



# 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

## When Ashes Touch Water

וְלָקְחוּ לְטָמֵא מֵעֵפֶר שְׂרֵפֶת הַחַטָּאת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִיַּם חַיִּים אֶל כֶּלִּי: (במדבר יט, יז)

**They shall take from the dust of the burning of the sin offering and place on it living waters in a vessel. (*Bemidbar 19:17*)**

This *pasuk* is talking about the *Parah Adumah*.

And what was the *Parah Adumah*?

It was essentially a sin offering, a *korban chatas*. This kind of offering possesses great *kedushah*. A *korban chatas* is considered *kodshei kodoshim*. This is the highest level of offerings.

However, the *Parah Adumah* is not actually offered on the *Mizbeach*. It is rather burned to ashes outside *Beis Hamikdash*.

And, the ashes left over after the burning of the offering are just a remembrance of what was. They are a mere residue that lacks any real content of what used to be a *korban*.

Nevertheless, since these ashes come from a *korban*, they still have great *kedushah*. If they are combined with *mayim chayim*, water drawn from a

running spring, they have the power to purify those who are impure and thereby render them fit for *avodas Beis Hamikdash*.

It says in *Sefer Taam v'Daas* that we can learn an important lesson from here. Every Jew comes from holy stock. Each one of us has many generations of *tzaddikim* in his lineage. Furthermore, our souls come from a supremely holy place. It's just that our *aveiros* have burnt us up, so we are mere ashes of what we used to be. Some people have been so consumed by the fire that it is hardly recognizable at all that they belong to the holy Jewish people.

But we can still return to our original purity and regain our former *kedushah*. And this is learned from *Parah Adumah*.

All we have to do is connect ourselves to the

*mayim chayim*, to the *Torah Hakedoshah*, which is compared to a well of living waters. Because when the ashes of *Parah Adumah* are combined with the *mayim chayim*, they acquire special purifying powers. Similarly, we can return to our roots and ascend to high levels of *kedushah* and *tabarah*.

This is why no Jew should ever despair of himself. He has holy roots. His soul was hewed from a place of purity. To regain it, he needs to devote himself to Torah learning, because without the *mayim chayim* of Torah, he is just burnt ashes.

But with the *mayim chayim* of Torah learning, he is something very great indeed.

The truth is that combining ashes with *mayim chayim* is the very basis of the human being. A person's body is created from the dust of the earth, and by virtue of *Hashem* breathing the soul of life into it, it becomes a live human being.

This shows that only if *mayim chayim* are combined with a person made from dust, by means of Torah learning, does he become a completed human being. Without the *mayim chayim* he remains a clump of earth.

This applies not just to humanity as a whole but also to each individual, every day.

*Hashem* recreates the world every day, and when a person goes through a day without learning Torah, it is like he isn't even alive that day. He is

like a dry, lifeless clump of earth. Only when his earthiness is combined with *mayim chayim* does a pure and holy soul come out.

This could also explain why Jews prostrate themselves on the graves of *tzaddikim* and embrace their dust. It is because the place has the holiness of the *tzaddik* buried there, and *tzaddikim* are even greater in their death than during their lives.

However, this works only when the holy dust is combined with the living waters of the Torah. This means that the person who is visiting the *kever* recalls and thinks about the deeds of the *tzaddik*, how he conducted when he was alive, how careful he was about every *mitzvah*, how much he devoted himself to *avodas Hashem* and *limud hatorah*. When the holy dust combines with the living waters of Torah, the holiness and purity comes out, in the merit of the *tzaddik*, and the gates of Heaven open to pour out a wealth of blessings.

This does not happen if the holy dust remains without water. In other words, if people just go to *kivrei tzaddikim* without learning from the ways of the *tzaddik*. This won't help anything. Light and blessing will never come from that.

But if a person sets himself to follow the ways of our holy forefathers and learn from their deeds, about him is said:

עבְדֵי אֲתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בְּךָ אֶתְפָּאֵר – You are My servant; Yisrael, in you I take pride.<sup>1</sup>●

1 Yeshayahu 49:3.

## לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמֹת

מוֹהָ"ד מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְבוֹרָהּר זצ"ל

וּמוֹהָ"ד בְּרוּךְ זֶאֱב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קְרָאוּס זצ"ל

נִדְבַת נְבוּדָהּם ~ עֲטַרֵת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְתַפְאֹת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

# Great Mistakes

יען לא האמנתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל. (במדבר כ, יב)

**Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of the people of Yisrael. (*Bemidbar* 20:12)**

The Torah tells us about sins committed by the greatest people in the world. Such as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, for instance. The Torah says about him here, “Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me.” We are told also about the sins of the sons of Yaakov, and of *David Hamelech*, and of many other *tzaddikim* as well.

Obviously, the Torah wants us to know all this. And it’s not to lessen their value in our eyes. Their sins do not diminish their honor at all. We all know that *Moshe Rabbeinu* did not merit entering *Eretz Yisrael*, yet the Torah says about him **וימת שם משה** – “Moshe died there,”<sup>1</sup> teaching that he died by a kiss from *Hashem*. The Torah would not tell us that *Hashem* loved him so greatly if it wanted to lessen his value in our eyes.

Similarly, Yaakov’s sons are viewed by us as the spiritual giants they were. They are the revered founders of the Jewish nation. And David is our king forever, he is *Mashiach Hashem*, he is the wondrously saintly author of *Sefer Tehillim*.

So why does the Torah recount their misdoings, if we are meant to treat them with the greatest respect?

It’s to show us and teach us how very careful we need to be about guarding ourselves from sin. Sometimes we think that the *Yetzer Hara* is busy with other people, with all those empty and clueless people wandering around out there. But I, who have accepted upon myself the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*, who keep *Shabbos* scrupulously and learn as much Torah as possible – I am not going to do stupid things and get tricked by the *Yetzer Hara* into *aveiros*.

So the Torah comes and tells us that even the holiest people that ever lived sometimes stumbled and sinned. If the great were not always successful

in avoiding *aveiros*, there is no reason we should consider ourselves immune from sin. So we need to be very, very careful. We need to *daven* to *Hashem* at all times to save us from sins and spiritual failures, from evil and from anything resembling it.

And there is another message here as well. Let’s say we were guilty every once in a while of certain sins such as *lashon hara*, *bitul Torah*, a little hatred and envy and quarreling. We might assume that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will not be too upset with us, and will let us off the hook. Because, after all, we are good Jews who learn Torah and keep *mitzvos* and are trying to do the right thing.

So the Torah comes and warns us that it is not so. The greatest and holiest people in the world, when they sinned, *Hashem* did not let them go. Not at all. He was exacting with them, down to a hairsbreadth. They were punished severely for even the subtlest of sins. So we better be really careful!

Sometimes a person feels good about himself. Let’s say he learned for several hours with great *hasmadah*, or he really put himself out to do a *chesed*, or he *davened* with intense *kavanah*, or something like that. He feels he is on good terms with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and allows himself to lighten up his efforts a little in Torah and *mitzvos*. It’s “not so terrible” to engage in a bit of idle talk, to spend a little time taking it easy with friends, to read the newspaper a little, to read a not-so-kosher book, etc. So he thinks.

This is the biggest mistake a person can make. *Hashem* is exacting with those close to Him, down to a hairsbreadth. Even if they are the greatest people in the world, and *Hashem* loves them so much that He gives them a kiss, so to speak. We for sure need to be meticulous about what we do, and only this will make us especially beloved by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. ●

<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 34:5.

יֵעַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם. הֲמָה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר רָבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת ה' וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: (במדבר כ, יב-יג)

Since you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the land that I have given to them. They are the Waters of Contention, that the Israelites contended with Hashem, and He was sanctified in their midst. (*Bemidbar* 20:12-13)

“To sanctify Me” – If you had spoken to the rock, and it would have brought forth its waters, I would have been sanctified before the eyes of the congregation. They would have said, “If this rock – which doesn’t speak and doesn’t hear and doesn’t need sustenance – fulfills the word of *Hashem*, surely we should do so.” (*Rashi*)

One of the central subjects of this *parshah* is the sin of Moshe at the rock, as a result of which he was not allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. This greatly changed the course of Jewish history. If *Moshe Rabbeinu* had entered the Land, *Beis Hamikdash* would never have been destroyed, and everything would be different.

Moshe’s sin was thus a monumental event. But what was his sin? What did he do wrong?

Rashi has a certain way of explaining it. *Hashem* told Moshe to speak to the rock, and instead of speaking to it, he hit it. He struck the rock with his staff.

This communicates a very basic point. It is basic to Judaism that we fulfill *Hashem’s* commands because He tells us to do so, not because He forces us. Judaism is built on the concept of *הבוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה*, “He chooses His people Yisrael out of love.” *Hashem* loves us, and we, too, need to love Him. Those who love each other don’t hit each other. If they need to hit each other, it is a different kind of relationship altogether.

Standing at the rock, Moshe presented a metaphor to the Jewish people. He said to them, שמעו נא – המורים – “Listen, now, you rebellious people.” Are you watching? When I communicate with the rock, it will fulfill my will. Why don’t you do so? And then he hit

the rock. He struck it with his staff.

But he should have spoken to it, thereby demonstrating that even a rock, when you speak to it, reacts and gives water. And the message is: Why, when *Hashem* speaks to you, don’t you listen?

This is how Rashi explains the matter. According to his approach, we indeed learn from this story a very important lesson.

Other Commentators offer additional explanations. The *Ohr Hachayim* presents eleven possible interpretations of the event. Clearly, there are profound matters here, but we will focus on the messages that are particularly relevant to us.

One such message emerges from the Rambam’s explanation.

### Written Torah and Oral Torah

The chain of tradition is a key point in the Jewish outlook. It is an important and sensitive subject. Judaism’s opponents, both inside and outside, direct their attacks to this point.

The Torah has two parts. There is the *d’oraisa* part, the “Biblical” part, and there is the *d’rabbanan* part, the “Rabbinical” part. The strictly “Biblical” *mitzvos* are those that are stated expressly in the *Chumash*, in the Written Torah. *Hashem* gave us *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, and it says in them to dwell in a *sukkah*, to put

on *tefillin*, to eat *matzah* on Pesach, and so forth. However, in addition to that, there is the Oral Torah. It is what *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave over to Moshe, but not in written form. It contains the explanation and the details of all the *mitzvos*.

This issue of the chain of tradition is not a new one. It existed way back in early Talmudic times. So we see from the story of the non-Jew who came to Hillel and asked Hillel to convert him to Judaism, but requested to be taught only the Written Torah, not the Oral Torah, as he did not trust the chain of tradition.

This is a very deep subject. The Oral Torah is not just a commentary on the Written Torah. The Talmud constitutes the basis of all the *halachos* and it is composed of several parts.

One part is that in which the Sages derive *halachos* from the Written Torah by means of the Thirteen Homiletical Principles, the *מדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן*. In this part, we find a lot of disagreements. R. Akiva says like this and R. Yishmael says like that, R. Meir says such and such and R. Yehudah has a different view. And there are rules for determining the *Halachah* in such cases.

Just how strong is the authority of *Chazal*? To what extent may we rely on them? What is the answer to all of Judaism's opponents who claim that *Chazal* acted on their own accord, that they made up *mitzvos* such as reading the *Megilah* on Purim and lighting Chanukah candles, the prohibition of *muktzeh* on *Shabbos*, and others? How do we know we can rely absolutely on what *Chazal* said?

To sharpen the question: we see that between the Sages of the Talmud themselves, there were thousands of disagreements. Almost every *daf* of *Gemara* has at least one *machlokes* in it. Thus we utilize various methods to decide the *Halachah*. Here we say the *Halachah* is in accordance with Abaye's view, and there we say it accords with his rival, Rava. And so forth.

After the *Gemara* came the *Rishonim*: Rashi says like this, Tosafos say like that, Rabbeinu Tam has such and such a view, while the Rif takes a different approach.

Until this day, there is hardly a question in *Halachah* that a person won't get different answers to, if he goes

and asks different rabbis about it.

This is one of the main points that our ideological opponents attack us on. And many faithful Jews are confused about the matter themselves. It is thus a crucial subject. so let's go into it.

## The Pure Thing

One of the principles of our faith, as stated in the *Siddur*, is as follows:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שנבואת משה  
רבינו עליו השלום היתה אמיתית, ושהוא אב  
לנביאים לקודמים לפניו ולבאים אחריו – I  
believe with perfect faith that the prophecy  
of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, may peace be upon him,  
was true, and that he was the chief prophet,  
both of those who preceded him and of  
those who followed him.

We believe that there is a fundamental difference between the prophecy of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and that of other prophets. This difference is illustrated by the following allegory.

Let's say a certain rabbi delivers a *shiur*, a Torah lesson, and he has two students. Both are knowledgeable, honest and intelligent. And each repeats the *shiur* to someone else. Although they both heard it from the same rabbi at the same time, and now attempt to say over the *shiur* exactly as they heard it, there will inevitably be differences between their renderings. This is because each one absorbs what he heard into himself, into his personality, and from there he transmits it to others, in his own unique way.

The same applies to prophecy. *Chazal* say that no two prophets prophesize in the same style.<sup>1</sup> Two prophets that receive the same prophetic message from *Hashem*, when they come to transmit it to their listeners, the message will not be exactly the same. Each one will transmit it in his own style and with his own personality.

This is how it worked with all other prophets, but it was not that way with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He did not have his own style and personality when it came to

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhedrin* 89a.

prophecy. If there would be another *Moshe Rabbeinu* in the world, and both of them would prophesize, the words would be exactly the same. Both of them would say *בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ* and so on with the rest of the Torah. The words of Moshe's prophecy had nothing of Moshe's personality or understanding in them. It was *Hashem's* word in its purest form.

This is one of the Torah's basic tenets. *Moshe Rabbeinu* transmitted *Hashem's* Word exactly as it is. If we would hear those words directly from *Hashem's* mouth, they would sound the same and be the same. It would be the identical *בראשית ברא אלקים*.

### The Sin Was Anger

This concept is fundamental to understanding Moshe's sin at the rock, according to the approach of the Rambam, as we will explain.

The Jewish people gathered before Moshe and complained that they don't have water, because Miriam passed away and the miraculous well disappeared. This was not just a complaint that Miriam is sorely lacking. It was a claim against Moshe. They came with claims against Moshe. When Moshe heard this, he got angry, and said to them: *שמעו נא המורים* – "Listen, now, you rebellious people!" You are stubborn people, he told them. He then said *המנ הסלע הזה נוציא לכם מים* – "Shall we bring out water for you from this rock?" and thereupon picked up his staff and struck the rock.

According to Rashi, the sin was hitting the rock instead of speaking to it. But according to Rambam, the sin was getting angry.

What was so terrible about that?

*Moshe Rabbeinu*, as we explained, was like a clear mirror, *אספקלריא המאירה*. He had no hue of his own that colored *Hashem's* Word. Everything Moshe did was reflective of *Hashem's* Word. He was a pure expression of *Hashem*. In other words, if someone would get up in the morning, and *Moshe Rabbeinu* would say good morning to him, it meant that *Hashem* Himself, so to speak, is saying to him good morning. If Moshe would reprove someone, and say, "I think it's time that you starting learning with a little more *hasmadah*," it meant that this word of reproof is

coming straight from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

So when *Moshe Rabbeinu* got angry, the Jewish people understood that *Hashem* is angry. But *Hashem* was not actually angry. *Hashem* does not get upset when someone asks for water. People need water. However, the Jewish people understood from Moshe's reaction that *Hashem* is angry with them for requesting water, and they claimed that they indeed have the right to ask for water.

This was Moshe's sin. Everything that Moshe did reflected *Hashem's* Word, but here there was a mistake. It was an exception to the rule. *Hashem* did not want the people to think that He is angry with them. That is a *chilul Hashem*. It desecrates *Hashem's* Name if it looks like He gets angry at people who ask for water.

### Only True Prophets

This brings us to a very important point.

As we explained, everything *Moshe Rabbeinu* did purely reflected *Hashem's* deeds, but one time he did something that was not *Hashem's* deed, and this caused a lot of damage.

The question is like this: if, one time, Moshe acted not in the name of *Hashem*, how can we know that the rest of the time it was in the name of *Hashem*? This brings us back to the question of how much authority does the Torah have, since it is ultimately based on human beings?

A person could argue that he wants to hear *Hashem's* Torah, not a human being's Torah, but we received most of the Torah from human beings. We might try to answer him by saying that these people were perfected human beings. But then he will reply that if they are perfect, why do they argue so much? If each claims that the other is mistaken, perhaps in truth they both are mistaken?

The answer emerges from the following teaching of R. Saadia Gaon, who asked like this: A prophet comes along, such as Yirmeyahu, for instance, and prophesizes, saying, "So spoke *Hashem*..." How do we know that Yirmeyahu is in fact a prophet of *Hashem*? Because it was handed down to us by tradition that he was. Yeshayahu declared that Yirmeyahu was a true prophet, and Hoshea declared that Yeshayahu was a

true prophet, and Shmuel declared so about Hoshea. Thus we have an unbroken chain of testimony that Yirmeyahu was a true prophet of *Hashem*. And Yirmeyahu tells us that *Hashem* said such and such.

But that just brings us to the niggling question of whether a true prophet can sometimes speak falsely. Does his innate nature force him to always say the truth, like a machine that spits out information, or is he capable of speaking falsehood?

If we say he can't speak falsehood, then he is a machine; he is not a human being. Because a human being, by definition, has free choice to do right or wrong. Thus, even a prophet is capable of speaking falsely. If so, how can we know that he spoke the truth?

The Rambam gives us signs by which we can test whether someone is a true prophet or not.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as we explained, even such a prophet is capable of speaking falsely. So how can we be sure that what he says is the Word of *Hashem*, if he is capable of falsehood?

R. Saadia Gaon answered as follows. Past, present and future are all the same to *Hashem*. He knows the future like He knows the past. And He promised us that if He knows that this person will speak falsely, He will not send him to us as a prophet in the first place. *Hashem* promised us that He will send us only people who will speak truthfully.

This explains the whole matter.

When Yeshayahu says things in the name of *Hashem*, we don't believe in his words because he is the prophet Yeshayahu, but because of *Hashem's* promise regarding prophets. *Hashem* commanded us: אליו תשמעון – “You shall listen and obey [the prophet].”<sup>3</sup> This command is also a promise. *Hashem* promises that He will examine the prophets, and if He sees that they won't tell the truth, He will not allow them to prophesize in the first place. Those who do

prophesize will only be the ones who will speak the Word of *Hashem* in absolute truth and honesty.

In other words, when *Hashem* commanded us to listen to the prophets, this is a promise that the prophets will be reliable, and when we embrace the words of the prophets, it is not because we know the prophets to be godly and infallible. Indeed, they were tremendously perfected and uplifted human beings. Nevertheless, we want to receive the Torah from *Hashem*. To that end, *Hashem* promised that the Torah will be transmitted to us in a true and accurate manner.

This applies to *Moshe Rabbeinu* as well. Moshe wrote in the Torah, in *Hashem's* name, that *tefillin* need to contain certain specific passages written on parchment, and he also transmitted to us that the *tefillin* need to be black and square. And that a *mezuzah* needs to fulfill such and such requirements. And that the other *mitzvos* need to be done according to their specific *halachos* as stated.

Is *Moshe Rabbeinu* capable of speaking falsehood? Definitely. Because if not, he is not a human being, but a machine. So how can we know that he spoke the truth? Because *Hashem* promised us, וגם בך יאמינו – “They will believe also in you, [Moshe,] forever.”<sup>4</sup> *Hashem* declared that we may trust *Moshe Rabbeinu* like we trust *Hashem*, because everything *Moshe Rabbeinu* will say is 100% correct.

Once in history, it happened that *Moshe Rabbeinu* acted like a human being when transmitting *Hashem's* Torah. Moshe got angry, like a human being, and this anger did not accurately reflect the word of *Hashem*.

As a result, Moshe forfeited his role as the leader of the Jewish people. It was decreed that he will not bring the people into *Eretz Yisrael*.

This was Moshe's sin at the rock, according to the Rambam's approach. ●

<sup>2</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah ch. 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *Devarim 18:15.*

<sup>4</sup> *Shemos 19:9.*