

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter X: Mikeitz (Gen. 41:1–44:17)

Essay 2. The custom of women not to work on Chanukah

On the 25th of Kislev (start) the eight days of Chanukah, and they are prohibited for eulogizing and fasting, but are permitted for doing work. The women have made it a custom not to do work while the candles are burning. And there is [an opinion] that says that we may not be lenient for them.

- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 670:1

וּבְעֵינֵינוּ איסור מלאכה שנוהגות הנשים בתנופה יש לפרש הפסוק "תנולה מפרי גדיה" וכו', דקשה שהרי פרי גדיה פבר הם שלה, ומה שייד לומר שיתנונה לה. ועוד מהו "מפרי גדיה" דמשמע מקצת מהם ולא כולם. ועוד למה דנקא בשערים והלוייה ולא בשאר מקומות.

With regard to the prohibition of work that women practice on Chanukah, we need to interpret the verse from *Eshet Chayil* ["A Woman of Valor"], Proverb 31, "Give her from the fruit of her hands; and let her be praised at the gates by her works."¹

A difficulty is that the fruit of her hand are already hers, so why is it relevant to say that [the fruit] should be given to her?

Also, what is the meaning of "from the fruit of her hands," for the meaning is a part of them and not all of them.

Also, why does the verse say specifically that she should be praised at the gates, and not at any other place?

ומלבד מה שכתבנו לעיל ריש פרשת חיי שרה, עוד יש לומר שפבר נודע שיש נוהגות שלא לעשות מלאכה כל הלילה, ויש מקמירות אף ביום ראשון ויום שמיני. ויש מקמירות יותר, ופליגי האחרונים אם מנהגן מנהג ואם יש להקל להן.

Apart from what we wrote above in the beginning of Chapter V, parashat Chayei Sarah, in essay 1, it can also be said that it's already known that there are women who are accustomed not to do work the entire night of Chanukah while the candles are burning, and there are those who are strict even during the day, on the first day and the eighth day of

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¹ Prov. 31:31.

Chanukah. **There are those who are even stricter** and don't work at all during Chanukah, **and the Acharonim**, the later rabbinic authorities, **disagree whether their custom is** indeed a proper custom, **and if we can be lenient with them** and tell them they can work.²

וְהִנֵּה צָד סְבָרָא לומר שֶׁהִבְעֵל אִם יִרְצֶה וְכֹל לְכוּפָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָה, שֶׁהָרִי כְּשֶׁנִּזְמַן לָהּ מְזֻנָּוֹת מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהָ שְׁלוֹ וְאִינָה רְשָׁאָה לְהִתְמַיֵּר עַל עֲצָמָה כְּדֵי לְהַפְסִיד לְבַעַל. אִי נִמְי שָׂאֵם תְּרַצָּה לְהִתְמַיֵּר עַל עֲצָמָה שֶׁהִבְעֵל לֹא יִתֵּן לָהּ מְזֻנָּוֹת כְּדֵי לְבַעַל אֶת רַגְלָהּ עַד שֶׁתַּעֲשֶׂה עַכ"ל. אֶבֶל הַט"ז אֵרַח חַיִּים (סִימָן תר"ע) דִּימָה דִּין חֲנוּכָה לְדִין רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ, וְכַדִּין רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ כְּתִב הַב"ח (סִימָן תי"ז) שֶׁהַנָּשִׂים אֵינָם אֲסוּרוֹת בְּמְלָאכָה אֶלָּא מִחֲמַת מְנַהֵג אֶבֶל הָאִיסוּר הוּא עַל בְּעֻלְיָהוּ שְׂאִינָם וְכֹלֵינּוּ לְכוּף אוֹתָן לְמְלָאכָה וְעִ"ש.

There is a well-known opinion that her husband, if he should wish, is able to compel her to work, for when he gives her bread, i.e. provides her with marital support, then the work of her hands belongs to him, and she does not have permission to be strict upon herself and abstain from work when the result would be to cause her husband a loss.

Alternatively, if she should wish to be strict upon herself, such that her husband not give her bread, as is brought in the Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer, siman 80, se'if 15, [the law is that] every women who will prevent herself from work that she is obligated to do, is compelled to do it [by the court]. [The husband] does not give her food until she does so.

But the Taz, Orach Chaim, siman 670, se'if katan 2, equated the law of Chanukah to the law of Rosh Chodesh,³ and for the law of Rosh Chodesh, the Bach wrote that the women are not forbidden from work except because of custom, but the prohibition is on their husbands, that they are not able to force them to work, and see there.⁴

וְאִם כֵּן הוּא הַדִּין אַף בְּחֲנוּכָה, וּמִכָּל שֵׁנוֹ לְסִבְרַת הַב"ח גּוֹפִיָה שְׂאִין לְהַקֵּל לְהֵן מִטַּעַם דְּבָרִים הַמְּוֹתְרִים וְכו', וְלָכֵן אָמַר הַכְּתוּב "תְּנִינָהּ לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יְדֵיהָ", תְּנִינָהּ לָהּ מְזֻנָּוֹת אֶף עַל פִּי שְׂאִינָה עוֹשֶׂה מְלָאכָה, לְפִי שֶׁמַּעֲשֵׂיָהּ הֵם מִהֲלָלִים אוֹתָהּ בְּשַׁעֲרֵיהֶם, דֵּהִינּוּ גַר חֲנוּכָה שֶׁמִּצְוָתָהּ בְּטַפַּח הַסְּמוּד לְפָתַח. וְעִיָּקָר הַנֶּס נַעֲשֶׂה עַל יְדֵי אִשָּׁה, וְלְפִי שֶׁלֹּא יֵרַע בְּעֵינֵי הַבַּעַל לִיתֵן לָהּ מְזֻנָּוֹת חֲנֻמָּה, מִשּׁוּם הִכִּי אָמַר "מִפְּרֵי יְדֵיהָ".

If so, the same is the case for Hanukkah, and even more so for opinion of the Bach himself, that one should not be lenient for them and allow them to work. This is because of permitted things that some treat as a prohibition, for which we should respect their beliefs, instead of being lenient and telling them that they are permitted to do these things.⁵

Therefore, the verse said, "Give her from the fruit of her hands," give her bread even though she isn't doing work. This is because her actions praise her at the gates, meaning the

² Abraham Abele Gombiner (c. 1635–82), *Magen Avraham*, Orach chaim, siman 670, se'if katan 2.

³ David ha-Levi Segal ("Taz") (c. 1586–1667), *Turei Zahav*, Orach Chaim, siman 670, se'if katan 2.

⁴ Joel ben Samuel Sirkis ("Bach") (1561–1640), *Bayit Chadash*, Orach Chaim, siman 417.

⁵ Pesachim 50b.

Chanukah lamp, for which the mitzvah is to place it within the handbreadth adjacent to the entrance. The essence of the miracle of Chanukah was done by a woman, as the daughter of Yochanan, the High Priest, fed cheese to the Greek general, making him thirsty. She then gave him wine, and when he fell asleep, she cut off his head, causing his soldiers to flee.⁶ Thus, Chanukah is considered a yom tov for women, and they should not be forced to work if they choose not to do so. In order that the husband not find it displeasing in his eyes to give her food freely, because of this, it is said, “give her from the fruit of her hands.”

וְדוֹקָא נִקְט "מִפְּרֵי יְדֵיהָ" וְלֹא מִמַּעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהָ מִשּׁוּם דְּבִכְתוּבָת אֶמְרִינוּן מָה הִיא עוֹשֶׂה לוֹ, מִשְׁקַל חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים בֵּיהוּדָה וְכוּ'. וּבְגִמְרָא פְּלִיגֵי רַבֵּי עֲקִיבָא וְחֲכָמִים אִם דְּחִקָּה עֲצָמָה וְעֲשִׂתָּהּ יוֹתֵר מִהֶרְאוּי לָהּ, כְּגוֹן שְׁעֲשִׂתָּהּ אַרְבַּע מְלֹאכוֹת כְּבַת אַחַת אוֹ שְׁעֲשִׂתָּהּ בְּלִילָה בְּשַׁעֲהַ שְׁדַרְדָּר בְּגֵי אָדָם לִישׁוֹן, אִם זֶה הַמוֹתֵר הוּא לְעֲצָמָה אוֹ לְבַעַל, וְגַם הַפּוֹסְקִים חוֹלְקִים בְּנֵה, וְעֵינֵי בְּשִׁלְחָן עָרוּף אֲבָן הָעֶזֶר בְּבֵית שְׁמוּאֵל (סִימָן פ' ס"ק ב'). וְדוֹכוּלֵי עֲלָמָא מִיְהָא מָה שְׁשִׁיף לָהּ יִלְקַח בְּהֵם קַרְקַע וְהַבַּעַל אוֹכֵל פִּירוֹת וְעֵינֵי"ש. וְהֵנָּה זֶה שְׁעֲשִׂתָּהּ בְּדוּחַק לֹא נִקְרָא מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהָ, שְׁהָרִי מַעֲשֵׂה הוּא מָה שְׁעוֹשֶׂה בְּטַבַּע פְּדָרְדָּר כֹּל הָאָרְץ אֲבָל מָה שְׁעוֹשֶׂה מִחֲמַת דְּחוּקָה זֶה נִקְרָא כְּמוֹ פְּרִי חֲדָשׁ שֶׁהוּא מְגַבְוֵרַת הַיְדִים שְׁלָהּ שְׁמוּצִיאוֹת פְּרִי. וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי אָמַר הַכְּתוּב "תִּגְנוֹ- לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יְדֵיהָ", כְּלוּמַר אֵל גֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי הַבַּעַל לִיתֵן לָהּ לְאִשְׁתִּי חֵיל מְזוֹנוֹת אַף עַל פִּי שְׁאִינָה עוֹשֶׂה מְלֹאכָה בְּיָמֵים אֵלֶּה, לְפִי שְׁתַּחַת חַיּוּב זֶה יֵשׁ לוֹ זְכוּת לְשְׁלוֹט בְּפְרֵי יְדֵיהָ שְׁעוֹשֶׂה עַל יְדֵי הַדַּחַק.

[Scripture] particularly took the language “from the fruit of her hands,” and not “from the actions of her hands,” because as in tractate Ketubot 59a, “What [is the fixed amount that] she [must] earn for him? [She must spin the] weight [of] five sela [of threads of the] warp in Judea.” In the Gemara, Rabbi Akiva and the rabbis disagree as to the law if she pushed herself and did more than was appropriate for herself, such as if she did four tasks at once, or she worked in the night at an hour when it was customary for people to sleep. They disagreed if this excess belongs to herself or to her husband, and also the decisors disagreed on this. See in the Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer, in the Beit Shmuel (siman 80, se’if katan 2), and the entire world agrees that with what money belongs to her, she acquires land with it, and the husband consumes the produce [of the land] while the principal remains hers.⁷

Here, what she did under pressure is not called the “work of her hands,” for work is what is done normally. But what is done because of pressure she places upon herself is considered like a new fruit, which is the strength of her hands that bear fruit. That is why Scripture said, “Give her from the fruit of her hands.” That is, it should not be bad in the eyes of the husband to give food to the woman of valor, even though she does not do any work these days of Chanukah. This is because of the fact that instead of her obligation to work during Chanukah, which she declines to do, he has the right to control the fruit of her hands which she produces under self-applied pressure.

⁶ Rashi to Shabbos 23a.

⁷ This is a Mishnah, Ketubot 8:3.

ועוד יש רמז בפסוק זה בענגן של חנוכה שהרי ראשי תבות של "ת'נו-ל'ה מ'פרי ל'דיה", הוא תלמ"י, ותחלת תגברת קליפת היננים הנה כשהעתיקו התורה ללשון יננים כמו שאמרו ז"ל שאז הנה חשך בעולם שלושה ימים, ומשם נתאמץ כח טומאת היננים עד שפאו בני חשמונאי ונצחום, וכמו שכתב הצמח דוד שאלעזר שהומת על ידי אנטיוכוס בן תשעים שנה, הנה בן עשרים שנה כשהעתיקו התורה לתלמי.

Also, there is a hint in this verse regarding Hanukkah, since the initial letters of the words “Give her for the fruit of her hands” is “Ptolemy” [תלמי]. The beginning of the increase of the *klipah*, the husk of spiritual impurity, related to the Greeks was when, under Ptolemy’s orders, [the rabbis] copied the Torah into the language of the Greeks. As [the rabbis] of blessed memory said,⁸ there was darkness in the world for three days, and from this the strength of the impurity of the Greeks grew stronger, until the Hasmonians came and conquered them. This is as the *Tzemach David* wrote,⁹ that Elazar, who was killed by Antiochus, was 90 years old, and he had been 20 years old when the Torah was copied into Greek for Ptolemy.

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⁸ Megillah 9a. See the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, siman 580.

⁹ Rabbi David Gans (1541–1613), *Tzemach David* (Prague 1592), a chronicle of Jewish and world history.