

## Upon completion of the days of her purity for a son or for a daughter. (12:6)

The term “son” or “daughter” denotes a stronger, more definitive relationship than that implied by referring to a child as either one’s male or female offspring. A son is the product of a viable, strong relationship, part of a legacy, who serves as a link in a generational chain. He identifies with his parent as the product of a relationship forged on the principles of devotion to a Higher Power, to Hashem. “Son” or “daughter” indicates pedigree. Thus, we call attention to the fact that previously, in *pesukim* 2 and 5, the Torah refers to the woman’s offspring as a *zachar*, male, or a *nekeivah*, female, rather than a son or daughter, as it does here. Why did the Torah alter its vernacular?

**Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl**, suggests that the transformation from male/female to son/daughter occurs as a result of the phrase, “Upon the completion of the days of her purity.” This is reference to the mother’s (and father’s) adherence to the laws of *taharas ha’mishpachah*, family purity. When a relationship is concretized in *kedushah* and *taharah*, sanctity and purity, the offspring produced by this union is a son/daughter, a link in the chain of *mesorah*, tradition, from *Har Sinai*. A human being is created with a purpose in life, with definite goals that he is to achieve. The Torah guides him and imbues him with *Yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, which is the reason for his living a life of *kedushah* and *taharah*. A home without *yiraas Shomayim* lacks the resources for maintaining spiritual restraint, depriving the offspring of forging a greater, more profound relationship with his/her past and future. The nomenclature, son/daughter, is applied to one who plays an active and participatory role in maintaining the legacy of *kedushah* and *taharah* in his life – as did his parents.

A family which focuses its life goals on spiritual advancement will inculcate these values and goals into the next generation. If *yiraas Shomayim* is paramount in the home, their relationship is Heavenly-sanctioned, since *kedushah* and *taharah* are its mainstays. Why does *yiraas Shomayim* play such a critical role? One would conjecture that *middos tovos* – positive character traits, ethics and moral correctness – should have primacy. It seems that the power source of positive spiritual energy is fear of G-d, without which nothing else seems significant. Why? A number of years ago I wrote concerning a lecture given by *Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl*, in the early 1930’s to a group of German *Rabbanim*. It is certainly worth repeating for its timeless value and message.

Going back to *Parashas Vayeira*, as Avimelech complains to Avraham *Avinu* for claiming that Sarah *Imeinu* was his sister when she was actually his wife, Avraham replied, *Rak ein yiraas Elokim ba’makom hazeh*, “Only because I said there is no fear of G-d in this place” (Ibid. 20:11). A lack of Heavenly fear was prevalent in Gerar. Thus, Avraham feared for his life. The *Malbim* underscores the Torah’s use of the word *rak*, “only,” as if intimating that, indeed, Gerar was a wonderful place. It had culture, refinement; its people were upstanding, kind and polite. Regardless of the community’s exemplary qualities, however, at the end of the day one’s life could still be forfeited, if he were to stand in the way of someone’s desire. Why? “Only,” because Gerar

lacks *yiraas Elokim*, fear of G-d. When mortal, subjective, prejudicial man is the ultimate authority, if laws are manmade, then they have little value. Man makes the law; man can alter the law as he sees fit. The only law that will compel society to be disciplined and law-abiding is Heavenly Law, the code authored and regulated by Divine Authority.

Rav Elchanan spoke prior to the malignant change in Germany's government. When the Nazi party came to power, it was all too obvious that Rav Elchanan's message was on the mark. Suddenly, the polite, cultured, refined German became a cruel monster, capable of committing the most heinous atrocities.

A story related by *Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita*, attributed to *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*, gives practical expression to the above. When Rav Hutner was a student in Slabodka, he remembers that *Horav Avraham Elya Kaplan, zl*, who later became *Rosh Yeshivah*, director, of Hildesheimer seminary in Berlin, went to Germany. He returned before *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, reverently known as the *Alter m'Slabodka*, asked Rav Avraham Elya for his impression of the German people.

Rav Avraham Elya raved about the German People's kindness, their impeccable manners and refinement of character. He even cited their manner of speech as demonstrating extreme politeness to one another. For instance, if someone asked for directions, the response would not simply be a curt set of directions; rather, after completing the directions, the man would politely ask, "*Nicht wahr?* Is this not correct?" This indicated his refinement. By refraining from asserting himself in a definitive manner, he would always conclude the sentence, "*Nicht wahr?*" In this manner, he maintained the dignity of the questioner.

The students who were privy to this exchange between Rav Avraham Elya and the *Alter* debated whether it was appropriate to praise the Germans. It was not as if we derived a way of life from other gentile nations. Why should the Germans be any different? What did they have to offer us that others did not? We do not learn how to live from the gentile world. *Baruch Hashem*, we have a Torah that guides our lifestyle. One student among them persisted in defending the Germans, maintaining that any people who ended their statements, "*Nicht wahr?*" indicated a sense of modesty and politeness worthy of emulating.

It took a half a century for the truth to be publicized, for that same student to declare his error publicly. Rav Hutner had just concluded his *shiur*, lecture, when a Jew walked in and asked, "Do you remember me? I was that student in Slabodka who complimented the German manner of speaking, who was amazed by their gentle manner and refinement of speech."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* said that he did remember the man and stuck out his hand to greet him, "*Shalom aleichem*." The Jew reciprocated, but, instead of a hand, he had a hook where his hand had been amputated. Apparently, he had lost his hand during his internment in the concentration camp.

The man looked at *Rav* Hutner and said, "When the Nazi cut off my hand, do you know what he said? He said, It hurts – *Nicht wahr*: Is this not correct? – You were right; I was wrong!"

*Rav* Elchanan observed that Hashem had created man after He had created all of the other creatures. Animals, both domesticated and wild, all fowl and beasts – all preceded mankind. *Rav* Elchanan commented that man is a composite of all of the preceding creations. He has in him the nature of every creature. Thus, at times, he may manifest the qualities of the most docile creation, while, at other times, he acts like a venomous snake or a vicious man-eating lion. What keeps all of these natural inclinations in check? What controls are in place to see to it that the man remains a decent, ethical and virtuous human being? Only one guarantee exists: *yiraas Elokim*, fear of G-d. With it – one is a *mentch*. Without it – he is, sadly, capable of the worst abominations and the most cruel, heinous brutalities against his fellow man.