah tells us to count seven weeks, and each week, seven days. But what do we count and how do

2 *Haggadah shel Pesach*.

we count it? And when we count the days, are they good days or bad days? A day by nature is a receptacle that can contain almost anything, good or bad. (Even the day Amalek was born was a day.)

And what is the significance of counting seven weeks, seven times?

And what does the sum total of the days and weeks represent, when we reach the number fifty?

## The Meaning of Counting

It's not so easy to answer all these questions on a simple level. However, *Sefer Hachinuch* explains as follows:

Among the roots of this *mitzvah*, on a simple level, is that the Jewish people exists for Torah. Because of the Torah, heaven and earth and the Jewish people were created.... And this is the root and reason that the Jewish people were redeemed and went out of Egypt: so they will receive the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it....

For this they were redeemed, and this is their greatest good. It is a great thing for them, more so than being freed from slavery.... Therefore, since it is what the Jewish people exists for, and because of it they were redeemed from Egypt and rose to all the greatness they attained, we were commanded to count from the day after the *Yom Tov* of Pesach until the day of the Giving of the Torah.

This is to demonstrate our great desire for the glorious day that our hearts long for, as "a slave longs for the shade."<sup>3</sup> A Jew is constantly counting: when will the time he longs for arrive, so he will be freed? This is because the act of counting demonstrates about a person that all his desire and longing is to reach that time.

This is why we count the *Omer*. In other

words, such and such a number of days have passed from the sum total. We don't count how many days we have left until the time, because all this demonstrates our strong desire to come to the time....<sup>4</sup>

(This explanation needs to be clarified, because in principle, *Rosh Chodesh* is declared according to the sighting of the new moon, which could appear on either of two days at the end of the lunar cycle. Thus, the months of Iyar and Sivan could both turn out to be only twenty-nine days long, and in that case, the count of fifty days would not correspond to the day of the Giving of the Torah. If so, how can it be said that we are counting toward the Giving of the Torah at Sinai?)

There is a well-known question on the explanation of *Sefer Hachinuch*. When a person counts toward something he is waiting for, he counts the days remaining, not the days that passed. He makes a countdown, not a count-up. For example, let's take a boy before his bar mitzvah. He counts how many days are left until his bar mitzvah will arrive. If so, we should start with the number forty-nine, and the next day count forty-eight, and so forth, thus counting down to *Kabbalas Hatorah*.

## Counting and Building

In order answer this question, we will first quote the illuminating words of R. Aharon Kotler *zt"l*.

The Torah recounts to us that Yaakov had to wait seven years in order to marry Rachel. And it says about this, "They were to him like a few days because he so loved her."<sup>5</sup> This seems strange, because we know that human nature is exactly the opposite. The more a person wants something and is waiting for it, the longer the passing days seem to him, until he attains his desire. A day seems to him like a year.

3 *Iyov* 7:2.

4 *Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah* 306.

5 *Bereishis* 29:20.

We must say that the Torah is telling us here that *Yaakov Avinu* sanctified and purified himself and prepared himself for building the Jewish people.<sup>6</sup>

The following allegory elucidates this idea. A man is in desperate need of a million dollars. If he hears that a hundred days from now he will receive a million dollars, he will be happy. However, each day he waits feels like an eternity to him. He sees the days of the interim period as separating him from the million dollars.

Now let's change the story a little. A man needs a million dollars. He is offered a job that carries a salary of ten thousand dollars a day. So at the end of a hundred days, he will have a million dollars. The days pass quickly for this man.

What's the difference between the two men?

When a person needs a million dollars and is told to wait around for a hundred days until he receives it, they are just empty days of waiting. All those days do is separate him from the money. But if the hundred days are not a waiting period, but rather a means to earn and obtain the money he needs, then the days are not empty. They are not getting in his way. On the contrary, each day is a day of building, of advancing toward his goal, and they pass by very quickly. Each of the hundred days is a day he is happy about, because if he skips one day he won't achieve his goal, which is the complete sum of a million dollars.

That's how it was with *Yaakov Avinu*. During the seven years preceding his marriage, he built himself. Thus, every day that passed was a day he was happy about. It was a day of preparation for building the Jewish people. This is why it says, "They were to him like a few days because he so loved her." This love was *Yaakov's* holy and pure desire for the Divine unification of *הוא ושכינתיה בריך קודשא* that will result from his marriage to Rachel. Every day that passed added another brick to the building. The

seven years were seven years of building toward the goal he so desired, thus they passed by quickly. "They were to him like a few days."

This makes all the difference. If *Sefiras Ha'omer* would just be a passive waiting time for *Kabbalas Hatorah*, if it just would be a period of fifty days in between, then we would surely count down, from fifty to one, because we would be waiting for the days to pass by already and get out of our way so we can receive the Torah. But it is not that way. These are days of preparation and building toward *Kabbalas Hatorah*. After one day of building, we are more ready for receiving the Torah, and after two days, we are more ready, and after three days we are even more ready, and so on, until at the end of the forty-nine days of counting we are completely ready to receive the Torah.

This is the simple meaning of *Sefiras Ha'omer*. We count forty-nine days of building toward *Matan Torah*.

These days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* are just begging us to fill them with content. This is what they were created for. Otherwise, we would make a countdown. Fifty days left, forty-nine left, forty-eight.... But we count up, because the *mitzvah* is to fill these days with content, with positive preparation. We fill up one day, and then two days, and then three days....

These are very important days. The Arizal says that ordinary days of the year are like water that comes down drop by drop, whereas *Yamim Tovim* are as if the channels of heaven opened up, and the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer*, too, are as if the channels of heaven opened up. They are days of building toward *Matan Torah*.

## What to Put Into Sefiras Ha'omer?

So far we have explained the meaning of *Sefiras Ha'omer* on a simple level. They are days of building toward *Kabbalas Hatorah*. But we still need to explain what we count. Do we count days of building good character traits? Or of building *hasmadah* in Torah learning? Or of working on *Tefilah*, such

<sup>6</sup> R. Aharon Kotler, Essay on Learning *Chumash*.

that during this period of forty-nine days, we climb higher and higher in *avodas Tefilah*? (The Alter of Kelm is quoted as saying that the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* correspond to the forty-eight matters by which the Torah is acquired, as enumerated at the end of *Pirkei Avos*. On these days we need to build these *kinyanei Torah*.)

We don't find it stated openly anywhere what the content of the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* is, and this requires explanation. Why doesn't it say?

The answer emerges from the following teaching of *Chazal*:

In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will grant 310 (י"ש) worlds to every *tzaddik* as an inheritance, for it says, "To grant ש" as an inheritance to those who love Me, and I will fill their treasure houses."<sup>7</sup>

This teaching of *Chazal* interprets the word ש" by reversing the order of its letters so that it reads י"ש, which has the numerical value of 310. Thus, *Hashem* will grant 310 worlds to every person who loves Him.

However, even after we interpret the word ש" as signifying 310, the verse still does not tell us 310 of what. How did *Chazal* know that it means 310 worlds? Maybe it means 310 chests of silver, or of gold, or 310 rivers of balsam oil? How did *Chazal* know that *Hashem* will give the *tzaddikim* worlds?

When a person talks about a sum of money without expressly stating the currency, it goes according to his location. Whatever is the currency in that place, that is what he meant. For instance, a person goes into a store in the United States and sees that a certain item bears a price tag of 199. Of course, it means 199 US dollars. In England, the price will be in pounds, and in Japan, in yen. Every location speaks in their own currency.

What is the Torah's "currency"? In other words, what is *Hashem's* terminology? We recognize *Hashem* by means of worlds. Worlds are all-inclusive. That's

what there is; there is nothing else we can see and speak about. So if the Torah speaks of י"ש, of 310, it obviously means 310 worlds, because the "currency" and terminology of the Torah is of worlds.

Now let's get back to *Sefiras Ha'omer*. We know we need to count something, and we know it is days. But what kind of days?

Days of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And since He is true and He alone is true and there is nothing besides Him, He is One and there is no other, we must be counting days of *Hashem's* Oneness. This doesn't need to be stated, just as it doesn't need to be stated that an item in an American store with a price tag of 199 costs 199 US dollars. It goes without saying.

Therefore these days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* need to be days that are only for *Hashem*. The Rambam writes about *Hashem*:

If we would say that He does not exist, then nothing else could possibly exist. But if we would say that all things other than Him do not exist, He alone would still exist. He would not cease because they ceased. Everything that exists needs Him, and He, blessed is He, does not need them or any one of them. Therefore, His trueness is not like the trueness of one of them.

This is what the prophet meant when he said, "*Hashem*, G-d, is true."<sup>8</sup> G-d alone has trueness, and no other has trueness like His trueness. This is what the Torah meant when it said, "There is none other besides Him." In other words, there is no other existing thing with trueness like His.<sup>9</sup>

What exists? There is only *Hashem*, only His Oneness. Since *Hashem's* Oneness is all there is, these days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* must be days of *Hashem*. This is the kind of days we need to build. Forty-nine days on which *Hashem's* Oneness expresses itself in everything we do. ●

<sup>7</sup> *Mishnah Uktzin* 3:12.

<sup>8</sup> *Yirmeyahu* 10:10.

<sup>9</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:2-4.

# STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF RAV SHIMSHON PINCUS ZT"l



## Counting

### Brick Upon Brick

Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l would explain, when he spoke on the subject of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, that the entire period of the *Sefirah*, all its days, have the purpose of building up and constructing a complete edifice, brick on top of brick, one day after another, until the spiritual building is finished and ready.

Each and every day is a new and additional stage in this ongoing process of construction. He would emphasize the importance of not missing the counting of even a single day, all the way from the second night of Pesach through to *Chag Shavu'os*.

The talks that he delivered on these special days were permeated with deep, Kabbalistic concepts, even if he did not mention them expressly. It was his way to "clothe" the Torah's profound teachings in layer after layer. He would elucidate the concepts in practical, down-to-earth language, and explain them on a simple level that people could grasp, by way of parables and examples from every-day life.

### Long-Distance Phone Call

Rav Shimshon was once heard talking on the phone before Pesach with a Torah-observant Jew who lived abroad. This person called to ask the Rav a question in *Halachah* pertaining to Pesach. Rav Pincus mentioned to him, in the course of the conversation, "Please watch out, be careful not to miss a single day of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. When I come to you for a visit, I will explain why."

### Getting Ready

His spiritual preparations for these special and uplifted days began a week before Pesach even started.

People with keen eyes noticed how he carried out his preparations, which included, among other things, reviewing the special Kabbalistic *kavanos* relevant to *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, in order to get ready for the *avodah* of the great days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*.

Despite Rav Shimshon's efforts to hide his personal *avodah* from the public eye, there were those who noticed that he would seclude himself in his room and invoke deep Kabbalistic intentions when he would count the *Omer*.

### How Long Does It Take to Count?

Rav Shimshon, toward the end of his life, would devote a lot of time to the *avodah* of counting the *Omer* with proper intentions and Kabbalistic *kavanos*. It would take him around forty-five minutes each night.

On Shabbos nights during the *Sefirah* he would ask one of his *talmidim* to hold up his children in *shul* by engaging them in Torah discussion. This was to save them from the unpleasantness of waiting for him at home until he finally finished counting the *Omer* and came home.

While they were involved in Torah discussion, he would finish up his *avodah*, and then hurry home to recite *Kiddush*. ●

*Published by Kollel "Nefesh Shimshon", Jerusalem – as an ilui neshamah for Rabbeinu Shimshon Dovid Pincus zt"l, and headed by his sons Harav Yosef Dov Pincus and Harav Shmuel Pincus, shlita.*

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