

Parashas
Shemini

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כ"ח ניסן תשפ"ה

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קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

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טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

לדעת מה ה' דורש מעמך

To know what Hashem demands of you

טיב המערכת

He shall bring it according to his will

יקריב אותו לרצונו

The Mishnah in Makkos (8a) says: "One who throws a stone into the public domain and kills – he goes into exile." The Gemara immediately asks: how is it possible that someone who threw a stone into the public domain must go into exile? He is considered intentional (meizid), for he should have checked to ensure no one was there! And indeed, the Gemara struggles greatly with this question until it finds a particular scenario – where someone threw a stone into a place where people are not expected to be at that time – in which case, he is called unintentional (shogeig), and therefore must flee to a city of refuge. But in all other cases, there is no doubt that someone who throws a stone into the public domain is a meizid and liable for the death penalty. Later in the *mesechta*, there is another Mishnah (13a): "And these are the ones who receive lashes... one who eats neveila and treif meat, creeping and swarming creatures." The Gemara (16b) brings: "Abaye said: one who eats a [certain type of] water creature – receives four sets of lashes; an ant – five lashes, because it is a creeping creature that swarms upon the earth; a wasp – six lashes, because it is a winged creeping creature." The question arises: is there a connection between these two statements?

A significant portion of Parashas Shemini deals with the kashrus of food. And so it is written in our parsha (11:44): והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני, ולא תטמאו את נפשתיכם בכל השרץ הרומש על הארץ - 'And you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy, and you shall not defile your souls with any creeping creature that crawls upon the earth.' Rashi explains: 'To transgress many prohibitions over them, and each prohibition entails lashes. This is what the Talmud says: one who eats a [certain type of] water creature – receives four; an ant – five; a wasp – six.' And not only this, but Chazal expound on the posuk "And you shall become impure through them (ונטמאתם)": Do not read "venitmeisem" but "venitamtem" – that eating forbidden foods stupefies (blocks) the heart. If so, one might ask: What do they want from me? That I should stop eating? Of course, this is not the intention of the Torah, for the Torah says: "And you shall live by them." So how is it possible to continue eating and not stumble?

The answer is found in the words of the Gemara we brought: just as a person who throws a stone into the public domain is called a meizid because he should have checked that no one was there, so too must we check everything before it enters our mouths – that it is kosher and contains nothing forbidden. Baruch Hashem, our generation has been merited with kashrus systems that do the work – but it is incumbent upon each individual to find out which kashrus is reliable, and of course, to check everything before putting it in one's mouth. And one who does all that he can – Heaven helps him not to stumble.

Tiv HaTorah - Shemini

ויאמר משה אל אהרן ולאליעזר ובניו ולאיתמר בניו ראשיכם אל תפרעו ובגדיכם לא תפרמו ולא תמתו ועל כל העדה יקצף ואחיכם כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ה' (י:ו)

Moshe said to Aharon and to his sons Elazar and Isamar, "Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you do not die and He become wrathful with the entire assembly, and your brothers, the entire House of Israel shall cry for the fire that Hashem ignited. (10:6)

Rashi explains: Do not leave your heads unshorn – do not grow hair. From here we learn that a mourner is not allowed to have a haircut. But you, do not disturb the rejoicing of the Omnipresent. That you not die – but if you do so, you will die. And your brothers, the entire House of Israel – from here we learn that the distress of *talmidei chachamim* is placed upon everybody to mourn it.

One who contemplates Rashi's words sees that the Creator Baruch Hu commanded here two directives that seem to contradict one another. On the one hand, the entire House of Israel was commanded to mourn the fire that the Hashem ignited, and to grieve the death of *talmidei chachamim*. On the other hand, Aharon and his sons – who were the closest relatives to the deceased – were commanded not to mourn at all, for doing so would mix into the joy of the Omnipresent, since this was the day when Hashem caused His *Shechina* to dwell among Israel. It was a great joy before Him Yisbarach. And if they were to mourn on that day, it would provoke great accusation (in Heaven), and then the wrath would not be only upon them, but upon the entire congregation, Hashem would be angry.

This matter requires explanation! If the death of the righteous demands public mourning to the extent that it should even suspend the great joy of 'Chanukas Hamizbeach', then why should the kohanim not also participate in this obligation? And if the mourning is not fitting to override this great joy, then why should all of Israel not be obligated to share in that joy?

And to reconcile this in the way of *mussar* (ethical teaching), we must preface a fundamental principle in serving the Creator: when a person desires to act piously beyond his usual practice, he must first reflect whether this is indeed the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. For sometimes,

this desire comes specifically from the *yetzer hara* — that is, the *yetzer* knows that this “piety” will delay a person from fulfilling what is actually obligatory, and so it entices him toward it. Therefore, a person must reflect on what the consequences of this act of piety will be, and if he sees that in the end, it will prevent the fulfillment of Hashem’s true will, he must understand that this desire originated from an undesirable source.

Based on this principle, the *posuk* alludes to the matter of mourning for Nadav and Avihu. For this mourning was not intended as a lament over the calamity that befell these two righteous men — for from their perspective, it was not a *calamity* at all. Their death had already been determined in advance when HaKadosh Baruch Hu said (Shemos 29:43): ‘וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכָבוֹדִי’ - ‘*And I will be sanctified through My honor*’ (see Rashi above on *posuk* 3). On the contrary, through this they fulfilled their mission in the world and sanctified the Name of Heaven in the world, and they had completed their rectification. Their souls became bound in the bundle of life, and from then on they merited to enjoy the radiance of the Divine Presence in the World of Complete Good. However, the mourning was meant to express the great loss to the people of Israel — that two righteous men had departed from among them, men who had protected them and illuminated them with the radiance of their spirit.

And there was no one who understood this loss more deeply than Aharon and his remaining sons. They understood very well just how much Israel had lost with the departure of these righteous men. Therefore, they greatly desired to mourn them. And even though they themselves were not in such great need of the merit of these righteous ones — for they too were exalted *tzaddikim* and merited spiritual light on their own merit — nevertheless,

they deeply grieved over the loss that had befallen the collective of Israel.

In contrast, the nation of Israel as a whole, although they recognized that this was a significant loss, did not merit to perceive its full magnitude. They did not yet grasp what kind of spiritual influence had been present and was now gone. Therefore, they were permitted to postpone their mourning until after that day — the day that was a joy before Yisbarach Shemo.

And this is the message in Moshe’s directive — that each person must examine whether his desire aligns with the will of the Omnipresent. And thus it emerges that Aharon and his sons, who longed to mourn their relatives, were required instead to continue in the joy of the Creator. For them, it was not such a great personal loss, and if they too were to mourn, it would be a blemish upon the *Shechina*, as they would be pushing aside its joy because of mourning. However, the people of Israel, who had experienced a great loss, were fitting and obligated to lament. They needed to set aside their desire to partake in the joy of their Creator, for it was not the proper time for them to rejoice. And this would not be a blemish to the *Shechina* — on the contrary, it would be an honor to the *Shechina*, as they were mourning the diminished revelation of the light of the *Shechina* that resulted from the departure of the righteous.

Here is a true story that illustrates our point well: It took place with one of the great kabbalists who lived before the days of the Arizal, the holy Rebbe Shimon Lavi, author of the *sefer Kesem Paz* and composer of the famous song *Bar Yochai*.

This righteous man lived in the Diaspora, and in his later years, he deeply yearned to merit stepping upon the dust of the Holy Land and to spend his final years there immersed in Torah and Divine service — a longing shared by many righteous

men of that time and generations thereafter. After making extensive preparations, he began his journey.

And behold, during his travels he happened to stop at a certain place and noticed that the Jews living there were ignorant and completely devoid of spiritual content. They didn’t even know how to pray, for they could not read or write. When he saw this, he understood that it was not the will of Heaven for him to continue on his journey and abandon an entire Jewish community in such a lowly state. He immediately decided to settle among them in order to teach them the ways of life and restore their spiritual stature. He even left behind his deep and hidden *avodah* (divine service) before his Creator, descended from the spiritual heights, and began to teach them the most basic things — letters, vowel points, and the laws of the Torah — just like a simple children’s teacher, literally.

And this became his mission from that day until the end of his life. In that same place, he was eventually laid to rest in honor.

This was an immense sacrifice for him, as he had attained lofty levels in Torah and Divine service, and nothing held back his yearning to ascend to the Holy Land and bask there in the radiance of the *Shechina* — even though such a journey in those days truly required *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). Yet, once he understood that the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu was for him to become a spiritual father to that community, he subdued his great love and burning yearning and served them as an “angel of salvation.”

This, then, is a foundational principle in the service of Hashem: to know what Hashem, your G-d demands of you. And even if you are stirred with a powerful desire to serve the Creator on a lofty level, you must examine whether it is truly pleasing in the eyes of Hashem — or perhaps His will is different from yours, and He desires a different kind of service altogether.

'From the best of his possessions'

'מהיפה שבנכסיו'

I asked at home, "What piece of jewelry would you like in honor of the Chag?" "To be honest, this time I would be really happy if you bought me a wet-dry vacuum — it would really ease the work at home for me!!!" When a wife makes a small request for help, the husband very much wants to buy it. Especially since hiring help costs quite a bit, and an *aishes chayil* who manages without a cleaning lady surely deserves a robotic assistant.

It turns out that the prices aren't exactly cheap — especially the better models — and if we're already buying, we want to buy the best one on the market. A device that really works, delivers results, and doesn't require a lot of maintenance.

I did some research, and I prayed to Hashem to help us choose the best model and determine the budget needed.

This morning, my mother calls me, as she usually does, to check how I'm doing. In the course of the conversation, she tells me about my younger sister who wants to get rid of her wet-dry vacuum, because her apartment is small and cramped, and she has no place to store it. "What kind of vacuum?" I asked in astonishment.

"The best vacuum on the market!!! Don't you know your mother?! If we buy something, it has to be the best!" It turns out that my mother had bought the wet-dry vacuum for my sister after her wedding, and it's brand new, never used, and she's more than happy to give it away to make room in her small rental unit, where she wipes the floor quickly with a small mop. I rejoiced greatly in HaKadosh Baruch Hu, who answered my prayers and fulfilled my wife's wish.

I saw that when HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives generously, He gives the best model!!! As the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* quotes in the laws of charity, Siman 34, seif 5, and this is the language: "One who wants to merit for himself should overcome his evil inclination and open his hand generously. And anything that is for the sake of Heaven should be from the best and the most beautiful. If he builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own home; if he feeds the hungry, he should feed them from the best and sweetest on his table; if he clothes the naked, he should clothe them with the finest of his garments; if he donates something, he should donate from the best of his possessions. As it is said: 'All the fat is for Hashem.'"

כ.ה.

For This, You Were Chosen

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן קְרֵב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת חַטָּאתְךָ וְאֶת עֹלֹתְךָ וְכִפֹּר בְּעַדְךָ
וּבְעַד הָעָם וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת קָרְבְּנֵי הָעָם וְכִפֹּר בְּעַדָם ט:ז

And Moshe said to Aharon, "Draw near to the altar and perform your sin offering and your burnt offering, and atone for yourself and for the people" (9:7).

think of ourselves as sinners unworthy of entering the halls of holiness. By doing so, we can avoid the despondency that the evil inclination uses to dissuade a person from repentance, constantly reminding them of their past sins to lead them to despair. Instead, we must recognize that the gates of repentance are always open, allowing us to return to God wholeheartedly.

For this, you were chosen!

In the region under the leadership of the holy Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apta *zt"l* (whose *yahrzeit* is on the 5th of Nissan), lived a wealthy landowner, a *poritz* (feudal lord) who ruled over numerous villages and towns.

As was typical of such landowners, he wielded absolute control over the forests and lands under his domain, amassing great wealth from leasing timber, fields, and other ventures.

His most trusted aide was a talented and energetic Jew who managed the vast estate with exceptional skill. The *poritz* placed greater trust in this Jewish assistant than in any of his non-Jewish servants or aides.

Over time, the Jewish aide became like a member of the *poritz's* household, often participating in the feasts and celebrations held by the *poritz* and his aristocratic friends. Unfortunately, as he mingled with them, he initially disregarded Rabbinic prohibitions against consuming non-Jewish wine and bread. Slowly but surely, the evil inclination led him astray, and he became entirely assimilated, behaving like one of the non-Jewish nobles.

Years passed, and as the aging *poritz* grew weaker, he transferred the management of his estate entirely to his Jewish aide. Eventually, upon the *poritz's* passing, his will named the Jewish aide his successor. Suddenly, the Jewish man found himself a full-fledged *poritz* among the non-Jewish aristocracy, holding a position of significant power and influence.

The deceased *poritz's* young widow, unaware of her Jewish roots, assumed he was a non-Jew like herself. She proposed marriage, and he saw no

Rashi explains, based on the *Toras Kohanim*: "Aharon was hesitant and afraid to approach. Moshe said to him, 'Why are you hesitant? For this you were chosen.'" A teaching of Rav Yitzchak Luria, the *Arizal zt"l*, reveals the profound truth in these words: "Why are you hesitant? For the very reason that you feel hesitant, you were chosen!"

A person who feels shame and regret for his actions, humbling himself with a contrite heart, is beloved before Hashem. The traits of humility and brokenness make a person worthy.

This is a great encouragement for those who have repented. Their hearts are broken and ashamed as they recall their sins, and they fear they have no hope, *chas veshalom*. But Moshe Rabbeinu taught a timeless lesson, showing us the immense power of repentance and humility and urging us not to despair over past sins.

As the prophet declares (*Yechezkel* 18:21-22), וְהָרָשָׁע בִּי יָשׁוּב מְכַל (חטאתו) חטאתיו, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה... כָּל פְּשָׁעָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לֹא יִזְכְּרוּ לוֹ
-If the wicked man repents from all his sins... none of the transgressions he has committed will be remembered against him. For the righteousness he has done, he shall live. Moreover, repentance born of love transforms intentional sins into merits (*Yoma* 86b).

There is a well-known story that the holy Saraf of Moglenitz *zt"l*, once visited the holy Rav Chaim Dovid Doktor, *zt"l*, toward the end of his life and found him despondent. The Saraf asked, "Why are you so downcast? Surely, the Torah states explicitly (*Bamidbar* 6:12), וְהַיָּמִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים, The first days shall fall away. -

As is known, Rav Chaim Dovid was a *baal teshuvah* who had drawn close to the holy Chozeh of Lublin and ascended to great spiritual heights.

Rav Chaim Dovid replied, "On the contrary, I do not wish for the first days to fall away, for through repentance born of love, even intentional sins become merits!"

This concept teaches us to strengthen ourselves in repentance, to clothe ourselves in holy boldness, and not to

reason to refuse. They were wed in a grand Catholic ceremony, during which the Jewish man formally converted to Christianity, cutting himself off from the Jewish people.

He lived as a non-Jew for many years, raising children with his noble wife. These children became prominent young dukes. The holy Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, the Ohev Yisrael of Apta, deeply grieved upon hearing of this Jewish soul that had fallen into the depths of impurity. He continually prayed and pleaded on behalf of this lost soul, beseeching Hashem to return him to the fold of Yisrael.

One year, as Pesach approached, a terrible blood libel arose in the region. The non-Jewish nobles accused the Jews of murdering a Christian boy to use his blood for matzah. This libel, fueled by anti-Semitic hatred, placed the Jewish community in grave danger.

According to local law, such accusations required the signatures of all the regional nobles to proceed. Only then could the decree be submitted to the king for approval.

When the nobles gathered to sign the decree, the Jewish *poritz*, now entirely estranged from his heritage, shocked everyone by refusing to sign. Questioned about his refusal, he rose with fiery passion and declared:

“My fellow dukes, listen well! You all know me. For many years, I have been a non-Jew like you in every way, and my family are all non-Jews. However, in my distant past, I was born a Jew, and I know their ways well. I can swear to you that this libel is nothing but a baseless lie. The Jews have never, and would never, use Christian blood for their matzah. They abhor blood, which is strictly forbidden by their law. This is nothing more than a vile fabrication by bloodthirsty conspirators seeking to harm innocent people!”

His heartfelt and sincere words, coupled with his respected status among the nobles, convinced them all. The libel was dismissed, and the decree was never enacted.

In Heaven, great commotion ensued over the mitzvah this Jewish *poritz* had performed in saving the Jewish people from disaster. The merit of this act reignited the dormant spark within his soul, buried for years beneath layers of impurity.

As explained in the holy *sefer* Kedushas Levi by Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev zt”l (at the beginning of *Parashas Vayikra*): “When a person performs a mitzvah, that mitzvah leaves an impression above, and

this impression inspires him to fulfill the will of the Creator continuously.”

Thus, his great mitzvah created a strong impression above, which began to stir and ignite within the pure soul of the Jew, awakening him from spiritual stagnation and drawing him closer to his Divine origin to fulfill the will of his Father in Heaven. Sparks of repentance and holiness kindled in his heart, prompting him to reconsider his entire life. He repeatedly asked himself, “What is happening to me? How is it that I, who was privileged to save all the Jews here from destruction, have fallen to such a lowly state? How did I abandon the living waters of the chosen and sacred nation, only to dig for myself broken cisterns of debauchery and abandon among impure non-Jews?”

His conscience tormented him day and night. One late night, after restless hours of soul-searching, he quietly left his grand estate and went straight to the holy home of the Ohev Yisrael, Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apta.

When the man, still dressed in his noble attire, presented himself to the Rav and asked to be guided in repentance, the Rav initially feared that this might be a ploy. Perhaps the apostate sought to frame the Jews with false accusations of trying to bring the *poritz* back to Judaism. Thus, the Rav initially rejected him to verify the sincerity of his intentions.

However, the man, whose inner flame of repentance burned fiercely, did not accept this dismissal. He began to cry bitterly, imploring the Rav to guide him on a path of repentance so he could abandon his sinful ways and return to his people and the holy nation of Yisrael.

The holy Rav remained unsure of the man’s sincerity and deliberated on how to respond.

Suddenly, during their conversation, the Rav pointed to his staff, which stood in the corner of the room, and exclaimed: “If grass were to grow from this staff, then I would know that your intentions are pure and sincere, and this is not some ploy or scheme!”

Minutes later, grass miraculously sprouted from the Rav’s staff, just as he had declared. The incredible wonder revealed the deep sincerity of the lost and anguished soul before him, who genuinely sought complete repentance.

The Rav immediately laid out a path of rectification and complete repentance for the man. He gave him a sign: “The day you hear that the noblewoman and her children have died, you will know that your repentance has been fully accepted.”

The man disappeared from his estate and went to the Rav’s *beis midrash* in Apta. There, he changed his clothing, restored his Jewish appearance, and integrated among the *talmidei chachamim* and chassidim. He dedicated himself to the *teshuvah* regimen set out by the Rav. Not long after, news reached him that the noblewoman and her children had passed away, confirming that his repentance was complete. The man went on to become an *adam gadol*.

This story teaches us the extraordinary power of repentance. Even if, *chas veshalom*, a Jew falls to the depths of spiritual degradation, the inner spark implanted in his soul—a part of Hashem above—will ultimately awaken him to return. As it is written (*Shmuel II* 14:14), *וְלֹא יֵשָׁא - אֱלֹהִים נָפֶשׁ וְחֹשֶׁב מִחֲשָׁבוֹת לְבַלְתִּי יֵדַח מִמֶּנּוּ נֶדַח - God devises ways so that he who is banished will not be cast from Him*. The holy *sefarim* explain that even the most distant souls, including apostates, will eventually return to their Divine source, and their repentance will be fully accepted.

As the Gemara (*Yoma* 86a) states: “Great is repentance, for it reaches the Throne of Glory.” Amen.

I know of a story shared by the person involved, a descendant of a poor yet noble family. Every year, as Pesach approached, various organizations delivered matzah, wine, meat, and fish to their home, ensuring they could celebrate the *chag* joyfully.

As a young boy, this generosity filled him with joy, and he resolved that one day, he, too would help poor families experience such happiness during Pesach. However, he did not know how to accomplish such a grand act of charity since he was neither wealthy nor experienced in fundraising.

Despite his limited means, he seized every opportunity to perform *chesed* for the needy, praying fervently that he might one day merit to assist others on a larger scale.

One year, shortly before Pesach, a wealthy man approached him in shul and asked to speak privately.

The man revealed that he had a large sum of money designated for kimcha d’Pischa (a charity to supply the poor with their Pesach needs) and had sought a trustworthy, God-fearing individual to oversee its distribution. After inquiring and observing, he had chosen him for the task.

Overwhelmed with gratitude to Hashem, the man eagerly accepted the responsibility, organizing a large-scale charity effort to provide for many families. This marked the beginning of a lasting partnership with the wealthy benefactor, and over the years, he built a thriving *kimcha d’Pischa* initiative for the glory of the Jewish people.