

# Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Tazria

### How Can We Learn to Gain from Our Losses?

#### **Making Space for New Growth by Kissing the Old Goodbye**

I like to see the good points in students and staff alike, and it is really painful when certain situations force me to criticize and note points of dissatisfaction. It is no less painful to let people go, but this is, unfortunately, part of life. Nothing and no one last forever (except Hashem!). As challenging and sad as it is when we experience loss or when someone leaves, it does open doors for renewal to enter. Whenever someone dear has left my life the space they left, eventually did get filled and sometimes in an even greater way than beforehand. The only exception is when my father, Shlomo ben Yisrael Leib OBM passed away, the third of Nissan, exactly six years ago, may his Neshama have an Aliyah. Whereas absolutely no one can take his place, in some eerie way I am finding myself growing into my father's shoes and following in his footsteps. Since my father's passing, I have become aware of how I resemble him in various ways, and these ways have increasingly become more apparent as the years pass by. I pray to sing the song of my father's intuition, creativity, brilliance, and warmth! As a good friend said at the Shiva, "When your parent is no longer in this world, you discover him within yourself." As I unearth the last tattered remains of the edible winter weeds that won't be part of my salads and dips for a while, I discover new growth hidden behind their smothering tangles. Now the spring flowers have space to appear! Every spring I marvel over nature's feast for sight and scent and revel in the flourishing of the assorted blossoms that have lifted their heads from below the earth or appeared on the trees in no time to welcome the new month of Nissan. Yet, it is the awareness of the fragility and short-lived beauty that increases our delight in spring. That is why the only thing more breathtaking than the sunset is the sunrise! Likewise, the engagement period can be more joyous than the actual marriage, and the pregnancy period is so exciting!

#### **The Transformation of the Fetus at Childbirth Teaches How We Can Gain by Losing**

*Parashat Tazria* opens by describing the spiritual state of childbirth and the ensuing purification process. The Talmud further expounds on the transition of childbirth: Rabbi Simlai questioned, what does the fetus in its mother's womb resemble? To a folded notebook, with its hands placed on the two sides of its head, at the temples, its two arms on its two knees, and its two heels on its two buttocks, and its head rests between its knees, and its mouth is closed, and its umbilicus is open. It eats from what its mother eats, and it drinks from what its mother drinks and it does not emit excrement lest it kills its mother (*Babylonian Talmud Niddah* 30b). I understand the comparison of the fetus to a closed book to mean that the fetus is in a total state of receiving. Just as no one can learn from a closed book, so is the fetus only absorbing without giving out anything. Rather than contributing the fetus is completely dependent on the mother's life support for all its essential functions. Yet once the baby emerges into the airspace of the world, the closed limb, i.e., its mouth, opens, and the open limb, its umbilicus, closes, as otherwise it cannot live for even one hour (*Ibid.*). This elucidates the concept that when one door closes another is opened. There are no days when a person is in a more blissful state than when he is a fetus in his mother's womb... A candle is lit for it above its head, and it gazes from one end of the world to the other, as it is stated: "When His lamp shined above my head, and by His light, I walked through darkness" (*Iyov* 29:3) ... The fetus is taught the entire Torah while in the womb... But once the fetus emerges into the airspace of the world, an angel comes and slaps it on its mouth, causing it to forget the entire Torah... when a person enters the world, he is immediately liable to sin

due to his loss of Torah knowledge (*Babylonian Talmud Niddah* 30b). This confirms the concept that we can gain by losing. The fetus is losing its ability to enjoy the bliss in the womb with the most expanded vision and it loses and forgets the entire Torah it learned in the womb. Nevertheless, it is specifically through nullifying the bliss of life inside of the womb that life on earth is created. This nullification is revealed through the suffering, the blood of birth, the contractions of birth, and the cry of the newborn. Without being slapped in the face to forget the Torah a person would be unable to fulfill his mission in this world – to exert his free will through working in Torah through his own efforts for the sake of transforming himself from a receiver to a giver.

### **The Death of Exile Gives Birth to the Nation of Israel**

Likewise, the birth of the nation also is connected with the nullification of its prior life form – The life of exile. Therefore, it entails much suffering, that we experience during the difficult birth pangs of our redemption. The forgetting of the Torah of exile – so that we can acquire the Torah of Eretz Yisrael – is like the slap in the face of the angel. This forgetting is connected with the revelation of the impurity at the beginning of the process of the sprouting of Geulah. I believe we are already at the end of this process and in the birthing clinic. The condemnation of Israel by the UN and the withholding of weapons by the USA are all symptoms of the death of a prosperous exile for the Jewish people. Perhaps the pain of the spilled blood of our dear heroic soldiers at this time can be compared to the blood of the birthing mother or even to the blood of the baby's circumcision. Maharal explains that the Jewish nation was born through the Exodus from Egypt specifically because a matter develops through its opposite (*Gevurat Hashem* Chapter 4). Of all countries, Hashem chose Egypt to enslave the Israelites, since they were the most perverse of all nations, as it states, "She lusted for their concubinage, those whose flesh is the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is the issue of horses" (*Yechezkiel* 23:20). According to the degree of the Egyptians' coarseness and sexual depravity the more refined and chaste would the Israelites turn out as the contrast, as experiencing evil brings out our greatest good. This is also what happened to our people in the wake of the barbaric attacks on October 7th. The intense cruelty of our enemy is finally bringing out the Jewish people's recognition of our right to the Promised Land, and our devotion to fight for truth without giving in to foreign pressure.

### ספר ויקרא פרק יב פסוק ב

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אֵשֶׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיִלְדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּימֵי נְדַת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא:  
 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, טָמְאָה וְטָמְאָה /v'tam'ah – 'she shall be impure' for seven days; as [in] the days of her menstrual flow, she shall be impure" (*Vayikra* 12:2).

How can impurity come from childbirth, when it is known that it is one of the three keys in Hashem's hands alone? (*Ta'anit* 2a). We would expect only purity to emerge from the hands of Hashem. The answer is that impurity only enters after pregnancy ends. The impurity of birth is due to the mourning of the fetus forgetting the Torah learned in the womb. The Kotzker Rebbe explains that in every important event – when holiness is strengthened – impure energies are also roused. Because of the power of pregnancy and birth, to which G-d controls the key, impurities are kept out until the baby is born. Then the holiness leaves, and impure energies gain entry. This is like the impurity that overtakes the body once the soul leaves. Similarly, when we excel in some area, especially in something Jewish, there is a danger of being unconsciously overwhelmed by negative

energies and subsequently backsliding. For example, I have experienced when a student wants to make Aliyah keep up your guard, and use each special event as a step to move higher. May we merit through the purification of the impurity of exile to complete the purification process of the birth of the renewed nation and our national revival. (Shaul Yosef Leiter, *Keys to Holiness The Principal Aspect of Redemption is Divine Light Revealed from Above.*)

**Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Tazria –  
Some Tips for How to Turn your Losses into Gains**

Life is a journey filled with ups and downs. At times, it may seem like we're faced with an insurmountable number of obstacles and setbacks. Losses, whether in the form of a job, a relationship, or a personal dream, can feel devastating. However, it's important to remember that adversity can be a powerful catalyst for personal growth and positive change. When it comes to losses, we can change our viewpoint, and thereby change our mood and mindset for the better. It may not be pleasant to face failure and accept your limitations, but looking at these failures from a broader perspective can change our mood from hopeless depression to excitement and optimism. It's merely a matter of thinking of trading losses in terms of the broader perspective. We're human, and not perfect. As much as we desire to succeed it is inevitable never to fail. "For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and doesn't sin" (*Kohelet* 7:20).

- **Your Strength Doesn't Come from Winning but from Struggles and Hardship** – Everything that you go through prepares you for the next level" (Germany Kent). Professional athletes and seasoned traders know how to turn losses into gains. Rather than mull over past defeats, they use the setback as a motivator, an opportunity to hone their skills, grow, and improve. They examine what they did wrong, learn from their mistakes, and view the temporary setback as a launchpad from which to achieve higher future performance.
- **Engage in Cheshbon Hanefesh (Soul Accounting)** – to determine why something had to end, or someone had to be ended. Every setback, no matter how painful, carries lessons. Was your loss due to happen as a result of matters beyond your control or is there a lesson for you to learn to do better next time? During your soul accounting include your plan to work out how to replace your loss in a way that will cause gain for you and others. Take time for Cheshbon Hanefesh to reflect on what you've learned from the experience. These lessons can become valuable tools for your future.
- **Cultivate Resilience** – Resilience is the ability to bounce back from hardship. It's a skill that can be developed over time. Focus on building resilience by staying positive, seeking support, and maintaining a growth mindset.
- **Set New Goals** – Losses often close one chapter but open the door to new opportunities. Set new goals and aspirations for yourself. Use your experiences to strengthen your determination to accomplish them.
- **Surround Yourself with Support** – Lean on friends and family for support during challenging times. Sharing your feelings and experiences with others can provide emotional relief and fresh perspectives.
- **Practice Self-Compassion** – Be kind to yourself. Understand that setbacks are a part of life, and they don't define you. Treat yourself with the same compassion you would offer to a friend in a similar situation.
- **Focus on the Present** – While it's essential to learn from the past, dwelling on it can hinder your progress. Focus on the present moment and the steps you can take right now to move forward.
- **Harness Your Strength** -- Take inventory of your strengths and talents. Utilize these assets as you navigate through life's challenges. Your strengths can be your greatest tools for success.

- **Seek Inspiration** – Look to stories of individuals who have overcome challenges. Their journeys can provide inspiration and proof that it's possible to rise after falling as King Solomon teaches, "For a righteous man can fall seven times and rise, but the wicked shall stumble upon evil" (*Mishlei* 24:16).
- **Celebrate Small Victories** – As you make progress and work towards your goals, celebrate even the smallest victories. Acknowledging your achievements boosts confidence and motivation.