

Upon the completion of the days of her purity for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a sheep... And the Kohen shall provide atonement for her, and she shall become purified. (12:6,8)

The *Talmud* (*Niddah* 31b) explains that when the *yoledes*, new mother, offers a *korban* as she is about to give birth, with the accompanying pain of childbirth she might take a personal vow not to have any more children. Obviously, this vow is short-lived. Thus, she brings a *korban* to atone for her impetuosity. *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, offers a practical reason for the *korban* – one to which we can all relate– childbirth or not. In the course of life we confront challenges – some overwhelming, others only in our minds. Regardless of the adversity that we face, we are anxious, some more so than others, but everyone goes through a moment of introspection during which we review our lives and promise that if this challenge ends on a positive note, we will do just about anything. There is no question concerning our sincerity. The issue is its duration: what do we do – or not do – once salvation has arrived.

Plagued by human nature, most people will not live up to follow through on their pledge once the period of adversity has become history. We forget that we made this pledge to Hashem. He carried out His part of the accord. Now it is time for the beneficiary to keep his/her commitment.

The new mother experienced a difficult and painful childbirth, during which she made all kinds of promises, pledges and declarations. Now that it is over, she feels fine as she holds her newborn close to her, marveling at her healthy child. She has forgotten her pledge or has put it on the back burner. In order to circumvent this problem, the Torah instructs her to bring a *korban*. Thus, she will address and receive her atonement via the medium of the *korban*.

Keeping our promises is not simply a matter of integrity. When we break our word, we defile the aspect of human creation which elevates us above and distinguishes us from the world of the animal. When the Torah writes, *Vayipach b'apav nishmas chaim*, "And He blew into his nostrils the soul of life" (*Bereishis* 2:7), *Targum Onkeles* interprets it: *V'ahavas b'adam l'ruach memaleha*, "And he was made into a speaking spirit." The power of speech is a uniquely Divine gift which Hashem Himself blew into man's nostrils. To squander or deviate from this gift's purpose represents the nadir of ingratitude. The following vignette demonstrates how far a *gadol*, Torah giant, went to keep his word.

Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, zl, the *Tchebiner Rav*, was an extraordinary Torah scholar, whose encyclopedic knowledge of all areas of Torah was matched only by his outstanding *middos tovos*, refined character traits. He believed in supporting himself through his business commitments, and he steadfastly refused to accept a rabbinical position. He finally relented when, at the age of forty, his business failed, forcing him to accept the position of *Rav* of Tchebin, Galicia. His fame spread

throughout Europe. Later, when Hitler's hordes began ravaging the Jewish communities of Europe, the Nazi Party's newspaper, *Der Sturmer*, portrayed Rav Weidenfeld as the greatest *Talmudist* in the world. This portrayal earned him a "position" on top of the wanted blacklist of *rabbanim* to be apprehended and executed. The *Tchebiner Rav* was forced to flee to Lvov/Lemberg, which was then under Soviet control. He stayed in the home of the Husyatiner Rebbe.

The *Tchebiner Rav* did not have much time to enjoy his new home before the dread Soviet police arrested him as an illegal alien. He was soon exiled with his family to the frozen forests of Sverdlovsk in Siberia, where the *Rav* was forced to endure backbreaking labor in the bitter cold. Despite the brutal deprivation, he secretly studied with his son-in-law, *Horav* Baruch Shimon Schneerson, *zl*, recording his novellae on scraps of paper and wood. At the age of 65, he was finally able to leave Russia for *Eretz Yisrael*, together with the remaining members of his family.

When the *Rav* arrived there, he discovered that his enviable reputation had preceded him. Indeed, a certain scholar in Yerushalayim asked to be his *shamash*, attendant. This man hardly left the *Tchebiner's* presence, seeking to imbibe from the saintly scholar the Torah erudition and unusual *middos tovos* that he exemplified. One day, as the *Rav* was about to leave the house, the attendant noticed that a button on his long frock was loose and would likely fall off. "Please wait a moment, *Rebbe*. I will sew the button on. A Torah scholar of note should not go in public with anything on his garment being out of order. *Est past nisht*, it is inappropriate for a scholar of such repute to appear in public sloppily attired."

The attendant sewed the button on while the *Rav* was wearing the frock, and, as would happen in such instances, the attendant unwittingly pricked the *Rav's* skin. Filled with dread, the attendant began to tremble, and he broke out in a cold sweat. He was literally shaking. The *Tchebiner* said to him, "Calm down. Nothing happened. I hardly felt it." The attendant was inconsolable. "Why are you so afraid?" asked the *Rav*. "It is nothing." The attendant responded, "My sin is too much to bear. Only the flames of *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, will atone for my sin."

The *Tchebiner Rav* looked at his attendant and, in his signature warm demeanor, said, "Do not be frightened. Even if you enter *Gehinnom*, I will personally take you out of there." When the attendant heard these words, he began to calm down.

The *Tchebiner's* fame spread throughout *Eretz Yisrael* and the world. He moved to the *Shaarei Chesed* neighborhood and reestablished his *yeshivah*, *Kochav M'Yaakov*, which he guided together with his son-in-law. Years passed, and the *Tchebiner* aged gracefully. Shortly before his passing, he summoned his attendant who was by now an old man, "Do you remember years ago when I promised to extricate you from *Gehinnom*?" It took the attendant a minute to recall the incident, but he remembered with shock and awe. The *Tchebiner* was one of the preeminent *gedolei ha'dor*. Did he have nothing else with which to occupy himself than some long-forgotten words spoken years earlier?

“Yes, *Rebbe*, I remember,” replied the attendant in almost a whisper. The *Tchebiner* looked at his close attendant, the man who had devoted himself to him night and day for years, and said, “I will keep my promise to you. This is one thing that should not worry you. I ask, however, that you grant me a great kindness. Please do not make the task too difficult for me.”

This is how a *gadol b'Yisrael* kept his word. This was an incident that took place between the *gadol* and another human being. Can one imagine how they kept their word to Hashem? David *HaMelech* declares, *Nedarei laHashem ashalem*, “My vows to Hashem, I will pay” (*Tehillim* 116:18). He took his own word seriously, because Hashem took his word seriously.