

## Chana: The Unique Quality of Womens' Prayer Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The story of Chana is well known. She had no children for 19 years. Penina, her husband Elkana's second wife, would bother her about it. One year when they came to the *mishkan*, she provoked her badly. Her husband tried to calm her but she could not be assuaged. She went to the *mishkan* to pray. Soon after, she was blessed with a son who later became Shmuel Hanavi. Two years later she brought him to Eli Hakohen in the *mishkan* where he remained for the rest of his life. Then she prayed another tefilah to Hashem. We will compare the two prayers and see how they are different from one other and how each one teaches us specific concepts in prayer. Many laws of prayer are learned from Chana. For example, Chazal say one should not pray when one is lightheaded. We learn this from Chana, "*Vahei marot nefesh*," she was serious. It was a purposeful prayer.

"*Vayachesh'veah Eli l'shekora*, Eli thought she was drunk." We learn that one who is intoxicated may not pray which is why Eli questioned her. "*V'hi medaberet al liba*, she spoke from the heart." We learn that prayer should emanate from the heart. "*Rak sefaseah naot*, only her lips moved." Chazal learn that we have to enunciate the words. It's not enough to think it. "*Ani ha'isha hanizevet pah*, I am the woman who is standing here." We learn that a person should not sit within four cubits of someone who is davening unless he is davening himself.

The *haftorah* of Rosh Hashana is *Tefilat Chana*. The structure of the prayers of *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* are learned from the prayer of Chana. She mentioned the name of Hashem nine times in her prayers. Similarly, the *shemone esrei* of *Rosh Hashana* has nine blessings. "*Vayehi ki hirbesa l'hispallel*, she prayed a lot." We learn that on *Yom Kippur* we pray more than usual, adding on *Neilah*, a fifth prayer. The core of the 18 blessings of *shemone esrei* are found in her prayer. All of this raises a question. If women are not obligated in formal prayer as men are, why do we learn the laws of prayer from a woman? Chazal say, "*Shtei nashim heim shehayu b'olam v'amru shirot v'tishbachot l'Hakadosh Baruch Hu sheshum gever b'olam lo amar*, There were two woman in the world who sang songs and praises to Hashem that no man ever said." There is something unique to the prayers and songs of Chana and Devora.

There are two *tefilot* that Chana prayed, one before she had a child and one after that. Penina provoked Chana. She cried and did not want to eat. Her husband attempts to calm her. He tells her, "*Lama sivki v'lama lo sochli halo anochi tov lach m'asara banim*; Why are you crying and why don't you eat? Behold am I not better to you than ten children?" You are not lacking anything in your life because of what I am giving you. There's a deeper explanation. Usually the word for I in Hebrew is *ani*. *Anochi*

brings to mind, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha, I am Hashem...*" *Elkana* meant to say, "Your Creator who said *Anochi Hashem* is better to you than ten children. The fact that you don't have children is a decision from Hashem. You have to accept that whatever He does is for the best." The Navi then tells us, "*Vatispalel al Hashem*," she prayed on Hashem, not *el Hashem*, to Hashem. Chazal say Chana spoke in a complaining way, perhaps bordering on *chutzpa*. She said to Hashem two things. First, "You gave me a body that can bear children but these parts are not being used. Am I an angel or a human? Angels don't eat or drink or have children or die. But humans do. Secondly, I want to have children but you aren't giving me any. I can bring my husband to suspect me so that I will go through the *ishah sotah* process and have children."

Chazal tell us Chana looked at all the parts of her body and saw they were all fully dedicated to Hashem. A person on that level could ask Hashem, "Why do I have parts that are not serving you?" Angels don't have natural continuity but they don't die. They can continue to serve Hashem. Chana asked, "When I die who will continue my legacy?" It was not an argument but a question. She wanted to serve Hashem in the best possible way. It's natural for a woman to want a child. Chana only wanted children *l'shem shamayim* (for the sake of heaven).

## Avos D'Rav Nosson: A Home of Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

In the sixth chapter of *Avot D'Rav Nosson*, Yosi ben Yoezer teaches, "*Yehi beitcha bayit vaad l'chachamim*; Your home should be a place that welcomes *chachamim* and their students." Rabbi Yehoshua brings an example of a spice store. Anyone who enters absorbs its odor. So too anyone who enters your home should absorb the sanctity of Torah. "*Vehevei misabek b'afar ragleihem*; And you should wallow in the dust at the feet of your teachers." One should humble oneself before

one's teachers. Success in Torah is not only intellectual mastery. It requires fear of heaven and good *middot*. One can try to stuff a large amount of precious stones into a bag, but if it has hole everything will fall out. If there is a hole in the individual, if he is lacking *middot*, he will not be able to contain *Torah*.

It says about Moshe Rabbenu, "*V'ish Moshe anav m'oaed m'kol adam*," Moshe was very modest. This is the ingredient needed to

acquire and live Torah. *Avek* means to fight. Torah is not passive. It's *milchemta*, a battle. We have to work hard to attain it. The *Ohr Hachaim* says a person is the *sefarim* he studies, the *shiurim* he hears, and the answers he comes up with after much struggle. The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* relates that there is a disagreement among the sages if a *baal din* can dismiss one of the judges without a bonafide reason. The *chachamim* say no, Rabbi Meir says yes. Although we rule like the

Continued on page 2

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Continues from page 1

*chachamim*, the Gemara does not dismiss Rabbi Meir's opinion and tries to come up with reasons why he ruled that way because Rabbi Meir was very great. The Gemara in Shabbat says, "If the Rishonim were like angels we are like people and if the Rishonim are like people we are like donkeys..." The further away we are from *maamad Har Sinai*, the lower we are. When we learn *Torah* and are *misabak* and question, we aren't questioning the piety or knowledge of the sages. The whole purpose of learning *Torah* is to find the truth but this must be b'afar ragleihem, with deference and humility to previous *chachamim*. One should figuratively sit on the floor and humble oneself, not find fault or call something

illogical.

The Mishna in the 6th perek in *Avot D'rav Nosson* also mentions humility as a factor in acquiring Torah. It brings proof from Rabbi Akiva. He observed drops of water penetrating a stone and he thought if water can bore a hole through stone then ein mayim eleh *Torah*, Torah can surely affect my heart. It was Rabbi Akiva who taught, "*V'ahavata l'reiacha komocha*; Love your friend like yourself." Torah is not just mental reasoning. It has to impact the person.

The Mishna in the 7th Chapter in *Avot D'Rav Nosson* tells us, "*Yosi ben Yochanon omar yehi beisacha pasuach l'ravacha...*" Your home

should be a home of *chesed*. Usually you give the poor what you have. But true *chesed* is going beyond that and giving them what they are accustomed to. The Mishna teaches that Iyov didn't reach even fifty percent of the *chesed* Avraham did. Iyov sat in his house and waited for guests whereas Avraham went out looking for them. Iyov gave the people what they wanted but Avraham gave them the best he could offer.

If a person does not have an abundance of financial resources, he should dispense advice and encouragement. A home should be filled not only with *Torah* but with a love for *chesed* as it says, "*Torat chaim v'ahavat chesed.*"

## Agonut Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

A priest once asked the Baal Shem of Michelstadt, "If your Torah says that everything is decided by majority then we the Christians are the majority and you should be like us." The Baal Shem answered that the only time we go after majority is when we have a doubt how to decide. Where we don't have a doubt it doesn't make a difference what the majority or minority says.

*Trei ruba*, two majorities, was an innovation in the area of *agonot* that Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner introduced after a case was presented to him. It involved a Jew who fell from a high bridge into a frozen river. Normally this would be a case of *mayim shein bahem* sof because even if you could see the two banks of the river, west and east, north and south were hidden. Perhaps the man came up somewhere. However here there were witnesses who saw him fall. He hit very hard ice, the body seemed to roll and fall into the water, and he never came up. Rav Chaim Volozhiner said that in this case it was *trei ruba*. The man fell from a great height onto solid ice and then into the water which

presented two causes of death. One can say that the person definitely died and the wife was free to remarry.

In the case of the WTC disaster, there was certainly *trei ruba* for anyone who was on the higher floors when the planes crashed. There was falling from such tremendous heights, there was the fire, the explosion, the impact of the plane, and the smoke that filled the building. All this made it hundred percent certain that any man trapped on the higher floors would not have survived.

The source for the leniency of *trei ruba* is learned from the case of a woman who was raped. If it was a non-Jew who raped her, she cannot marry a *kohen*. If it was a Jew, she is allowed to marry a *kohen*. How do we know? If she was in a place where the majority of people are non-Jews then we can assume it was a non-Jew. If she was in a place where the majority were Jews, we can assume it was a Jew. But the Gemara objects. One majority in such a serious case is not enough. We need two majorities. Not only the town where it happened, but also the majority of people who

passed by at the time needed to be Jews. Only then can we permit her to marry a *kohen*.

In the case of the Titanic there was also *trei ruba*. There were multiple reasons why the people may have died. In fact, the water was so cold that most people did not drown but froze to death. Any people left on the ship certainly died and that was the reason they could find a *heter* for the wives to remarry again.

There are severe repercussions in a case where the wife remarries thinking her husband died and then he comes back. She needs to divorce both husbands. She doesn't get a *kesuba* from either one. The children from the subsequent marriage are *mamzeirim*. Therefore the *halacha* is very strict in the case of an *agonah*. On the other hand, it is very lenient in accepting testimony. In a difficult situation where it would be very hard to find testimony, Chazal allowed for leniencies in accepting witnesses who would normally not be accepted.