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**Is it Wrong to Like**

**A Lot of Stuff?**

**By Rabbi** [**Aharon Loschak**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/23628/jewish/Loschak-Aharon.htm)



 Is it OK to own a lot of stuff? Is it OK to want to have a lot of things? Is it wrong to enjoy a good shopping spree and to delight in yet another Amazon box at your doorstep?

 People often rail against the consumer culture in which we live, and there’s something intuitively noble about the notion of paring down and making do with less. He who is content with very little and shuns an overt material lifestyle would seem to be oh-so-righteous, no?

 So the next time you’re tempted to order another gadget on Amazon, is the “right” thing to hold back? If you have a lot of stuff in your closets, is it pious to start clearing things out and donating them?

 No.

 In a surprising twist, the Torah teaches us a radical approach to how we ought to think about all our “stuff.”



**Clearing the House**

 In the two portions of Tazria and Metzora, we learn about a curious leprosy-like disease called *tzara’at*that was prevalent in ancient times as a punishment for one who spoke slanderous words. Toward the end of our parshah, we learn about *tzara’at*that appears not on human skin, but on the walls of one’s house.

 Upon spotting a lesion, the owner is to call a *kohen* to determine whether or not it is, indeed, *tzara’at*. Prior to his arrival, the Torah tells us that the *kohen*sends a warning: “The *kohen* shall order that they clear out the house, before the*kohen* comes to look at the lesion, so that everything in the house should not become unclean. After this, the *kohen* shall come to look at the house.”1

 You see, if the house turns out to indeed be infected, it is deemed impure—along with everything inside of it. Inasmuch as, in Rashi’s words, “the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people,”2 the owner is afforded the chance to clear his possessions from the house before the *kohen*arrives and thus spare them from potential destruction.

 This is quite surprising. After all, we’re talking about someone who has gravely sinned, a slanderer who is getting what’s coming to him for speaking ill of others. Why are we so concerned about his possessions? One could even argue that he deserves it, so why are we giving him the chance to spare his stuff?

**Concerned About the Property**

 The key lies in careful examination of the words “the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people.” Note that the concern here is not for the owner and the prospect of him crying over his lost jugs, rather it is for the jugs themselves, the “property.”

 This brings us to a classic chassidic idea about “divine sparks” and our mission on earth.

 It’s a big idea, like mind-blowingly big, but here it is in a nutshell: Though it may not seem this way to the naked eye, everything in this world has a divine “spark,” a G‑dly force of energy that animates it. Trapped inside the coarse material matter of your laptop, your steak dinner and the front door of your house is a divine spark of G‑dliness waiting to be redeemed.3

**How are these sparks redeemed?**

 By interacting and engaging with them for holy purposes. And when I say “holy purposes,” that doesn’t necessarily mean to saw off your front door and fashion a Torah scroll holder out of it. Rather, every time you pass through your front door and kiss the *mezuzah*, it has now been sublimated, the G‑dly spark released. When you use your laptop to read a Torah column or use the energy boost from your steak dinner to finally clean the garage like your wife asked you to, the sparks in those items are redeemed as well.

 In fact, taught the famous chassidic master the Baal Shem Tov,4 when you’re hungry for a bowl of vegan steel-cut oats, it’s not what you think it is. You think you want the oats because you’re hungry. But what’s really going on is that your G‑dly soul senses the divine spark in those steel-cut oats and wants to set them free, so you’re now all of a sudden hungry for oats. Voilà—you eat the oats, you use that energy to help your friend move into her new apartment, and the sparks are flying high.

**Your Spark**

 The Kabbalists take this idea one step further, lending precision to the specific items we interact with over the course of our life. You see, if your job is to engage with material matter and make it holy, then it follows that the particular items life throws your way are not random. Rather, the reason why you own a Macbook and not a Surface Pro (besides the fact that you’re convinced the Macbook is so much better) is because there’s something about your soul that makes you uniquely suited to be the one to redeem the G‑dly spark in that particular Macbook.5

 You ordered steak and not chicken? It’s because you’re the one who’s best suited to sublimate steak right now.

 The Kabbalists use this idea to explain why we lose things at random: It’s because your job redeeming the G‑dly energy in that item is over, and there’s now someone else whose soul is better suited to engage with it. So you lose your MacBook and someone else finds it, picking up the spiritual work where you left off.

 Hopefully that’ll make you feel better about the Macbook you recently lost.

We emerge with a profound understanding of the idea that “the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people.” Yes, it’s the property (not just the person) the Torah is concerned about, because the Torah wants you to own it, engage with it, and redeem the G‑dly energy in it.

 And that’s why the Torah wants the person whose house is about to be condemned because of *tzara’at*to keep his things. Though he may have sinned and arguably deserves to lose the roof over his head, that doesn’t change the fact that his soul is still uniquely suited to transform the dishes, furniture and gadgets in his home. If we’re able to keep them in his hands, we’ll do whatever it takes to make that happen so he can continue engaging with “his” soul-items.

**Keep Your Stuff**

 And with that, we now can now officially feel better about all the stuff we own—if we approach it the right way. Once we understand that the material items in our possession are uniquely matched to our soul and only we can properly make them holy and divine, well, then we should tackle that mission with gusto.

 So if you were thinking about selling your newest iPhone on eBay because you were inspired to lead a simpler lifestyle, consider this: Don’t sell it; rather, resolve to use it in the most G‑dly way possible. Read Torah articles on it, send out helpful messages to friends, and listen to Torah classes with your podcast apps.

 If you have a lot of clothing, dress your finest on Shabbat and festivals. If you’re a foodie, perhaps up the kosher game in your neighborhood and persuade a friend on the fence that kosher isn’t all that bland. If your house is grand, no need to downsize; rather, invite guests to celebrate Shabbat, host a Torah class, or have a get-together that uplifts people’s spirits.

 If G‑d has given you “stuff,” it is your duty to reflect on how you are uniquely suited to engage with those things in a holy, G‑dly, meaningful way. Enjoy it, use it, and most importantly, do good things with it.6

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a5095602) [Leviticus 14:36](https://www.chabad.org/9915#v36).

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a5095602) Rashi to [Leviticus 14:36](https://www.chabad.org/9915#v36).

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a5095602) See, for example, *Eitz Chaim* of the Arizal, 26:1.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a5095602) *Keter Shem Tov*, §194.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef5a5095602) *Ohr Torah*, *Agaddot Chazal*§413.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095602/jewish/It-It-Wrong-to-Like-a-Lot-of-Stuff.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a5095602) This essay is based on *Torat Menachem*, vol. 27, p. 173.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tazria-Metzorah 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

# Rav Avigdor Miller on

# Preparing for Marriage



 **QUESTION:** **The Rambam says that the sole desire of the Avos was l’haamid umah ovedes es Hashem – to establish a nation that would serve Hashem. So why did Yakov wait until he was in his 60’s to get married?**

 **ANSWER:** Why did Yakov Avinu postpone getting married until later in life? And the answer is that when you have to succeed at a very important mission, the preparation for that mission is very crucial for its success. Suppose you have to accomplish something like building a tall office building. You will have to spend a lot of time and effort making the plans for the building. It takes a long time to draw up plans for such a building.

 Now, Yakov Avinu getting married and having children was immensely more important than building a skyscraper. His getting married and having children was an accomplishment adei ad. He had to accomplish the building of a nation and therefore he had to prepare himself with the utmost shleimus.

 A young man of twenty-one gets married and he makes all kinds of mistakes. He doesn’t have the experience needed because he didn’t learn too much about it. But little by little, by trial and error and some troubles, he is able to settle down after a while. But all types of trouble come up.

 Yakov Avinu couldn’t afford trial and error. He couldn’t afford such a thing because he was building – he was creating – a nation. Because his kavanah was li’haamid umah ovedes es Hashem that’s exactly why he had to make himself as perfect as he could be. And therefore he spent all the time that he could preparing for his role as the progenitor of the Holy Nation.

*Reprinted from the December 1, 2020 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from Tape #E-258.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Tazria-Metzora 5781**



 The Torah indirectly, but softly and clearly, speaks to the continuity of the Jewish people and the human race generally, through the idea of having children. It has been statistically shown that as prosperity rises in certain sections of society, the birthrate in that section of society declines. For me, this was always counterintuitive, because if one is prosperous, then one can certainly support more children. If one is almost impoverished, the difficulty of raising and supporting children is much greater.

**The Affluent Doesn’t Want to**

**Waste Money on Their Children**

 The statistics regarding this matter are borne out by much empirical evidence that we also see in our own personal experience. For some reason, the affluent amongst us wish to retain their affluence by not having to spend money on raising and educating children. Children, to a great extent, impose themselves on the lifestyle, comfort, and wealth of their parents.

 Having and raising children is a positive act of faith in the future, and the unlimited generosity towards others. The amount of selfishness and narcissism that unfortunately characterize many in our society today accounts, in a great measure, for the large decrease in the birth rate in many western cultures and countries. Europe is shrinking population-wise, and it is only the migration of millions from Africa and other parts of the world that keep its labor supply constant and allow it to function.

 Eventually this phenomenon causes many other societal problems, and many of those problems are already apparent in France, Germany, Italy, and other parts of Europe where there had been an absorption of many immigrants who have not been able to integrate themselves successfully into European society.

 The United States is not far behind in this critical problem, regarding the numbers and dimension of immigration and its integration, and the shrinking birthright amongst the well-educated and the well-heeled.

**Judaism is Pro-Large Family**

 Judaism has always been pro-family… and pro-large family. King Solomon pointed out to us that the future is unknown, and no parent can predict the success and life of one's child. Yet what is hidden from us by Heaven, the Talmud says, need not concern us as far as our duties to obey and perform God's commandments. The future is always inscrutable, and try as we may, and we certainly do, we are unable to guarantee lives and fortunes of the next generation.

 The variables in life are so enormous that there is no certainty possible. Having and raising children is a matter of faith and belief that somehow there is a future, and that the children that we bring into this world will be able to manage and benefit from that future.

**The Importance of Women to Jewish Survival**

The Torah emphasizes that women have a strong maternal instinct that drives them to wish to have children, despite the immediate discomfort and long-range problems that all children bring to their parents. It is this life force within the woman that guarantees the survival of the Jewish people, and, in effect, the entire human race. In this week's reading the Torah concentrates on the purity of the woman and her relationship to the Creator through childbirth, for she is “the mother of all life.”

*Reprinted from the current website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Tazria/Metzora**

**Learning Torah: That was Easy**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



 “*On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised*.” — Vayikra 12:3

 The Da’as Zekeinim (Shemos 21:1) explains that bris milah perfects a person. And only when he has a bris can a person grasp the depths of Torah. He brings an example of this concept.

 On the inside of almost every Chumash is the Targum written by Onkelos. While Onkelos became a profound talmid chacham, that wasn’t his beginning. He was a gentile, the nephew of the Caesar Adrianna. He became aware of the truth and desired to convert to Judaism, but he was afraid of his uncle’s reaction. He approached his uncle and said, “I wish to engage in commerce.”

 His uncle responded, “If you need money, my treasure house is open to you. Take whatever you need.”

 Onkelos responded, “It isn’t money that I seek; it is knowledge. I wish to go out to discover the ways of the world. Please, my uncle, give me advice. Which type of merchandise do you recommend that I invest in?”

 Adrianna responded, “Find a commodity that is depressed in value. The ways of the world are cyclic. What is low now will rise later, and you will ride the crest upward and find your fortune.”

 With that, Onkelos left to Israel and approached the chachamim, seeking to learn Torah. They told him, “The Torah cannot be absorbed by one who isn’t Jewish.” He converted, went to yeshivah to learn, and became a great Torah scholar.

 After he returned home, his uncle noticed that his appearance had changed. “Why do you look different?” he asked.

 Onkelos responded, “Because I converted and have learned Torah.”

 “Upon whose advice did you do this?”

 “Yours, my uncle. Didn’t you tell me to invest in merchandise which is currently depressed because surely it will rise? I searched and found no nation as downtrodden as the Jews. Yet in the World to Come, there is no people that will be as exalted.”

 His uncle was so impressed with this line of reasoning that he promptly smacked him across the face. “You could have learned Torah without converting!” he exclaimed.

 Onkelos responded, “Torah cannot be learned by one who doesn’t have a bris milah.”

**Understanding the Implications**

 While this is a beautiful story, when we take into account two points, a powerful question emerges.

 Firstly, we are dealing with a man who is clearly brilliant. Once he converted, he became such a master of the Torah that he was able to distill all of its wisdom into a concise Targum that has become universally accepted throughout the generations. Obviously, he was of extraordinary intelligence.

 Secondly, we are dealing with an extremely motivated individual. He was living in the lap of luxury, enjoying great power and prestige, and had the entire world open to him. He was a favored nephew of the most powerful emperor of his time. When he approached his uncle for help, his immediate response was, “My treasure house is open to you.”

 In simple terms, he had everything that a young man could dream of. Yet he was willing to give it all up, at risk of his position and maybe even his life, to go to a foreign land to learn Torah. Clearly he was a driven individual.

 With all this, why couldn’t he learn Torah without converting? The chachamim didn’t say to him, “You aren’t allowed to learn.” They didn’t tell him that the halachah prohibits a gentile from studying Torah. They said it won’t work. The question is, why not? Here we have a man who was so brilliant and dedicated that he was willing to give up everything to learn. Why would he be incapable of learning Torah if he wasn’t Jewish?

**The Nature of Torah**

 The answer to this lies in understanding the nature of Torah.

 The Torah is pure wisdom from HASHEM. A Rashi on Chumash can be understood by an eight-year-old child. Yet that same Rashi contains worlds of depth and opens up to understandings that are infinite. The ability to delve into the depths of Torah is precisely what a gentile cannot do. A gentile can study geometry, physics, or business law. Those studies are accessible to the mind of man. The Torah is different. It is the “word of HASHEM” and cannot be perceived by man.

 However, HASHEM created the Jew with a neshamah uniquely suited to learn Torah. Different than all of the nations of the world, the Jew alone has the ability to access the Torah, to be able to plumb it depths, and to reach the Divine wisdom contained in it. But more than simply the ability to learn Torah, we were given a tremendous receptivity to it.

**Torah Comes Naturally to the Jew**

 This seems to be the answer to the question. As wise and as motivated as Onkelos was, had he remained a gentile, he could never have mastered the Torah. Torah is the exclusive heritage of the Jew. Only we have the right to it, but even more, only we have the inborn capacity to understand it and master it.

 This concept is very relevant to us because the Torah contains all the wisdom of the world. There may be times when we feel overwhelmed by the challenge. But the understanding that the Torah is our exclusive heritage and that we are uniquely suited to learn it should be a motivating force to help us set goals of mastering our portion in Torah.

 We have a natural affinity for learning Torah; while we may have to strain our minds and exert ourselves, we are naturally suited to it, so it settles into our soul easily. We are like a musically gifted child sitting down to play the violin — it is in our blood.

*Reprinted from the website of Theshmuz.com.*

**The Jew’s Opportunity to Partner With G-d in Perfecting the World**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 The first of this week's two Torah portions, Tazria, contains the mitzva of circumcision, brit mila: "And on the eighth day shall the flesh of his foreskin be circumcised."

 The Midrash relates that our Sages asked a question: If G-d wants Jews to be circumcised, why doesn't He create them that way in the first place? Surely it is not beyond the power of the omnipotent Creator to do so.

 The reason, they explain, is the principle of tikun, or correction. G-d deliberately creates many things in the world in an incomplete or partial state, all for the purpose of the Jew perfecting them. Indeed, this is the Jew's Divine mission: to bring G-d's creation to perfection through Torah and mitzvot.

 Of course, G-d doesn't really need our help; He could just as easily have created everything at the very peak of perfection. However, appointing us as His "partners" allows us to earn merit and actually "work" for the blessings we receive in life.

 When a Jew fulfills his Divinely-ordained mission and imbues the world with holiness, all the goodness G-d bestows upon him -- life, children, and livelihood -- is transformed from a "charitable donation" into his rightful due.

 G-d isn't giving him a gift; he deserves all these blessings because he has worked for them.

 At the same time, awareness of this relationship prompts the Jew to want to do even more to fulfill his end of the bargain, for human nature is such that a person abhors being sustained by the "bread of shame." Circumcision is only one example of how we earn this merit.

 A similar question may be asked about the seemingly inequitable distribution of wealth in the world. Why does G-d give so much money to some and so little to others? Why can't the poor person receive his sustenance directly from G-d instead of relying on the generosity of others? The answer is that G-d wants the rich man to earn additional merit by giving tzedaka to the poor.

 In truth, not all the money in his possession belongs to him; G-d merely puts it in his hands so it can be redistributed in a more equitable fashion.

 Yes, the more affluent person faces a difficult test, for his Evil Inclination rises up in protest. But the fact of the matter is that when he overcomes his Inclination and gives to the needy, not only does he not forfeit his wealth, but G-d grants him even more in payment for his good deed. (*Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Vol. 27)*

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