

The Weekly Daf



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Week of 8-14 Av 5757 / 11-17 August 1997

Niddah 25-31

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

Return and Re-Learn

There are no better days in a person's life than those he spends in his mother's womb before birth, where he is taught the entire Torah. Just as he enters the world an angel comes and gives him a slap on his lips, causing him to forget what he has learned.

This fascinating account of our pre-natal learning experience is cited by some commentaries as the explanation of the custom to visit the home of a newborn boy the Shabbos eve before his *bris milah* and to eat there cooked chickpeas. The child is considered a mourner because of the Torah he has forgotten, and the visitors come to console him and to partake of the round-shaped traditional mourner's food which symbolizes the eternal circle of life and death.

But why is it necessary for the unborn baby to learn the Torah if he is destined to forget it at birth?

The explanation offered by the great Chassidic leader, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, in his classic "*Bnei Yissaschar*" is that the Divine wisdom of Torah is beyond the grasp of human intellect. Without a pre-natal exposure to this wisdom it would be as unattainable as aerial flight is for fish. But a problem arises if man is born with a complete knowledge of Torah, for then he is no longer faced with the *challenge* to learn it and thus be eligible for the great reward which comes for Torah study.

The Divine solution is to expose us to Torah before birth and cause every learning experience to be a *deja vous* adventure.

This may also explain why our prayer in our three regular daily services is "return us to Your Torah." We have all been there already before we were born and all we have to do is return.

Niddah 30b

The Unknown Miracle

"On that day you shall say: 'I will praise You, Hashem, for showing anger towards me; Your anger has been turned away and You comfort me'." (*Yeshayahu 12:1*)

These enigmatic words of the prophet are explained by Rabbi Yosef in this manner:

Two people set out to conduct major business ventures. One of them is, however, unable to proceed because he sustains an injury from a splinter in his flesh. Instinctively, he begins to curse his bad fortune as the other fellow's cargo-laden ship embarks on a sea journey which will earn him a considerable profit. Some days later he hears that his friend's ship has sunk. Now realizing that his injury saved him from suffering a similar fate he begins to praise Hashem.

Maharsha explains that this is the praise that one is obligated to offer Hashem when he safely completes a sea journey. The one who realizes that the comparatively mild expression of Divine anger which caused him to suffer his injury that rescued him from the need for the harsher form of ship-sinking equates not embarking with safe completion of the journey and offers the praise due for the latter.

This idea finds expression in *Tehillim* (72:18) where the psalmist speaks of Hashem "Who does wondrous things *alone*." Even the beneficiary of a miracle is sometimes not aware of the miracle, such as in the above case of the life-saving injury. Only Hashem is aware of its benefit to him at that moment. It is only when the other's ship sinks is Hashem no longer alone in appreciating the miracle. When this realization of disguised Divine mercy dawns upon man, he too joins in declaring (*Tehillim* 72:19): "Blessed be His glorious Name forever."

Niddah 31a

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