



# 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

## You are Destined for Holiness

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. (ויקרא יט, ב)

**You shall be holy because I, *Hashem* your G-d, am holy. (*Vayikra* 19:2)**

The *parshah* begins with the *mitzvah* to be holy. What does it take to be holy, and thereby fulfill this *mitzvah*? Our Rabbis taught that we should not make do with just avoiding known *aveiros* such as forbidden foods and forbidden gender relationships and other such prohibitions. We are rather are commanded to go beyond this, and sanctify ourselves even in permitted matters.

What does this mean?

It means living a life of *kedushah* as befits the Chosen People, as befits *Hashem's* beloved children. *Hashem* wants to be proud of us and how we live our lives. So we should separate and abstain even from that which is technically permitted but is not consistent with living a life of *kedushah*.

In fact, the Torah says even more than this. It says: קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – “You shall be holy because I, *Hashem* your G-d, am holy.” The Torah compares our holiness to *Hashem's* holiness.

*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said: Since you

were sanctified to My Name before I created the world, you shall be holy like I am holy.<sup>1</sup>

Even before the world was created, the sanctity of the Jewish people was destined to be.

But what does this idea add to the *mitzvah* of קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ? Why is *Hashem's* holiness the basis of the *mitzvah*?

The *Dubner Maggid* explains it by way of allegory. A rich man lived in a little village among simple people. He had an only daughter, and he wanted to seek out a bridegroom who was a great *talmid chacham*. He traveled a long way until he came to a leading *yeshivah*, and the *rosh yeshivah* there picked out the top *talmid* for him. The rich man put out a fortune to take this brilliant and dedicated young man, who learned day and night, as a bridegroom for his daughter.

<sup>1</sup> *Tanchuma, Kedoshim* 2.

After the marriage, the rich man noticed that his new son-in-law had become lazy about his learning. He only learned an hour or two a day. The rich man was perturbed by this, and said to him, “Why is it, my son, that you are not a *masmid* like you were before?”

The young man replied, “What do you mean? Just ask the *shamash* of the *beis midrash* if there is anyone in this whole village who opens a *sefer* even once a month. I may be a bit lazier about my learning than I was before, but I still have way more Torah erudition than you will find in all the villagers here!”

The rich man said, “Wait a minute. You know very well that I didn’t take you as my son-in-law because you were the best among the villagers. I met you when you were learning in a leading *yeshivah*, among *talmidei chachamim*, and you were the top *talmid* there. I am not satisfied with you just being the best Torah learner in this little village. I want you to dedicate yourself to your learning like you did back in the *yeshivah*, because that is context in which I chose you as a fitting husband-to-be for my daughter.”

This throws light on the *mitzvah* of תהיו קדושים.

A person might be tempted to consider himself “holy” as compared the average guy nowadays. In our generation, moral standards are not very high, and denial of *Hashem* is pretty prevalent. But the Torah tells us not to apply relative, “modern” standards.

We were sanctified to *Hashem’s* Name before the world was even created, before this lowly generation came into existence. We are called upon to be holy like *Hashem* is holy. His sanctity is not relative. It is not as compared to someone less than Him. *Hashem’s kedushah* is inherent and absolute. This is how we, too, should be.

In our lowly generation, a person is liable to allow himself all sorts of things that every normal Jew would have held in detest in former times, and say to himself that by today’s standards, his lifestyle qualifies as holy. This is a mistake. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* asks of every Jew, in every generation, to be inherently and absolutely holy. Just as *Hashem’s kedushah* doesn’t change from generation to generation, so the *kedushah* of the Jewish people should retain its original beauty for all time. ●

## Don't Retaliate

לא תקם. (ויקרא יט, יח)

**Do not take revenge. (*Vayikra* 19:18)**

It says in *Sefer Mesilas Yesharim*<sup>1</sup> that it is very hard for the human heart to free itself of vengefulness, because people are very sensitive to insult. It hurts them a lot, and revenge feels sweeter than honey, because it eases them.

Why is it so very sweet to get even with the one who hurt you and put you down? Let’s say Reuven wronged Shimon. What does Shimon actually gain by avenging himself on Reuven?

The answer is Shimon gains a lot. When he gets back at Reuven and settles accounts, he retroactively

<sup>1</sup> Ch. 11.

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

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removes the humiliation and the smirch to his name that was perpetrated on him yesterday. It shows that Reuven never had the right to treat him that way in the first place, because now all can see that Reuven is paying for it dearly.

This is sweeter than honey because it retroactively removes the blemish to Shimon's honor.

But the Torah tells us not to do it. **לֹא תִקּוֹם** – “Do not take revenge.” Why not? Because we need to recognize the truth: had it not been decreed in Heaven, the other person would never have been able to treat us that way.

There is no prohibition on guarding oneself from further harm. A person is allowed to protect himself from hurt and damage. But what happened yesterday, it already happened. Although the deed cannot be undone, we might be tempted to change what it means, and show retroactively that it was wrong, that it was unfair. Regarding this, the Torah tells us no, don't do it. Don't take revenge. Instead, we should recognize that everything is decreed by Heaven. No one down here does anything that was not decreed up there.

By contrast, *Hashem* is called **אֵל גִּמְלוֹת** –

“*Hashem* is a G-d of requital.”<sup>2</sup>

Not only is it proper and fitting for *Hashem* to pay back evildoers for their deeds, it is even necessary, due to *Hashem's* absolute Oneness.

How so?

Let's say a person sins against *Hashem* one day and stops sinning the next day. Yesterday he acted against *Hashem's* Will and today he did *Hashem's* Will.

This contradicts *Hashem's* Oneness, because *Hashem* always ruled and always will rule. He is in control of every single moment and every single action. There can't be a moment or an action that is out of *Hashem's* domain.

Every deed that appears to be against *Hashem's* Will must meet with punishment and reprisal, because this is the only way to remove the deed retroactively and demonstrate for all to see what it means to act against *Hashem's* Will; it means the perpetrator will pay for it dearly, he will hurt and suffer for it. This shows that there is no such thing as going against *Hashem*, and retroactively rectifies the deed. ●

<sup>2</sup> Tehillim 94:1.

## PARSHA TOPIC

## Clean Hands

**לֹא תַעֲשֶׂק אֶת רֵעֶךָ וְלֹא תִגְזֹל. (ויקרא יט, יג)**

**Do not withhold wages from your fellow, and do not rob. (*Vayikra* 19:13)**

### Honest Possessions

I want to address a topic that the *Baalei Mussar* used to speak about a lot, due to its great importance, but today you hardly hear it mentioned. This is the topic of *gezel*, dishonest gain.

When I said I am about to talk about a really important topic, people probably thought to themselves, “Hmm, I wonder what he is going to say.” And when I said I am going to talk about *gezel*, I imagine that some people probably felt a little insulted. “Oh come on, does he think anyone here is a thief?!”

But the truth is I have permission from *Chazal* to talk on this topic, because they said:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: The majority of people are guilty of dishonest gain, and the minority of forbidden gender relationships, and nearly all of speech bordering on *lashon hara*.<sup>1</sup>

So we see that there are a lot people who don't come completely clean of dishonest gain. It's hard to believe, it's hard to understand, but if you walk into a group of people, you can assume that many of them have committed misdeeds in monetary matters. If that's what *Chazal* say, it must be so.

*Chazal* also stated that if a person has a box full of *aveiros*, the first one to speak up and accuse him in the Heavenly court is *gezel*.<sup>2</sup>

What does this mean as regards us?

Let's say a person is trying to figure out why he is not having a lot of success in his life. The first thing he should attribute his lack of success to is dishonest gain, because it is the first to speak up and accuse him in *Shamayim*.

However, most people, after examining themselves, usually come to the conclusion that their hands are clean. They don't find impropriety in their financial dealings. "I didn't steal anything!" they say to themselves.

So why didn't *Chazal* see it that way?

It's all a question of what is considered *gezel*, and what *Chazal* had in mind when they spoke about it.

Those who sit in the *beis midrash* and learn Torah already know that *gezel* is not just putting your hand into someone else's pocket and taking out money, or deliberately damaging someone's property. We wouldn't even think of doing something like that.

But we live in a material world, we walk around in

it, and wherever we go, we encounter other people's property. For instance, you get on the bus and you realize that you are missing a quarter to pay the fare. You see someone there you know, and you say, "Hey, Yankel, lend me a quarter, I'll pay you back tomorrow." And tomorrow, they both completely forget about the quarter.

That's *gezel*.

A thousand *dapim* of *Gemara* that a person learned could go down a black hole like this. Forgetting a quarter is *gezel*. It makes a "hole" in a person's soul.

## Gezel is Sticky

*Sefer Mesilas Yescharim* says an amazing thing about this. It is speaking on the trait of *nekiyus*, cleanliness:

Even Iyov said about himself: אִם תִּטָּה אֲשָׁרִי מִנִּי הַדֶּרֶךְ וְאַחֵר עֵינֵי הָלֶךְ לִבִּי וּבִכְפִי דָּבַק מָאוֹם – "If my feet have strayed from their course, and my heart followed after my eyes, and something stuck to my hands."<sup>3</sup> See how beautiful this metaphor is. It is comparing hidden *gezel* to something that sticks to a person's hands. Even if a person did not deliberately go and pick it up, and it just inadvertently got stuck to him, in the end, it is in his hand.

So it is with *gezel*. Even if a person doesn't deliberately go and steal something, it is hard for his hands to remain completely empty of *gezel*.<sup>4</sup>

We know that when we walk down the street we need to guard our eyes, and not just look at anything and everything, because if we don't guard our eyes, there is a natural tendency to get pulled toward *aveiros*. This is how *Hashem* created the world.

1 Bava Basra 165a.

2 Yalkut Shimoni, Behar 660.

3 Iyov 31:7.

4 Mesilas Yescharim ch. 11.

The *Mesilas Yescharim* is telling us that this applies also to guarding our hands. Our hands have a certain invisible “glue” on them, and when we go around in the world, all sorts of things inadvertently get stuck to them. If we don’t pay attention to remove from our hands whatever got stuck on, those things will stay with us, and it is considered *gezel*, improper gain. This is the nature of the world. It is not something you can argue about. It is natural for things to get stuck to our hands, and the only way to avoid the sin of *gezel* is to always remove from our hands whatever got on them.

I will tell you a little story.

A few years ago, I was talking with a good *yeshiva bachur* from a good family. I asked him, “Do you have any debts? Do you owe money to people?”

He said he does. So I asked him, “How much?”

He said, “I don’t know.”

I asked him, “How much to you think it is, approximately?”

He answered, “Every once in a while I buy a soft drink or a snack, and stuff like that, I think I probably owe about eighty shekels.”

I said to him, “Think about it again and really try to remember who you owe money to.”

He thought for a moment, and said, “Oh, I also owe this guy and that guy.”

A few minutes went by, and he realized that he owes approximately 200 shekels. After another few minutes, he already owed 240 shekels...

And this was a good *bachur*, not a youth at risk or someone from a weak background.

Here’s another example. Someone is cleaning up the house for Pesach and finds a *sefer* he doesn’t recognize. He tries to remember who it belongs to, but can’t think of the owner. This is simply *gezel*.

How do I know it is *gezel*?

Because sometimes I am looking for a *sefer* of mine, and I don’t find it, and then I try to remember who I lent it to, and I find it hard to forgive him. How many times did I have to buy this *sefer*?!

We are talking about regular, normative people. They borrow a book, and sometimes they forget. It happens. They borrow a pen from a friend, and forget. It happens. This is what the *Mesilas Yescharim* is talking about. We have this invisible glue on our hands, our hands are sticky, and things get attached to us all the time.

## You are Naturally Forgetful

Why is it this way?

Human beings have a peculiar trait: they forget things. For instance, we all remember that it used to be winter. It was really cold, maybe it was snowing where you live, and people were thinking to themselves, “Oh, I just wish summer would come already. Even if it will be baking hot, it will be such a relief to get away from this freezing weather!”

Then summer comes, and people are wiping the sweat off their brows, and longing for winter. Even if it will be freezing, the main thing is to get away from this oppressive heat and mugginess!

Such is human nature. We don’t remember.

A person can’t understand why his friend forgot to return a *sefer* to him: What’s the matter with him? Is he okay? Does he think that’s normal behavior or something?! The answer is yes. It’s normal behavior because people are by nature forgetful. People don’t think they will forget, but in the end they do. We don’t think we will forget the *Tosfos* we just learned, but a few days pass by, and we already forgot it. It’s like we have a hole in our pocket. We simply don’t remember things.

My *zeideh* would say, “Every Jew in America, unless he is especially careful, will over the course of his life accumulate a ‘little *chazir*’ in his body.” He was talking about food products with a dubious

*kashrus* status, which in his days many people would consume.

We can apply this idea to our subject. Everyone has items that he takes from others and forgets to return. And this is nothing but *gezel*. If he never returns them, they will eventually accompany him to the grave.

I tell this to young *bachurim*: If you get into the habit at your age to avoid *gezel* as much as possible, you will live happy lives. Because if a person lives carelessly, he will gradually accumulate property that doesn't belong to him. Five dollars here, five dollars there, and he broke something accidentally, etc etc. It all adds up, and he doesn't remember that it ever happened. Years go by, and in the end, a person comes to *Olam Ha'emes* with a giant bag of stolen property.

This is really something to think about. The *Vilna Gaon* is quoted as saying that if a house has one stolen nail in it, good children won't come from this home.

*Gezel* is not something to treat lightly. We know that even Yom Kippur will not atone for *gezel* until the person returns the misappropriated property. I think this is one of the reasons why people aren't successful in their lives. It's because they are holding things that don't belong to them.

As we said, it's all a matter of habit. Just like we need to watch over what our eyes see and our minds think about, so we need to watch over our hands. Let's say you go into the corner grocery and accidentally break something. Go and pay for it right away.

## Fix It Up

Some of the people sitting here and listening to this lecture are thinking to themselves, "Yeah, okay, it's a nice lecture. That's a good idea...." There is a *bachur* who felt a little prick in his heart. And the subject poked a hole in the heart of someone else. He feels pangs of conscience. He

anxiously thinks to himself, "What am I gonna do? I *mamash* forgot a bunch of things like this, and now I want to make good, I want to get this stuff off my hands. But how am I going to find all the things I once borrowed from people, and remember sums of money I was lent but forgot all about?!"

Good question. What can a person actually do to rectify the sin of *gezel*?

First of all, it is a general problem in *avodas Hashem* that if we focus on the problems, it makes us feel down. And if we feel down, we don't want to think about it anymore. And if we don't think about it, we just keep on doing the same thing, without solving the problem.

I want to tell you something. Most of you probably know this already, but for those who don't, this is something you need to know.

There is a story about R. Zelmeleh from Volozhin. Apparently, he was still a child at the time of the story, or perhaps a young *bachur*.

He was among the outstanding *talmidim* of the *Vilna Gaon*. They say he didn't belong to the generation in which he was born. He was compared to a meteor that passes over a certain place and sheds a glow from high up. R. Zelmeleh was from a different generation. He was a tremendous *gaon*, a unique personality. His *hasmadah* and breadth of knowledge were out of this world.

So the story is that R. Zelmeleh was once sitting in the *beis midrash*, and someone came over and spoke to him in learning, and while they were talking, R. Zelmeleh said some word that the other person took offense to.

Afterward, R. Zelmeleh thought to himself, "Oh no, I insulted someone!" He went to look for the person, he looked and looked, but couldn't find him. He was so pained over this incident that he fell ill.

His family saw that he was in a terrible situation and they tried to find a solution to ease his mind.

Someone came along and said, "I have an idea." He dressed up like the person who got insulted, and came to R. Zelmeleh. But R. Zelmeleh started crying, and said to him, "I know you aren't that person, I want to find that person, so he will forgive me!"

His family went to the *Vilna Gaon* and told him the story. He opened up *Sefer Chovos Halevavos* and started reading to them:

If a person did some sin that is hard to rectify in the way of repentance specific for it... he should accept upon himself to fulfill all the requirements and conditions of repentance that he has the strength and ability to perform. Then the Creator will treat his repentance leniently, and let him go regarding everything he doesn't know and is out of his control. The Creator will place an exit from his sin in front of him, and provide excuses for him....

If he wronged his fellow physically or financially, the Creator will put love and goodwill in that person's heart, bringing him to forgive the sinner for what he did to him, as it says: **בְּרָצוֹת** – "If *Hashem* is pleased with a person's ways, even his enemies will make peace with him".<sup>5,6</sup>

So we see that there is a way out even for sins

<sup>5</sup> Mishlei 16:7.

<sup>6</sup> Chovos Halevavos 7:10.

such as these. We need not despair over it, but we should give some thought to it.

Treating other people's property with proper care is a point we need to work on. You could keep a little notebook in which you jot down things you borrow and loans you take. After eight months, take out the notebook and you might see things you totally forgot about.

Although hard at the beginning, if you get used to living this way you will save yourself from a lot of *aveiros*, and you will attain happiness.

We all want to achieve things, we want to uplift ourselves, and *David Hamelech* asked a very relevant question:

מִי יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר ה' וּמִי יָקוּם בְּמִקְוֵם קֹדֶשׁ –  
Who will ascend the mountain of *Hashem*,  
and who will rise up to His place of  
holiness?<sup>7</sup>

*David Hamelech* also answered the question:

נָקִי כַפַּיִם וּבֶרֶךְ לֵב – He who is clean of  
hands and pure of heart.<sup>8</sup>

The first condition is to have clean hands. To check all the time if money or property that doesn't belong to us got stuck to our hands somehow or another.

Having clean hands is one of highest and most beautiful of *madreigos*. Such a person is invited to ascend *Hashem's* mountain and stand in His holy place. ●

<sup>7</sup> Tehillim 24:3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

