The Wisdom of Women Builds Their Homes in Holiness and Purity
(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto)
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 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” (Taanith 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.
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 vener-ated 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 it 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 will of history, but Israel continued to live in its Torah, the Torah through 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.

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 modestly 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.

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
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 desecrater 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.”