

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter V: Chavei Sarah (Gen. 23:1-25:18)

Essay 1: A detailed analysis of *Eshet Chayil* (a Woman of Valor), Proverbs 31:10–31

"אִשָּׁה יְרֵאתָהּ הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל". "אִשְׁת־חַיִל עֹטֶרֶת בְּעֵלָהּ" זו שְׂרָה: בְּעֵלָהּ נִתְעַשֵּׂר בָּהּ וּבָרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שָׁבָה. וְלִכְבוֹדָהּ נִפְרָשׁ כָּל פְּרִשְׁת אִשְׁת־חַיִל כִּי ה' הַטּוֹבָה עָלֵינוּ, וְאַחַר כֵּן נְבוֹא לְבַאֵר הַפְּרָשָׁה.

“A woman who fears the L-rd—she shall be praised.” (Prov. 31:30). **“A woman of valor is a crown to her husband”** (Prov. 12:4)—**this is Sarah: her husband was crowned through her and through the spirit of holiness within her. In her honor, we will explain the entire poem “A Woman of Valor”** (Prov. 31:10-31) **with G-d’s help, and afterward we will come to explain the parsha, i.e., Chavei Sarah.**

"אִשְׁת־חַיִל מִי מְצָא" וכו'. קִשָּׁה, דְּמָמָה נִפְשָׁה אִם יֵשׁ אִשְׁת חַיִל בְּעוֹלָם אֵינָה אָדָם יִמְצָאָנָה, וְאִם לֹא יֵשׁ בְּעוֹלָם אִשְׁת חַיִל פְּשִׁיטָא שְׂאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִמְצָא.

“A woman of valor, who will find her; and her worth is beyond that of pearls.” (Prov. 31:10). **There seems to be a difficulty: if there is a woman of valor in the world, then some man will find her.¹ But if there is no woman of valor in the world, then it is obvious that it will be impossible for her to be found.**

וּבִפְרָק ו' דִּיבְמוֹת אֶמְרֵינוּ, בְּמַעֲרָבָא כִּי נָסִיב אֵינִישׁ אֶתְמָא אֶמְרֵי לִיה הֲכִי: "מְצָא" או "מוֹצָא"? וְהַקְשָׁה שֶׁמֶ הָרִי"ף שְׂזוּ לְכַאוֹרָה שְׂאֵלָה בְּלִי טַעַם, דְּאִיךְ אֶפְשָׁר לְחַתֵּן בְּוִלְיָלָה אֶחָד סְמוּךְ לְגִישׁוֹאִיו שְׁהִיָּה יוֹדֵעַ אִם מְצָא אִשָּׁה טוֹבָה או רְעָה, שְׂזוּהָ לֹא יִבְסֵן אֵלָא בְּהַמְשָׁךְ הַזֶּמֶן.

In the sixth chapter of Yevamot (63b), it says, “In the West, i.e., in the Land of Israel, when a man took a wife, they would say to him, ‘matza (i.e., have you found) or motzei (i.e., are you finding)?’ ” That is, “Has the verse of Proverbs 18:22 been fulfilled with you, that ‘he who found a wife has found goodness, and has won the favor of the L-rd?’ Or has the verse of Ecclesiastes 7:26 been fulfilled with you, that ‘I am finding more bitter than death the woman?’ ” **The Rif² raises a concern there that this appears to be a pointless question, because how is it**

* English translation: Copyright © 2019 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ I.e., marry her, cf. Prov. 18:22, in which marrying a wife is referred to as having “found” a wife.

² This is not the earlier and more famous “Rif” [Rabbi Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103)], but rather Rabbi Josiah ben Joseph Pinto (c. 1565–c. 1648), Syrian rabbi and preacher, a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Vital. His sefer, Me’or Enayim

possible for someone who has just married to know if he's found a good wife or a bad one, as this can be discerned only with the passage of time.

ועוד מה תועלת יש בשאלתם, דממה נפשך, שאם היא אשה טובה גם בלא דברייהם היא טובה, ואם מצא אשה רעה מה בידו של זה לעשות? ואתו לנחומי, צעורי קא מצערי ליה, ועיי"ש שתיירץ מה שתיירץ.

Another difficulty is: What's the point of their question, because if she's a good wife, then she'll still be a good wife without any words of praise from the questioners. But if he's found a bad wife, what can he do about it? "They came to comfort him and instead they upset him."³ See there what solution [the Rif] has reached. He writes that when a man marries, all of his sins are set to the side,⁴ but if he still isn't pardoned,⁵ as long as he changes his behavior to good, then his sins will be converted to merits. This is the meaning of, "He who found a wife has found goodness," because on account of the marriage and his repentance, his sins have been converted to merits. But if the groom hasn't changed his behavior and continues on a bad path, the questioners will come to him asking why he hasn't improved his path and strived to take the opportunity to convert his sins to merits. Therefore, it will be said about such a groom, "I am finding more bitter than death the woman."

ולדידן קושיא מעיקרא ליתא, דכי נסיב איש איתתא אינו רוצה לומר לאחר שנגנסה עמו לחופה, כמו שכתב הרב ז"ל. אלא כשבא מתחלה בשעת שידוכין לשדך לו אשה, כדי לעשות עמה אירוסין וקידושין ולקחת אותה לו לאשה, היו שואלים לו "מצא" או "מוצא".

We can interpret the practice related in Yevamot 63b to clarify that **there is no difficulty.** When it says "**a man took a wife,**" it **does not mean that after she entered under the marriage canopy with him** that they asked him the question above, "*matza*" (have you found) or "*motzei*" (are you finding), **as written** (i.e., interpreted) **by the rabbi** (i.e., the Rif), **of blessed memory. Rather, at the beginning of the couple's match, in order to arrange the engagement and betrothal and for him to take her as his wife, they would ask him: "*matza*" (have you found) or "*motzei*" (are you finding).**

(Part One: Venice 1643; Part Two: Mantua 1743) was a commentary on Rabbi Jacob ibn Habib's "Ein Yaakov," a compilation of Aggadic material from the Talmud, and both parts are now commonly printed together with the Ein Yaakov. See Me'or Enayim (Mantua 1743, page 3b).

³ Massat Moshe on Esther 6:13 (by Rabbi Moshe Alshich, 1508–93, rabbi and Kabbalist in Safed); also see Ketubot 8b.

⁴ Yevamot 63b: "Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said, 'Once a man marries a woman, his sins crumble.'"

⁵ Presumably the specific sin is erased, but he isn't pardoned for having wasted the time in doing the sin, when he could have been doing a mitzvah.

ובת זוגתו. וזהו "מצא" לשון עבר, לרמוז לארבעים יום קודם יצירת הנלד שאז יוצאת הבת קול בת פלוני לפלוני.

The intent was to ask the groom: If this woman came to him without a specific prayer or entreaty on his part, then she is certainly his intended and his match.⁶ This use of “*matza*” (have you found), in the past tense, is a hint that 40 days before the creation of a recognizable fetus,⁷ a Heavenly voice emanates saying, “So-and-so is a match for so-and-so.” In such a case, it is appropriate to allude to the verse, “He who found a wife has found goodness.”

או אם זאת האשה באתה לו על ידי תפלותיו שהתפלל עליה. וכמו שאמר, שמא יקדמנו אחר ברחמים. וזהו "מוצא" לשון הונה, שמצאה עתה. ואז אין זיווגו עולה יפה, כשהיא דרבא בפרק ג' דמועד קטן, דשמעיה לההוא גברא דקאמר: רחמנא לינדמן לי פלגיתא וכי, ואי לא כפרת בה.

Or if, to the contrary, this woman came to him because of his prayers that he prayed specifically for her. As it is said in Moed Katan 18b, a man may become engaged to a woman during the intermediate days of a holiday, “lest another come before him” and become engaged to her out of compassion. I.e., the view is that if the interloper prayed specifically for a particular woman, he may win her even though she was not his predetermined match. This case—“*motzet*” (are you finding) is in the present tense, that he is finding her now, i.e., that she is not his intended. In such a case, it is appropriate to allude to the verse, “I am finding more bitter than death the woman.” This match of his won’t go well, like an incident that is related in the third chapter of Moed Katan (18b), in which [Rava] heard a certain man asking for compassion (i.e., praying), who said, “Grant me so-and-so as a wife.” Rava said to him, “Do not ask for compassion (i.e., pray) like this. If she is fit for you, she will not depart from you. But if she is not for you, you will reject her.”⁸

⁶ The correct approach is for a single man to pray to find a proper match in the proper time, without designating a particular woman as his intended wife. There is a principal that everyone has a portion designated for him by G-d, and that, “No person may touch that which is prepared for another” (Yoma 38b).

⁷ A fetus becomes recognizable at 40 days after conception, so 40 days before then would be at the time of conception itself.

⁸ The Venice edition (1820-23) and the Vilna edition (1886) of Moed Katan 18b have the text 'כפרת בה' (reject G-d)—i.e., because the man’s prayers to marry a specific woman were not granted. The commentaries there say that a prayer to marry a woman who is not one’s intended will never succeed.

However, the Pizarro edition (c. 1509-16), and manuscripts of the Talmud dating back to the 13th Century (Munich cod. hebr. 95, Vatican ebr. 108, BL Harley 5508) do not have the *geresh* (apostrophe) and thus like *Zera Shimshon* read כפרת בה (reject her)—i.e., his prayers to marry a specific woman were granted, but such a marriage typically won’t be a good one. A footnote in ArtScroll’s Schottenstein Talmud states that at least some manuscripts of Rashi support the reading “reject her.” The Ein Yaakov, a collection of haggadic material from the Talmud with commentaries, also includes the “reject her” reading. Finally, the next paragraph shows that the Zohar does believe that such a prayer could be granted.

וכפונותם היתה להזיירו ושם זכה בה מחמת תפלתו, אף על גב שאינה בת מזלו, ותחזק נמי בתפלתו, שמא תועיל לו לראות סימן יפה בזיווגו. כדאיתא בזוהר פ' שבת נ"ה.

The intent of those questioning the groom is to warn him that if he merited her through his prayers specifically for her—even though she is not his intended—he should intensify his prayers, that the match should turn out well. This is brought in the Zohar III:283a–284b on the parsha Vayelech (Deut. 31:1–30).

ונידוע שקשואין הזיווג עולה יפה, אם באים לידי עניות, הם חיים של צער אף לאשה. ואם תמות היא, יש לה צער למות קודם זמנה. ואם ימות הוא, יש לה צער לישוב אלמנה, שהוא סימן רע לה.

It is known that when a match doesn't go well, the husband and wife may fall into poverty, or one may die young; if they fall into poverty, it will be a life of suffering even for the wife. If she dies, she'll suffer to die before her time. If he dies, she will suffer to sit as a widow, because he was a bad omen for her.

ולכן אי אפשר שיזדמנו אלה המקרים באשת חיל, הואיל שרב זכותה. ומשום הכי, אמר הכתוב "אשת-חיל מי ימצא" בלשון עתיד, דהיינו על ידי תפלותיו, בנדאי זה אי אפשר ולא יועילו כלום תפלותיו נגדה אם אינה בת מזלו וראויה לו.

Therefore, it is impossible for these events to happen to a woman of valor, since she has many merits. Because of this, the text, "A woman of valor, who will find her," is written in the future tense. Because even with a man's prayers to marry her, if she is a woman of valor, certainly [the match] is impossible and his prayers won't accomplish anything with regard to her, if she is not his intended and suited for him.

ואף אם תמצא לומר שלפעמים אפשר שתשאיר אשת חיל בלי בן זוג שלה, דהיינו שמת בעודו קטן על חטא אביו או על ידי איזו סבה אחרת. ואז אפשר שיועילו תפלותיו של אדם זה לקחת אותה לו לאשה. עם כל זה אמר הכתוב "וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָהּ".

But you might want to say that sometimes it's possible for a woman of valor to remain without her intended spouse, such as if he died while young, as a result of a sin of his father⁹ or for some other reason. Therefore, one might think that it is possible for the prayers of the interloping man to allow him to take her as a wife. Nevertheless, only a special type of prayer can accomplish this, as is hinted in the second half of the verse, where Scripture says, "her worth is beyond that of pearls."

⁹ Under what conditions this can occur is a complex theological matter. Support for the concept that a child can die for the sins of a father or ancestor appears, e.g., at Ex. 20:5 and 34:7; Ketubot 8b; and I Kings 14. But others say that is only when the child has adopted the sinful ways of the ancestor, as supported by Deut. 24:16; Ez. 18:4; Berachot 7a; and Sanhedrin 27b.

וְכַתּוּב הָרַב מְנַחֵם עֲזַרְיָה (בַּמְאָמֵר תְּקוּרָה דִּין ח"ד פ"ז) וז"ל, הַמְּבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל הַזְּיוּג עֲלִיּוֹן לְפִי הַפְּנוּנָה שְׁזָכְרָנוּ, וְהוּא צָרִיד לְאוֹתוֹ דְּבַר, הוּא נִעְנָה תְּחִלָּה. לְמַעַן יִזְכֶּה לְאַתְעָרָא מִתַּתָּא לְהִיּוֹת שׁוֹשְׁבֵין לְעֵילָא עַכ"ל.

Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano¹⁰ writes in *Asara Ma'amarot*, in the article “Hakor Din,” part 4, section 17: “He who requests compassion (i.e., prays) on behalf of the *zivug ha'elyon* (the uppermost match)¹¹ with the intent we have mentioned—that he needs the same thing (i.e., in this case, a proper match)—he will be answered first.¹² In order to merit this lower match, he awakens the uppermost match.”¹³

וְזֶהוּ "וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכֻרָה", שֶׁהַמְּכַר שָׁלָה בָּא מִמְּקוֹם רַחֵק וְשָׁנָא פְּנִינִים, שֶׁהָרִי תְּלוּי וְעוֹמֵד בְּזְיוּג עֲלִיּוֹן, וּמִי שֶׁמִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל זֶה הַזְּיוּג, שֶׁהוּא זְיוּג נֶעְלָם שֶׁל הַפְּנִימִיּוֹת לְפָנָי וְלְפָנָיִם בְּקִדְשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים, כְּמוֹ הַפְּנִינִים שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ כֶּן לְפִי שְׂיוּשְׁבוֹת לְפָנָי וְלְפָנָיִם, אֵץ דִּנְקָא יִזְכֶּה בָּהּ. וְלֹאֲחֵר שְׂיוּזְכֶּה בָּהּ . . .

This is the meaning of “her worth is beyond that of pearls,” that her value comes from a distant place that is called “*peninim*” (i.e., pearls, from the adjective “within”), that depends and stands on the *zivug ha'elyon* (the uppermost match). One who prays on behalf of this uppermost match—which is a match hidden in an innermost place, inside the Holy of Holies (where G-d’s presence dwells), similarly to the pearls which are named thus with a derivation from the adjective “within” because they are found within oysters, which in turn are found deep within the ocean¹⁴—he will certainly merit her.

After he merits her . . .

”בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בְּעֵלָה” וכו'. שֶׁבְּשִׁבְיָלָה יִהְיֶה לְבַעֲלָה בְּרַכָּה וְשְׁלוֹם וְעוֹשֵׁר כְּדֹאִתָּא בִּיבְמוֹת.

“*Her husband’s heart trusts in her, and lacks no spoils (i.e., good things).*” (Prov. 31:11). Because of her, her husband will have blessing and peace and wealth, as is written in Yevamot (62b).¹⁵

¹⁰ Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud.

¹¹ The *zivug ha'elyon* (the uppermost match) is a Kabbalistic concept representing the bond between G-d and the created beings (specifically Adam, mankind, and the Jewish people).

¹² We have a principal that if one prays on behalf of a second person with the same need, the one praying will have his need answered first. See Bava Kama 92a (where Rabba bar Mari derives the principal from Job 42:10, and where Rava derives it from Gen. 20:17–21:1).

¹³ Specifically, the Rema M’Pano says that at the end of every Shemona Esrei prayer, one who needs a spouse should read Ps. 121 before stepping backward out of the prayer. He says that verse 1, reading “... from where will my help (*ezri*) come,” refers to a wife (*ezer k’negdo*) (helpmate), and that verse 2 answers “my help comes from the L-rd, maker of Heaven and earth.”

¹⁴ Similarly, the Holy of Holies is a chamber inside one hall (the *ulam*) which is inside another hall (the *heichal*).

¹⁵ Rabbi Tanchum said that Rabbi Chanilai said: “Any man who does not have a wife is left without joy, without blessing, without goodness. Without joy, as it is written: ‘And you shall rejoice, you and your household’ (Deut. 14:26) (i.e., a man has joy only when he is with his household, i.e., his wife). Without blessing, as it is written: ‘To place a blessing on your house’ (Ezek. 44:30) (i.e., blessing comes through one’s house, i.e., one’s wife). Without goodness, as it is written: ‘It is not good that man should be alone’ (Gen. 2:18) (i.e., without a wife).”

לפי שהמקטרגים לא היו רוצים שהאדם יהיה שרוי בטובה, כמו שדרשונו¹⁶ ל סוד הפסוק "ואכלת את-שלל איביו" שהיה לו ממון הרבה הפך רצון המקטרגים, ויהיה נקרא פאלו זוכה בשלל שלהם.

The fact is that the prosecuting angels don't want a man to be steeped in goodness, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory expounded on the esoteric meaning of the verse, "you will eat the spoils of your enemies" (Deut. 20:14).¹⁶ He will have much wealth, as will be explained, but this is in opposition to the will of the prosecuting angels, and it will be considered as if he merited their spoils.

ועוד של"ל גימטריא חמש פעמים חס"ד, שיזכה להיות משפע מפל החמשה חסדים הידועים, הפך דעת המקטרגים שכל חפצם הוא להשטין ולעורר הדין חס ושלום.

Furthermore, the word *shalal* (שלל) (spoils) has a Gematria of 360, being five times that of *chesed* (חסד) (kindness, with a Gematria of 72), as thanks to his wife, the woman of valor, he merits to be influenced by all the five known kindnesses.¹⁷ This influence is in opposition to the will of the prosecuting angels, whose sole will is to accuse him and to awaken judgment against him on account of his sins, G-d forbid.

"גמלתהו טוב ולא-רע". קשה דאם הוא טוב פשיטא דאינו רע. ויש לומר דאמרינו במציצא פרק ד' שאין הברכה מצויה בתוך ביתו של אדם אלא בשביל אשתו, שנאמר "להניח ברכה אל-ביתך". והטעם שהברכה באה לאדם דוקא בשביל האשה, היינו לפי שהאשה טובה נאמנת לבעלה. לפיכך הקב"ה שולח לבעלה ברכות על ידה, כדכתיב "איש אמונות רב-ברכות". ואמרינו במדרש פרושת פקודי, כל מי שהוא נאמן, הקב"ה שולח ברכות על ידו. ובסוטה, שאינה נאמנת, כתיב ומעלה בו מעל.

"She does good to him and not bad, all the days of her life." (Prov. 31:12). This is difficult, as if there is good, it is obvious that there is no bad. One can add, as it says in the

In the West (i.e., the Land of Israel), they say: "One who is without a wife is without Torah, and without a wall of protection. Without Torah, as it is written: 'Is it that I have no help in me, and that sound wisdom is driven from me?' (Job 6:13) (i.e., one without a wife lacks sound wisdom, i.e., Torah). Without a wall, as it is written: 'A woman shall go around a man' (Jer. 31:21) (i.e., similar to a protective wall)."

Rava bar Ulla said: "(One without a wife is) without peace, as it is written: 'And you shall know that your tent is in peace; and you shall visit your habitation and shall miss nothing' (Job 5:24) (i.e., a man has peace only when he has a tent, i.e., a wife)."

While the Gemara doesn't mention wealth, blessing is equated to wealth by the Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, d. 1609, Kabbalist, commentator on the Talmud, and philosopher in Moravia and Bohemia). Also, the Zohar Chadash on the parsha Chukat (Num. 19:1–22:1) cites our verse "her husband puts his confidence in her and lacks no good thing" as meaning that he will merit wealth because of his wife.

¹⁶ There is a general concept not to flaunt wealth (or other blessings) in order to avoid the *ayin hara* (evil eye), as in Berachot 55b. However, a specific source based upon Deut. 20:14 has not been located.

¹⁷ A Kabbalistic concept is that five kindnesses guard us from dark forces. We are in a state of *Ein Sof* (infinity), and if our souls would be attuned to that state, we would have great understanding. Just as the human body has five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch), the human soul also has five senses, but most of us cannot access these senses of the soul because of *klipot* (husks or shells). The light of the five kindnesses can break through these *klipot* and allow us to access the senses of the soul, in which case we would be able to access the *Ein Sof*.

fourth chapter of Bava Metzia (59a), that a blessing is only found in a man's house because of his wife, as it is said, "to place a blessing on your house" (Ezek. 44:30). The understanding is that this blessing comes to the man specifically because of his wife, because the wife is good and faithful to her husband.¹⁸ Therefore the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends a blessing to the husband through her hand, as it is written, "A faithful person will be richly blessed" (Prov. 28:20). It says in the Midrash (Ex. Rabbah 51:1) for the parsha Pekudei (Ex. 38:21–40:38), "For everyone who is faithful, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sends blessings through his (i.e., the faithful person's) hand." But with regard to a *sotah* (a woman suspected of adultery), who is not faithful,¹⁹ it is written "and she has unfaithfully done an act of unfaithfulness to him" (Num. 5:12).²⁰

וְקוֹשֵׁר הַפְּסוּקִים הוּא כָּדָּ: "גְּמַלְתֶּהוּ טוֹב" דְּהֵינּוּ הַטּוֹב וְהַבְּרָכָה שֶׁבָּאָה לְבֵית בַּעֲלָהּ עַל יְדָהּ. וְלִמָּה הַבְּרָכָה בָּאָה דְּנֹקְאָ עַל יְדָהּ, "וְלֹא-רָע", מִשּׁוּם שֶׁאֵינָה עוֹשֶׂה שׁוּם רָע וְאֵינָה מוֹעֵלָת בְּבַעֲלָהּ.

The connection of this discussion in Bava Metzia 59a to this verse is this: "she does good to him," means the goodness and the blessing that comes to her husband's house through her hand. Why the blessing comes specifically through her hand, and "nothing bad," is because she does not do anything bad, and she is certainly not unfaithful to her husband.

וְאִם תֹּאמַר, וְאִיךָ יִבְחִין הַבַּעַל שֶׁהַבְּרָכָה בָּאָה לוֹ בְּשִׁבִיל אֲשֶׁתוֹ וְלֹא בְּזַכּוֹתָיו? מִשּׁוּם הֵכִי הוֹסִיף, "כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ", שֶׁכְּשֶׁתִּמּוֹת הֵיא תִפְסֹק הַבְּרָכָה מִבֵּיתוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ רַשִׁ"י עַל פְּסוּק "וַיִּנָּחֶם יִצְחָק אֲחֵרֵי אִמּוֹ" שֶׁכְּשֶׁמָּתָה שָׂרָה פְּסָקָה הַבְּרָכָה מִן הַעִיסָה וְעַי"ש.

You might ask: How is the husband able to distinguish that the blessing comes to him because of his wife and not because of his own merits? Because of this possibility, the verse adds, "all the days of her life," because if she were to die, the blessing would cease from his house. Rashi²¹ explained this in his comments on the verse, "Isaac was comforted after his mother (i.e., after her death)" (Gen. 24:67), that when Sarah died, the blessing ceased from the dough. And see there.²²

¹⁸ For the previous verse, "Her husband puts his confidence in her, and lacks no spoils [good things]," we discussed in the text and in footnote 15 that material wealth can come from the blessing brought by a man's wife. The present verse explains that G-d gives the blessing to the wife as her reward for being faithful to her husband.

¹⁹ A *sotah* is a wife whose husband suspected her of infidelity, warning her in front of two witnesses not to speak to a particular man, and she nonetheless was later witnessed being secluded with that man. See Num. 5:11–5:31. While it is not definite that a *sotah* has committed adultery, she is at least "unfaithful" in that she created a reasonable suspicion even after being warned in front of witnesses.

²⁰ An unfaithful wife doesn't bring a blessing of material gain, and can actually cause a material loss. The same word מעל (*ma'al*) used in Num. 5:12 for a wife's unfaithfulness occurs in Lev. 5:15 for someone who improperly uses consecrated funds. If an unfaithful wife becomes pregnant with the child of another man, her husband could unknowingly raise this child as his own, causing him a financial loss.

²¹ Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105), French rabbi and commentator.

²² Rashi cites a Midrash (derived from Gen. Rabbah 60:16), that as long as Sarah lived, a candle would (miraculously) burn from one erev Shabbos to the next, there would be a blessing in the dough (that fresh and warm bread would always be on the table), and the tent would be graced with a Divine cloud. When Sarah died, these three things ended. When Isaac brought Rebecca into his tent, these miracles returned.

"דְרִשָּׁה צֹמֶר וּפְשֵׁתִים" וכו'. כְּתוּב הַשְּׁלֵחַן עָרוּךְ אֲבוּ הָעֶזֶר (סִימָן פ'), מֵעֲשֶׂה יָדֶיהָ לְבַעֲלָהּ, מְקוּם שֶׁדָּרְכָן לְאָרוֹג אוֹרָגָת, לְרִקוּם רוֹקֶמֶת, לְטוֹוֹת צֹמֶר וּפְשֵׁתִים טוֹוָה. וְאִם לֹא הָיָה דָרֵךְ נָשִׁי הָעִיר לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל הַמְּלָאכּוֹת הָאֵלוּ אֵינּוּ כּוֹפֵה אֶלָּא לְטוֹוֹת אֶת הַצֹּמֶר בְּלִבָּד. וּפִירֵשׁ שֵׁם הַבַּיִת שְׂמוּאֵל, אֶפִּילוֹ שֶׁדָּרֵךְ נָשִׁי הָעִיר שֶׁלֹּא לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם מְלָאכָה וְגַם כֵּן בְּנוֹת מְשֻׁפְחָתָה יוֹשְׁבוֹת בְּטָלוֹת, יְכוּל לְכוֹפֵה שְׂאֵל תִּשָּׁב בְּטָלָה, וְתַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה בְּצֹמֶר עַכ"ל.

“She looks for wool and flax, and works them with the will of her hands.” (Prov. 31:13). **It is written in Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer (80:1)²³: “The product of her hands belongs to her husband. . . . In a place where their way is for the women to weave, she weaves. Where their way is to embroider, she embroiders. Where their way is to spin wool or flax, she spins. If the way of the women of the city isn’t to do any of these jobs, he can compel her only to spin the wool.”** The Beit Shmuel²⁴ explains there: **even if the way of the women of the city is not to do any work, and even if the girls of the family sit idly, [the husband] can compel [his wife] that she not sit idly, and that she should at least work with wool. This is [the Beit Shmuel’s] language.**²⁵

וְלִכְּן הָאִשָּׁת חֵיל, אִם כִּי אֵין דָּרֵךְ שְׂאֵר הַנָּשִׁים לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם מְלָאכָה, אֵינָה רוֹצֶה לִישֵׁב בְּטָלָה. וְגַם אֵינָה מְמַתְּנָת שֶׁבַעֲלָהּ כּוֹפְנָה לְטוֹוֹת הַצֹּמֶר, אֶלָּא מֵעֲצָמָה דוֹרְשָׁת וּמְבַקֶּשֶׁת לְטוֹוֹת הַצֹּמֶר.

Therefore, the woman of valor—even if it is not the way of the women of her city to do any work—does not want to sit idly. She also doesn’t wait for her husband to compel her to spin wool. Rather, on her own she looks for wool and wants to spin it.

וְלֹא דִי שְׂמַבְקֶשֶׁת הַצֹּמֶר, אֶלָּא אִם הַפְּשֵׁתִים, אִם עַל פִּי שֶׁבַפְּשָׁתוֹן לֹא הָיָה יְכוּל בַּעֲלָהּ לְכוֹפֵה כְּדֵאִתָּא שָׁם.

It’s not enough that she requests wool, but also flax, even though with regard to flax her husband cannot compel her, as is written there in the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer. This is based on Ketubot 59b (Mishnah 5:5), which explains that a husband can’t force his wife to spin flax fiber into linen thread, as the flax needs to be kept moist, such as by holding it in one’s mouth, and that causes bad breath and causes the lips to swell.

The Sefer HaChinuch, Terumah, mitzvah 97 discusses the commandment found in Ex. 25:30 to bring “show bread” in the Temple, and notes that man lives through bread, which explains the importance of having a blessing to be found within the bread.

²³ The Shulchan Aruch (written 1563) is the most widely consulted of legal codes in Judaism. It was authored by Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575).

²⁴ The Beit Shmuel (1689, 2nd ed. 1695) is a commentary on the Even HaEzer section of Shulchan Aruch. It was written by Rabbi Samuel ben Uri Shraga Feivish (Phoebus) (1650-1706), a Polish commentator on the Talmud.

²⁵ The text provided in *Zera Shimshon* is not an exact quote from either the first or second edition of the Beit Shmuel, but it is an accurate paraphrase.

וְכָל כָּךְ לָמָּה לָפִי שֵׁשׁ לָהּ אֲדַרְבָּא רְצוֹן וְהִנָּאָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָה, וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לָהּ שָׂבַח וְכְבוֹד בְּמִלְאכְתָּהּ וּבְמַעֲשֵׂהּ יְדֵיהָ וְזֶהוּ "וַתַּעַשׂ בְּחֶפְזָן כַּפֵּיהָ".

Why? Because she has so much will to work and so much enjoyment from it, and she also has praise and honor in her work and in the product of her hands. This is the meaning of the text, “she works them with the will of her hands.”

אִי נָמִי יֵשׁ לוֹמֵר דְּבַפְרָק ב' דְּבִכּוּרוֹת (דף י"ז) אֵיתָא דְרַחֵל בַּת עֲזָרָה לֹקִינָא עַל צְמֵרָה מְשׁוּם כְּלָאִים, שְׁנֵאמַר "לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שְׂעִטָּנוֹ צֵמֶר וּפְשָׁתָיו יִחְדּוּ". מַה פְּשָׁתָן שְׂלָא נִשְׁתַּנָּה, אִף צֵמֶר שְׂלָא נִשְׁתַּנָּה. וּפִירֵשׁ רַש"י, עַל צְמֵרוֹ שְׂלָהּ שְׂאִינוֹ מִיּוֹחֵד שְׂהָ לְדוֹרוֹתָיו עַכ"ל. דְּהֵינּוּ עַד שְׁתַּהֲיֶה מִיּוֹחֵדָת רַחֵל בַּת רַחֵל. וּפְסָקָה הֶרַמְב"ם (בְּפֶרֶק י' מִהֲלָכוֹת כְּלָאִים), וְהוֹסִיף שָׁם מְסַבְּרָתוֹ, אֲבָל אֲסוּר הוּא מְדַבְרֵיהֶם מִפְּנֵי מַרְאִית הָעֵינַי, עַד כָּאֵן לְשׁוֹנוֹ.

Alternatively, one can note that the second chapter of Bechorot (page 17a) writes of a sheep that is apparently an offspring of a male sheep and a female goat. We don't give lashes for mixing its wool with linen on account of violating the prohibition of *kilayim*,²⁶ regarding which it is said in the Torah, “Don't wear *shatnez*:²⁷ sheep wool and linen together” (Deut. 22:11). Bechorot explains that lashes are not administered because just as flax doesn't change its character, so too wool doesn't change its character.²⁸ Rashi explains this Gemara: the prohibition against taking “its wool” refers to a sheep that is not special, a sheep like its ancestors. That is to say, the problem of *shatnez* only arises when there is a sheep that is specifically an offspring of a sheep, and not a hybrid. The Rambam decided the law (in the tenth chapter of the Laws of Kilayim in the Mishneh Torah) and added his own explanation: it may be permitted under Torah law to mix wool from a hybrid sheep with linen, “but it is forbidden according to the words of the rabbis, because of the appearance to the eye.”²⁹

²⁶ This is a prohibition against: planting certain mixtures of seeds; grafting; mixing plants in vineyards; crossbreeding animals; working a team of different kinds of animals together; and *shatnez* (mixing wool and linen in garments).

²⁷ The prohibition of *shatnez*, mixing sheep wool and linen in garments, is one of the cases of *kilayim*. This forbids spinning a thread together that contains both sheep wool and flax, or knitting together threads of sheep wool with threads of flax, or making a single garment from pieces of sheep wool fabric and pieces of linen fabric. The prohibition does not apply with regard to wool from goats, camels, rabbits, etc.

²⁸ The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* notes: If the verse wanted to stress only the willingness of the woman of valor to go above and beyond her duties, it could have simply said that she requested flax, without mentioning wool. Or it could have said, not only does she request wool, but also flax. Instead, the verse lists both wool and flax, with the words adjacent to each other—in the Hebrew the “and” is provided by the letter “*vav*” prefixed to the word for “flax”. This may have inspired Rabbi Nachmani to look beyond the first explanation of the woman going above and beyond her duties, and to suggest this second explanation that relates to the forbidden combination of wool and linen in a single garment.

²⁹ *Marit ayin* (the appearance to the eye) is a principle not to do something that may appear to be a violation of Torah law, even if it is really permissible because of a special situation. The rationale is that others who aren't so learned may not be aware of the special situation or its ramification and may mistakenly think that the forbidden act is permissible in all circumstances. In other words, in this case, one should not combine wool from a sheep hybrid with flax fiber or linen, because even though this does not violate Torah law, someone seeing one do this may think it is okay to combine ordinary (non-hybrid) sheep wool with linen.

והאשה הזאת אף על פי שעשתה הדרש של צמר ופשתים מה פשתן שלא נשתנה וכו', ולפי זה הנה מותר חיבור מן צמר זה עם הפשתים, עם כל זה "ותעש בהפץ כפיה", רצתה לעשות דבר שיהיו הכל תפצים בו שלא יהיה בו שום איסור ואפילו מדרבנן. אף על פי ששאר הנשים אינן כל כך נזהרות באיסורא דרבנן או במה שלא נכתב בפירוש בתורה. כמו שכתב השלחן ערוך אורח חיים (סימן תר"ח), נשים שאוכלות ושותות עד שתשיכה וכו' אין מוחין בידן כדי שלא תבאנה לעשות בידן.

This woman of valor, even though the ruling regarding wool and flax was made in Bechorot 17a, “just as flax doesn’t change its character, so too wool doesn’t change its character,” and according to this the combination of wool and linen would be permissible according to Torah law, nevertheless—“and she works them with the will of her hands”—she wants to make something that everyone will want, in which there will be no prohibition, not even a rabbinic prohibition. This is despite the fact that some other women may not be so cautious with regard to a rabbinic prohibition, or what is not explicitly written in the Torah. As is written in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim (608:2): “For women who eat and drink on erev Yom Kippur until it grows dark and they do not know that it is commanded to add some time from the secular day (i.e., erev Yom Kippur) to the holy day (i.e., Yom Kippur itself), we don’t protest,³⁰ so that they will not come to intentionally do this prolonged eating and drinking.”

ואחר שאמר הכתוב "ותעש בהפץ כפיה", שיש לה נחת רוח לעסוק במלאכה ולהנות לבעלה ממעשה ידיה, אמר . . .

After it is written “and works them with the will of her hands,” that she has enjoyment to keep busy in work and to please her husband with the actions of her hands, it says . . .

“היתה כאגוז סוחר.” דבפרק ד' דפסחים אמרינן המצפה לשכר אשתו אינו רואה סימן ברכה. שכר אשתו מתקולתא. אבל עבדא ומזבנא אישתבוחי משתבח בה קרא, "סדין עשתה נתמכר". וכתב שם מהרש"א שכל מה שעושה היא בידיה ומוכרת, יש לה שבח וסימן ברכה. אבל במה שאינו מעשה ידיה, אין בו סימן ברכה אם תעשה בו סחורה ועיי"ש.

“She is like the ships of a merchant, she brings her bread from afar.” (Prov. 31:14).

First explanation—No miracle is involved: As the fourth chapter of Pesachim (50b) says: “One who expects the earnings of his wife . . . will not see a sign of blessing. ‘Earnings of his wife’ refers to rent derived from a scale³¹ However, if a woman works and sells the product of her labor, the verse praises her, as it is written later in the poem, ‘She makes a linen

³⁰ The source for the Shulchan Aruch is Shabbat 148b. The Torah commands us to correct a Jew who is committing a sin (Lev. 19:17), though this should be done tactfully (so as not to embarrass the sinner). In addition, an attempt to correct a fellow Jew should be made only if it seems likely that he will amend his ways. That's because in most cases, a person who commits a sin unintentionally (*b'shogeg*) will not be punished (at least not by a Jewish court, a *beit din*), in contrast with someone who commits the same sin intentionally (*b'mezid*), i.e., knowing the act to be wrong, and intending of his own free will to do the act. Therefore, if we believe that someone will continue doing the forbidden act, it is better to allow him to continue to do so out of ignorance rather than to choose to do so knowing it's wrong, as stated on Shabbat 148b. Someone who starts to rebuke his fellow Jew should stop doing so if he shows signs of anger, or if he becomes insulting, scornful, or simply refuses to listen, per Arachin 16b.

³¹ Rashi interprets this to mean that such a woman would take a scale to the market and rent it out to whomever needs it, bringing in only a small sum that would disgrace the woman.

cloak and sells it' (Prov. 31:24).³² The Maharsha³³ comments on this: for everything that she makes by her hands and sells, she will have praise and a sign of blessing. But for that which she doesn't make by hand, there is no sign of blessing just for using it in commerce. And see his words **there**.³⁴

וְהוֹאִיל שֶׁהִיא עוֹשֶׂה "בְּחֶפְזָא כְּפִיָּה", יְכוּלָה לְהֵיוֹת "כְּאֶגְיוֹת סוֹחֵר" וּלְהִבְיָא לְחֻמָּה מִרְחוֹק. דְּאֶמְרִינָן נְמִי הֵתָם אַרְבַּע פְּרוּטוֹת אִין בְּהֵם סִימָן בְּרַכָּה, וְחָד מִיַּנְיָהוּ מְעוֹת הַבָּאוֹת מִמְדִּינַת הַיָּם. וְזוֹ "הֵיִתָה כְּאֶגְיוֹת" שְׁמַבְיָאִין סוֹחֵרָה מִמְקוֹם רְחוֹק, אֲבָל לֹא כְּאֶגְיוֹת הַשָּׂרִים וְהַמְלָכִים שֶׁדַּרְכָּם לְסֻמוּד עַל הַיָּם. שֶׁהֵרִי אֲדַרְבָּא בְּנֻדָּי תְּבִיא לְחֻמָּה מִמְרָחֵק, שְׂאֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁשׁוֹלַחַת מְעַשֶׂה יָדֶיהָ לְאַרְזֵי רְחוֹקָה, עוֹשֶׂה בְּעֵנָן שְׂלֵא יִהְיֶה בּוֹ גַּם, אֲלָא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם בְּעֵנָן בְּטוֹם כְּמִנְהַג הַסוֹחֵרִים.

Since she is doing something with the will of her hands, she is able to be like the ships of a merchant and bring her bread from afar. As it says there (Pesachim 50b): “In four payments, there is not ever a sign of blessing: wages of scribes of sacred books; wages of those who repeat and explain the lectures delivered by Rabbis on the Sabbath; wages from engaging in a partnership with the executor of an orphan’s estate;” and the fourth one of these payments is “money that comes from a country overseas.” The Gemara explains that shipping cargo overseas requires a reliance on a miracle (that the ship won’t sink, be pirated, etc.), but as a miracle doesn’t happen every day, one’s merit is diminished each time his merchandise arrives intact. **This woman of valor is like ships bringing produce from a distant place, but not like the ships of ministers and kings whose way is to rely upon a miracle by sending ships to dangerous places. So she will certainly bring her bread from afar, because even though she is sending the work of her hands to a distant land, she’s doing so in a manner that doesn’t rely upon miracles. Instead, it will always be done in the safe manner of merchants, who typically send ships only to secure places.**³⁵

³² As the entire poem is praising the woman of valor, we can interpret each listed action as praiseworthy.

³³ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

³⁴ Chiddushei Agadot on Pesachim 50b: “The language doesn’t specifically mean that renting out a scale is the problem, or that the small income derived from that is the problem, but rather the law is that even with all other things that she hasn’t made herself, she shouldn’t engage in business transactions and demean herself in the marketplace, because her honor is to be found within (cf. Ps. 45:13), i.e., to sit at home and to do work, as discussed in the section on women’s work (Ketubot 59b). And a later verse of this poem provides proof, ‘she makes linen cloth and sells it,’ and that verse concludes ‘and a belt she gives to the Canaanite [merchant]’ (i.e., for him to sell as her agent), and the intent is that for a belt she hasn’t made, it would be demeaning for her to sell it by herself, rather she should give it to a Canaanite merchant for him to sell as her agent.”

³⁵ I.e., she is both industrious, like ships, but also cautious, like merchants. The Mevuar edition points out that in section 15 of *Zera Shimshon*’s commentary on the Song of Songs, it notes that despite engaging in maritime trade, the tribe of Zebulun was able to obtain a blessing, because they contributed funds to the Torah study of the tribe of Issachar.

אי נמי "הַיְתָה כְּאֵנוֹת סוֹחֵר" אף על פי שְׁמִצְפָּה לְשׂוֹכֵר אִשְׁתּוֹ אֵין בּוֹ סִימָן בְּרָכָה, זֹאת הָאִשֶּׁת חֵיל תְּבִיא לְחֶמֶה מִרְחוֹק. דְּהֵינּוּ מְטוֹב הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, כְּדֵאִיתָא בְּזוֹהַר פְּרָשַׁת בְּשַׁלַּח, "מִמְרָחֵק תְּבִיא לְחֶמֶה" כִּמְה דְּאִתָּא אָמַר "הֵנָּה שְׂמֵיהּ בָּא מִמְרָחֵק" תְּבִיא לְחֶמֶה בְּסוֹד דְּרַגְנָא דְּשָׂאֲרֵי עָלְהָ עכ"ל.

*Second explanation—A miracle is involved:*³⁶ Or also one could say regarding “**she is like the ships of a merchant,**” that despite the fact that one who expects the earnings of his wife will not see a sign of blessing, this woman of valor will bring her bread from afar. That is, she will bring it from the goodness of the World-to-Come, as it says in the Zohar II:50b on the parsha Beshalach (Ex. 13:17–17:16): from afar she will bring her bread, as in the verse that says, “**See, the name of the L-rd comes from afar**” (Isaiah 30:27). By analogy from the word “afar,” we see that bounties come from the goodness of Heaven, thanks to the name of G-d. With regard to the text, “**she . . . brings her bread,**” that means **from one level of the Upper Tier**, i.e., from Heaven.

וְכֵן אָמְרוּ ו"ל על פסוק "יֵצֵו ה' אֶתְּךָ אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמִיךָ" שִׁישְׁלַח לוֹ בְּרָכָה מֵעֵין הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וּבְנֵה לֹא יִשְׁלוֹט בָּהּ עֵין הָרַע וְלֹא מִזִּיקוֹן. וְזֶהוּ לְשׁוֹן יֵצֵו כְּלוֹמַר "יֵצֵו" שְׂאוֹתָהּ בְּרָכָה תִּשְׂאָר קִיּוּמָת וְלֹא יִשְׁלֹטוּ עָלֶיהָ זָרִים. וְכֵן תִּרְגַּם אֲנִקְלוֹס "יִפְקֵד", לְשׁוֹן פְּקֻדוֹן, שְׁהַמִּזִּיקוֹן לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְגַשֵּׁת אֶל הַקִּדְוֶה לְמַה שֶּׁהוּא מֵעוֹלָם הָעֲלִיוֹן.

Thus on the verse, “**The L-rd will command (yatzav) (יצב) blessings for you upon your storehouses**” (Deut. 28:8), [Rabbi Elazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus] of blessed memory said that He will send a blessing resembling the World-to-Come, and the Evil Eye and damaging forces won’t rule over (i.e., overturn) this blessing.³⁷ This is the meaning of, “**will command,**” that this blessing will continue to exist and strangers won’t rule over it.³⁸ Similarly, Targum Onkelos (Deut. 28:5) translates the word [yatzav (יצב) (will command)] found in Deut. 28:8 as *yefaked* (יפקד), which also means “will command,” which *Zera Shimshon* interprets as meaning *pikadon* (פקדון) (a deposit). I.e., G-d deposits the blessing only temporarily with the recipient; if it is withdrawn, it does not become free for others to take.³⁹ **Damaging forces won’t be able to approach the holiness, because it is from the Uppermost World** (i.e., Heaven).

³⁶ The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* suggests that Rabbi Nachmani was not entirely satisfied with the first explanation. A later verse, Prov. 31:24 (“she makes linen cloth and sells it”) also deals with trading in merchandise, and there is a principal that there are no wasted words in the Torah, but rather that something can be learned from any apparent redundancy. Therefore, Rabbi Nachmani offered this second explanation, that perhaps there is indeed a miracle involved in this verse (in contradiction to the first explanation of this verse), whereas Prov. 31:24 may relate to non-miraculous industriousness.

³⁷ Rabbi Elazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus (a.k.a. Elazar of Worms or Elazar Rokeach) (c. 1176–1238), German commentator on the Talmud, and a Kabbalist. The cited commentary appears within the prayer book, Ha’Rokeach, in a discussion of the Saturday night prayer “Vayiten Lecha.”

³⁸ See Ps. 33:9 “He commanded and it endured.”

³⁹ The Mevuar edition notes that this is stated explicitly in *Zera Shimshon*’s Essay 24 on parshat Beshalach.

ומשום דאמרינו בפרק ג' דתענית אסור ליהנות ממעשה נסים, אמר הכתוב "הייתה פאניויות סוחר", ולא אמר הייתה פאניויות סתם. כלומר שתמשוץ השפע מעולם העליון, אבל לא דרך גס ובשופי, אלא קרוב אל הטבע פאניויות סוחר. כי כן דרך הסוחרים, שלא לסמוך על הנס, לפי שרוצים להרויח מעט בנדאי, ולא הרבה בספק.

It says in the third chapter of Taanit (24b) that it is forbidden to benefit from the product of miracles, therefore the verse says “she is like the ships of merchants,” and it doesn’t say simply that she is “like ships.” That is to say, the abundance will continue to flow from the Uppermost World, but not by way of a miracle and with tranquility, but rather similar to nature, like the ships of merchants. Because this is the way of merchants: they don’t rely upon miracles, as they want to earn a little with certainty, rather than earn a lot with doubt.

ואינו אומר מפרק תביא להם אלא להמה, כדי צרכה בלבד, דהינו הלהם שתאכל. ופשיטא שמוותרת ליהנות ממנו כדאמרינו בתענית, הרי הן עליה הקדש ואין לה בהן אלא פאחד מעניי ישראל. דשמע מינה דכדי צרכה מותר ליהנות, משום דכתיב "נתן להם לכל-בשר", ואינו אסור אלא הנאה ומירה.

It doesn’t say “she will bring bread from afar,” but rather “her bread,” for her needs only—that is, the bread that she will eat. It is clear that she is permitted to benefit from it, as it says in Taanit (24a), “For you, this wheat is consecrated property to be given to charity, and you have a share in it only as much as one of the poor of Israel.”⁴⁰ Hear from this, that she is permitted to enjoy the miraculous bounty only according to her needs, as it is written, “He gives bread to every creature” (Ps. 136:25). That is not forbidden; only the enjoyment of more than necessary would be forbidden.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Taanit 24a: Whenever charity collectors would see Elazar of the village of Birta, they would hide from him, as any money Elazar had with him he would give them, and they did not want to take all his property. One day, Elazar went to the market to purchase what he needed for his daughter’s dowry. The charity collectors saw him and hid from him. He went and ran after them, saying to them, “I urge you, tell me, in what mitzvah are you engaged?” They said to him, “We are collecting money for the wedding of an orphan boy and an orphan girl.” He said to them, “I swear by the Temple service that they take precedence over my daughter.” He took everything he had with him and gave it to them. He was left with one single dinar, with which he bought wheat, and he then ascended to his house and threw it into the granary. Elazar’s wife came and said to her daughter, “What has your father brought?” She said to her mother, “Whatever he brought he threw into the granary.” She went to open the door of the granary, and saw that the granary was full of wheat, so much so that it was coming out through the hinges, and the door would not open due to the wheat. The granary had miraculously been completely filled. Elazar’s daughter went to the study hall and said to her father, “Come and see what He Who loves You, the Almighty, has performed for you.” He said to her, “I swear by the Temple service, as far as you are concerned this wheat is consecrated property, and you have a share in it only as one of the poor of Israel.” He said this because he did not want to benefit from a miracle.

⁴¹ The word *lechem* (להם) is translated literally as “bread,” though it can be taken generally for “food,” as it apparent from Ps. 135:25, as many creatures would not be sustained by bread.

"**וַתִּקַּם** בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה". זאת האשה כל כך חפצה במלאכה, שדחתה עצמה. ובשעה שגני אדם ישנים, היא מתעוררת לעשות מלאכה.

"And she rises while it is still night and she gives provisions for her household, and a ration to her maidservants." (Prov. 31:15). **This woman is so satisfied with her work, that she pushes herself. At an hour that people generally sleep, she awakens to do work.**

ואימת בשלחן ערוך אכן העזר (סימן פ') דחקה עצמה ועשתה יותר מהראוי לה, המותר לבעל. וכתבו שם האחרונים דהיינו שעשתה בלילה או שתיים או שלש מלאכות בבת אחת, ויש אומרים שהכל לעצמה. וכתב הב"ח, שמהנהג הוא שלא להוציא מיד האשה שום העדפה שעל ידי הדחק עכ"ל.

It is taught in the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, section 80 (80:1): "If she pushed herself and did more than is appropriate for her, the excess belongs to her husband." But other *poskim* (decisors) have written an interpretation there: that she worked at night or performed two or three jobs simultaneously, and there are those *poskim* who disagree with the Shulchan Aruch and say that all the extra income belongs to her. The Bach⁴² is one who disagrees with the Shulchan Aruch, and he writes: that the custom is "not to remove from the hand of the wife any loose change that she earns from pushing herself." (Bach, Even HaEzer, 80:11).

והיינו "וַתִּקַּם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה" שדחקה עצמה לעשות יותר מן הראוי. ואף על פי שהדין הוא שתהיה לעצמה הואיל שיש מחלוקת בין הפוסקים והמוציא מחבירו עליו הראיה, מכל מקום היא נותנת זה הרינה לבעלה, להביא המזון לבית הרינה ולא בצמצום, כדי שתהיה ברפת הבית מרובה, כי טרף הוא לשון מזון כגודע.

This verse, "she rises while it is still night," means that she pushes herself to do more than is appropriate. The law is that [the earnings] should be hers, because there is a dispute between the *poskim*. There is a presumption that property belongs to the one who is in possession of it, and therefore one who wants to take something from his fellow must bring a proof that he is entitled to the property.⁴³ As the husband can't prove that the excess should be his, as there is a dispute between the *poskim*, it is rightfully hers. Nevertheless, she gives the profit to her husband, to bring food to the house in plenty and not in meager quantities. She does so in order that there will be an expanded blessing upon the house, because "provisions" [*teref*] [טרף] is another word for "food," as is known.

ועוד יש לומר שקראו "טרף" לפי שלא בא ליד בעלה מן הדין, אלא בשביל שהיא מוחלת לו כדי למצוא סן בעיניו. נמצא שהוא טרף אותו ממנה.

It is also worthwhile to note that it is called "provisions," because [the money] is not coming to the husband by force of law, rather because she is relinquishing it to him in order

⁴² Rabbi Yoel ben Samuel Sirkis (1561–1640), Polish *posek* (decisor).

⁴³ Bava Metziah 2b.

to find favor in his eyes. We therefore find thus that he is tearing (*toref*) (טורף) the money from her.⁴⁴

ועוד נותנת מנה הרינוח "חק לנערתיה". ו"חק" הוא נמי לשון מזון פדכתיב, "הטריפני לחם חקי", דבפרק אף על פי תנן הכניסה לו שפחה אחת אינה טוחנת וכו'. ויש מחלוקת בין הפוסקים אם אלו השפחות חייב הבעל לזונם או אם חייבת היא, ועיין בהדושי ריטב"א ובתוספות. והואיל שיש מחלוקת בזה הרינוח של העדפה על ידי הדחק אם הוא לבעל או לאשה, ויש מחלוקת אחר מי מהם חייב לזון את שפחותיה, היא דוחקת עצמה להביא רינח יותר כדי לזון את שפחותיה שהן נערוותיה ממש.

She also gives from this money a ration (*chok*) (חק) to her maidservants, as will be clarified later. “Ration” (*chok*) is also language for “food,” as is written, “provide me with my ration of bread” (Prov. 30:8). She gives from this money a ration to her maidservants, according to this section, even though it was taught, “If she brought him one maidservant, she doesn’t need to grind etc.” (Ketubot 59b).⁴⁵ There is a dispute among the *poskim* if the husband is obliged to feed the maidservants or if she is so obliged, and see the novel writings of the Ritva⁴⁶ and in Tosafot.⁴⁷ So there are two disputes. There is a dispute regarding this profit of excess funds from her pushing herself, whether it belongs to the husband or the wife. There is another dispute which of them is obliged to feed her maidservant. Because of these disputes, she pushes herself to bring greater profit in order to feed the maidservants, who are her “young women.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ The root, *taraf*, means “torn,” such as an animal (or human) torn to pieces by another animal (Gen. 37:33), and so the related word, *teref*, can mean food in that context. Also related is the word *treif* (non-kosher), because even an animal that could be kosher would be forbidden if it dies by being torn apart (as opposed to being ritually slaughtered).

⁴⁵ The Mishnah there reads: “And these are tasks that a wife must perform for her husband: She grinds wheat into flour, and bakes, and washes clothes, cooks, and nurses her child, makes her husband’s bed, and makes thread from wool by spinning it. If she brought him one maidservant, i.e., brought the maidservant with her into the marriage, the maidservant will perform some of these tasks. Consequently, the wife does not need to grind, and does not need to bake, and does not need to wash clothes. If she brought him two maidservants, she does not need to cook and does not need to nurse her child if she does not want to, but instead may give the child to a wet nurse. If she brought him three maidservants, she does not need to make his bed and does not need to make thread from wool. If she brought him four maidservants, she may sit in a chair like a queen and not do anything, as her maidservants do all of her work for her.”

⁴⁶ Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (c. 1260s – c. 1320s), Spanish commentator on the Talmud. His commentary on Ketubot 59b says that the husband enjoys the benefits and therefore needs to pay.

⁴⁷ Medieval commentators on the Talmud. Their comments on Ketubot 59b are that it would be a big burden upon the husband to have to pay this, and therefore he is not obliged to do so.

⁴⁸ Our verse literally reads, “and a ration to her young women.” Rabbi Nachmani stresses that the term doesn’t mean her daughters, who are already provided for as part of the household, but rather it means “servant.” There are many instances in the Torah of an adult servant being referred to as a “youth.”

"זממה שדה" וכו'. מהרינו שעושה בשביל שדוחקת עצמה ונותנתו לבני ביתה למזון מרובה ולברכת הבית, מה שמשתתיר ממנו פתבו הפוסקים הנ"ל שאף על פי שאין מוציאים אותו ממנה, מפל מקום יש לו דין נכסי מלוג והבעל אוכל פירות.

"She sets her mind on a field and acquires it; she plants a vineyard by her own labors." (Prov. 31:16). **She makes a profit from pushing herself, and she gives plentiful food to the members of her household and a blessing to the house.** Regarding what is left over from the profit after paying for these things, as mentioned above, the *poskim* wrote that it's not taken from her. Nevertheless, [the husband] has the law on his side that regarding "assets she brings to the marriage, the husband enjoys the fruits,"⁴⁹ i.e., he can take any profit earned from the principal, though the principal itself remains her property.

ואם היא חושבת לקנות ממנו שדה, בנדאי שתוכל ליקח, וזהו "זממה שדה ונתקחה". דהכי אמרינן בפ"ק ח' דכתובות (דף ע"ט), פשיטא ארעא וקתי ארעא.

If she thinks to purchase a field from this [principal], it is certain that she will be able to purchase it, and this is "she sets her mind on a field and acquires it." As it is said in the eighth chapter of Ketubot (page 79a): "It is clear that if one spouse wants to buy land with the principal that the wife brings to the marriage, and the other spouse wants to buy houses, they must buy land which is more secure."⁵⁰

ואם כבר יש לבעל פרום, שצריה הוצאה מרובה לזמר ולתקן הפרם, הואיל שיש בו ריח גדול, וכמו שקתבו התוספות שם בכתובות (דבור המתחיל אילני וכו'), "מפרי כפיה נטעה פרום". דוחקת עצמה ונוטעת הפרם וטורחת לעובדה ולשומרה, מלבד חיוב מעשה ידיה שפיר היא מחוייבת לעשותם, להביא עושר לבעלה.

But if the husband already has a vineyard, such that a big outlay is required to prune and repair the vineyard—which offers a big profit potential from the sale of the grapes, as Tosafot writes there in Ketubot (the words starting with "trees etc.")⁵¹—then "she plants a vineyard by her own labor." I.e., rather than hiring workers, she pushes herself and plants the

⁴⁹ Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, 85:13.

⁵⁰ The word for "she sets her mind" is *zamema* (זממה), which has the connotation of "to plot," "to conspire," "to scheme," and therefore it implies that there is an opposition to her plans. That is why Rabbi Nachmani brings this discussion of a dispute between husband and wife regarding the principal that she brings into a marriage.

⁵¹ Tosafot writes: "It's said that vines are worse than trees, and all the more so they are worse than date trees, which are better than [other] trees. But there's a question, for we say in Bava Kama (92a) that Shmuel's sharecropper brought dates to him. [Shmuel] tasted in them the taste of wine. He said, 'They are weakening the vines so much. Tomorrow, bring to me their roots (uproot them)! We hear from this that vines are better than date trees! But it can be said that date trees are better in the respect that one does not need to spend anything to maintain them. However, vines need great expenditures, to prune them and fix the vineyard. If not, they get ruined. For one who can toil and work and guard them property, there is great profit.'"

vineyard, and toils to work it and to guard it—beyond the obligation of the work of her hands, of which she is already obliged—to bring wealth to her husband.⁵²

אי נמי יש לומר דכי אמרינן התם בכתובות, אילגי וגופני, אילגי. שהיא מעפב בנדח שלא לקנות הפך. הני מילי להוציא המעות בגפנים שקרוקים להתקלקל, ולא נשאר בהם לא קרן ולא רינח. שהיאיל שפכר הם גפנים גדולים, צריך ליתן פדי שוים. אבל זאת האשה לאסר שלקחה שדה היא לעצמה, גוטעת הפך בלי הוצאת מעות כלל, שבזה יש רינח גדול כנ"ל. ואף אם יתקלקל הפך, חוזר להיות שדה כבתחלה.

Or alternatively one can say, as it is also written there in Ketubot (79a), “If the dispute is between spending the wife’s pre-marital assets on regular trees or grapevines, they should purchase regular trees, which will last longer.” That is, he can prevent her from buying a vineyard. In other words, he can prevent her from expending funds on grapevines that because of their age are close to failure, and then they wouldn’t retain either a vineyard or a profit. As such grapevines are already mature, [a purchaser] would need to give their full value, which is a great risk if in fact they fail shortly afterward. But this woman, after acquiring a field for herself, plants a vineyard without any expenditure, an action which has a large profit potential, as discussed above. Even if in the worst case the vineyard fails, it will revert to being a field as at the beginning and they can use it for planting grains or to plant regular trees, which will still bring some profit.

"תגרה בעוז מתניה" וכי. לפי שעתה צריכה לטרום לומר ולתמן הפך ולעבוד בקרקע. ושמא מתמת הטורח הזה, שאינו רגיל באשה, תפול חגורתה ויפלו מלבושיה ותגלה ערנותה. או תגביה זרועותיה יותר מדאי והוא דבר מגונה אפילו שתהיה פעם אחת בלבד בשוגג, משום הכי "תגרה בעוז מתניה ותאמץ זרעותיה".

“She girds her loins with strength, and strengthens her arms.” (Prov. 31:17). **Now she needs to toil to prune and repair the vineyard and to work the soil. Perhaps because of this toil, which is irregular for a woman, her belt will fall and her clothing will slip and reveal a private part of her body. Or perhaps because of this toil she will lift her arms higher than she should, which is a disgraceful thing even if it happens only once, by accident. Because of this risk, she girds her loins with strength, i.e., she securely tightens her belt around her waist, and she strengthens her arms, i.e., she is cautious not to lift her arms too high, or she securely ties her sleeves so that they don’t slip.**

⁵² The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* points out that this interpretation is not a continuation of “she sets her mind on a field,” as it instead relates to a field previously owned by her husband. Instead, this seems an interpretation related to the previous verse of her pushing herself. Perhaps because of this, Rabbi Nachmani presents an alternative explanation in the next paragraph.

"טַעֲמָה כִּי־טוֹב סַחֲרָה" וכו'. הנה אִמְרָנוּ לַמַּעֲלָה עַל פְּסוּק "הִיְתָה כְּאֲנִיּוֹת סוֹחֵר", שְׁזוֹכוֹתָהּ מִמְּשִׁיף לָהּ הַשֶּׁפַע וְהַבְּרָכָה מֵעִין הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֲבָל לֹא דָרָךְ נֶס. אֲמָנָם פֶּשֶׁהיָא מְרַגְּשֵׁת בְּעֲצָמָה שֶׁהַשֶּׁפַע בָּא לָהּ יוֹתֵר מִדְּאֵי חוּץ מִן הַטֹּבֵעַ, אֵינָה רוֹצֶה שְׁיִנָּכּוּ לָהּ מִחֻלְקָה שֶׁל הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְזֶהוּ "טַעֲמָה כִּי־טוֹב סַחֲרָה", וְרָאוּ כִּי־טוֹב ה' ", אֵינָה רוֹצֶה שְׁתִּכַּבֵּה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שְׂדוּמָה לְלִילָה הַגֵּר שְׁלָה, דְּהִינּוּ חֵלֶק הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא לְאוֹר בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים.

"She senses that her business is good; her lamp will not be extinguished at night." (Prov. 31:18).

First explanation—A miracle is involved: **We have said above on the second explanation of the verse, “she is like the ships of a merchant” (Prov. 31:14, i.e., that a miracle is involved), that her merit maintains the abundance and the blessing coming from the well of the World-to-Come, though not by way of a miracle that is evident to all. In fact, when she feels that she is receiving more abundance than necessary, supernaturally—she doesn’t want this to deduct from her portion in the World-to-Come. This is the meaning of the text, “she senses that her business is good”: She takes her own counsel, and when she thinks that her business is very good, and that the abundance coming to her is an excellent abundance, in the way of “sense and see how good is the L-rd” (Ps. 34:9), she doesn’t want her lamp—that is a portion of the World-to-Come, “the light of life” (Job 33:30)—to be extinguished in this world that resembles nighttime.**⁵³

אֵי נִמְי כְּשֶׁטַעֲמָה טַעַם טוֹב בְּסוֹחֲרָתָהּ, שְׁנֹתֵעֲשֶׂרָה כְּכָר מִשׁוּם שֶׁסּוֹחֲרָתָהּ הִיְתָה טוֹבָה וְקָפְצוּ עָלֶיהָ זְבִינֵי, אֵינָה רוֹצֶה עוֹד לְטַרֵחַ כְּדֵי לְהַתְעַשֵּׂר הַרְבֵּה. וּמָה הִיא עוֹשֶׂה. . .

Second explanation—No miracle is involved: **Alternatively, based on the premise that no miracle is involved, when she senses how good her business is (in part because up until now her lamp was not extinguished at night), and when she senses that she has already become rich because her business is good and customers are jumping on her merchandise, she won’t want to continue to toil in order to even more greatly enrich herself. What she does as a result of this decision is . . .**⁵⁴

"יָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָה בְּפִישׁוֹר" וכו'. מוֹנַעַת עֲצָמָה מִפֶּל מְלָאכּוֹת הַיְתִירוֹת וּמִסַּפְקַת עֲצָמָה בְּמִלְאכּוֹת הַטּוֹיָה שֶׁל צֶמֶר. שְׂאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לָהּ בְּלֹאוֹ הַכִּי, כְּדָתְנָן כּוֹפֵה לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּצֶמֶר, שֶׁהַבְּטָלָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי זִמָּה אוֹ לִידֵי שְׁעָמוּם.

"She sets her hands to the distaff; her palms work the spindle." (Prov. 31:19). **She restrains herself from additional work and satisfies herself with the work of spinning wool. It would be impossible for her not to spin wool, as it is taught that [a husband] forces [his**

⁵³ See Bava Metzia 83b, in which the text, “You make darkness and it is night,” is interpreted homiletically as referring to this world, which resembles nighttime.

⁵⁴ The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* notes that the first explanation of the verse may not have been completely satisfactory to Rabbi Nachmani, prompting this additional explanation. If the verse is intended to relate to a potential diminishment of her reward in the World-to-Come, then it is a continuation of Prov. 31:14, and it is unclear why it would be presented after the three interposing verses. If the second explanation of the verse is correct, that she simply realizes she is wealthy enough from her labor, then the earlier verses are all additive in showing her labor.

wife] to work with wool, because being idle brings [a woman] to the hands of depravity or to the hands of boredom.⁵⁵

וזהו הלשון של "בכישור" דמשמע הכשר גופה ותיקונה.

The word “distaff” (*cishur*) (כישור) allegorically has the meaning of the fitness (*hechsher*) (הכשר) and repair of her body.⁵⁶

"וכפיה תמכו פלה" שלא יפל למטה, שהיא דבר מגונה אם תפול נגד פניה של מטה, כמו שפירש רש"י על וטוה ונד כנגד פניה בהעוברת על דת יהודית ועיי"ש.

Her palms work the spindle so that it shouldn't fall downward. It would be improper for the spindle to fall downward away from her face, as Rashi explained on the text of Ketubot 72b that reads, “she spins and it falls downward away from her face,” in discussing one who violates the laws of a [Jewish] woman. See there, where Rashi’s interpretation is that she holds the spindle on her thigh. Perhaps the intent is this can attract a man’s gaze to her legs.⁵⁷

והיא מיירי שיש לה ולבעלה מזונות צרכם. אבל למזן "סדין עשתה ותמכר", מיירי שאין להם מזונות כדי סיפוקם, דהיינו בתחלת זיווגם שמתחלת להתעסק.

Here in this verse it is saying that she and her husband have enough food to satisfy their needs. But further in the poem, we have the verse that “she makes cloth and sells it” (Prov. 31:24), saying that they don’t have enough food in order to be satisfied. That later verse was a retrospective look at the beginning of their marriage, when she starts to occupy herself in working hard.

"כפה פרשה לעני" וכו'. צריך ביאור: מהו "שלקה" ומהו "פרשה"? ועוד למה מתחלה "כפה" ואחר כך אמר "וידיה"?

“She opens her palm to a poor person; and she sends out her hands to the impoverished person.” (Prov. 31:20). **Explanation is required: what is “sends out” and what is “opens”?**

⁵⁵ Ketubot 59b (Mishnah 5:5).

⁵⁶ The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* notes that as we were previously told of her working with wool in Prov. 31:13, there must be another lesson to be learned here. Rabbi Nachmani thus suggests that she keeps physically active and fit in order to avoid depravity and boredom.

⁵⁷ In Ketubot 72a, the Mishnah states that a husband can divorce his wife without paying the fee specified in the Ketubah (marriage contract) if she violates halacha or violates the customs of Jewish women. Included in a list of violations of the latter is a wife who spins wool in the marketplace. This is analyzed by the Gemara on 72b, where various proposals are offered as to the exact problem. Rav Yehuda quotes Shmuel: “This means that she reveals her arms to people by raising her sleeves as she spins.” Rav Chisda quotes Avimi: “It is referring to when she spins ורד opposite her face.” Rashi interprets ורד as “*va-red*” (“and it falls”) and he deduced that she is holding the spindle on her thigh and the thread falls down, which he considered immodest. [A later work, *Imrei Binah* (1821), by Rabbi Dovber Schneuri (the Mittlerer Rebbe; the second Chabad Rebbe) (1773-1827), reads ורד as “*vered*,” a rose, and interprets the quotation to mean that she is spinning with a red thread opposite her face to highlight her beauty, which entails an element of promiscuity.]

Furthermore, why is “her palm” at the beginning of the verse read, but afterward it says, “she sends out her hands to the impoverished person”?

אָלָא לְפִי שְׁהֶעֱנִי אֵין לוֹ כֵּף צוֹרֵף כְּמוֹ הָאֶבְיוֹן, לְכֹן נוֹתְנָת לוֹ צְדָקָה בְּיַד אַחַת לְבַד. וְאַף אֵינָה נוֹתְנָת לוֹ מִיַּד לְפִי שְׁאֵינָה יוֹדַעַת אִם יִרְצֶה לְקַסֵּת צְדָקָה. רַק פּוֹרְשֵׁת לוֹ כַּפָּה וְאִם יִקְחֶנָּה, יִקְחֶנָּה. וּמִשְׁמַע שְׁהֶעֱנִי הוּא אֶצְלָה וְהוּא סְמוּךְ לָהּ.

As the poor person doesn’t have as great a need as the impoverished person, therefore she gives the poor person charity with only one hand. She doesn’t give him charity immediately because she doesn’t know if he will want to take charity. So she only opens her palm for him, and if he will take [charity], he will take it. The meaning is that the poor person is beside her and adjacent to her.

אָמְנָם לְאֶבְיוֹן, שְׁהוּא תָּאָב לְכָל דְּבָר, הִיא נוֹתְנָת לוֹ בְּשֵׁתֵי יָדַיִם וְשׁוֹלַחַת לוֹ בְּלֵב בְּטוּחַ שְׁיִקְחֶנָּה. דְּ"שְׁלָחָה" מִשְׁמַע שְׁעַדִּיין לֹא בָּא אֶצְלָה וְהוּא רְחוּק מִמֶּנָּה.

Indeed, for the impoverished person,⁵⁸ who has a craving for everything,⁵⁹ she gives [charity] to him with two hands and sends [charity] to him with a heart that is certain that he will take it. So “sends out” means that he has not yet come to her, and instead he is still far from her.⁶⁰

וְהַקַּב"ה נִתֵּן בְּלֵבָה לְשִׁלּוּחַ לוֹ הַצְּדָקָה בְּאוֹתוֹ הַרְגַע וּבְאוֹתוֹ הַזְּמַן דְּנִקְא, כְּדַכְתִּיב "לֹא יוֹעִיל הוּן בְּיוֹם עֲבָרָה וְצְדָקָה תִּצְלֵל מִמֶּנָּה. צְדָקַת תְּמִיִם תִּישֶׁר דְּרָכּוֹ, וּבְרִשְׁעוֹתוֹ יִפֹּל רִשְׁעוֹ. צְדָקַת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּצְלֵם, וּבְהִנּוֹת בְּגָדִים יִלְכְּדוּ" וְכוּ'. וְאֵיתָא בְּזוֹהַר עַל פְּסוּק "וְאֶבְרָהִם וְשָׂרָה זְמַנִּים בָּאִים בְּיָמִים" וְכוּ', בְּשַׁעֲתָא דְּקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא רְחִים לִיה לְבַר נֶשׁ, עַד לֹא גֵיתִי דִּינָא לְעֵלְמָא מְשַׁדֵּר לִיה דּוֹרוּנָא דְּהוּא מְסַכְנָא, בְּגִין דִּיזְכָּה בֵּיה. וְיִשְׁתַּזִּיב מִדִּינָא עַכ"ל. דְּשִׁמְעַת מִינָה שְׁהַצְּדָקָה צְרִיכָה שְׁתַּהֲיָה קוּדְשׁ בּוֹא הַדִּין לְעוֹלָם, כִּי אֵין מְרַצִּין לוֹ לְאֵדָם בְּשַׁעֲתָא כְּעָסוֹ. וְזֶהוּ "לֹא יוֹעִיל הוּן בְּיוֹם עֲבָרָה", שְׁאֵף אִם יִתְנַגּוּ לְצְדָקָה לֹא יוֹעִיל לוֹ, אָמְנָם הַצְּדָקָה הַעֲשׂוּיָה מִקוּדְשׁ, הִיא "תִּצְלֵל מִמֶּנָּה". "צְדָקַת תְּמִיִם", מִי שְׁהוּא רְגִיל לְעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה, "תִּישֶׁר דְּרָכּוֹ", שְׁיִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ הַעֲנֵי קוּדְשׁ הַדִּין. אָמְנָם הַרְשַׁע יְפוּל בְּרִשְׁעוֹתוֹ שְׁלֹא תִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ מִצָּה זֶה כְּדִי לְזַכּוֹת בָּהּ, וְזֶהוּ נְמִי "צְדָקַת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּצְלֵם" וְכוּ'.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, puts it in her heart to send charity to [the impoverished person] at the same moment and time, as it is written: “Wealth is of no avail on the day of wrath; but charity saves from death. The righteousness of the blameless man will straighten his path; but the wicked man will fall by his wickedness. The righteousness of the upright

⁵⁸ The first half of the verse speaks of “a poor person” (i.e., with the vowelization indicating the indefinite article), while the second half of the verse speaks of “the impoverished person” (i.e., with the vowelization indicating the definite article). The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* suggests the impoverished person is well known to the community as being legitimately in need.

⁵⁹ Lev. Rabbah 34:6 gives eight terms that are used for poor people, and the derivation or meaning. The term *evyon* (אביון), which we translate as “an impoverished person,” is related to the adjective *taev* (תאב), which means “craving.”

⁶⁰ See Shabbat 104a, “It is the manner of one who bestows loving-kindness to pursue the poor.” See also Taanit 24a as discussed in footnote 40 above, that Elazar of the village of Birta would chase after charity collectors.

will save them; but in a disaster the faithless will be trapped.” (Prov. 11:4–6).⁶¹ It is brought in the Zohar I:104a on the parsha Vayeira (Gen. 18:1–22:24) on the verse, “Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years” (Gen. 18:11): “When the Holy One, Blessed be He, loves the son of man, before [the man] receives judgment, He sends him a gift. This gift is a poor miserable man, so that the man beloved by G-d will gain merit by giving charity to the poor man and the judgment against him will fail.”⁶² Hear from this that the charity needs to always be given before judgment comes upon the giver, because we don’t placate someone at the time of his anger (Pirkei Avot 4:18), i.e., if G-d is angry at a person, that isn’t the time to try to placate Him. This is the meaning of “wealth is of no avail on the day of wrath,” that even if [a person facing judgment] will then give charity it won’t avail him, but in fact the “charity” given previously will “save from death” (Prov. 11:4). “The righteousness (i.e., charity) of the blameless man”—someone who is accustomed to doing righteousness—“will straighten his path” (Prov. 11:5) means that a poor person chanced upon him (i.e., in his path) prior to the judgment, and the blameless man gained merit by giving charity to the poor person. But in fact, “the wicked man will fall by his wickedness” (Prov. 11:5), i.e., the opportunity to perform this mitzvah won’t chance upon [the wicked person] in order to give him merit. This is the meaning of “the righteousness (i.e., charity) of the upright will save them” (Prov. 11:6).⁶³

וְהָכָא נִמְי אָמַר הַכְּתוּב הוֹאִיל וְשׁ כִּפְּהָ פְּרָשָׁה, שְׁנוֹתָנֹת לְכֹל עֲנִי אֶף עַל פִּי שֵׁשׁ לְהִסְתַּפֵּק בּוֹ שֶׁהוּא רַמְאִי. וּמִתְמַרְתָּ עַל עֲצָמָה לִיתֵן לוֹ אֵינָה דְבָר וְשִׁלָּא לְהַשְׁיבוּ רִיקָם מִחֻמַּת הַסְּפֵק. בְּשִׁבְלִי זֶה, מְצֻנָה גּוֹרְרַת מְצֻנָה, שֶׁהִקְבִּ"ה יִזְמֵן לָהּ בְּדַעְתָּהּ לְשִׁלוֹם לְאַבְרָהָם עַד דְּלֹא יִתִּי דִּינָא לְעַלְמָא. שֶׁהָרִי הָאֲבִיוֹן הוּא בְּנֻדָּא מוֹצְרָה, וְצִדְקָה רְאוּיָהּ הִיא לְקַבֵּל עָלֶיהָ שְׂכָר.

But the verse says that “her palm is opened,” that she gives, i.e., offers charity to every poor person, even though there might be reason to doubt whether one is a cheater. She is strict upon herself to give at least something to him and not to turn him away empty-handed because of the doubt. Because of this offering to give at least a token amount to every poor person, one good deed leads to another; thus the Holy One, Blessed be He, will arrange for her to give to an actual impoverished person, so that a bad judgment won’t ever come to her.

⁶¹ The three verses all use the word *tzedakah* (צדקה), which can mean either “righteousness” or “charity.” In the first verse I have translated the word as “charity,” as a parallel to “wealth.” In the second and third verses I have used “righteousness,” as being more general, though Rabbi Nachmani shows later that he is applying these verses with reference to charity.

⁶² G-d sent three angels to announce that Sarah would give birth to a son. (Gen. 18:1-16). Abraham first thought the angels were poor men, and he brought them into his tent and attended to their needs. (Id.). G-d then revealed that He planned to destroy Sodom (Gen. 18:17–23), which would have killed Abraham's nephew, Lot. The Zohar’s interpretation is that G-d wanted to give Abraham the chance to gain merit, so He sent the three angels to Abraham in the guise of men. Abraham responded charitably, gaining merit, and as a reward G-d saved Lot from death. *Zera Shimshon* paraphrases the Zohar.

⁶³ Charity given after a person has a crisis will not help him. But if he accustoms himself to give charity, by offering a small quantity to every poor person (even when uncertain if the person is legitimately poor), then G-d will reward him by putting in his path a genuinely impoverished person. The giving of charity to the truly impoverished person will serve as a great merit in the event of any future crisis, to shield him from that judgment.

This impoverished person is indeed needy, and with her gift of charity to him, she is fit to receive a reward.

ועוד יש לומר שלעני שאינו כל כך מוצרך, פורשת לו פפה בסתר ובהצנע, ואינה מגבשת ידה ונרועותיה קלל, כדי שלא יתבייש אם יראו אחרים תנועת ידה. אמנם לאביון שאדרבא הוא צריך לכל הבריות, שולחת לו ידה שמגביהתו כדי שיראו האנשים וילמדו ממנה ליתן לו מתנות וצדקה.

It is also worthwhile to say that for a poor person who is not so needy, she opens her palm for him secretly and modestly, and she doesn't lift up her hands and her arms at all, in order that he won't be embarrassed if others see the movement of her hands. In fact, for the impoverished person who needs help from everyone, she sends her hands to him, she raises them so that people will see her actions and learn from her to give him gifts and charity.

"לא-תירא לביתה משלג כי כל-ביתה לבש שנים." כתב הש"ך על פסוק "הבא-נא ידך בתיקה . . . והנה ידו מצרעת בשלג", ובמצורע לא נאמר בו שלג אלא במרים, לומר שאינו מסתרא דשמאלא אלא דין מצד הרחמים, בשלג שהיא רחמים לעולם ויש בו קצת דין נסתר עכ"ל. ובנדאי שפוננה דעתו לדעת הרב שפירא ז"ל בדירוש רפ"ח ניצוצין שנפלו של"ג אורות בקליפות ועיי"ש. והם דינים לפי שהם מעורבים בקליפות, אבל עם כל זה הם דינים מצד הרחמים, שהרי האורות האלו לא נפלו אלא לקיום העולמות כנודע אצלנו.

"She will not worry for her household because of sheleg (שלג); for her whole household is clothed in shanim (שנים)." (Prov. 31:21). A literal translation is: "She will not worry for her household because of snow; for her whole household is clothed in scarlet [wool]."

First explanation – Kabbalistic: An advance summary of this Kabbalistic explanation may be appropriate, given the challenging material. The word *shanim* (שנים) is a plural form that could mean either "scarlet" or "years." No ambiguity would have existed had the singular form been used, either *shani* (שני) for "scarlet," or *shana* (שנה) for "year." Being clothed in "scarlet" is usually interpreted as being clothed in wool garments that are dyed a scarlet color, and this translation makes sense, as wool would provide a physical protection against snow. However, it is noted that the singular form of "snow" (*sheleg*) is used in the verse, contrasting with the plural nature of the word *shanim*. Shabbat 89b notes that the same singular/plural mismatch (*sheleg* and *shanim*) appears in Isaiah 1:18, and quotes Rabbi Yitzchak that *shanim* in that verse of Isaiah means "years." Rabbi Nachmani thus also adopts "years" for *shanim* for Proverbs 31:21, and uses a Kabbalistic translation of *sheleg* to arrive at: "She will not worry for her household because of the (judgment associated with) 333 (lights from Creation); for her whole household is clothed in the merits that she has acquired over a course of years."

The Shach comments on the verse, "The L-rd said to him further, 'Put your hand into your bosom,' Moses put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, his hand was leprous as snow" (Ex. 4:6). He writes: "With regard to leprosy, [the Torah] speaks about it only in one

other place as being ‘like snow’ and that is with regard to Miriam (Num. 12:10).⁶⁴ The intent is to say that [the leprosy that afflicted Moses and Miriam] was not from the left side (*sitra d’smola*) of the Sefirot tree, representing strict judgment, rather it was judgment from the right side of the Sefirot tree, representing mercy,⁶⁵ like snow that is always merciful, in that it waters the earth, although there is within [snow] some hidden judgment, in that the extreme cold can be injurious.”⁶⁶

It is certain that his opinion is like the opinion of Rabbi Natan Shapira,⁶⁷ of blessed memory, in his commentary on the essay of Rabbi Chaim Vital⁶⁸ entitled “The Gate of 288 Sparks,” that 333 lights fell in *klipot* (husks or shells), and see there what he says.⁶⁹ [The lights] judge according to being intermingled with the *klipot*, but nevertheless they judge from the side of mercy, as these lights fell only to create the worlds, as is known to those of us who are learned in Kabbalah.

וְאָמַר הַפְּתוּב "לֹא-תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשְׁלֵג", לֹא תִירָא מִהַדְיָנִים וּמִהַקְּלִיפּוֹת אֲשֶׁר כָּל כּוֹחַם בָּא מִשְׁלֵג אִוְרוֹת אֱלֹהִים, יַעַן "כָּל-בֵּיתָה לְבֶשׂ שָׁנִים". וּמִלֵּת "שָׁנִים" הֵינּוּ כִּדְאִיתָא בְּפֶרֶק ט' דְּשִׁבְתָּהּ, "אִם-יְהִיֹו חֲטָאִיכֶם כְּשָׁנִים", כְּשָׁנִי מִבְּעֵי לֵיהּ. אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר הַקַּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אִם יְהִיֹו חֲטָאִיכֶם כְּשָׁנִים הִלְלוּ שְׁסֻדְרוֹת וּבְאוֹת מִשְׁשֵׁת יָמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית וְעַד עֶכְשָׁיו, "כְּשֵׁלֵג יִלְבִּינוּ" עכ"ל.

The verse says: “She will not worry for her household because of snow,” i.e., reading the Hebrew word for snow, *sheleg*, for its Gematria value of 333, she won’t worry about the judging forces and the husks, of which all their force comes from these 333 lights, for her whole household is clothed in *shanim*. The word “*shanim*” is as brought in the ninth chapter of Shabbat (pages 86a and 89b), on the verse “if your sins will be like *shanim*, like snow they will be whitened” (Isaiah 1:18). In Shabbat 86a, the Mishnah discusses Lev. 16:8, where a scapegoat is dispatched to Azazel, and identifies Isaiah 1:18 as the source for learning that one ties a scarlet strip of wool to the head of that scapegoat. In Shabbat 89b, the Gemara asks why Isaiah

⁶⁴ Chapter 13 of Leviticus speak about leprosy creating lesions that are white, and the Mishnah (Negaim 1:1) explains this means like snow, but the Torah explicitly uses the term “like snow” only in the verses about Moses and Miriam.

⁶⁵ Kabbalah recognizes ten Sefirot (attributes or emanations), which are sometimes illustrated as a tree. The central column (trunk) of the tree, which is considered balanced, includes the first, sixth, ninth, and tenth Sefirot: Keter, Tiferet, Yesod, and Malchut. The right column, which is considered as “the pillar of mercy,” includes the second, fourth, and seventh Sefirot: Chochmah, Chesed, and Netzach. The left column, which is considered as “the pillar of severity,” includes the third, fifth, and eighth Sefirot: Binah, Gevurah, and Hod.

⁶⁶ Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Sifte Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

⁶⁷ Rabbi Natan Shapira (1585-1633), Polish rabbi and Kabbalist.

⁶⁸ Rabbi Chaim Vital (1542-1620) was the principal student of the Arizal, Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-72).

⁶⁹ The first two verses of the Torah read: “In the beginning of G-d’s creating the heavens and the earth, when the earth was chaos and void, and darkness was on the surface of the depths, and the sovereignty of G-d hovered [*merachefet* (מִרְחַפֶּת)] above the surface of the waters.” Rabbi Vital relates the Arizal’s teachings that the word *merachefet* (מִרְחַפֶּת) is a compound of two words, *met* (מת) (died) and *rapach* (רָפַח) (288), and that it signified that vessels of chaos had shattered (died) into 288 fragments.

Rabbi Shapira’s commentary, on the fourth section of the essay, is: “It also appears in my humble opinion that if one combines . . . the Gematria of מ”ה [the abbreviation for the Attribute of Mercy] (i.e., 45) with the number 288 it adds up to the Gematria of *sheleg* (333).” I.e., that the judging forces of the 333 lights include not only the 288 shards of the broken vessels but also include a component of mercy (45).

1:18 uses the plural form *shanim*, noting it should be *shani*, the singular form of scarlet. **Rabbi Yitzchak said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel, “Even if your sins will be as numerous as those *shanim* (years) that have proceeded continuously from the six days of Creation until now, ‘they will nevertheless become white like snow’.”** I.e., Rabbi Yitzchak interpreted *shanim* as “years,” rather than as “scarlet.”

וּפִירְשׁוּ הַמְפָרְשִׁים דְּמִדְּלָא כְּתִיב "כְּשֵׁלְגִים יִלְבִּינוּ" אֵלָּא "כְּשֵׁלְג", אִם כֵּן כְּשָׁנֵי מִבְּעֵי לִיהּ וְכוּ'. וְהָכִי נָמִי מִדְּכַתְּבַב בְּתַחֲלָה "לְבֵיתָהּ מִשֵּׁלְג" לְשׁוֹן יְחִיד, הֵנָּה לִיהּ לְסִיָּים נָמִי כִּי כָּל בֵּיתָהּ לְבוּשׁ שָׁנִי.

Commentators noted the question of the Gemara on Isaiah 1:18 **that regarding the sins, it doesn’t read “like snows they will be whitened,” but rather “like snow,” and therefore it should say “*shani*,”** i.e., the singular form of scarlet. **Here too, as the beginning of the verse, “she will not worry for her house because of snow,” is in the singular form, therefore it should conclude “for her whole household is clothed in *shani* (scarlet).”**

אֵלָּא וְדַאי שָׁבָא לְרִמּוּז שְׁלֵא תִירָא מֵאֵלוּ הַדֵּינִים כְּמִסְפֵּר שֶׁל"ג שָׁהֵם שׁוֹרָשׁ וְחַיּוֹת שֶׁל כָּל הַדֵּינִים כּוּלָּם. יַעֲן "כִּי כָל-בֵּיתָהּ לְבוּשׁ שָׁנִים", כְּלוֹמֵר שֶׁתִּיקוֹן יְמֵיהָ וּמַעֲשֵׂיהָ וּשְׂבוֹתֶיהָ וְזִכּוֹתֶיהָ, הֵם כְּמוֹ מִלְבוּשׁ טְהוֹר לְנִשְׁמָה שְׁלֵה. כְּנוֹדַע בְּסוּד, "וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו", כְּדֹאִיתָא בְּזוֹהַר פְּרָשַׁת וַיְחִי (דָּף רַכ"ד וְרַכ"ו) וְעֵי"ש. וְכֵשֶׁם שֶׁמִּלְבוּשִׁים שֶׁל אָדָם מְגִינִים מִן הַחֹרֶף וְהַשֵּׁלֶג, כִּךָּ מִלְבוּשִׁים שֶׁל הַמְצֻוֹת מְגִינִים מִן הַמִּזִּיקִים.

Rather, it is certain that this verse is hinting that she won’t fear from these 333 judging forces that are the root and life of all judging forces altogether. “For her whole household is clothed in years,” as if to say that she will correct any behavior needing improvement in her days, and in her actions, and in her years, and in her merits, as though they are dressed in purity like her soul. This is known by the esoteric meaning of the verse “Abraham was old, advanced in years” (Gen. 24:1), as is brought in the Zohar, vol. I, page 224 and 226 on the parsha Vayechi (Gen. 47:28–50:26), and see there. The Zohar says that the man who behaves in the path of the Torah merits that his days will be clothed in honor, to be dressed in them in the World-to-Come. In the contrary case, one who doesn’t have mitzvot and Torah arrives to the World-to-Come without such spiritual clothing. As the clothing of a man shields him from the winter and the snow, similarly the clothing of the mitzvot shield from damaging forces.⁷⁰

וְאָמַר "בֵּיתָהּ", לְרִמּוּז שֶׁזִּכּוֹתָהּ יַעֲמוּד לְבִנֶיהָ אַחֲרֶיהָ, כְּדֹאֲמַרְיֵנוּ בְּפֶרֶק כ"ג דְּשִׁבְתָּ, לְעוֹלָם יִבְקֹשׁ אָדָם רַחֲמִים עַל מַדָּה זוֹ, שְׂאֵם הוּא לֹא בָּא, בָּא בְּנוּ, וְאֵם בְּנוּ לֹא בָּא, וְכוּ'.

[Our verse] says “she will not fear for her house,” to hint that her merit will stand for her children after her, as it is written in the 23rd chapter of Shabbat (151b): “It was taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says: A person should always request Divine mercy with

⁷⁰ This could refer to a person’s position in the World-to-Come, or perhaps it alternatively (or in addition) means in this world, as the next paragraph discusses poverty.

regard to the condition [of poverty], for if he does not come to a state of poverty, his son will, and if his son does not come to such a state, [his grandson will].”

ועל דרך הפשט נוכל לומר לפי שדרך בני אדם להתחלש ולהתעצל בימי הקור והחורף, כמו שפירשו המפרשים על פסוק "והוא ירד והכה את הארי בתוך הבור ביום השלג. קא משמע לן קרא שזאת האשת חיל לא תתירא ולא תתעצל כלל מהקור והחורף. "לא תירא לביטה משלג", שכן דרך הכתוב לקרוא להקור בשם שלג, כמו הפסוק הנ"ל "ביום השלג", וכמו "כצנת שלג ביום קציר", וכמה פסוקים אחר.

Second explanation – plain meaning: According to the plain meaning, one is able to say that it is according to human nature to become weak and lazy in the days of cold and winter, as the commentators noted on the verse “[Beniah the son of Jehoiada] . . . descended into the pit and struck the lion on a snowy day” (I Chron. 11:22).⁷¹ Therefore, our verse is telling us that this woman of valor will not worry and will not be lazy at all from the cold and the winter. “She will not worry for her household because of snow,” as it is the manner of the Torah to refer to cold weather as snow, as in the verse mentioned above “on a snowy day” (I Chron. 11:22), and as in the verse, “like the chill of snow on a harvest day” (Prov. 25:13), and in a few other verses.

ולמה לא תירא מהקור? כי כל-ביטה לבש שנים", כדאמרין בגמרא על פסוק "לפני קרתו מי יעמד", יתיר חד כסו וצינתא אזלת. ומשום הכי אמר "שנים" בלשון רבים ולא "שני" בלשון יחיד. ומנהג האשה ללבוש בגדי צבעונים כדאמרין בפירק ערבי פסחים ובפירק המדיר. והעקר הוא שהולכת בדרך חכמה לקיים מה שצאמר "צנים פחים בדרך עקש שומר נפשו ירחק מהם".

Why is it “she will not worry” from the cold? “For her whole household is clothed in scarlet [wool],” as it says in the Gemara on the verse, “He sends hail like crumbs; who can endure His coldness?” (Ps. 147:17), that people add one layer of clothing and the cold goes away (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 53b). It is because of this that our verse reads “*shanim*” (scarlet) in the plural form and not “*shani*” (scarlet) in the singular form, because people add multiple layers of clothing during cold weather. The custom of a woman is to wear colorful clothing, as it says in Arvei Pesachim and in HaMadir.⁷² The principal is that [the woman of valor] walks

⁷¹ The commentary of Rabbi David Altshuler of Prague (1687–1769), *Metzudat David* (published 1753), notes on I Chron. 11:22: “The nature of the lion is to strengthen itself on cold days, while the nature of the man is to restrain himself from vital actions as it grows cold.” This follows the commentary of Rabbi Levi ben Gerson (“the RaLBaG,” or “Gersonides”) (1288-1344), French Talmudist, philosopher, mathematician, physician, and astronomer, who wrote (on the parallel verse, II Sam. 23:23) that man weakens from the cold.

⁷² Arvei Pesachim refers to the tenth chapter of Pesachim, which begins on page 99b. The specific reference is to page 109a, where Rav Yosef teaches that before every festival, a man should bring happiness to his wife and daughters by giving them new clothing: “in Babylonia with colored clothes; in the Land of Israel with pressed linen clothes.”

HaMadir refers to the seventh chapter of Ketubot, which begins on page 70a. The specific reference is to page 71a-b, discussing a vow of affliction such as a woman vowing not to wear colorful clothing.

It seems anachronistic to cite to the Gemara, which was written 1400 years after King Solomon wrote Proverbs. The Torah itself provides support for women to wear colorful clothing, later discussing in Prov. 31:22 that the woman

in the ways of wisdom, to fulfill what is written, “Chills⁷³ [and] snares are in the path of the crooked; he who values his life will keep far from them” (Prov. 22:5).

ועוד אפשר שאמר "שנים" לרמזו לת' עלמין דכסופא דירתין צדיקייא, שמלת שני"ם בגמטריא ת'.

Third explanation – Kabbalistic: It is also possible that it says “shanim” to hint at the 400 worlds that the righteous inherit,⁷⁴ as the word “shanim” has a Gematria of 400. The woman of valor does not need to worry about the judging forces, because she has the protection of 400 worlds.

"מַרְבָּדִים עֲשֵׂתָהּ-לָהּ" וכו'. כָּשֶׁם שֶׁבְּאִשָּׁה זֹנָה מִצִּינּוֹ "מַרְבָּדִים רַבְדָּתִי עֲרָשִׁי . . . נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכָּבִי מֵרְאֵהִים וְקִנְמוֹן", כִּי הָאִשָּׁה כְּשֶׁרָה מְבִיאָה בַעֲלָהּ לִידֵי רִצּוֹן טוֹב שֶׁיִּזְדַּקֵּק עִמָּה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם. כִּדְאָמְרִינוּ בְּסוּף פֶּרֶק ב' דְּהַנְּדָרִים כֹּל אָדָם שֶׁאִשְׁתּוֹ תוֹבַעְתּוֹ דְּהֵינּוּ דְאֲרִצּוֹנֵי אֲרִצּוֹנֵי קַמִּיָּה הֵנִיחַ לוֹ בְּנִים שֶׁאִפִּילוֹ בְּדוֹרוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם לֹא הָיוּ כְּמוֹתָם.

“She made coverlets for herself; linen and [the fragrant dye] argaman are her dress.”
(Prov. 31:22).

First explanation – Argaman as a fragrance: Just as with a woman of ill repute we find her quoted, “I layered my couch with coverlets⁷⁵ of dyed Egyptian linen; I perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon” (Prov. 7:16-17), similarly, by making coverlets to adorn her bed, the proper woman brings her husband into the hands of good desire, that he will desire her for the sake of Heaven.⁷⁶ As it says at the end of the second chapter in Nedarim (20b), “Any man whose wife demands of him that he be intimate with her will have children the likes of whom did not exist even in the generation of our teacher Moses, peace be upon him.”

ועוד, "שש וארגמן לבושה", יש לה חלוק של שש לעדן הבשר, וארגמן שרצה לומר מין בושם שיש לו ריח טוב, כמו שפירש רש"י בפרק ט' דשבת (דף צ') על ההיא דתנו רבנן המוציא ארגמן טוב כל שהוא.

Further, “linen and argaman are her dress,” means that she has a slip of linen to be soft against the skin, and argaman means a type of fragrance that has a pleasing scent.⁷⁷ Rashi commented in the ninth chapter of Shabbat (page 90a)—where the rabbis taught that

of valor also wears *argaman*, interpreted both as a fragrance and also a purple dye. The Mevuar edition suggests that Rabbi Nachmani is pointing out that because a husband would buy his wife clothing before festivals, she would have plenty of garments available in times of dangerous cold.

⁷³ The word is frequently translated as “thorns,” but is translated as “chills” by Rashi (in his commentary on the verse in Bava Batra 144b). It is also translated as “chills” in the commentary on Proverbs by the RaLBaG.

⁷⁴ Zohar III:288a, on the parsha Ha’Azinu (Deut. 32:1–32:52).

⁷⁵ The word *מרבד* (*marvad*) (coverlet) appears only one other time in Scripture, also in Proverbs. The rarity of the word inspired Rabbi Nachmani to find a parallel between the two verses.

⁷⁶ I.e., for procreation, or at least for strengthening the marriage bond.

⁷⁷ The most common use of *argaman* was as a purple dye, but we learned in the last verse that women wore colorful garments, so there would be no novelty to interpret the verse that women wore purple. Interpreting *argaman* as a fragrance would be a novelty and would also parallel Prov. 7:17, that the woman of valor is using fragrance so that her husband will desire her.

one who on the Sabbath takes out any amount of good argaman from one domain to another is liable for having sinned—that it is argaman’s utility as a fragrance that makes it a violation to transfer even the smallest of quantities.

ועוד יש לומר דהשש לבד מעדן הבשר והארגמן הוא תכשיט של בגדי צבעונים הראויים לאשה. והשש הוא לבוש מבפנים סמוך לבשר, והארגמן הוא מבחוץ.

Second explanation – Argaman as a dye: **One could say as above that the linen is soft against the skin, but consider that the argaman is an adornment of colorful clothing that is suitable for a woman. I.e., the linen is an undergarment worn against the skin while the argaman is worn as an outer garment.**

ובזה יש לפרש הפסוק "המלבשכם שני עם-עדנים". שרצה לומר ששאויל הנה מלבישים בגדי צבעונים מבחוץ וכלי פשתן מבפנים, ונקראו "עדנים" לפי שהפשתן מעדן הבשר. ומקום הניחו לנו במפרשים ז"ל.

With this understanding, we can explain the verse from David’s eulogy, “Daughters of Israel, Weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and gentle things” (II Sam. 1:24). That means that Saul dressed them in colorful outer garments, and in undergarments of linen,⁷⁸ and the latter were called “gentle things” because linen is soft against the skin.⁷⁹ There is room for us to interpret that verse among the commentators of blessed memory.

נודע בשערים בעלה" וכו'. יש לדקדק מהו "ארגן", דהנה לו לומר "בשבתו עם-זקנים". ועוד למה דנקא "בשבתו עם-זקני-ארגן" אז "נודע בשערים"?

“Her husband is known in the gates; as he sits with the elders of the land.” (Prov. 31:23). We should scrutinize what is meant by “sits with the elders of the land,” as [King Solomon] could have simply said “sits with elders.” Furthermore, why specifically by sitting with the elders of the land is he known in the gates?

וגיש לומר דאמרינו בפרק ז' דיומא, "יראת ה' טהורה עומדת לעד", אמר רבי נחוניא ז"ל הלומד תורה בטרה. מאי היא? נושא אשה נאחרי כן לומד תורה.

One can say, as in the seventh chapter of Yoma (72b): “Regarding the verse, ‘Fear of the L-rd is pure, standing forever’ (Ps. 19:10), Rabbi Nehunia⁸⁰ said, ‘This is one who learns

⁷⁸ King Saul wanted Jewish women to have attractive outer garments so that they would be able to find husbands, and he wanted them to have soft undergarments so that they would be comfortable.

⁷⁹ Other commentators translated the word עדנים (*adanim*) in II Sam. 1:24 as “ornaments,” but Rabbi Nachmani proposes a translation as “gentle things,” as then that verse would provide support for his interpretation of our verse that the woman of valor wears linen undergarments.

⁸⁰ Modern printed editions of the Talmud have “Rabbi Hanina,” as do most manuscripts. However, the Guadalajara (Spain) printing c. 1488 has “Rabbi Nehunia,” and Munich cod. hebr. 6 has “Rabbi Hunia.”

Torah in purity,’ for he won’t forget what he has learned. **What is the meaning of this term, ‘to learn in purity’? One first marries a woman and afterwards learns Torah.** Since he is married, his heart won’t be occupied with thoughts of sin, which could lead him to become impure.”

ובפרק קמא דקידושין אמרינן דר' יוחנן אמר ריחים בצנארו ונעסוק בתורה? ומתריץ הא לן וקא להו, ופירש רש"י, בגי בקל היו הולכים ללמוד משניות התנאים בארץ ישראל, ומתוך שהם לומדים חוץ למקומם אין צרכי הבית מוטלים עליהם, ומשום הכי נושא אשה ואחרי כן לומד תורה. ובגין ארץ ישראל הלומדים במקומם, אם נושא אשה יהיו צרכי הבית מוטלים עליו ויבטלוהו.

In the first chapter of Kiddushin (29b), it says that Rabbi Yochanan said, “There’s a yoke around his neck to have to support a wife, and yet he’ll still be able to learn Torah?” [Rabbi Yochanan’s] solution to this difficulty is that in his time, which was 1150-1200 years after King Solomon’s time, there was one law for Babylonia and another law for the Land of Israel. Rashi explains: the sons of Babylonia would travel to learn the Mishnayot of the Tannaim in the Land of Israel, and since they were learning outside their country, the need to support their household was not imposed upon them,⁸¹ and because of this they were able to marry a woman and afterward learn Torah. But regarding the sons of the Land of Israel, who learn Torah in their own country, if they were to marry a wife, the needs of the household would be imposed upon them and they would waste time earning a living and wouldn’t be able to learn Torah. I.e., even in Rabbi Yochanan’s time, the Torah scholars of the Land of Israel typically had to support their wives, and that would have also been true in King Solomon’s time. Therefore they would generally first learn Torah and afterward marry, which would mean that they wouldn’t be learning in purity. Thus, “elders of the land” is taken to stress that even though they lived in conditions that generally precluded marrying before learning, the industriousness of the woman of valor allowed her husband to do just that.

ואמר הכתוב "נודע בשערים בעלה". היא מספקת במעשה ידיה לתכשיטיה, שהרי "מרבדים עשתה־לה", עשתה ממנש בגדיה. ולכן בעלה יכול לישא אשה תחלה ואחרי כן ללמוד תורה בטרה, ובזה תורתו תעמוד לו לעד. ויהיה "נודע בשערים", שתהיה תורתו שגורה בפיו אפילו בשבתו "עם־זקני־ארץ" דהיינו בארץ ישראל. שאף שם יהיה יכול ללמוד בלא תרהור, זקני הארץ דוקא.

The verse says: “her husband is known in the gates.” The actions of her hands provide enough in the way of ornamentation, as she “made coverlets for herself”⁸²—and as the word “made” means literally with her own hands. Therefore, thanks to her industriousness, her husband was able to marry a wife first and afterward learn Torah in purity, so that his Torah would last forever. It says that he will be known in the gates, because his Torah will be fluent in his mouth. This is true even when sitting with elders of the land, which refers to the Land

⁸¹ I.e., in Rabbi Yochanan’s time, married women in Babylonia were expected to support themselves while their husbands traveled to the Land of Israel to learn Torah.

⁸² The poem has previously detailed her industriousness in providing for the physical needs of herself and her family (Prov. 34:13-15), but this verse also shows the spiritual benefits that are attained thanks to her efforts.

of Israel. Even there, he will be able to learn without impure thoughts, literally [with] elders of the land.

ואם תאמר כל זה ניקחא מה שצריך לה לתכשיטיה, אמנם מה שצריך למזונותיה צריך הוא לטרום אסר זה ונקרא ריחים בצנארו, לזה בא כמתרץ ואמר. . .

If you will say, this contribution to her husband's ability to learn all depends on what is needed for her ornaments, and that he still needs to toil for what is needed for her food, and that is called "a yoke around his neck," regarding this a solution arrives and says . . .

"סדין עשתה ותמכר" וכו', שמלבד שהיתה עושה כל צרכי תכשיטיה, היתה גם כן עושה ומוכרת לצורך מזונותיה.

"She makes linen cloth and sells it; and a belt she gives to the Canaanite [merchant]." (Prov. 31:24). **Besides attending to her needs of ornaments, she also makes and sells items for her food requirements.**

והטעם שסדין אמר "ותמכר" דמשמע שהיא היתה מוכרת מש. ובתגור אמר "ותגור נתנה לפנעני", שאינה מוכרת בעצמה.

Regarding linen cloth, it says "she . . . sells it," and the meaning is that she was literally selling. But regarding a belt, it says "a belt she gives to the Canaanite," and the meaning is that she is not selling the belt by herself.

יש לומר שהסדין הוא דבר הצריך לכל נפש, על כן היתה מוכרתו היא בעצמה. אמנם התגור שיש נשים שלוקחות אותו לזנות, כמו שפרש מהרש"א א בפרק ו' דשבת על שהיא ד' ותסתת תגורה נקפה", מקום שהיו חוגרות בצלצול וכו'. וכמו שפצינו בסוטה, היא חגרה לו בצלצול וכו'. ויש לומר שם, שצריך נשים זונות חוגרות בו להתנאות עכ"ל. משום הכי אמר "ותגור נתנה לפנעני", דהינו תגרא, ופשוטו משמע נכרי שהוא ימכור לנכריות.

First explanation: **That is to say, linen cloth is something needed by every person, and therefore she sells it herself. Actually, [regarding] the belt, there are women who purchase it for immorality, as explained by the commentary of the Maharsha on the sixth chapter of Shabbat (62b). The Gemara includes a discussion of punishment for sins, and quotes Isaiah regarding a Jewish woman who is haughty, that G-d will punish her so that "in place of a belt, [she will need to wear] a [less fashionable] rope (nikpeh)" (Isaiah 3:24). Noting the unusual word for "rope," the Gemara quotes Rabba bar Ulla that the place where they were girded with a sash became covered with many bruises (nekafim). In Chidushei Agadot for Shabbat 62b, the Maharsha brings a parallel use of the word for "sash," as we find in Sotah (8b), "she girded herself with a sash for him." It is also noted there by the Maharsha "that the way of prostitutes is to make themselves pleasing," with one example being wearing an attractive sash. Therefore it says in our verse, "a belt she gives to the Canaanite"—that is to a merchant—and the plain meaning is a non-Jew, who will sell it to non-Jewish women.**

אי נמי בְּדֶרֶךְ אַחֲרָתָהּ, הַסְדִּין שֶׁהוּא דְבָר הַצָּרִיף לְכָל נֶפֶשׁ וּמִדָּתוֹ שָׁנָה לְכָל אָדָם. הֵיחָת מוֹכְרָתוֹ הִיא בְּעֶצְמָהּ, שָׂאִין לָהּ לֵאמֹר זְמַנָּה בּוֹ. אֲמַנָּם הַחֲגוּר שֶׁמְשַׁתְּמָשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וְנָשִׁים כְּדֹכְתֵיב "בְּחֻגְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִתְנָיו", וְכֹתִיב "וְתַחַת חֲגוּרָה נִקְפָּה", וְצָרִיף שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד יִהְיֶה עֹשֵׂי דְנִקָּא לְמִדָּת גּוּפוֹ, הִיא אֵינָה רוֹצֵה לֵאמֹר זְמַנָּה בְּזָה. אֵלָּא "נִתְּנָה לְפְנֵעֵנִי", דְּמִשְׁמַע תַּגְרָא, שֶׁכָּבֵר יֵשׁ לוֹ הַרְבֵּה מֵהֶם קִטְנִים וְגִדּוּלִים, וְהוּא מוֹכְרוֹ בְּשִׁבְלָהּ כְּשֶׁבָּא אֶצְלוֹ אָדָם אֶחָד שִׁיְהִיָּה עֹשֵׂי לְמִדָּתוֹ.

Second explanation: Viewed in a different way, linen cloth is something needed by everyone, and a bolt of cloth with a uniform measurement will be useful for everyone.⁸³ Thus, she sells [the linen cloth] by herself, for she will not lose any time by doing so. Actually, the belt is something that is used by both men and by women, as it is written for men “on the girdle of his loins” (I Kings 2:5), and as it is written for women, “in place of a belt, [she will wear] a rope” (Isaiah 3:24). But every belt needs to be made specifically for the measure of the customer’s body, so she doesn’t want to waste her time on this. Rather, “she gives it to the Canaanite,” meaning to a merchant, who already has many of them, both small ones and big ones, and he will sell the belt for her, when a particular person comes to him who is the right size for that belt.⁸⁴

וְעוֹד מִשׁוֹם צְנִיעוּת אֵינָה רוֹצֵה לְהִתְעַסֵּק עִם הָאֲנָשִׁים עַד שִׁיְהִיָּה כְּמִדָּתָם.

Third explanation: Furthermore, because of modesty, she doesn’t want to occupy herself with men, measuring them until [the belts] will be sized for them.

“עֵז-וְהֶדֶר לְבוּשָׁה” וְכוּ'. הִיא גּוֹמְנֵת רְשׁוֹת לְבַעֲלָהּ לִילָף לְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה, כְּאֲשֶׁתוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, וּמְחַמַּת זֶה זֹכָה גַם הִיא בְּתוֹרַת בְּעֻלָּהּ, כְּדֹאֲמַרִּינוּ הַתָּם, שְׁלִי וְשְׁלֵכֶם שְׂלָהּ הִיא. וְגִדּוּלָהּ הַבְּטָחָה שֶׁהִבְטִיחָן הַקַּב"ה לְנָשִׁים יוֹתֵר מֵהָאֲנָשִׁים.

“She is clothed in strength and splendor; and she will laugh at the final day.” (Prov. 31:25). She gives permission to her husband to go to a study hall to learn Torah, like the wife of Rabbi Akiva,⁸⁵ and because of this she will also merit in her husband’s Torah, as it says there that Rabbi Akiva told his students, “That which is mine and that which is yours, belongs

⁸³ Many translations of Prov. 31:24 render סָדִין (*sadin*) as “linen clothing,” but clothing needs to be sized for the wearer. The less common translation, “linen cloth,” makes more sense, because this could be a uniform width, perhaps sold by the bolt, with the purchaser then having it made into a garment by a third party.

⁸⁴ Our verse uses the singular form both for “linen cloth” and “belt.” While she certainly would make more than one piece of cloth and one belt, the singular form is interpreted by Rabbi Nachmani as meaning that she makes only one style and size of a belt.

⁸⁵ Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef (c. 50-135) was a leading contributor to the Mishnah. The Talmud relates that he was an unlearned shepherd working for a wealthy man, when his boss’s daughter recognized Akiva’s good character traits and married him. She pushed him to go learn Torah, and he stayed away 24 years, finally returning to her with his 24,000 students, telling them that all of his accomplishments and their accomplishments were thanks to her.

to her” (Nedarim 50a). **The Holy One, Blessed be He, has made a greater promise to women than to men for an easy future.**⁸⁶

ועוד, "שנא לך מן שפימי קום", אלו נשותיהן של תלמידי חכמים שמנדדות שינה מעיניהן בעולם הזה והקב"ה משביען וכו'.

It also says, “In vain do you rise early and stay up late, you who toil for the bread you eat; He provides sleep for His loved ones” (Ps. 127:2). Rabbi Yitzchak explains in Yoma 77a that **“these are the wives of Torah scholars, who disturb their sleep” from their eyes “in this world”** by staying up waiting for their husbands, **and the Holy One, Blessed be He, rewards them by giving them merit in the World-to-Come.**

וכך המצוות שעושה האדם בעולם הזה הם מלבושים רוחניים לנשמתו. וזהו "עזר והדר לבושה", שעוז הוא זכות דתורה דכתיב, "ה' עז לעמו ויהו". והדר הם המצוות דאמרינו, הידור מצנה עד שליש במצנה, וזה אלי ואננהו" התנאה לפניו במצות.

All of the mitzvot that man does in this world are spiritual clothing for his soul. This is the meaning of “she is clothed in strength and splendor.” The “strength” refers to the merit of Torah, as it is written, “G-d will give strength to His people” (Ps. 29:11). “Splendor” is the mitzvot, as it says that one should spend as much as a third extra to beautify the performance of a mitzvah (Bava Kama 9b), and as it says, “this is my G-d and I will praise Him” (Ex. 15:2), which Shabbat 133b interprets as, “beautify yourself before Him in mitzvot.”

"נתשחק ליום אחרון", שבעולם הזה יש לה צער שרשות אחרים עליה. ואינה סניכת בתורה ובכל המצוות. ואף על פי שיש לה חלק בהם, מכל מקום היא נהנית משל בעלה, לפי שאינה מצווה ועושה. אמנם לאחר מיתה תהיה משחקת שלא תצטרך עוד לחזור בעולם הזה בגלגול כמו האנשים. וזהו "ליום אחרון", אחרון דוקא. אלא תלך מיד למנוחות שאננות, כמו שכתב בספר הגלגולים (כ"י פי"ג) ועיי"ש הטעם. ואפשר שזהו הטעם שנקראו "נשים שאננות".

“She will laugh at the final day” means that in this world she has grief, with others having authority over her, i.e., her father before she marries, and her husband afterward. She is not obliged in all of the Torah and mitzvot but only in what is obliged upon women. Even though she has a portion in these [mitzvot] in which she is obliged,⁸⁷ she also benefits from these [mitzvot] of her husband, because she does things to help him that she is not obliged to do. Indeed, after her death she will laugh that she will not need to return to this world in a

⁸⁶ Berachot 17a: “Greater is the promise for the future made by the Holy One, Blessed be He, to women than to men, as it is stated: ‘Rise up, women at ease; hear My voice, confident daughters, listen to what I say’ (Isaiah 32:9). This promise of ease and confidence is not given to men. Rav said to Rabbi Hiyya, ‘By what virtue do women merit to receive this reward?’ Rabbi Hiyya answered, ‘They merit this reward for bringing their children to read the Torah in the synagogue, and for sending their husbands to study Mishnah in the study hall, and for waiting for their husbands until they return from the study hall.’”

⁸⁷ A Jewish woman is obliged to observe only the negative mitzvot and those positive mitzvot that are not time-bound.

reincarnation (*gilgul*) like the men. This is the meaning of “the final day,” literally the final day of her life, when rather than having to return to this world, she will go immediately to a carefree rest, as is says in the Sefer haGilgulim (section 13) and see there the intent.⁸⁸ Perhaps that is the reason why Scripture refers to “carefree women” (Isaiah 32:9).

"פיה פתחה בחכמה". דאמרינו בפרק ו' דברכות, נשים דברגיות הן, שהן מדברות הרבה, וקרא פתיב "נקול פסיל ברב דברים". ועוד פתיב "והסכל נרבה דברים", וכן אמרו ו"ל נשים דעתן קלה.

“She opened her mouth in wisdom; and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” (Prov. 31:26). As it says in the sixth chapter of Berachot (48b), women are chatterers, i.e., they talk a lot, and it is written in Scripture, “so does foolish utterance come with much speech” (Eccl. 5:2). It is also written, “and the fool talks a lot” (Eccl. 10:14) and [Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai], of blessed memory, said that “women are light-headed” (Berachot 33b).

אמנם זאת האשה חזל לא הרבתה דברים, רק היא ממצטת דיבורה, שאינה פותחת פיה אלא נוקא בחכמה, והחכם דבריו מעטים.

In fact, this woman of valor does not talk a lot, but rather minimizes her speech, only opening her mouth in wisdom; and the wise person’s words are few (cf. Eccl. 5:1-2).

ולא די שהיא ממצטת דיבורה, אלא שאף מלמדת לאחרים שימצטו דיבורם עמה, ובנה "תורת-חסד על-לשונה". דברק ד' דסוכה תורה למדה זו היא תורה של חסד. ובפרק ד' דעירובין אמרינו ר' יוסי הגלילי הנה קאזיל באורחא, אשכח לברוריה, אמר לה באינה דרף גלף ללוד? אמרה לו גלילאה שוטה, לא פך אמרו חכמים, אל תרבה שיחה עם האשה, הנה לך לומר באיזו ללוד עכ"ל.

It’s not enough that she minimizes her speech; rather, she opens her mouth only to teach others to limit their talking with her, and in this way, “the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” Thus, in the fourth chapter of Sukkah (49b), it says “Torah studied in order to teach it to others: this is a Torah of kindness.” In the fourth chapter of Eruvin (53b), it says Rabbi Yosi the Galilean⁸⁹ was walking on the path and met Bruriah;⁹⁰ he said to her in four Hebrew words, “On which path do we walk to Lod?”⁹¹ She said to him, “Foolish Galilean,

⁸⁸ *Sefer haGilgulim* was written by Rabbi Chaim Vital. Section 13 says that any sins of women can be corrected in Gehenna after their deaths, whereas men who were engaged in Torah study will not be subject to Gehenna after their deaths and will therefore have to be reincarnated to correct their faults. [Other rabbis believe that women can be reincarnated. For example, Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano lists many women in Gilgulei Neshamot.]

⁸⁹ Rabbi Yosi the Galilean (ca. 1st and 2nd Centuries of the Common Era), was one of the Tannaim whose work was gathered in the Mishnah.

⁹⁰ Bruriah, who was described as being very learned in Torah, was the daughter of Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradion. She was married to Rabbi Meir.

⁹¹ The first edition of *Zera Shimshon* misquoted this in five Hebrew words, "באינה דרף גלף לעיר לוד" (“On which path do we walk to the city of Lod.”) A search of The Friedberg Project for Talmud Bavli Variants, <https://bavli.genizah.org>, does not show any printed editions or manuscripts that contain the extra word “city.” Thus, the translator edited the Hebrew text, omitting the word "עיר" (“the city of”).

didn't the Sages say: 'Do not talk much with women'? You should have said in two Hebrew words: 'Which way to Lod?' ”

"צופיה הליכות ביתה" וכו'. איתא בשלחן ערוך חושן משפט (סי' שלו סעיף י"ט) אין הפועל רשאי להרעיב ולסגף את עצמו מפני ביטול מלאכתו של בעל הבית וכו' עכ"ל. וכן איתא בפרק ז' דדמאי, רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר לא נקשוך מפני שממעט מלאכתו של בעל הבית. ובפרק ח' דקמא אמרינו, השכם ואכול, בקנין מפני התמה, ובחורף מפני הציונה. ואמרי אנשי שתין רהוטי רהוט, ולא מטו לגברא וכו'.

“She watches the ways of her household; and will not eat the bread of idleness.” (Prov. 31:27). It is brought in the Choshen Mishpat section of the Shulchan Aruch (337:19) that a worker does not have permission to go hungry or to deny himself, because that would nullify his ability to do the work of his boss, the homeowner. Similarly, it is brought in the seventh chapter of Mishnayot Demai (7:3), that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said that a person should not refrain from eating a dried fig out of fear that the house owner did not tithe the fruit, because that would reduce the work of the homeowner. In the eighth chapter of [Bava] Kama (92b) it says: “The Sages stated ‘awaken early and eat in the summer because of the heat, and in the winter because of the chill,’ and people say, ‘Sixty runners run but do not catch up to the man who ate in the morning.’”

והאשת חיל צופה ורואה כל הליכות המוטלות עליה בביתה, דהיגו כל צרכי ביתה, ומשום הכי "ולקחם עצלות לא תאכל". לא היתה מתעצלת מלאכול שחרית, כדי שיהיה לה פס לטרום ולפקס בהם ולא תהיה עצלה מתמת חלשות.

The woman of valor watches and sees all **“the ways”** imposed on her in her household—that is, all the needs of her household—and because of this, “will not eat the bread of idleness.” She won’t be idle from eating breakfast, but will eat so that she will have strength to toil and to supervise [the tasks] and not to be idle because of weakness.

"קמו בניה" וכו'. שהבנים מראים היושר של האשה, כדאמרינו בפרק ה' דיומא על רבי ישמעאל בן קמחית, שראתה אמן שני בניה פהגים גדולים ביום אחד. אמרו לה רבנו מה ראית שזכית לכה וכו'? מכאן שהבנים מורים יושר וזכות האם.

“Her children rose and called her happy; her husband, and he praised her.” (Prov. 31:28). The children reflect the woman’s integrity,⁹² as it says in the fifth chapter of Yoma (47a) about Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Kimchit who saw two of her sons serve as High Priest in a single day. The rabbis said to her, “What did you do to merit this?” From here, [we see] the rabbis’ view that the children demonstrate the integrity and merit of the mother.

⁹² The verb קמו (*kamu*) (rose) can be interpreted literally as physically rising, or figuratively as rising to prominence. In Gen. 37:7, Joseph relates his dream, “My sheaf rose and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf.” Rashi interprets the verb there as a physical rising, but we can see that a figurative reading would also work, as Joseph was destined to achieve great stature in Egypt. In Ex. 1:8, “A new king rose over Egypt,” the verb is interpreted figuratively.

וכן מצינו שמימת יצחק נכתבה בתורה, אבל לא מימת רבקה, כדי שלא יקללו הבריות כרם שיצא ממנה עשו.

Likewise, we find that the death of Isaac was written in the Torah, but not the death of Rebecca, so that people wouldn't curse the belly from which Esau came.⁹³

"בעלה וניהלה", כדכתיב "אשת-חיל עטרת בעלה", ואמרינו במדרש על פסוק, "שרי אשתך לא-תקרא את-שמה שרי", בעלה נתעטר בה, והיא לא נתעטרה בבעלה.

“Her husband, and he praised her,” as it is written, “A woman of valor is a crown to her husband,” (Prov. 12:4) and regarding the verse, “G-d said to Abraham, ‘As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah’ ” (Gen. 17:15), it says in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 47:1, “Rabbi Acha said, ‘Her husband is crowned by her, but she is not crowned by her husband.’ ”

וקשה וכי לא גדול זכותו של אברהם משרה, שנתנסה בעשרה נסיונות וכמה דברים אחרים? ויש לומר במאי דפתבו התוספות בכתובות (דף ב') שהאשה נקראת שדה של הבעל, ואין הבעל נקרא שדה שלה. אחר כך אמר . . .

But there is a difficulty: wasn't Abraham's merit greater than that of Sarah, as he experienced ten trials and a number of other things?⁹⁴ **One can say what was written by Tosafot in Ketubot (2b): “that the woman is called a field of the husband, but the husband is not called a field of hers.”** I.e., a man is said to acquire a wife, but a woman is not said to acquire a husband.

After this it says . . .

“רבות בנות עשו חיל.” דאמרינו התם שאמרו לה חכמים לקמחית, הרבה עשו כן ולא הועילו. ואת עלית על-פלגה", שקמח קמחית עלה לגג.

“Many daughters have done well; but you surpass them all.” (Prov. 31:29). As it says there in Yoma 47a, after the rabbis asked Kimchit how she had merited such sons, she said to them, “In all my days, the beams of my house never saw the braids of my hair. The rabbis said to

⁹³ Gen. 35:8-9: “Deborah, Rebecca’s nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named *Alon-bachut* [the tree of weepings]. G-d appeared again to Jacob . . . and He blessed him.” The plural form of “weeping” suggests a double tragedy. Gen. Rabbah 81:5 interprets that Rebecca also died at this time, and that G-d gave Jacob the blessing that one gives to mourners.

Midrash Tanchuma, in the section *Ki Teitzei* 4, says that Rebecca’s bier was carried out secretly, at night. This was done so that Esau wouldn’t come to mourn her, for then people might say, “Cursed are the breasts that fed this wicked person.” Rabbi Yosi bar Rabbi Hanina is quoted there that since her bier was carried out at night, Scripture doesn’t openly record her death, but only does so obliquely.

⁹⁴ *Pirkei Avot* 5:3 states that Abraham experienced ten trials. The Rambam offers a list of which all can be found in Scripture. Other commentators, such as Rabbi Ovadiah of Bertinoro (“the Bartenura”) (c. 1445–c. 1515), offer lists in which some items are listed only in Midrash. *Zera Shimshon* says “ten trials and a number of other things” because ten of the items listed by Rambam, the Bartenura, and others must have been the “ten trials” that *Pirkei Avot* intended, while the remaining items they list must have been “other things” experienced by Abraham.

her,” to Kimchit, “Many acted thus but did not succeed.” King Solomon would say, “But you surpass them all,” i.e., that the fine flour (*kemach*) of Kimchit⁹⁵ (i.e., her sons) “ascends to the roof.”⁹⁶

אי נמי בדרך אחרת, נשים רבות נזדרזו במצות, אבל "את עלית על-פלגה" שזכית אף בתורה. כדתנן ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם.

Also, in an unrelated idea, many women are hurried in performing mitzvot, “but you surpass them all” in that you merited the Torah. As has been taught, “Learning Torah is greater than all other mitzvot.” (Mishnayot Pe’ah 1:1).

אי נמי נקט לשון "בנות" ולא אמר "רבות נשים", משום דאמרין חייב אדם ללמד את בתו תורה. ואף אם "רבות בנות עשו תיל" בתורה, דהיינו שזכו ללמוד, "את עלית על-פלגה", שזכית אף ללמד, כמו שיש נשים ששלמדו את הבנים.

Also, [King Solomon] used the language “daughters” and didn’t say many “women,” because it says “a man is obliged to teach his daughter Torah” (Sotah 20a).⁹⁷ Furthermore, even if many daughters achieve valor in Torah, by meriting to learn, “you surpass them all,” in that you also merited to teach, as there are women who teach the children.

"שקר הסו וקהל היפי" וכו'. קשה מה רצה לומר "שקר הסו", למה הוא שקר?

“The grace is deceptive, and the beauty is illusory; a woman who fears the L-rd, she will be praised.” (Prov. 31:30). A difficulty is what [King Solomon] wants to say by, “the grace is deceptive”—why is it deceptive?

⁹⁵ This is a play on words, based on the similarity of the name “Kimchit” to the word for “fine flour.”

⁹⁶ Yoma 47a: “They said about Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimchit (that his hands were so large) that he would scoop up four kav (of flour, i.e., a volume equal to 96 eggs), (which he would hold) by his handfuls, and say: ‘All the women selected (the best they could for their children,) but the selection of my mother rose to the roof,’ (i.e., my mother chose the best. Some said that Rabbi Yishmael ben Kimchit was referring to himself, as he matured to a great height and stature, while others said he was referring to his mother’s selection of flour, in accordance with the statement of Rabba bar Yonatan, who quoted Rabbi Yechiel that, ‘Flour is beneficial for the sick.’ I.e., since Kimchit ate this flour when she was pregnant, her son grew heartily.”

The Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* suggests that “ascends to the roof” also relates to the High Priesthood because on Yom Kippur, the High Priest immersed five times in a ritual bath, and all (except possibly the first immersion) were done on the roof of a building within the Temple courtyard. Yoma 30a; Mishnayot Yoma 3:3.

⁹⁷ Sota 20a quotes Ben Azzai that “a man is obliged to teach his daughter Torah,” with regard to the laws of the *sotah*. This was not a unanimous view, as Rabbi Eliezer followed by saying, “Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is teaching her *tiflut*.” Rashi interprets *tiflut* as immorality, that she would use Torah knowledge to undermine and violate its precepts, while Rambam interprets *tiflut* as frivolity, that she would not take the Torah learning seriously. The Mishnah in Nedarim 35b says that a man may teach Scripture to his sons and daughters. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 246:6 says that one should not teach his daughter the Oral Law, and that it is preferable that he not even teach her the Written Law, but that if he does teach her the Written Law it is not *tiflut*.

ומהו "נהבֵּל הַיָּפִי", ומה ענין זה עם סוף הפסוק, "אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת־ה' היא תִּתְהַלֵּל"?

What is meaning of “the beauty is illusory,” and how does this relate to the end of the verse, “a woman who fears the L-rd, she will be praised”?

ויוכּוּן בְּמֵאֵי דְאִמְרִינָן בְּיַלְקוּט עַל פְּסוּק "וְהַסֵּד ה' מֵעוֹלָם" וכו', כֹּל מִי שֵׁיֵשׁ לוֹ חֵן בְּיָדוּעַ שֶׁהוּא יִרְאָ שְׂמִימִם. אֲבָל זֶה נִיחָא בְּאַנְשִׁים, אֲבָל בְּנָשִׁים שְׂעָם הַפְּחָל וְהַפְּרוּס וְהַמְכַשִּׁיטִין מֵעֲלוֹת חוֹן, בְּזָה לֹא [נ]וּכַל לְהַכִּיר שֶׁתְּהִיָּה יִרְאַת שְׂמִימִם. לְכֵן אָמַר "הַסֵּן", שֶׁהוּא בָּא לְאִשָּׁה מְדַבְּרִים אֵלָיו, הוּא שָׁקֵר, שֶׁמִּיד שֶׁתְּסִיר מֵעֲלֶיהָ אֵלּוּ הַבְּגָדִים תִּפְשׁוּט אֵף מִהַסֵּן.

It will be understood by what is said in Yalkut Shimoni on Psalms (859:9). On the verse, “But the L-rd’s kindness is everlasting toward those who fear him” (Ps. 103:17), “Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa said that one who has grace is known to fear G-d.” But this was said about men. Regarding women, for whom eye shadow, and makeup, and ornaments give rise to grace, we won’t be able to recognize from this grace that she fears G-d. Therefore, it says that “the grace”—which for a woman possibly comes from these superficial things—is deceptive, that as soon as one would remove this costume from her, the grace would also be removed.⁹⁸

וְאֵף אִם יִהְיֶה לָּהּ יוֹפִי בְּטִבְעָהּ, וּבְגִלְלָהּ זֶה הִיא מוֹצֵאת חוֹן, הַנָּה זֶהוּ הַבֵּל.

Regarding “the beauty is illusory,” **even if she has a natural beauty, and because of this she finds grace** in the eyes of others, **this** impression of grace brought about by her beauty **is illusory**.

אָמְנָם "אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת־ה'" , שְׁנֵה מְבִיא לָּהּ הַסֵּן הָאֲמִיתִי, "הִיא תִּתְהַלֵּל".

Indeed, it is a woman who fears the L-rd—which brings her actual grace—who will be praised.

"תְּנוּי־לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ". הַפֶּל הוֹלֵךְ אַחַר הַחִיתוּם לְשִׁבְחַת זֹאת הָאִשָּׁה. דְּאִמְרִינָן בְּפֶרֶק ג' דְּסוֹטָה, נְהִי דְפָקוּדֵי לֹא מְפָקְדָא, בְּשִׁכְרָ דְמִסְרִינָן בְּנִיחָהּ וּמְנַטְרָן לְגַבְרִיָּהּ מִי לֹא מִיפְלִגָּן בְּהַדְרִיָּהּ, לְכֵן אָמַר "תְּנוּי־לָהּ" הַחֲצִי שֶׁל זְכוּת בְּעֲלָהּ וְתִהְיֶה זֹאת לָּהּ "מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ".

“Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her be praised at the gates by her works.” (Prov. 31:31). **At the conclusion** of the verse, **everything** she does **leads one to praise this woman**. As it says in the **third chapter of Sotah (21a)**, **“Granted that women are not commanded to study Torah, but in the merit of having their sons taught Scripture and having waited for their husbands to return home from the Study Halls, don’t [the women] share the**

⁹⁸ Note that the verse doesn’t read “grace” and “beauty,” but “the grace” and “the beauty.” That is, not all grace and beauty is bad, and in fact they can be praiseworthy. But the definite article “the” teaches that in some specific cases, i.e., with some people, what is perceived as grace and beauty can be deceptive and illusory.

reward with them?”⁹⁹ Therefore it says “give her,” meaning give her the half of the merit of her husband, and this will be “the fruit of her hands.”

"ויהללוהּ בשעריה מעשיה". קשה דלמה דוקא "בשערים מעשיה", ולא בשאר מקומות? ועוד שיהיה לו לומר "ויהללוהּ מעשיה בשערים".

“And let her be praised at the gates by her works.” There is a difficulty, why specifically at the gates will she be praised, and not at additional places? Furthermore, the Hebrew is written in the order: ויהללוהּ בשערים מעשיה (and let praise her / at the gates / her works); King Solomon could have reversed the last two words and said “and let praise her / her works / at the gates.”

ונראה שתיבת "בשערים" דבוקה ל"ויהללוהּ" ועוד דבוקה ל"מעשיה", כאלו אמר ויהללוהּ בשערים ועוד בשערים מעשיה. כלומר ויהללוהּ בשערים, דהיינו שערי בית המדרש, כמו שאמרו שערי ציון ושערים המצויינים בהלכה. ושם יהללוהּ. כמו שאמר רבי עקיבא לתלמידיו, שלי ושלקם שלה היא.

So it appears that the Hebrew word meaning “at the gates” is connected to both the word meaning “and let praise her” and also to the word meaning “her works,” as if to say, “and let her be praised at the gates,” and also “at the gates are her works.” As if to say, “and let her be praised at the gates,” that is at the gates of the study hall, as it is said “the gates of Zion” means “the distinguished gates of halacha.”¹⁰⁰ There they will praise her. As Rabbi Akiva said to his students, “That which is mine and that which is yours, belongs to her” (Nedarim 50a).

ועוד "בשערים מעשיה", שהאשה צנועה וכשרה גורמת לבניה שיהיו תלמידי חכמים, כדאמרינן קמח קמחית עלה לגג. וכמו שאמרו "ל על" ברכת שדים נרחם".

Further, “at the gates are her works,” that the woman who is modest and proper causes her sons to become Torah scholars, as it says “the fine flour (*kemach*) of Kimchit ascends to the roof” (Yoma 47a).¹⁰¹ This is as the rabbis commented on “the blessings of the breasts and womb” (Gen. 49:25).¹⁰²

⁹⁹ The text given in the *Zera Shimshon* is similar to editions and manuscripts for Sotah presented on The Friedberg Project for Talmud Bavli Variants, <https://bavli.genizah.org>, is not a precise quotation. Either the text was quoted from a different source, or it is a paraphrase.

¹⁰⁰ Berachot 8a: “Rav Chisda said as follows: What is the meaning of the verse: ‘The L-rd loves the gates of Zion (*Tzion*) more than all the dwellings of Jacob’ (Ps. 87:2)? This means that the L-rd loves the gates that are distinguished (*metzuyanim*) through the study of halacha more than the synagogues and study halls (where they learn Aggadah).” I.e., although those places are the most outstanding of the dwellings of Jacob, they are not engaged in the study of halacha. [The Hebrew word for distinguished, מצויינים (*metzuyanim*) is similar to that for Zion (ציון) (*Tzion*).]

¹⁰¹ As the Mevuar edition of *Zera Shimshon* points out, Eccl. 5:4-5 includes the term “the work of your hands,” and Shabbat 32b interprets this as referring to a person’s sons and daughters.

¹⁰² Commentators such as Gen. Rabbah 98:20, and also the RaLBaG in *Beur ha’Milot*, interpret that the woman is blessed to give birth to healthy children, and that she is blessed that her breasts will give adequate milk to feed them.

וּכְנֻגָּד זֶה יֵשׁ לָהּ שְׁנֵי תְּלָקִים וְשְׁנֵי מִינֵי שְׂכָר טוֹב.

In conjunction with this she has two portions, i.e., a reward from her husband thanks to encouraging him, and also from her sons thanks to her modesty and only giving them kosher food, **and two types of good reward**, i.e., that she'll "be praised at the gates" because of the Torah of her husband, and that "at the gates are her actions," that through bringing her son to learn, he became a Torah scholar.

* * *