

Fascinating INSIGHTS

כ' ניסן תשפ"א

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Childless Couples

The Mishna¹ says ... לא יבטל אדם מפרייה ורביה... one may not abstain from procreation unless he has children—according to Beis Shamai he must father two boys and according to Beis Hillel a boy and a girl. How are we commanded on פרו ורבו if it's not up to us to have children? There is no other Mitzva like this where it is entirely up to Hashem.

The Halichos Eliyahu² explains that the Mitzva is to be engaged in פרו ורבו and whenever one is involved with it to fulfill this Mitzva, he fulfills it—even if his wife doesn't become pregnant. The opinions of Beis Shamai

(one must have two boys) and Beis Hillel (boy and a girl) just mean that once one has those children, he is not obligated in this Mitzva anymore since he already fulfilled it. R' Moshe Feinstein³ points out how this is inferred from the Mishna, as it doesn't say how many children one is obligated to father rather it says one may not abstain from procreation unless he has children, meaning the Mitzva of פרו ורבו is to be engaged in having children since this is what is in his power to do and he shouldn't abstain unless he has children.

The Gemara⁴ tells us that one of the questions a person will be asked is עסקת בפרייה ורביה, did you engage in procreation. While for many this doesn't take much work, for others it does. Some people spend years visiting doctors, trying different treatments and the like so that they can have children. This is why the term עסקת is used. That is, to be actively involved and engaged in it. When one makes an effort in this area, he can answer this question in the affirmative.⁵

עסקת בפרייה ורביה can also apply if a person helps others in this area. So the organizations and the like that help people have children,⁶ also can answer this question with a resounding yes. The Maharsha⁷ writes that the question of עסקת בפרייה ורביה is whether one facilitated procreation meaning did he help those less fortunate, such as orphans, find mates and get married.

The Pele Yoatz⁸ writes that a childless person mustn't despair and declare I am a withered tree, because there may still be hope for children. Even if, after major efforts, it is clear they can't bear children, they shouldn't feel bad. The reason for wanting children shouldn't be a personal desire—for posterity or heirs—but rather for the fulfillment of what Hashem wants. Since they wanted to do the Mitzva but couldn't because of an אונס, out of their control, the Torah considers it as if they fulfilled it⁹ and they will be appropriately rewarded. So they should be happy with their lot... The main פרייה ורביה is in Torah, that one

³ Igros Moshe, Even Haezer, 2:18.

⁴ Shabbos 31a.

⁵ See Mishnyaos Gittin, chapter 4, Haghos V'hachidushim on Tiferes Yisrael Yachin 37.

⁶ Having no children for R' Shlomo Bochner and his wife Chanie was very painful. Amidst the pain, Chanie thought that although they may be unable to have children of their own, they will use their experiences to help others. She told her husband, "For 20 years now, we have been working and gathering information. We know all the treatments. We have cell phone numbers that no one else has. We have connections and experience. It's time to share it with others." From this, their organization *Bonei Olam* was created. *Bonei Olam* started in Brooklyn and has grown to 13 offices internationally, including Canada, Israel, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Australia. In 1999, the first baby funded by *Bonei Olam* was born. As of 2015, the number of children born with the helping hand of *Bonei Olam* (which offers medical and financial assistance) was over 11,000. So, although the Bochners have no biological children, they truly have more children than those with big families! What a lesson we can learn from these great people, as they turned their trouble into triumph!

⁷ Shabbos 31a, s.v. ואמר עסקת.

⁸ ועקר and אבל. פרייה ורביה, s.v. The son of the R' Eliezer Papo who authored the Pele Yoatz wrote about his mother, the wife of R' Papo (Hakdama to the Sefer Chessed La'alafim): "My mother was a woman filled with *Daas* and *Yiras Hashem*, was known for her piety and was complete in good Middos and proper conduct. She constantly read works of Mussar. She would speak with my father about *Yiras Hashem* all day. She helped him in all the holy things that he undertook."

⁹ Brachos 6a.

¹ Yevamos 61b.

² אבן העזר, Siman 4. See also the Har Tzvi Orach Chaim 2:76. Halichos Eliyahu was authored by R' Eliyahu Feinstein (1843-1929), the uncle of R' Moshe Feinstein. He learned at the Volozhin Yeshiva, then led by the Netziv. He held many rabbinical posts during his life, but always on the condition that he be free from non-urgent community concerns until noon every day, so he could study Torah uninterrupted. He was twice offered the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, but each time turned it down.

should “procreate” with Torah, by originating new Torah thoughts, having many students...¹⁰

R’ Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro¹¹ says that the main fulfillment of the Mitzva of פרו ורבו is not by physically giving birth to children, which can be done only a limited number of times, but rather by mentally “giving birth” to new thoughts in Torah, which can be done all the time. He writes that even if one lacks the physicality to do a Mitzva, it can still be done, because the Torah is eternal and always applies. The Mitzva of פרו ורבו can always be done—when one produces a novel Torah thought he fulfills פרו ורבו.

During a walk around Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, R’ Meir Shapiro told his student R’ Shmuel Wosner, that although he doesn’t have any biological children, he still fulfilled the Mitzva of פרו ורבו because he has two children—Daf Yomi and Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin.

Concerning couples that don’t have children in this world, let us cite the words of the Maharam Galanti: Relations done for the sake of Hashem are not wasted (זוגים לשים אינם) rather they give birth to children in Gan Eden. In עולם הבא, the parents will meet these children.¹²

Financial Loss or Gain

In the time of R’ Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821), there was a wealthy Jew by the name of Moshe who gave lots of money¹³ to Tzedaka.¹⁴ Upon losing his wealth, people were investigating why this happened to such a kind person. All they could think of was that he gave more than 1/5 to Tzedaka. R’ Chaim Volozhiner remarked that that wasn’t the reason and with time we will see why this occurred. Because Moshe lost his wealth, he now spent his days entirely immersed learning Torah.¹⁵ This impacted his children whom he also brought to the Beis Midrash. This Moshe became R’ Moshe Solivechik. His descendants became some of our well-known Gedolim—the Beis Halevi, R’ Chaim Brisker, the Griz, R’ Avraham Yehoshua Solivechik and so on. The reward for R’ Moshe being such a Baal Tzedaka was that he would have such Gedolim come from him, which was the result of his losing money so that he can spend his days engrossed in Torah.

¹⁰ When R’ Simcha Wasserman was in Los Angeles and his wife was in Detroit teaching, she would send her meager salary to Los Angeles so her husband can spread Torah. R’ Simcha wanted to abandon his project in Los Angeles since it was very difficult for them to be separated as they themselves never had children. His wife disagreed and said if Hashem didn’t bless us with children, it’s so that we can dedicate ourselves to teach Torah to the Jewish people. She told him you stay in Los Angeles and teach Torah and those children you teach will be our children.

¹¹ Derech Pikudecha, mitzva 1:26. He is known for his sefer Bnei Yissaschar.

¹² See the Chida in Pesach Einayim, Sota, chapter 1.

¹³ It has been said, “When G-d blesses you financially, don’t raise your standard of living, raise your standard of giving.”

¹⁴ The Gemara (Brachos 5b) says אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים, both one who gives much and one who gives little are equally pleasing to Hashem provided he directs his heart to heaven. In the name of R’ Aharon Leib Shteinman the following is said: A wealthy man who had 50\$ million gave 1,000\$ to charity whereas a poor person who had 10,000\$ gave 500\$ to charity. So proportionally the pauper gave more than the wealthy person. Consequently, the novelty is that Hashem accepts what the wealthy person gave. So אחד המרבה—the poor person who gave proportionally more, ואחד הממעיט—the wealthy man who gave proportionally less, both are pleasing to Hashem provided their heart is directed to heaven (וּבְלִבָּד שִׁיכוּיִן לְבוֹ לְשָׁמַיִם).

¹⁵ See Ahavas Chessed 2:19, 20. When the Abarbenel stopped being finance minister in Spain, he remarked מהסרה והכי קתני (a phrase from the Gemara): now that I stopped being busy with that (מהסרה והכי קתני), I can learn (והכי קתני).

R’ Moshe Leib Sassover once gave lots of money to an evil person to the point that he had nothing left for himself. When asked about his behavior, he explained that he is not good either. “If I give Tzedaka to one who isn’t good, Hashem will judge me¹⁶ the same way.”¹⁷

It was in the cemetery in Brisk that the Beis Halevi (1820-1892) noticed two gravestones where on one it was written כפה פרשה לעני, her palm was spread for the poor, and on the other וידיה שלחה לאביון, and she extends her hand to the pauper.¹⁸ The Beis Halevi checked the ledger of the Chevra Kadisha, where he found the following: There were two wealthy people in the town of Brisk who would help the poor. When their businesses plummeted causing them to struggle financially, the only explanation Beis Din¹⁹ could come up with was that they were guilty of giving too much Tzedaka. As a result, Beis Din told them the Chazal of ...המבובו אל יבובו, don’t give more than a fifth of your money to charity.²⁰ Accept this upon yourselves. Although it was difficult for them to accept, they did. When the poor approached them, they reasoned that Beis Din only forbade us from giving away too much money, not our assets. Consequently, they began distributing their assets to the poor. Eventually, all was given away. Then, one day, two poor people came to their door for Tzedaka. All they had left was one gold spoon. So, they broke the spoon in half, and gave the round side to one and the handle to the other.²¹ When everyone saw how desperate they were to give Tzedaka, the people davened for them. The result: these two men became wealthy again. When they passed away, their graves were inscribed with the Pasuk, וידיה שלחה לעני, כפה פרשה לעני—the round end of the spoon was given to the poor person. וידיה שלחה לאביון, the handle was given to the pauper.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R’ Mordechai Friedlander ztz”l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R’ Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz”l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁶ A Chassid once saw his Rebbe giving money to one who was collecting charity. The Chassid commented that this person was a thief. The Rebbe’s reply: At times I need these thieves to break into some locked gates in heaven. He was saying many times I am not either worthy either. If I deal with such people this way, then Hashem will deal with me the same.

¹⁷ Taamai Haminhagim, pp. 102-3, s.v. ובספר המאור. In this way we can grasp a novel explanation by the Tzemach David of Dinov in אפס כי יהיה בך אביון. He explains אביון is one who is destitute from Mitzvos. It then continues האביון...האביון, לא תאמין, לא תקפין, don’t harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother (Devarim 15:7-10), even though he is impoverished from Mitzvos. Why? Because הוא בך הטא, they search after your deeds to see if you are fitting to receive bounty according to what you lack. Maybe they will find some sin which will disrupt the flow of bounty just as you didn’t give one who was destitute from Mitzvos. So, נתן תתן לו, even if he is improper, give him because בגלל ...הדבר הזה יברכך ה’, Hashem will bless you in all your deeds and your every undertaking.

¹⁸ Mishlei 31:20.

¹⁹ They wanted to discover the sin that these two men committed, but they couldn’t find anything that warranted such a loss.

²⁰ Kesubos 50a.

²¹ R’ Zalman Sorotzkin said in the name of the Chofetz Chaim that if the wealthy would know the great esteem and reward in the Next World for one who supports Torah, then they would take advantage of every opportunity to support Torah. They would pursue the yeshivos to give them money instead of waiting to be asked for money. Hashem didn’t reveal this great merit of supporting Torah so that even the poor should have the opportunity to support Torah to some extent. If the wealthy knew the great reward for this they would take care of this need all by themselves without giving this opportunity to the poor.