

## Speak unto the Bnei Yisrael, saying, when a woman conceives and gives birth to a male. (12:2)

In the *Talmud Niddah 30b* Chazal describe the scenario of an embryo in its mother's womb. They say that a light burns above his head, so that he is able to see from one end of the world to the other. Man enjoys no greater satisfaction and happiness than during his months in utero. He is also taught the entire *Torah*. Immediately before he is born, an angel catalyzes him to forget all of his learning. This well-known statement of Chazal stimulates a number of questions. First, why is the child taught in the womb? Would it not have been more appropriate to teach the child *Torah* in the *Olam Ha'neshamos*, spiritual world, before the soul enters its physical container? Second, what purpose is served by first teaching and then making the child forget what he has learned? Why bother to teach him in the first place?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, explains that although in the spiritual world the soul has the opportunity to amass an incredible amount of knowledge, it cannot comprehend those aspects of *Torah* that address the physical dimension. Only when the baby is in the embryonic stage, when he is somewhat meta-physical, can he grasp a remarkable amount of *Torah* wisdom. He has the ability to focus on those *mitzvos* and areas of *Torah* knowledge that deal with the physical realm of man. This aspect of *Torah* study is only temporary, since all is forgotten before the child is born. Nevertheless, the learning has been imbued into the spiritual and physical psyche of the child. Consequently, if a person studies *Torah* with extreme devotion, he will merit to pierce through the outer *kelipos*, spiritual shells, that obscure the *Torah* he has learned while yet in the embryo stage of development.

This concept assists us in understanding Chazal's statement in the *Talmud Moed Katan 25b* regarding the *pasuk* in *Bereshis 5:1*, "This is the *sefer/book/accounting* of the descendants of Adam". They remark that man is compared to a *Sefer Torah*, *Torah* scroll. Therefore, one who is in the presence of someone who dies should tear *kria*, rend his garment, just as when he witnesses a *Torah* scroll burning. Man's destiny is intrinsically bound up with the *Sefer Torah*. His soul has been imbued with the entire *Torah* prior to his birth. He has forgotten its knowledge, but its spiritual essence is infused in him. Is it any wonder that we refer to the spiritual elite, the accomplished *Torah* scholar whose life is totally dedicated to *Torah*, as a *shtick Torah*, a piece of *Torah*?