

התורה THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 75 TAZRIA 29 ADAR II 5765 APRIL.09.2005

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Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

THE WISDOM OF WOMEN BUILDS THEIR HOMES IN HOLINESS AND PURITY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male" (Leviticus 12:2), on which the Gemara comments: "If the woman emits seed first, she will beget a male" (Berachot 60a). Our parsha also says, "If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a swelling ... he shall be brought to Aaron the priest" (Leviticus 13:2), and also, "This shall be the law of the leper ... he shall be brought to the priest ... and the priest shall command" (Leviticus 14:2,4).

Let us try to understand why Parsha Tazria was not written after Parsha Metzora, since the former has only a few verses concerning the birth of a male or female child, whereas it deals in great part with the leper. Moreover, what connection is there between Parshiot Tazria and Metzora, which in general are read together? And why must the Kohen go out to see the leper or the affliction? Since he is the Tzaddik of the generation, it should be enough that he indicates the procedure to follow in order to rectify the sin committed, without actually having to see the person. Above all, why did the Sages say that if a woman emits seed first, she will produce a boy? On one hand, what does this come to teach us, and on the other hand, why is this the case? Furthermore, why does the leper bring his sacrifice only after his purification?

We will attempt to explain all this as best as possible. As we know, women are exempt from positive, time-based mitzvot (Berachot 20b). This is in order for them to devote themselves to their homes and the education of their children, for "all glorious is the king's daughter within" (Psalms 45:14). And as we know, women earn great merit in the spiritual development of their husbands (see Berachot 17a), for they encourage them in their study of Torah and service of G-d, just as Rabbi Akiva said to his disciples concerning his wife: "Everything that is mine and yours belongs to her" (Ketubot 63a). In fact, it was his wife who pushed him to study, and in several places the Sages affirm that blessing is found in the home thanks to the merit of the wife, and that she protects a man from the council of the evil inclination (Zohar 52a).

In addition, the main reason for the resurrection of the dead will be due to the merit of women, who push their husbands to study Torah, and who liberate them from household work. Now we know that only the one who studies Torah will merit to live again, as it is stated concerning the resurrection: "For Your dew is as the dew of light" (Isaiah 26:19). On this verse, the Gemara says that whoever uses the light of Torah, the light of Torah will make him live (Ketubot 111b). Since it is by the merit of these women that their husbands have bathed in the light of Torah, it follows that they will also be resurrected by their merit.

The verse that states, "When a woman conceives" (Leviticus 12:2) speaks of a woman who aspires for her children and husband to study Torah, and who behaves like the daughter of a king, whose entire honor is on the inside. The desire that she demonstrates allows her to merit "to beget a son" – to have a child that will be a זכר (male), meaning

an everlasting remembrance (זכרון) for why the world was created. Moreover, the Torah is called זכרון (remembrance), as it is written: "Remember [זכרון] the Torah of Moses My servant" (Malachi 3:22). It follows that the Torah is the goal of Creation. This male child will also merit circumcision on the eighth day, the number eight alluding to the future resurrection of the dead, for as we know, the number eight is above nature and time. During the era of the eighth, the evil inclination will no longer exert any influence, and the reign of G-d will be universal in a world that will have reached perfection.

"This is the law of one who gives birth to a male or to a female" (Leviticus 12:7). When she gives birth, she will truly exercise a Torah influence, for her merit will earn her sons that will study, arriving at the "eight" and conquering the Kelipah, until arriving at the resurrection of the dead. Yet when the power of desire has less influence on sons who study Torah than on children that assure the continuity of the generations, this does not advance the world in any way. They only risk becoming gossipers, for if they don't speak words of Torah they will only speak ill of others, like a child who goes and tells everyone what he has heard from his mother or father (Sukkah 56b). His life does not advance.

Thus we perfectly understand why Parsha Tazria (the birth of a boy and a girl) is written before Parsha Metzora, for if there exists an imperfection at the beginning of conception, the soul of the child will contain a great defect and he will speak ill of others and become leprous, as the Sages have said, "The word כצורע [leprous] sounds like כנוציא [he who spreads evil]" (Erchin 15b). A man without Torah is arrogant and speaks ill of everyone. He has a "tongue that speaks boastfully" (Psalms 12:4), for he believes himself to be better than everyone and assumes the right to ridicule. He also doesn't demonstrate any confidence in G-d, his pride making him think that he can do everything by himself without His help. This is why he is punished by the plague of שאנת, a word whose root means "high" (Shavuot 6b) and by צרעת (leprosy). It is also why he must remain isolated outside the camp (Leviticus 13:46). There it will be easier for him to humble himself and to fix times for Torah study (which he had neglected). This constitutes another way of understanding צרעת, meaning that now that he is living cramped (צר), he fixes times (עית) for the study of Torah. From a gossiper, he becomes someone who studies regularly. And when he completely repents and follows the advice to "not be sure of yourself until the day you die" (Perkei Avoth 2:4) – a phrase whose numerical value is the same as that of צרעת (leprosy) – he arrives at the level evoked by the verse that states, "The wise of heart seizes mitzvoth" (Proverbs 10:8), an expression that also has the same numerical value.

We now perfectly understand why the Kohen has to see the leper.

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The Kohen, whose inheritance is G-d Himself and who lives from the donations of others, trusts in G-d at all times. This is why it is he who can discern if the leper has humbled himself before G-d. The verse states, "This is the law of the leper on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the priest" (Leviticus 14:2) because the Kohen must sense if this man – from the wicked person that he was – has become good. He is also told that the leper fixes times for Torah study, demonstrates great humility before G-d, and has completely rid himself of pride. At that moment, the Kohen leaves the camp to verify the accuracy of all these claims, and checks to see if the lesions have healed.

There is yet another lesson to be learned by this. The Kohen monitors the progress of the leper, asks how he is in order to see if he is healed, and inquires about his spiritual well-being. He does all this in order for the leper not to fall into despair, for even if he has sinned, he should feel that G-d is with him and desires his repentances, as it is written, "For I do not desire the death of the one who should die. ... Turn back and live!" (Ezekiel 18:32). It is also in this way that we should conduct ourselves with those who return to Judaism. It is not enough to help them take this step; they must also be followed up and encouraged so that they don't give up hope, until such time as we feel that they are sufficiently strong and dedicated enough to get along by themselves. Even afterwards we must act like the Kohen, who went out of the camp to see them. We must go to them and see where they stand and how they are conducting themselves.

When the leper is purified he must bring some cedar wood and hyssop, as it is written, "The priest shall command, and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop" (Leviticus 14:4). This is an allusion to humility. He should bring cedar wood because his lesions stem from pride, and he should make amends by lowering himself like hyssop (Erchin 16a). Let us now ask ourselves why he brings his sacrifice only after being purified. The opposite procedure, in which a sacrifice helps a person to return to G-d, seems like the more logical approach. The reason why the sacrifice is brought afterwards is because it is not enough to be healed, abased and rid of pride, since this pride can potentially return. This is why one must come to the Temple and bring a sacrifice –one that alludes to humility – *after* being healed.

The affliction of a house also depends on a woman, for a house also needs to be educated. When its walls hear slander, they are punished in proportion to the severity of what they have heard, to the extent that it's possible that the affliction will never heal. At that point, the Kohen gives the order to demolish the house. The house itself can thus be harmed and bring harm to others. But the opposite is even more true, meaning that it can gain merit and make others meritorious. It is solely man's conduct that has an influence on the house, for better or for worse, and which in turn influences others. It is not for nothing that we inaugurate a house (*Chinuch*, which also means "education"), as we inaugurated the Temple (Psalms 30:1). In the same way that we educate our children regarding mitzvot, as it is written, "Train the youth according to his way" (Proverbs 22:6), we "educate" the house so that only Torah, mitzvot and good deeds are performed inside. And then, when the opportunity to commit a sin presents itself, we don't do it inside the house, for it reminds us to avoid sin. As the Gemara says, "The beams and the stones of the house bear witness against a man" (Ta'anith 11a). This is why we build a railing on the top of the roof. It represents that which surrounds the house to prevent a man from falling. In effect it is surrounded by mitzvot, by the railing, by mezuzot, and by Torah. Concerning the mitzvah of the railing (Deuteronomy 22:7), the *Keli Yakar* asserts that it constitutes the foundation of faith and one's attachment to G-d.

We see from all this that leprosy basically depends on what happens in the home. Everything begins and ends there. If a woman aspires to sow Torah and give birth to male offspring for Torah, with the goal of rectifying the world and bringing about the Kingdom of G-d, her reward

will be great. At the same time, she is of great value to the entire world and, so to speak, to G-d. In the opposite case, if she only wants a son for the pleasure of having a child, this constitutes a great misfortune, and she not only harms herself but also her descendants and the entire world. May G-d help us to truly merit repairing the world by bringing about the Kingdom of G-d, and may His Name and His throne be complete through the arrival of the redeemer, quickly in our days.

Amen, may it be so.

PERKEI AVOTH

Supreme Joy

It is written, "Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai received [the oral tradition] from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say: 'If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself, since for that very purpose you were created' " (Perkei Avoth 2:8).

It must not be deduced from this passage that we don't have the right to rejoice over Torah knowledge that we have acquired. Hence the Talmud informs us that Rav Sheshet reviewed his learning every 30 days, and that he shouted in joy, "Rejoice, my soul. It is for your good that I studied the written and oral Torah" (Pesachim 68b). Yet the Sages raise an objection to this, since we should learn Torah in order to accomplish the wider purpose of Creation, as it is written, "If not for My covenant [the Torah], I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 33:25). The response to this objection is that the first goal of Torah study is the ennoblement of the soul; the purpose of Creation then happens automatically. We learn from this that we have the right to rejoice over acquired Torah knowledge. Rabban Yochanan warns us only against vanity and presumptuousness.

At the end of Tractate Kiddushin our Sages teach that a man who completely lives up to the purpose of Creation will find his sustenance on earth painlessly. The loftiest goal of human life is to recognize G-d and to observe His holy commandments with the help of Torah study. This is also taught by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai in Perkei Avoth: "If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself" – then you will not need to cling to the good things of life by force, then you will not need to work so hard for good fortune. For G-d will then keep you and bless you because you are fulfilling the purpose of Creation, "since for that very purpose you were created."

Another similar interpretation is the following: Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua transmitted it to his disciples and so on. It is in this way that the Torah has reached us. We are also duty-bound to transmit to our students that which we have learned from our teachers, for it is only in this way that the Torah has been able to be passed on through many generations. The one who gathers the greatest treasures of wisdom, yet only to keep them for himself, has not accomplished his life's goal, for when he dies all these treasures will be buried with him, without having helped anyone. This is why Rabban Yochanan teaches: "If you have learned much Torah, don't keep this good for yourself, for you were not created only to learn, but also to teach."

If this last interpretation is correct, it wonderfully suits the words of the great teacher, who focused all his efforts not only into learning, but also into teaching, and who in the midst of the holy Temple's ruins asked no other favor from the Roman emperor than to peacefully teach in the tiny city of Yavneh. Thus he saved our greatest treasure from the inferno of war and preserved it for all time.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBAN YOCHANAN BEN ZAKAI

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai was the youngest student of the great Hillel, and he outlived Hillel's son, grandson, and great-grandson. The son and successor of Hillel in his role as prince was Shimon. Shimon's son was Rabban Gamliel the Elder, and his son was Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who died as a martyr during the time of the Roman conquest. Since his son, Rabban Gamliel II, was still too young at time to assume the role of prince, it was conferred to the elderly Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai. It was only at his death that Rabban Gamliel II was bequeathed the heritage of his fathers.

The destruction of the holy Temple and the disintegration of the Jewish state was the saddest, most painful, and most difficult event in Jewish history, and the aged Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai experienced it as such. Yet with regards to him we may apply the Sages' teaching that G-d, in His great goodness, always sends the cure before the disease.

A funeral procession was advancing through the streets of the old city of Zion at dawn. It was said that they were students who were burying their beloved teacher. Filled with respect and awe, everyone made way. Even the guard at the city gate let the procession pass through unfettered. The students stopped in front of the city and let the casket down. Then they opened the cover and out came the venerated Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, who was carried like the dead to the outside of the city in order to safely reach the Roman camp.

There he presented himself before Vespasian, on whom the reverence of the awe-inspiring teacher took hold, and which allowed him to ask what he desired. However it was not for his people, nor for the holy city – no, not even for the Temple – that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai requested a favor, but rather to “allow me to found a school at Yavneh.” That was his request. And with a smile the proud Roman indicated that his request was granted. He did not realize the spiritual importance of his act to a people whose existence was dependent upon the preservation of its Torah, even though its state lay in smoldering ruins. Powerful Rome was to succumb to the many peoples that were carried about by the violent winds of history, but Israel continued to live in its Torah, the Torah which Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai extracted from the flaming city of Jerusalem in order to transfer it to tiny Yavneh.

In his youth, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai was a merchant, and it was only in his fortieth year that he devoted himself exclusively to the study of Torah and became a member of the Great Sanhedrin, located in the paved vestibule to the holy Temple. There he distinguished him by his sharp mind and great cautiousness, so much so that he once managed to save an accused person from death because he was able to unmask false witnesses by a meticulous cross-examination. At the age of 80, he opened a school in Jerusalem that young people who were eager to learn flocked to. He himself was

renowned for his piety, knowledge, and keen intellect.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai reached the age of 120, but he lived only a few years after the destruction of the holy Temple. Despite the devastation of the Jewish state and the destruction of the Temple, he benefited from this short time to assemble his students around him in Yavneh. He combined a great sense of modesty with a knowledge that was universal, as testified to by a passage preserved in our Masechet (see the article entitled Perkei Avoth).

We do not have the right to consider ourselves as superior to others for having performed our duty. Hence our Sages teach as follows: “Who is allotted eternal life? One who walks humbly and modesty on earth, who constantly occupies himself with Torah, and who does not glory from it.”

THE PATH OF THE JUST HUMILITY - PART IV

We continue here with a description of the six different ways in which a man reveals his humility:

4. If the Creator fills a humble man with good things – children, wisdom, intelligence, riches and honor – he will become even more humble and self-effacing before Hashem. He will also honor men and serve them even more.

Now the wisdom or money that Hashem fills a man with in this world can come as a result of three things: The first is a pure gift from Hashem, the second is a test, and the third is a punishment.

The sign indicating that it is a gift is that a rich man does not harm anyone with his money, but rather puts it even more into the service of G-d. In such a case it is clear that he demonstrates that the wisdom or riches he received is purely a gift from Hashem.

The sign revealing that it is a test is that a rich man is so occupied by the preservation of his wealth that he constantly fears his money will disappear. He worries that he will not be able to benefit from it by either gaining power or acquiring goods. Nevertheless, he doesn't wrong anyone with his money and does not become proud of it. Yet he spends his time amassing and hoarding wealth, never gives gifts to anyone, and does not have pity on the poor in order to give them the means to nourish or clothe themselves.

Finally, the indication that it is a punishment is that a rich man causes harm to others with his money and becomes proud of it. He does not use it for charity and cares only about enjoying it. He will not give any of what's due of it to the Eternal, to the extent that for him, his money becomes “riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune” (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

An intelligent man will therefore apply himself to do good by means of his money or wisdom. He will do so by doubling his subservience and modesty, and he will be careful not to become proud.

5. Suppose that a man has harmed someone by his actions or words. If he then feels guilty about it and on his own he asks the offended party for forgiveness in order to rectify the wrong or harm that he has caused (even though he doesn't need to or profit by it in the least), this is also a sign of humility.

6. If a man is accustomed to speaking gently, as it is written, “A gentle reply turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1), with

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

Concern for other people's money

Reb Shmuel, the Shamash of the Tzaddik Rabbi Israel of Rojine, was astonished by his request to summon the Rav of the town, Rabbi Shlomo, who was an expert in Halachah. "Now?" he asked, "late on an afternoon before Shabbat?"

The Tzaddik of Rojine had stopped on route in the town of Skola to spend Shabbat there. He had already gone to the mikveh and was wearing his Shabbat clothes, when all of a sudden he began pacing back and forth in the courtyard. After a certain time he stopped, his gaze fixed on an invisible point. He then gave the order to his assistant to have the Rav of the town brought to him.

The Rav hurriedly made it to the house where the Tzaddik was staying. What was there that was so pressing? For what reason had he been summoned exactly when preparations for Shabbat were being made?

The Tzaddik asked him to sit down next to him and began to recount a story. The Rav was astonished at the moment that the Tzaddik had chosen to do this.

The story concerned a Jew that had all the best character traits. He was honest, served G-d faithfully, and studied. He was also very rich. Even though he was very busy, he found time to help the needy, and his generosity was legendary. He also fixed times for the study of Torah. "This Jew," said the Tzaddik, "was already old, and he had sons who feared G-d and who walked in his ways."

He was so well known for his honesty that many people entrusted their money to him for safekeeping. Sums of money that were subject to litigation remained with him until a verdict had been reached. Widows and orphans chose him to be the faithful custodian of their money. Of course, whenever asked, he promptly gave back what had been entrusted to him.

One day this rich man had the opportunity to enter into an excellent business agreement with the authorities. According to all projections, he was to make a substantial profit from the deal, and what's more is that there was no risk involved.

Those interested by the deal were asked to entrust a sizeable amount of money as collateral. The contract stipulated that it was to be promptly signed at the time requested by the authorities. There was also a clause which stated that failure to comply with any of the contract's provisions entailed the immediate loss of all money put forth as collateral.

The merchant accepted the deal, but then discovered that he did not have the necessary amount of money required for collateral. A thought then came to him: Since the money requested by the authorities served only as a guarantee, and since he had a great deal of money with him that was sitting around and doing nothing, of what importance was it to those who had entrusted it to him where this money was? What did it matter if it was in his table drawer or in the state treasury? He thought it over well, and concluded that it was permitted for him to use the money as collateral.

"Everything had been written up and was ready to sign at the bureaucrat's office. Then, all of a sudden, disaster struck! The bureaucrat in question hated Jews, and he devised a terrible plot: He stipulated that the contract had to be signed on Shabbat. During Shabbat itself, the merchant was told that he had to come and sign it!

"The merchant carried himself about in his house as if he had been hit by a ton of bricks. His doubts gave him no rest. What was he to do? One way or the other, the situation was tragic. Was he going to sign on Shabbat? It was inconceivable – it was a public desecration of Shabbat! And if he didn't sign? Many people's money would go up in smoke!

"His heart melted when he thought of the distress that those poor people would experience when they would come to reclaim their money, and he was absolutely terrified. And now there was someone knocking at the door! It was an employee that came to invite him to the government office where he was to sign the contract. Without thinking he got up, his head frantic with many thoughts. Completely incapable of controlling his actions, he followed the man like a robot. He arrived at the bureaucrat's office, approached him, and signed the contract.

"Then he repented. All of a sudden, he realized what he had done. Trembling seized him and he fainted. He regained consciousness, but didn't know exactly what was happening around him, and his memory was slightly impaired.

"He got better only slowly. Though no longer bedridden, he was still weak, and he never got back to his previous state of health. He stopped seeing people and no longer left his home other than for communal prayers. He no longer returned to his business. He thought of one thing only: To return all the money that everyone had entrusted to him. At the end of several months, he died of grief and anguish.

"When his soul ascended on high, a discussion arose in the Celestial Court. Were the merits of his generosity going to be enough to atone for the grave sin of desecrating Shabbat in public, or was he to be first punished for his sin? Opinions in Heaven were split, and it was finally decided to entrust the decision to the world below. That which would be decided on earth would be carried out above.

"The Rav is a pillar of Halachah in our time," continued the Tzaddik to the one who was sitting and listening attentively before him. "Let him decide." At that point, the Rav understood the urgency of the situation. He examined the case deeply, and after thinking it over well, and while keeping in mind the opinion of the Poskim, he announced the following verdict:

"It was obviously forbidden for him to desecrate Shabbat in order to avoid a loss of money. Yet despite everything, we can't simply judge him as a desecrator of Shabbat. During his entire life, never did he commit a sin with the aim of acquiring money. What happened was that he was concerned for the money of Jews, and it was for them that he let himself get ensnared. He has already received his punishment by having suffered in this world. Now he is clear of all punishment and his place is in Gan Eden."

A contented smile appeared on the face of the Tzaddik. "Blessed be He Who gives His wisdom to those who fear Him," he said with satisfaction. "In the Celestial Court, the verdict has been accepted and the soul of this Jew has already been brought into Gan Eden. Let's go to synagogue. The sun will soon set."