

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Niddah 11-17

Week of 23-29 Tamuz 5757 / 28 July-3 August 1997

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Wasting Souls

Those who are involved in "child's play," our Sages tell us, are guilty of holding back the arrival of our redeemer Mashiach. The "child's play" referred to, explains the Gemara, is the action of a grown man marrying a girl too young to bear children.

Mashiach, the scion of David, will not arrive, says Rabbi Yossie, until all the souls which have been decreed to enter this world have arrived. Since this man has married a woman too young to bear children he has delayed realizing his procreative potential which would have brought closer the day when all the souls had arrived and the stage set for Mashiach's arrival.

Tosefos presents an interesting challenge to this scenario for Mashiach's arrival. The Gemara (*Mesechta Shabbos 118b*) states that if all Jews would properly observe two Sabbaths they would immediately be redeemed. This statement certainly reveals the tremendous power of Sabbath observance to influence the destiny of our people and the world. But how do we reconcile this promised immediate redemption with the aforementioned requirement of the arrival of the souls who are supposed to enter the world?

The solution offered by Tosefos echoes the Talmudic account of the miraculous birth rate of our ancestors in Egypt when it was standard for Jewish women to give birth to sextuplets. This same miracle would take place if Jews observed those two Sabbaths. Jewish mothers would be involved in so many multiple births that all the souls would be used up and Mashiach would arrive.

Niddah 13b

The Wise Choice

When human life is to begin, the angel in charge of conception takes the seminal drop before Hashem and says: "Sovereign of the Universe, what will be the destiny of this drop? Will it produce one who is strong or one who is weak? One who is wise or one who is foolish? One who is wealthy or one who is poor?"

He does not ask, however, whether it will produce a wicked man or a righteous one, as Rabbi Chanina has already pointed out that "Everything is predestined by Heaven except the fear of Heaven."

This statement about predestination by Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa raises an interesting problem. Rambam (Laws of Repentance 5:2) writes that everyone has the free will to be as righteous as Moshe or as wicked as Yeravam and to be a wise man or a fool. His inclusion of human intelligence in the range of free will seems to run counter to the aforementioned Talmudic assignation of wisdom and foolishness to the realm of predestination.

One of the resolutions of this problem proposed by Hagahos Maimonios, is that what is determined by Heaven is the degree of intelligence with which a person will be born. It is this intelligence to which Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa refers when he quotes the angel who asks the Creator what levels of wisdom or foolishness are to be instilled in the seminal drop at the moment of conception. There are, however, courses of life which are described as "wisdom" and "foolishness." The choice of whether to follow the course of wisdom — obedience to Hashem — or that of foolishness — shortsighted indulgence in sinful activity — is a moral choice rather than an intellectual one. It is this sort of wisdom and foolishness to which Rambam refers and he therefore relegates it to the realm of free will.

Niddah 16b

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