



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

Jews Don't Change

וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמְּנֹרֶה מִקֶּשֶׁה זָהָב עַד יָרֵכָה עַד פְּרָחָה מִקֶּשֶׁה הוּא כְּמֵרָאָה אֲשֶׁר הִרְאָה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה בֶּן עֲשָׂה אֶת הַמְּנֹרֶה: (במדבר ח, ד)

This is how the *Menorah* is made: from one piece of gold. From its base to its ornamental flowers, it is of one piece. Like the image that *Hashem* showed Moshe, so he made the *Menorah*. (*Bemidbar* 8:4)

The way the *Menorah* was made teaches us an important point about the *avodas Hashem* of every Jew.

It is recounted in *Sefer Daniel* that Nevuchadnezzar saw in a dream the image of a statue. This statue, composed of various materials, represented the general history of the nations of the world throughout the generations. But it also alludes to the essential form and nature of non-Jews.

It was a statue whose head was made of pure gold, whose chest and arms were of silver, whose abdomen and loins were of bronze, whose thighs were of iron, and whose lower legs were a mixture of iron and clay.¹

This teaches us that the nature of the nations of the world changes fundamentally over the course of time. They started out made of gold and then went down stage after stage until their “lower legs,” their end, is made of clay, which is the lowest of materials.

Not just the history of generation after generation is like this, but also the essential nature of the individual. The head of the non-Jew might sometimes be precious like gold, but the other parts of the body go down level after level to the lowliest.

It is not like that with Jews. About them it says וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמְּנֹרֶה מִקֶּשֶׁה זָהָב עַד יָרֵכָה עַד פְּרָחָה מִקֶּשֶׁה הוּא – “This is how the *Menorah* is made: from one piece of gold. From its base to its ornamental flowers, it is of one piece.” This tells us two things.

Regarding the history of generation after

1 Ch. 2.

generation, although there are vast differences between the later generations and the earlier ones, the Jewish people is “one piece of gold” from beginning to end.

And regarding the nature of the individual, the Jew is one piece of gold all the way from his “base,” his lowest aspects, how he eats and drinks and conducts his mundane business, up to his “ornamental flowers,” his spiritual beauty and splendor, when he learns Torah and does *mitzvos*. It is all one piece of pure gold.

All this teaches us that a Jew’s essential form and nature can never change. Jews will always dress modestly, speak respectfully, do business honestly, have *mesirus nefesh* for Torah and *mitzvos*. Even in this last generation, which is so much lower than

that of our forefathers, we still need to preserve the pure form of a Jew, which is to be one piece of pure gold.

This applies as well to the way a person conducts his day. Not only the hours that he devotes to *avodas Hashem* are pure gold. Also when he is engaged in physical matters, he needs to do everything *l’sheim Shamayim*, to gain strength for serving *Hashem*. And the way he does these things should be with humility and modesty, free from pursuit of excess materiality.

Whether it is the “base” or the “flowers,” it is all one *Menorah* on which the sacred lamps burn with flames of *kedushah*. It is all one piece, all pure gold. This is what a Jew looks like; this is what *Hashem* is proud of. ●

Upwardly Humble

וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: (במדבר יב, ג)

And the man Moshe was very humble, more than any person on earth. (*Bemidbar* 12:3)

One of the rungs in R. Pinchas ben Yair’s ascending ladder of spiritual growth, leading to *ruach hakodesh*,¹ is *anavah*. Humility. *Sefer Mesilas Yeshtarim* elaborates on the meaning and significance of this trait, and on how to acquire it.

There is an amazing story about *anavah* in *Sefer*

Me’iras Einayim, authored by R. Yitzchak of Acco (from the period of the *Rishonim*), and the story goes like this:

A certain elderly man met a member of the *Chaburas Misbodedim* (literally, “those who seclude themselves,” a society of pious men who practiced a very high level of *avodas Hashem*) and asked if he could join them.

1 See *Avodah Zarah* 20b.

לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמוֹת

מוֹהַ"ד מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְבוֹרָגָה זצ"ל
וּמוֹהַ"ד בְּרוּךְ זָאב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קְדוּשָׁה זצ"ל

גְּדֵבַת נְכֻדִים ~ עֲטֹדַת זְקִינִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְהַפְאֵרַת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

The member responded: May *Hashem* bless you! You surely have good intentions. But please tell me, have you attained the level of *hishtavus* (equality)?

The elderly man asked: What is *hishtavus*?

The member explained: It means that someone who praises you and someone who puts you down are equal in your eyes. They are the same to you.

The elderly man replied: No, I cannot say such a thing about myself. When people praise me, I enjoy hearing it. And when I am insulted, although I never take revenge and I don't bear any resentment in my heart, I must admit that it hurts me.

The member then told him: If that's the case, I wish you all the best, but the answer is no. If you haven't attained the *madreigah* of *hishtavus*, meaning that you don't feel anything when you are praised or insulted, then you can't connect your thoughts to Above, and you should not practice *hisbodedus*. Go acquire the trait of humility, and come to the level of *hishtavus*, and then you can join our *chaburah*.

That's the story, and the idea behind it is as follows.

Chazal teach us that there is a certain process and order by which one arrives at the level of *ruach hakodesh*. One of the stages on the way is the *madreigah* of *anavah*, humility. This means *hisbatlus*. Making yourself to be nothing, literally. It makes no impression on you what people say about you. It's all "equal," it makes no difference to you. It's the same to you if someone says that you are a genius and a holy man, or whether someone says you are an idiot and a lowlife.

This trait is not just one of the stops on the way to *ruach hakodesh*; it is actually one of the most crucial conditions for attaining *ruach hakodesh*. Because what is *ruach hakodesh*? It is when a person's personality fades away to nothing. You can't be

both "Mr. Goldstein" and a holy person. It's a total contradiction. A person's own personality and self has to dissipate completely, to the point that what people say about him is absolutely meaningless to him.

This was what the members of the *Misbodedim* society worked on. It is along the lines of the description that the *Tur* provides in *Hilchos Tefilah*:

Chassidim and *Anshei Maaseh*, pious people and those who perfected their deeds, would seclude themselves (*misbodedim*) and focus on their prayers to the point that they divested themselves of physicality, and the spirituality of the intellect gathered strength, until they came close to the level of prophecy.²

The elderly man in the above-quoted story, who apparently was a great man, said that he wants to practice *hisbodedus* with them, which was their means of connecting their thoughts to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and attaining a state of *kedushah*.

But the member of the *chaburah* told him that it won't work. A person can't even approach the subject of *ruach hakodesh* if, when he says, "I want," he is talking about himself. *Ruach hakodesh* for such a person is simply out of the question. If it makes any difference to a person whether he is praised or put down, *Chaburas Misbodedim* is not for him.

It is worth noting that it doesn't say in the story that the member of the *chaburah* told the elderly man, "Come to us, and we will teach you." Because without humility, it is a non-starter. *Anavah* is one of the basics, so he needs to acquire it on his own, before he even comes to the *chaburah*. ●

² *Tur Orach Chayim* 98.

וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְנִים רַע בְּאָזְנֵי ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' וַיַּחַר אַפּוֹ וַתִּבְעַר בָּם אֵשׁ ה' וְגו' וְהָאֶסְפָּסֶף
אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבוֹ הִתְאוּוּ תֹאזָה וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יֹאכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר: (במדבר
יא, א-ד)

The people were as if they were mourning evilly in the ears of *Hashem*, and *Hashem* heard and His anger flared up, and the fire of *Hashem* burned them.... The mixed multitude among them desired lust and then the people of Yisrael, too, began crying. They said, “Who will feed us meat?” (*Bemidbar* 11:1-4)

The Triple Chumash

The Torah is divided into five books which are the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*. However, *Chazal* indicate¹ that there are actually seven *chumashim*. About this it is written:

– חִכְמוֹת בָּנְתָה בֵּיתָה חֲצָבָה עֲמוּדֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה –
“Wisdom built her home; she hewed out
her seven pillars.”²

This is because *Chumash Bemidbar* divides up into three *chumashim*. The first is from the beginning until *בנסוע* ויהי. The second is the passage of *בנסוע* ויהי itself. And the third is from the sin of the *מתאוננים*, the complainers, until the end.

The first *chumash* describes the camp of the people of Yisrael when they left Egypt. The Torah depicts at length how the Jewish people was positioned around the *Mishkan* and the *Aron*. The *Shechinah* was in the center, and around it was the camp of the Levites, which consisted of the families of Gershon, Kehas, Merari and *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Further away, around the camp of the Levites, was the camp of the ordinary Jews, which itself consisted of four divisions: Yehudah, Reuven, Efraim and Dan.

¹ *Shabbos* 116a.

² *Mishlei* 9:1.

The second *chumash* is, as we said, the passage of ויהי *בנסוע הארון*. It is demarked by two upside-down letters, the letter *nun*, one at the beginning of the passage and the other at the end. This designates it as a *chumash* on its own. It is considered a whole *chumash* even though it contains only two verses.

The third *chumash*, which speaks of the sins of the Jewish people in the *Midbar*, begins right after that, with the verses describing the sin of the *מתאוננים*, the complainers, and this is what we will now discuss.

Complaining is the Beginning of the End

This passage about the complainers is one of the deepest in the Torah. It is quite an amazing story.

“The people were as if they were mourning evilly in the ears of *Hashem*, and *Hashem* heard and His anger flared up, and the fire of *Hashem* burned them.... The mixed multitude among them desired lust.”

They had a desire for physical pleasures. “And then the people of Yisrael, too, began crying. They said, ‘Who will feed us meat?’”

They mentioned the various foods they used to eat in Egypt, which they missed having in the

Midbar. We don't know the exact translation of all the products they mentioned. They might not be the same ones we know today. But they did mention onions and garlic, and we definitely know what they are.

Then they said:

וְעַתָּה נַפְשֵׁנוּ יְבֵשָׁה אֵין כֹּל בְּלִתֵּי אֵל הַמָּן
וְעֵינֵינוּ – And now our souls are dry, there is nothing; we have only the Manna to look forward to.³

They complained that they had nothing to eat. There was only the *Mon*.

The Torah tells us what the *Mon* was like. It had the color of diamonds, because when light reflects off a diamond, one can see all the colors of the rainbow. Similarly, the *Mon* had all the flavors in the world. Furthermore, they didn't actually have to grind it and cook it or bake it. Rashi explains that it tasted as if they cooked or baked it.

But the Jewish people didn't want *Mon*. They wanted onions, garlic and meat.

Their desire for meat is itself puzzling. Rashi points out that they brought sheep and cattle with them when they left Egypt, and they did not consume them; they still had vast flocks when they entered *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, says Rashi, they were just looking for something to complain about. They were seeking an excuse to break away from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

In other words, they had everything, but they were not satisfied. They were looking for something completely different. They wanted meat, onions and garlic. This is so amazing!

And how did Moshe respond to the request of the complainers?

וּבְעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה רָע. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֵל ה' לָמָּה הִרְעִיתָ
לְעַבְדֶּךָ וְלָמָּה לֹא מָצִיתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְשׂוּם אֶת מִשָּׂא כָּל

הָעָם הַזֶּה עָלַי וְגו' לֹא אוֹכֵל אֲנִי לְבִדִּי לְשֹׂאת אֶת כָּל
הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי כָבֵד מִמֶּנִּי – “It was bad in the eyes of Moshe. Moshe said to *Hashem*, “Why did You deal badly with Your servant and why did I not find favor in Your eyes, that you placed the burden of all this people on me? ...I cannot bear on my own the burden of all this people because it is too heavy for me.”⁴

Moshe Rabbeinu says he is quitting, so to speak.

When he saw the *Eigel Hazahav* he did not quit. He handled the situation. He burned the *Eigel*, he cried out אֵלֵי מִי לָהּ – “Whoever is for *Hashem*, come to me!” and then he prayed to *Hashem* to have mercy on them. But here he pulls back. He feels he cannot bear it anymore. He says הַזֶּה לִּי בָשָׂר לְתֵת לְעָם הַזֶּה – “Where will I get meat for this whole people?!” It's too much for him.

And *Hashem's* reply doesn't urge him to carry on as he has until now. *Hashem* rather tells him to gather seventy elders who will share in bearing the burden of the people.

From here on until the end of *Chumash Bemidbar*, almost every *parshah* describes the sins of the Jewish people. *Parshas Shelach* has the sin of the Spies, *Parshas Korach* has the controversy instigated by Korach, *Parshas Chukas* has the story of Moshe hitting the rock, *Parshas Balak* describes at its end the sin committed by the people of Yisrael with the women of Moav.

From the sin of the complainers on, the Jewish people started moving in a different direction that nearly brought them to total ruin.

This deterioration begins in our *parshah*. Let's understand what is at the root of it.

The Challenge of Constant Connection

The people asked for meat. Meat and milk have a common basis. *Chazal* say that meat is red because

3 *Bemidbar* 11:6.

4 *Ibid* 11:10-14.

it is based on blood. And milk, too, is formed from blood. The blood undergoes a chemical transformation and transforms into milk.⁵

So what's the difference between meat and milk? *Chazal* say that when a baby is nourished by milk from its mother, it tastes in the milk the flavors of all the foods that the mother eats.⁶ This signifies that milk comes from the mother. But meat is completely different. You take a piece from the flesh of an animal and eat it.

In the first section of *Bemidbar*, the Torah describes the Jewish people, how they lived around the camp of the *Shechinah*. It was like one big family with the *Shechinah* in the center, and *Moshe Rabbeinu* led them according to the word of *Hashem*. So to speak, they were nurtured directly from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. When the people wanted to eat, they went to *Moshe*, and he told them that food comes from *Hashem*, and then *Hashem* brought down *Mon* for them to eat. When *Hashem* Himself gives the food, it has all the beauty and all the flavors.

This is the type of life that *Hashem* wanted for the Jewish people. They were to be nourished straight from Him.

Imagine that in our days, a person would come to the *Rav*, who is a great *talmid chacham*, and say, "I have a problem. Yesterday was Rosh Hashanah, and before the blowing of the *shofar*, my little child fell down, and I had to take him to the hospital, because his life was endangered. So I missed the whole *mitzvah* of *shofar*. Why should I lose out on the *mitzvah* of *shofar* – לָמָּה נִגְרַע?"⁷

Then the *Rav* says, "Just wait a minute while I speak to *Hashem*," and he comes back with the answer, "If you didn't hear *shofar*, you can hear it on *Tzom Gedaliah*."

We all know that it doesn't work that way. A person needs to wait until next year for another chance to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *shofar*.

But it wasn't like that with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. The first section of *Bemidbar* contains the passage of *Pesach Sheini*.⁸ There were some individuals who were unable to offer their *Korban Pesach* at the proper time, as they were ritually impure then, so they came and said: Why should we lose out on the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach* – לָמָּה נִגְרַע? *Moshe* asked them to wait while he asks *Hashem*, and came back with the answer that *Hashem* is giving them a second chance. There will be a second *Pesach* in just a month, and they can offer their *korban* at that time.

Moshe Rabbeinu brought all questions straight to *Hashem*, Who provided answers. This is how it is when life is lived directly around *Hashem* and nourishment comes straight from His table.

But the people felt it was too much for them. They wanted meat, not milk. They don't want *Mon*. They don't want to eat straight from *Hashem's* table.

This may be compared to someone who was invited to be the guest of the *Chasam Sofer* for an extended period, during which he will eat all his meals with the *Chasam Sofer* himself, sleep in his home, etc. In short, he will be living with the *Chasam Sofer*. He says, "I want to go home! I could maybe handle one meal, but to live in the presence of the *Chasam Sofer* all the time is too much for me. I want to relax..."

This is what the Jewish people in the *Midbar* said: We don't want *Mon*, we want other products, we want onions and garlic.

Not because these other products are tastier, but because *Mon* is angel food, and they didn't want to live like angels. They didn't want a life where the *Rav* is *Moshe Rabbeinu* and when there

5 *Bechoros* 6b.

6 See *Yalkut Shimoni, Beha'alos'cha* 735.

7 *Bemidbar* 9:7.

8 *Ibid* 9:6-14.

is a question, he asks *Hashem*. A life of direct connection to *Hashem*. They felt it was too much for them.

They wanted to live a “normal” life like human beings. At 9:00 AM you come to *kollel*, you learn all day, and at night you can unwind a little bit. So to speak, they said, “Let us live!”

They “desired lust.” They wanted to live a normal, this-worldly life. A slice of meat, onions, garlic and whatnot. Not life with Moshe and Aharon all the time.

Once I tried to offer an excellent *bachur* as a *shidduch* to a fine young lady whose father was a simple Jew. The father said to me: I am looking for a young man who is not a bum and also not the *gedol hador*. I am looking for a simple, regular guy as a son-in-law.

Similarly, the Jewish people were saying, “We want a slice of kosher meat, of course. We don’t want *treif*, no way! But to live in *Hashem’s* camp, that He should be our whole life – that’s too much.”

What Goes In Must Come Out

A little later on we find another complaint they had about the *Mon*. They said:

וַנִּפְשְׁנוּ קֶצֶה בֶּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל – We are sick of this light bread.⁹

Rashi explains that the *Mon* absorbed completely into their bodies and no waste was excreted. They didn’t need to relieve themselves. The people thus complained that it is going to rot inside their innards, because what goes in must come out. They are going to get sick from it.

What did they mean? They had been eating *Mon* all along, and so far, so good. What were they worried about all of the sudden?

This was another form of the same complaint as

before. *Mon* is food for angels. They complained that they were expected to live like angels. And someone who lives like an angel, in constant proximity to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, is expected to behave like an angel. He has to watch every word that comes out of his mouth. They wanted to live like normal people and not be held to such a high standard.

Seventy Elders to the Rescue

So what did *Hashem* do? He told Moshe to assemble seventy elders from among the people, and He will take the spirit that until now rested solely on Moshe, and extend it to them, too. Then they will help in bearing the burden of the people.

However, as Rashi comments, there was an arithmetical problem with this plan. There are twelve tribes, and if six elders are selected from each tribe, there will be two extra elders. $6 \times 12 = 72$. And *Hashem* said seventy, not seventy-two. Which tribes will accept less than fair representation?

The solution was to draw lots. Seventy-two elders were chosen, and each had to draw a lot. There were two blank lots, and whoever drew a blank lot had to go back home. He was not chosen to be among the elders.

There were two humble people, Eldad and Meidad, who were sure they will not be chosen because, “We are not fitting for this greatness,” to be among the leading elders of the generation. They drew the blank lots. But in truth, they were fitting to be among the chosen elders, and they started prophesying inside the camp, while all the others were with *Moshe Rabbeinu* at *Ohel Mo’ed*. What did they prophesize? “Moshe is going to die and Yehoshua will bring the Jewish people into the Land.”

Gershom, son of Moshe, came running and told his father: אֵלְדָד וּמִידָד מֵתִנְבְּאִים בְּמַחֲנֵה – “Eldad

⁹ *Ibid* 21:5.

and Meidad are prophesying in the camp” and saying that you will die and Yehoshua will bring the people into *Eretz Yisrael!*” Yehoshua urged Moshe to take action against Eldad and Meidad, but Moshe said **לִי אֶתָּה** – “Are you being a zealot for me?” Moshe was saying that he would be happy if everyone would become prophets.

What was this story all about?

Hashem's plan for the seventy elders was that they will lead the people according to Torah, but not that they will ever be able to say, like Moshe did, “Wait and I will hear what *Hashem* commands.”¹⁰ They were not meant to bring new teachings of *Hashem* to the people. They were to be *rabbanim*, *tzaddikim*, but not like *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

Eldad and Meidad did not want to be part of the Jewish people's desire for normal, this-worldly life that entailed rejection of constant contact with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Eldad and Meidad wanted *Moshe Rabbeinu*. So they said to the people: Do you realize what you have done? Moshe is now going to die, and Yehoshua will bring us into the Land. It's all because you didn't want Moshe.

Moshe's reaction was, “Are you being a zealot for me” now? Where were you before? Now it's too late. Let them all be prophets.

Downward Path

As we mentioned before, the sin of the complainers, the **מתאוננים**, was a turning point that led the Jewish people to a succession of sins along

¹⁰ *Ibid* 9:8.

the downhill path they were now following. The root of it all was their desire not to be overly close to *Hashem*.

Right after the events of this *parshah* comes the saga of the Spies, the *Meraglim*, and what we have been describing was exactly the sin of the *Meraglim*. When they saw the giants in the land of Canaan it shook them up. Why? Didn't they just miraculously leave Egypt, and see ten plagues right before their eyes? Is there something *Hashem* can't do?

Their attitude was like this: Who took us out of Egypt? *Hashem* Himself. We don't want *Hashem* to keep leading us, because if *Hashem* leads us, life is too demanding. We want a normal, kosher lifestyle, go to a hotel every once in a while, with a *Shabbos* elevator and *Cholov Yisrael*... we have had enough of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* style of leadership.

The *Meraglim* saw *Eretz Yisrael* as a place too holy for them.

And then comes the *parshah* of Korach. He, too, claimed: **רַב לָכֶם בְּנֵי לֵוִי** – “You Levites are taking it too far!”¹¹ We don't want Moshe's leadership. Let us lead normal lives, please.

And when you don't want *Moshe Rabbeinu*, you just keep on going downhill all the way to the sin of the women of Moav.

This is how the *parshiyos* progress from one to the next. Let us learn from these stories that constant relationship with *Hashem* is the best and indeed the only path in life. ●

¹¹ *Ibid* 16:7.