

”והשיב את אשמו בראשו”

A Man Has a Huge Responsibility to Conduct His Household with the Power of Torah Study

In this week’s parsha, parshas Nasso, we read (Bamidbar 5, 6): **”איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעול מעל בה’ ואשמה הנפש: 5, 6) ההיא, והתוודו את חטאתם אשר עשו, והשיב את אשמו בראשו וחמישיתו יוסף עליו ונתן לאשר אשם לו—a man or woman who commits any of man’s sins, by committing a trespass against Hashem, and that person shall become guilty—and they shall confess their sin that they committed; he shall make restitution for his guilt in its principal amount and add its fifth to it, and give it to the one to whom he is guilty.**

In this essay, we intend to revel in a delightful interpretation of this passuk pertaining to parents’ sacred task to educate their children in the ways of Torah and the service of Hashem. The esteemed Reb Chaim Yissachar Dov Gross, ztz”l, judge and rabbinical teacher in Petrova, emphasizes this point in the introduction to the sefer Kesivah LaChaim. He refers to what we have learned in the Gemara (Yevamos 63b): **”כמערכבא כי נסיב: אינש איתתא אמרי ליה הכי מצא או מוצא, מצא דכתיב (משלי יח כב) מצא אשה --in the West (Eretz Yisrael), when a man marries a woman, they ask him the following: “Matza” or “motzeh”? (Is she a good wife or a bad wife?) “Matza” alludes to a good wife, as it is written: “He who has found (“matza”) a wife has found goodness.” “Motzeh” alludes to a bad wife, as it is written: “And I have found (“u’motzeh”) the woman more bitter than death.”**

In Chiddushei Aggados (ibid.), the Maharsha expresses this point by means of an allusion. The numerical value of **אי”ש** (man) is 311; whereas the numerical value of **אש”ה** (woman) is 306. So, when a woman defers to her husband, and views

herself as being less than him, Scriptures says (Mishlei 18, 22): **”מצא אשה מצא טוב”**. However, when she does not defer to her husband but insists on being his equal, Scriptures (Koheles 7, 26) specifically employs the term **האש”ה**, which also equals 311: **”ומוצא אני מר ממזות את האשה”**.

We should point out that this allusion is presented in greater detail in Iggeres HaTiyul, authored by the great Rabbi Chaim, the brother of the Maharal of Prague, zy”a:

”מצא אשה מצא טוב, אוהבי גימטריאות אומרים, כי אש”ה גימטריא שלה ש”ו דהיינו ה’ פחות ממנין אי”ש, רמוז כי בזמן שהאשה משעבדת עצמה לבעלה, בה’ מלאכות שהאשה עושה לבעלה אופה ומשקה כו’, אז מצא טוב.

וכתוב אחד אומר (קהלת ז כו) ומוצא אני מר ממזות את האש”ה, גימטריא שלה שי”א כמנין אי”ש, ורוצה לומר בזמן שהאשה רוצה להשוות עצמה כבעלה ואינה נכנעת אליו זה מר ממזות.

וכתוב אחד אומר (שם ז כח) ואשה בכל אלה לא מצאתי, ואש”ה גימטריא שלה שי”ב דהיינו אחד יותר מן האיש זהו היותר גרוע, שהרי היא רוצה להשתרר על בעלה עד שבכל הנשים הרעות לא מצאנו דומה לה.”

He writes that the gematria of **אש”ה** (306) is five less than the gematria of **אי”ש** (311). This alludes to the fact that when a woman is subservient to her husband, by performing the five tasks a woman is obligated to perform on her husband’s behalf, then **”מצא טוב”—he has found goodness**. On the other hand, the passuk in Koheles (7, 26) employs the word **האש”ה** equaling 311, the same as **אי”ש**. Here Scriptures indicates that when a wife wants to be her husband’s equal and does not submit to him, the situation is **”מר ממזות”—tantamount to death**. Lastly, a third passuk (Koheles 7, 28) states: **”ראשה”**

—**but one woman among them I have not found.** Here the term **ואש** is employed, which has a gematria of 312, i.e. one more than **אי**. This situation is the worst of all; here the woman wants to rule over her husband. Of all the bad wives, none is worse than this.

Regarding the five tasks a wife performs on behalf of her husband, let us refer to the Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 21, 7): **”נמצאו כל המלאכות שכל אשה עושה אותן לבעלה חמש מלאכות, טווה, ורוחצת --פניו ידיו ורגליו, ומוזגת את הכוס, ומצעת את המטה, ועומדת ומשמשת בפניו”**—**Thus, there are five tasks that every woman must perform on behalf of her husband: to spin [thread], to wash his face, hands and feet, to pour beverages for him, to make his bed and to do his bidding.**

The Parents’ Responsibility to Educate

It is an accepted fact that if, *chas v’shalom*, sons’ or daughters’ behavior is poor, it reflects upon the parents. Their poor behavior had a negative influence upon their children. In Rashi’s commentary on the Torah (Devarim 22, 21), he explains that this is why a betrothed girl who has illicit relations is stoned outside the entrance to her father’s house. Is it as if we are saying to her parents: **“See the offspring that you have raised.”** Accordingly, when we see children behaving improperly, *chas v’shalom*, who is more to blame, the father or the mother?

It appears that we can resolve this inquiry based on the insight of the Maharsha presented above. Since the numerical value of **אש** is less than that of **אי**, this suggests that the woman is required to defer to the authority and decisions of her husband. This implies that the authoritative influence in the home is the man. Hence, if the behavior of the children is improper and unacceptable, *chas v’shalom*, the father is held more accountable than the mother.

This then is the message of the passuk: **“A man or woman who commits any of man’s sins, by committing a trespass against Hashem.”** When a man or woman, in their capacities as a father and a mother, transgress against Hashem, *chas v’shalom*, as a result of their actions **“that person shall become guilty.”** The son or the daughter will also violate the word of Hashem, *chas v’shalom*. To remedy this situation, the Torah instructs them: **“They shall confess their sin that they committed”**—they shall admit that they behaved improperly,

recognize the harm they caused their offspring, and inquire as to which parent is more to blame, so that the guilty party can make amends through *teshuvah*.

Thus, the Torah teaches us: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—the man shall make restitution, because the father is held accountable, not the mother. The Torah proceeds to explain the rationale: **“וחמישתו יוסף עליו”**—for we see that HKB”H made the numerical value of **אי** exceed that of **אש** by five. In this manner, He alludes to the fact that the wife should be subservient to her husband and, as a consequence, the behavior in the house depends primarily on him. It is primarily his responsibility to ensure that the conduct of his household accords with the precepts of the Torah.

A Father Is Obligated to Do Five Things for His Son

Let us add a delightful thought. As we have illustrated, the Torah emphasizes that the man is held more accountable than the woman: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—because his numerical value exceeds hers by five: **“וחמישתו יוסף עליו”**. So, let us endeavor to understand why he is held more accountable and how this relates to the number five.

Now, we have learned in the Mishnah (Kiddushin 29a): **“כל מצוות הבן על האב אנשים חייבים ונשים פטורות”**—**regarding all obligations of the son upon the father, men are obligated and women are exempt.** The Gemara explains (*ibid.*): **“תנינא”** להא דתנו רבנן, האב חייב בכנו למולו ולפדותו וללמדו תורה ולהשיאו אשה **“וללמדו אומנות”**—**we have learned in our Mishnah that which was taught in a Baraita: A father is obligated with respect to his son, to circumcise him, to redeem him, to teach him Torah, to take a wife for him and to teach him a craft.**

Thus, we see that a father is obligated to perform five functions on behalf of his son. Accordingly, we can suggest that this is why the numerical value of **אי** exceeds that of **אש** by five specifically, no more and no less. It is an allusion to the fact that a father is obligated to perform these five functions on behalf of his son, while the mother is exempt.

This explains very nicely why the father is considered blameworthy for the sons’ improper behavior while the mother is not. For, these five paternal obligations encompass all matters pertaining to one’s son, both material and spiritual.

Without a doubt, the most important of these obligations is the obligation to teach him Torah.

Now, by means of engaging in Torah-study, it is possible to withstand the yetzer hara, as the Gemara explains (Kiddushin 30b): **“כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה -- Thus has HKB”H said to Yisrael, “My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.”** So, if the sons sin, chas v’shalom, it is evident that the father neglected his duty to teach them Torah adequately. As for the woman, she is exempt from Torah-study, as the Gemara explains (ibid. 29b): **“דאמר קרא ולמדתם אותם את בניכם, ולא בנותיכם” —for the passuk states: “You shall teach them to your sons”—implying that your daughters are excluded.**

So, we can now suggest the following interpretation of the passuk: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—the blame for the sons transgressing should be assigned to the father; for, he is obligated to educate them more so than the mother. Then the Torah provides the reason: **“והמישתו יוסף עליו”**—for we find that **אש”ה** exceeds **אי”ש** by five. This numerical discrepancy highlights the fact that the man is obligated to fulfill these five functions on behalf of his sons that the woman is exempt from. Therefore, this proves that the greater blame lies with him.

“והמישתו יוסף עליו” the Letter “Yud” versus the Letter “Hei”

Following the lead of the Ketivah LaChaim, it appears that we can explain why the Torah places the burden of responsibility for the children’s education on the father based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Sotah 17a): **“דריש” Rabbi Akiva expounded: “If a husband and wife are meritorious, the Shechinah is present between them.** Rashi provides the following clarification: **“שכינה ביניהן, וזכו שכינה ביניהן, י”ד באיש”**—the letters **י”ה** from G-d’s name are split between the man and the woman; the letter **“yud”** appears in the word **איש**, while the letter **“hei”** appears in the word **אשה**. This still requires further explanation. Why did HKB”H place the name **י”ה** specifically between a man and a woman?

The Keren L’David (Chayei Sarah) explains that it is a man’s job to engage in Torah-study; whereas it is a woman’s job

to be an **“עזר כנגדו”**. She complements him by taking care of all the needs of the household, which enables him to engage in Torah-study without any distractions. Elsewhere, the Gemara (Menachos 29b) addresses the passuk (Yeshayah 26, 4): **“כי ביה”ה צור עולמים”**. It explains that HKB”H formed the two worlds with the name **י”ה**; Olam HaBa was created with the letter **“yud”**, and Olam HaZeh was created with the letter **“hei”**.

With this in mind, we can suggest a reason as to why HKB”H placed the name **י”ה** between a husband and wife. The letter **“yud”** appearing in the word **איש** alludes to the fact that it is his responsibility to engage in matters pertaining to Olam HaBa—namely Torah and mitzvos. The letter **“hei”**, on the other hand, appearing in the word **אשה** alludes to the fact that it is her responsibility to assist him by dealing with the household matters pertaining to Olam HaZeh. This concludes his remarks. Now, the letter **“yud”** of **איש** possesses a numerical value of ten—five more than the value of the letter **“hei”** of **אשה**.

This agrees very nicely with the interpretation of the passuk: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—that the blame for shortcomings in the education of the children lies with the father more so than with the mother. Why? **“והמישתו יוסף עליו”**—because the man possesses the **“yud”** from the name **י”ה**, which is five greater than the **“hei”** of the woman. This alludes to the fact that it is the man’s job to engage in Torah-study; whereas the woman is not obligated to do so. That being the case, the responsibility to educate the children in the ways of the Torah most certainly rests upon the father, who is obligated to engage in Torah-study.

The Power of a Husband’s Torah Enables His Wife to Overcome the Yetzer

I would like to add a spicy tidbit of my own regarding this topic based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 17a): **“אמר ליה רב לרבי חייא, נשים במאי זכיין, באקריוי בנייהו לבי כנישתא, Rav said to Rabbi Chiya: Through what deeds do women merit eternal life? Through bringing their children to the Beis Kenesses to learn Torah, and through sending their husbands to the Beis Midrash to learn, and for waiting for their husbands until they come home from the Beis Midrash.** Rashi comments: **They wait for their husbands and give them permission to go and learn Torah in a different city.**

Asking what merits women have seems quite surprising. After all, they perform many mitzvos and good deeds; they perform all mitzvos aseh that are not time-related, observe all mitzvos lo ta'aseh, in addition to all of the mitzvos which apply specifically to women. The Yearos Devash (Drush 1) and the Beis Shmuel Acharon (Balak) provide us with an explanation based on the following Mishnah (Berachos 12b): **“אמר רבי אלעזר—בן עזריה, הרי אני כבן שבעים שנה ולא זכיתי שתאמר יציאת מצרים בלילות”**—**Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: I am like a seventy-year-old man, yet I did not succeed in convincing my colleagues that one must mention “yetzias Mitzrayim” at night.** The Bartenura explains that he was not able to prevail over the other sages.

Now, we have already pointed out that the only way to prevail over the yetzer hara is by means of Torah-study. Accordingly, women, who are not commanded to study Torah, lack the means to defeat the yetzer hara. This then is what Rav was asking Rabbi Chiya: What means do women have at their disposal to defeat the yetzer hara, seeing as they lack the mitzvah of Torah-study?

To this he answers: **“Through bringing their children to the Beis Kenesses to learn Torah, and through sending their husbands to the Beis Midrash to learn, and for waiting for their husbands until they come home from the Beis Midrash.”** In other words, because they do these things, women are credited with a portion of their sons' and husbands' Torah-study. This enables them and gives them the power to prevail over the yetzer hara. Thus, we learn that the only way a woman can subdue the yetzer hara is through her husband's Torah-study, which is partially hers.

This coincides very nicely with our interpretation above of the pesukim: **‘איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעול מעל בה’** ואשמה הנפש ההיא, והתוודו את חטאתם אשר עשו, והשיב את אשמו בראשו—when the parents do not behave properly it is reflected in the behavior of their offspring, chas v'shalom; the majority of the blame is attributed to the father; after all, HKB”H gave him the letter “yud” in **אי”ש**, which is five greater than the “hei” He gave to the **אש”ה**. We viewed this as an allusion to the fact that it is a man's job to engage in Torah-study, whereas a woman is exempt from Torah-study; and, as a consequence, the responsibility for educating the children in the ways of Torah falls upon him.

The Advocate Walks in front of a Person whereas the Prosecutor Walks behind Him

The great Rabbi David Deutsch, ztz”l—one of the foremost pupils of the great Chasam Sofer, zy”a—provides us with a wonderful interpretation of these pesukim in the sefer Ohel David. He refers to what we have learned in the Gemara (A.Z. 5a): **“כל העושה מצוה אחת בעולם הזה מקדמתו והולכת לפניו לעולם הבא, שנאמר (ישעיה נח ח) והלך לפניך צדקך וכבוד ה' יאספך, וכל העובר עבירה—Anyone who performs a single mitzvah in this world, it precedes him and goes before him into the next world, as it is stated: “And your righteous deeds will precede you . . .” and anyone who commits a single transgression, it envelops him and leads him to the Day of Judgment.**

The Maharsha notes the difference in the phraseology used between the mitzvah and the transgression. Concerning the mitzvah, they state: **“It precedes him and goes before him into Olam HaBa”**; whereas concerning the transgression, they state: **“It envelops him and leads him to the Day of Judgment.”** He explains the difference in his own inimitable way:

“כבר הקדמנו בזה כי לפי המעשה נברא לו מלאך רוחני, אם סניגור ואם קטיגור, ושינה לשונו במצוה מקדמתו והולכת לפניו, ובעבירה מלפנתו ומוליכתו, על דרך משל כי למוליכין למקום שמחה וטובה, אין צריך המוליכו לאחוזו בידו, דודאי ילך אחר המוליכו ולא ישמט ממנו, כן הוא במצוה, אבל ההולך לגרדום צריך המוליכו ללפתו ולאחוזו שלא ישמט מליכך אחריו, כן הוא בעבירה.”

When a person performs a particular deed, a spiritual creature, a malach, is generated. Depending on the nature of the act, it can be an advocate or a prosecutor. Therefore, the text employs different phraseology regarding a mitzvah versus regarding an aveirah. It is analogous to taking a person to a happy and good place; in this case, the person accompanying him does not need to hold onto his hand or coerce him; for he will surely follow and will not attempt to escape. This is the case regarding a mitzvah. On the other hand, if the person is being led to his execution, the person accompanying him must guard him and hold onto him and prevent him from trying to escape; he will surely not follow on his own. This is the case regarding an aveirah.

We can understand the Maharsha based on the following analogy. A prominent king sends his servant to bring one of

his important nobles to a feast he was making. On the way to the feast, the servant walks in front of the noble to show him the way. He has no reason to suspect that the noble will try to run away; after all, it is a great honor to attend the king's feast. In contrast, if the king sends the servant to bring someone who has rebelled against the king to the dungeon, the servant will need to take precautions to prevent the prisoner from fleeing—he will walk behind the rebel keeping a watchful eye on him. In similar fashion, the advocate generated from the performance of a mitzvah walks in front of the person, because he has no reason to worry that the person will try to flee.

Thus, they chose their words carefully: **“כל העושה מצוה אחת”**—in other words, the advocate generated by the performance of a mitzvah precedes the person and walks before him. This is substantiated by the passuk: **“And your righteous deeds will precede you.”** They precede him, because there is no fear that he will flee. Yet, in the case of an aveirah, which generates a prosecutor, an angel of destruction, they said: **“כל העובר עבירה אחת מלפנתו ומוליכתו ליום”**—in this situation, the malach walks behind the person to make sure that he will not flee.

“והשיב את אשמו בראשו” to Transform the Prosecutor into an Advocate

With this in mind, the Ohel David presents a tremendous chiddush. It is true that the commission of an aveirah generates a prosecuting malach, an angel of destruction that follows behind the person, guarding him and escorting him to Gehinom. Nevertheless, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 86b) that due to teshuvah inspired by ahavah, intentional, deliberate sins are transformed into merits. As a result, the prosecuting malach is transformed into an advocate, and the bad malach is transformed into a good malach. So, instead of continuing to walk behind the person, the malach will now walk in front of the person, in order to escort him to Gan Eden.

Thus, we have the following interpretation of our passuk: **“איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעול מעל בה' ואשמה הנפש ההיא”**—when one has sinned and rebelled against Hashem, angels of destruction are generated that accompany him from behind into Gehinom. The suggested remedy is that one perform teshuvah for all of one's transgressions: **“והתוודו את חטאתם אשר עשו”**—confess to the wrongdoing and admit one's guilt. The

passuk, however, goes on to warn that performing teshuvah out of yirah is not sufficient, because the willful transgressions are merely transformed into unintentional transgressions. Performing sincere teshuvah out of ahavah, however, will result in: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—his guilt, represented by the accusing, prosecuting malach, will now take a position in front of him as opposed to behind him. (Translator's note: According to the simple interpretation of the verse, **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**, means to make restitution or compensation of the principal amount. The homiletic interpretation, however, plays on the literal meaning of the words. **“אשמו”**, meaning his guilt, is taken as a reference to the accusing angel of destruction; **“בראשו”**, is interpreted as in front of him, i.e. at his head.) These are the beautiful words of the Ohel David.

Thus, we have learned an amazing chiddush! Not only does teshuvah performed from ahavah transform deliberate aveiros into merits, in addition, it also transforms the angels of destruction generated by these aveiros into angels of rachamim. Instead of ceasing to exist, these newly found advocates: **“והשיב את אשמו בראשו”**—walk in front of him and tout his merits.

Teshuvah from Yirah Requires Atonement for Killing the Prosecutor

It is important to note that this noble idea is also presented by the Arugos HaBosem (Vayishlach). He focuses on the Gemara's (ibid.) statement that teshuvah stemming from yirah merely transforms deliberate aveiros into unintentional ones. This is somewhat surprising! While this less desirable form of teshuvah does not have the power to transform deliberate aveiros into merits, but what is the logic behind transforming them into unintentional aveiros? On the one hand, if teshuvah out of yirah is indeed considered legitimate teshuvah, then it would make sense that the aveiros would be erased—leaving behind neither aveiros nor merits. On the other hand, if it is not considered legitimate teshuvah, then the deliberate aveiros should remain intact as they were.

To explain the matter, the Arugos HaBosem refers to a statement in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Nachum 561) regarding the passuk (Tehillim 145, 9): **“טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו”**—**“כל מעשיו - טוב ה' לכל, יכול לכל, תלמוד לומר ורחמיו על כל מעשיו”**—the passuk states: **“Hashem is benevolent to all, and His mercy**

encompasses all of His works.” The Gaon Chida in Midbar Kedemot interprets the Midrash based on what we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 4, 11): “העושה מצוה אחת קונה לו פרקליט אחד, והעושה עבירה אחת קונה לו קטיגור אחד” — **a person who performs one mitzvah acquires for himself one advocate; while a person who commits one aveirah acquires for himself one accuser.** In other words, by performing a mitzvah, one creates a positive malach, who proclaims his virtues. Conversely, when one commits an aveirah, he creates a negative malach that acts as a prosecutor by exposing his shortcomings.

Now, when a person performs teshuvah out of yirah, HKB”H terminates the prosecuting angel’s existence. Seemingly, since Hashem is benevolent to all of His creatures (as the passuk states), HKB”H should have had mercy on this malach and not terminated it. However, since it was generated by an aveirah, HKB”H does not show it mercy. For, if it continues to exist, it will continue to accuse and prosecute and recall the aveirah.

This then is the interpretation of the Midrash: “טוב ה' לכל, יכול” — **is it feasible that HKB”H is benevolent to all, even to the prosecuting angel generated by aveiros?** As we have learned, HKB”H does not allow it to live; He does not show it mercy. So,

the Midrash answers by citing the conclusion of the passuk: “תלמוד לומר ורחמיו על כל מעשיו” — HKB”H only shows mercy to “כל מעשיו” — all of the creatures that He Himself created. The prosecuting malach does not fall into this category; it was created by man’s actions. Therefore, it does not qualify for HKB”H’s rachamim and its existence is terminated for the reasons listed above.

Then the Arugos HaBosem adds that this only applies in cases of teshuvah from yirah; only then does the sinner’s teshuvah not have the power to transform the aveiros into merits and assets. If, however, the teshuvah was performed out of ahavah, in which case the deliberate aveiros are transformed into merits, then the prosecuting malach remains in existence as a malach of rachamim. Thus, it turns out that when a person performs teshuvah out of yirah, he is in effect killing the prosecuting malach inadvertently. It is precisely for this reason that they said that as a result of teshuvah from yirah deliberate aveiros become inadvertent, unintentional aveiros. For, this person requires atonement for terminating the existence of these prosecutors rather than transforming them into angels of rachamim.



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