



# 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

Break Free of  
Gravity

אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יִפְּלֵא לְנֹדֵר נְזִיר. (במדבר ו, ב)

**A man or woman who expresses the vow of a Nazirite. (*Bemidbar 6:2*)**

What does the word *Nazir* mean? The *Rishonim* say that it comes from the word *nezer*, which means “crown.” Someone who takes the vow of a *Nazir* is thereby “crowned.”

A crown is an ornament that a king wears on top of his head. The head is the highest point of the body, and the crown is above the head. This represents kingship. The king is separated and uplifted from the rest of the people. Everyone bows before the king to show the importance and eminence of the king, to express their lack of significance as compared to him.

The same applies to the “crown” of Torah. The Rambam writes:

A man should not marry the daughter of an ignoramus, because if he dies or is exiled, his children will be ignoramuses, since their mother does not know the crown of Torah.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s understand what the Rambam is saying here when he emphasizes the “crown” of Torah. He is talking about a woman whose father is ignorant in Torah. The father is an *am haaretz*. And why is he an *am haaretz*? Because of all the demands and exigencies of life. A person needs to earn a livelihood and take care of other pressing matters. In many cases, such pursuits are not against Torah, they are not anti-Torah, but they do go against the “crown” of Torah. An *am haaretz* does not know that the *Torah Hakedoshah* is above and beyond everything else, that Torah is the most important and the most eminent thing there is, that nothing else has significance as compared to Torah.

How uplifted is a crown? It may not seem to be much higher than the head, but early Torah sources say that when it comes to *Hashem’s* “crown,” when we speak of *midas hakeser*, enfolded within it is *Ein Sof*, Infinity. The attribute of *keser*, “crown,” represents infinite loftiness.

<sup>1</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Issurei Bi’ah 21:32.*

Accordingly, when we say that the *Nazir* has a “crown,” we are saying that he is separated and uplifted in his holiness from the rest of the people, and he has the ability to thereby raise himself up without limit.

This requires explanation. After all, he did a relatively small thing. He uplifted himself a little bit by renouncing worldly desires and refraining from wine. Why does this little step grant him the ability to rise infinitely high?

The following metaphor explains it. A person wants to get higher. He jumps up again and again, thousands of times. If we would put all of his jumps together, this time a foot and that time two feet, it would come out that he jumped hundreds of yards. Yet, he is still standing on the ground, right where he was in the beginning. Why? Because gravity pulls him down to the ground all the time and doesn't let him break loose. So after all his jumping he still stands on the ground.

But if he could for one moment rise to a height when he breaks away from the earth's gravitational force, then he would be able to keep rising further and further, infinitely.

This has actually happened in our times. Rockets and spaceships have gotten to the moon and beyond. How can a rocket have so much force that it gets to the moon? How can it travel such a distance? Because all it really needs is enough fuel to get it past the gravitational force of the earth, and once it gets up that far, it can keep on going unhindered, even into deep space, powered only by the initial momentum.

This is what the *Nazir's* “crown” signifies. By renouncing worldly desires he got high enough to be beyond the natural pull of materiality. He broke away from the gravitational force of physical matters. And once he rises even just a little bit above the pull of *gashmiyus*, he can keep going higher and higher

in *kedushah* without limit. The “crown” on his head represents tremendous *kedushah* because once he breaks loose from the hold of human smallness, there is no end to the levels of *kedushah* he can attain.

This is a great principle in attaining spiritual greatness. Many people try to uplift themselves, but since they feel the tug of materiality, no matter how many times they try to jump up, in the end they find themselves back on the ground where they began.

So how did the *tzaddikim* do it?

First, they exerted great effort in disconnecting themselves from the gravitational pull of *gashmiyus*. Once they broke away from it, they went up and up to very great levels.

The Rambam writes as follows:

If a person wants to attain the crown of Torah, he should be careful with all his nights not to lose even one of them to sleeping and eating and drinking and conversing and so forth. Rather, he should utilize his nights for Torah study and words of wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

The Rambam writes this because by nature it is hard to learn at night. Even if a person sits himself down to learn, he is likely to doze off, because a human being is tied to materiality, and it overcomes him and paralyzes him. But if a person overcomes this tendency, and gets in the habit of learning at night, it disconnects him from the pull of materiality, and he will go up and up.

I once caught a glimpse of what attaining the crown of Torah means. A great *talmid chacham* whom I knew once ended up in a certain town where he had nowhere to sleep that night. He was not perturbed or pained by this. He simply went down

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:13.

## לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

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to the nearest *shul*, and there he sat and learned until the morning. It wasn't because he was in the habit of always learning all day and night. He had no plans to stay up and learn that night. He simply was not controlled by the need for a bed. If there is a bed, he goes to sleep, and if there isn't, he sits in the *beis midrash* and sleeps another time.

What happens to people like us when we don't have a place to sleep? We wander around all night from here to there because we feel we must find some place where we can catch a few winks.

The Ibn Ezra wrote on the passage of *Nazir* that

“all people are enslaved to worldly desires.” We might think he is speaking of evil hedonists who obsessively pursue lowly pleasures. But that is not what the Ibn Ezra means, because he said, “All people,” and that is not what all people do.

Rather, the worldly desires that he spoke of are the routine life of all people. Although we need to keep ourselves healthy by natural standards, this doesn't mean we need to be enslaved to the demands of the body. Rather, a person should give his body what he understands that it needs without it ruling over him. If he does this, he is “crowned.” ●

## Who was Shimshon?

וַתֵּלֶד הָאִשָּׁה בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְשׁוֹן וַיִּגְדַּל הַנַּעַר וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ ה': (הפטרה)

**The woman gave birth to a son and called him Shimshon. The lad grew up, and Hashem blessed him. (Haftarah)**

How would you describe Shimshon? As a great *tzaddik*? As a man who followed his eyes?

When *Yaakov Avinu* blessed his twelve sons, and the twelve tribes that would descend from them, he said in the blessing to Dan:

לְיִשׁוּעָתְךָ קוִיִּתִּי ה' – For Your salvation I hope, *Hashem!*<sup>1</sup>

This was said about Shimshon, who came from the tribe of Dan. Why did *Yaakov* make this remark about Shimshon? The *Midrash* explains:

*Yaakov Avinu* saw Shimshon [in prophetic vision] and thought that he was *Melech Hamashiach*. When *Yaakov* saw that Shimshon died, he remarked, “Even he died?! For Your salvation I hope, *Hashem!*”<sup>2</sup>

From here we see that Shimshon was such a tremendously great *tzaddik* that he was fitting to be *Mashiach*.

Indeed, *Chazal* say about his name:

Shimshon, שִׁמְשׁוֹן, was named after *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, as it is written: כִּי שֶׁמֶשׁ וּמָגֵן ה' אֱלֹקִים – “*Hashem*, G-d is the sun and a shield<sup>3</sup>.”<sup>4</sup>

*Chazal* also say about Shimshon:

Shimshon judged the Jewish people like their Father in Heaven did, as it says, דָן יִדִין עַמּוֹ כְּאַחַד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – “Dan will judge his people, like the One of the tribes of Yisrael<sup>5</sup>.”<sup>6</sup>

1 *Devarim* 49:18.

2 *Bereishis Rabbah* 98:14.

3 *Tehillim* 84:12

4 *Sotah* 10a.

5 *Bereishis* 49:16.

6 *Sotah* *ibid*.

If Shimshon judged the Jewish people like *Hashem* did, then he must have been enormously great.

But besides all the good things *Chazal* have to say about Shimshon, they also say that “Shimshon went after his eyes,”<sup>7</sup> and that “he rebelled against *Hashem* with his eyes.”<sup>8</sup> And *Chazal* comment that Shimshon, Gidon and Yiftach were the least among the Jewish people’s leaders, and were the opposite of Moshe, Aharon and Shmuel in this respect.<sup>9</sup>

So who was Shimshon?

There is no question that Shimshon was tremendously great. When *Chazal* commented that he was among the least of the Jewish people’s leaders, they were referring to his contribution to future generations. Moshe brought down the Torah for all generations, Aharon established the *Kebunah* for all generations and Shmuel opened up the era of the Prophets – he wrote several books of *Tanach*, he anointed Shaul and David as kings. Whereas Shimshon, Yiftach and Gidon were great people in and of themselves and they rescued their own generation, but they did not build something eternal.

Shimshon was a great *tzaddik* and judged the Jewish people like *Hashem* did, but this went on for only forty years. He did not set up something that continued forever, unlike Shmuel, who anointed the Davidic dynasty which is destined to rule even in the era of *Mashiach*.

But we still need to address the issue of, “Shimshon went after his eyes.” How does that fit in with his towering spiritual greatness?

Shimshon was commanded by *Hashem*, through *Ruach Hakodesh*, to take Philistine women as wives. Yet, it is still considered that he “went after his eyes.” This calls for explanation.

Furthermore, when *Chazal* said that he was fitting to be *Mashiach*, they implied that he should have been victorious by means of a spiritual greatness that no other human being ever showed. Because *Mashiach* is something special and different. What

was this special *avodas Hashem* that was unique to Shimshon?

To enable us to understand who Shimshon was, first let us consider a wonderful explanation from R. Yechezkel Abramsky *zt”l* on the subject of *eishes yefas to’ar*.

In certain cases, the Torah allowed Jewish soldiers who went out to war to bring back home a non-Jewish woman and take her as a wife. This is called *eishes yefas to’ar*, “a woman of beautiful appearance.” *Chazal* say that the Torah permitted *eishes yefas to’ar* only as a means to counteract the *Yetzer Hara* – לא דיברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע. If the Torah would not offer the Jewish soldier a permitted way of marrying her, he might take her in a forbidden way.<sup>10</sup>

This is puzzling. Since when does the Torah permit the forbidden, out of concern that a Jew might not be able to withstand temptation? With every other *nisayon* in the world, the Torah exhorts us to stand strong and not give in. Only here, in this one specific case, the Torah lets a Jew succumb to the *Yetzer Hara* and do what is ordinarily forbidden (with certain caveats, of course, as stipulated in the Torah passage of *eishes yefas to’ar*). Why?

The general rule as regards the *Yetzer Hara* is that we overcome it by distancing ourselves from it, by avoiding temptation in the first place. We see that Yosef so conducted himself. When tempted by the wife of Potiphar, he fled the house. And *Sefer Chassidim* quotes a wise saying, “The only thing that separates a person from physical desire is closing his eyes to it.” One should never try to battle the *Yetzer Hara* face-to-face.

There is one situation where a person can’t flee, and that is war. A soldier is forbidden to flee the battlefield; he must fight.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Torah needed to permit *eishes yefas to’ar*, because the Torah never commands us to fight the *Yetzer Hara* face-to-face; it always exhorts us to flee temptation.

So explained R. Yechezkel Abramsky *zt”l*.

Now let us understand Shimshon. When *Hashem*

<sup>7</sup> Sotah 9b.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rosh Hashanah 25b.

<sup>10</sup> Kiddushin 21b.

<sup>11</sup> Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim 7:4.

commanded him to take Philistine women as wives, there was a reason for this. It says clearly in the *pasuk* that it was only in order to fight the Philistines, the *Plishtim*. But Shimshon was never actually permitted to see these women or take pleasure from them for personal reasons. He was thus placed in a *nisayon*, a trial and temptation, that no other person was ever commanded to undertake and no one had ever withstood. Normally, the Torah permits “*eishes yefas to’ar*.” But Shimshon was different.

It is written that Shimshon requested not to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, and the *Midrash* cites him as saying, “The only thing between me and them is *milah*.”<sup>12</sup>

What did he mean by that?

Regarding Jews who descend to *Gehinom*, *Chazal* say:

*Avraham Avinu* comes and raises them out and receives them, except for a Jewish man who has relations with a non-Jewish woman, for he has pulled his *orlah* [over his male organ] and Avraham does not recognize him.<sup>13</sup>

The point we want to take from this *Chazal* is that having relations with a non-Jewish woman is equivalent to becoming uncircumcised again. This is what Shimshon meant when he said, “The only thing between me and them is *milah*.” He was saying that if he would take any personal pleasure from Philistine women, he would lose his *milah*, his sign of purity, because this pleasure was never permitted to him.

Did Shimshon pass this *nisayon*?

Yes. He remarked, “The only thing between me and them is *milah*,” signifying that he remained pure. He stood up to a temptation that no man ever withstood before.

<sup>12</sup> *Midrash Rabbah Vayechi*.

<sup>13</sup> *Eruvin* 19b.

Now we can understand what *Chazal* meant when they said, “Shimshon rebelled against *Hashem* with his eyes.” As far as looking with his eyes was concerned, he did not pass the *nisayon*. He “went after his eyes.” The Philistine women “were good in his eyes.”

This was a *nisayon* the likes of which we do not find in the entire Torah. He was expected to be with his Philistine wives against his will, not for his own pleasure and benefit, only in order to bring a *yeshu’ah* to the Jewish people, to save Jews from the military onslaughts of the *Plishtim*. Shimshon was not allowed even to enjoy seeing his wives, and he did not withstand this part of the *nisayon*.

If he would have kept up his great righteousness all the way, and would not even have looked at them, the *Plishtim* would not have been able to gouge out his eyes, and he would have defeated them, and brought the *Ge’ulah Sheleimah*. He could have been *Mashiach*. But he did not stand up to the *nisayon* completely, and that’s why he fell into the hands of the *Plishtim* and they put out his eyes.

When *Yaakov Avinu* saw that Shimshon fell, he remarked: If that is the case, then “*לְיִשׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי ה’*” – For Your salvation I hope, *Hashem!*”

*Yaakov* was expressing the idea that there never will be someone greater and holier than Shimshon, and there never will be someone who can withstand *nisyonos* like this, except for the *Mashiach* himself, assisted by a spirit from Above.

Indeed, the generation of *Mashiach* will need to face terrible *nisyonos* like this. Because in all previous generations, it was possible to be in a place without immodesty. But in the final generation, on every street, just going from one’s home to the *beis midrash*, there will be *nisyonos* that never were before. And Jews in that generation will withstand the *nisyonos*. In this merit, they will merit the coming of *Mashiach*. ●