

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XXVII: Tazria (Lev. 12:1–13:59)

Essay 1. Living for two worlds

מדרש רבה "אשה פי תזריע", הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב "אַחֹר וְקִדְמָא צָרְתָנִי". אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן אִם זָכָה אָדָם בּוֹחֵל שְׁתֵּי עוֹלָמוֹת הִנֵּה וְהִבָּא, הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב "אַחֹר וְקִדְמָא צָרְתָנִי", וְאִם לֹא בָּא לִיתָן דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן וְכוּ' עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah**:

“When a woman conceives and bears a male, she shall be impure seven days.”¹ This is the meaning of what is written, “You have formed me behind and before; You placed Your hand upon me.”²

Rabbi Yochanan said: If a person merits, he attains two worlds, this one and the next. This is the meaning of what is written: “You have formed me behind and before.” If not, he comes to give judgment and accounting, as it is stated: “You placed Your hand upon me” [understood as referring to Divine retribution].³

- Lev. Rabbah 14:1

יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק אִיךָ קָאָמַר בּוֹחֵל שְׁתֵּי עוֹלָמוֹת וְהִלָּא אֲדַרְבָּא בְּעוֹלָם הִנֵּה הַצְדִּיקִים גִּידוּנִים בְּיִסּוּרֵין וְהַרְשָׁעִים נְתוּנִים בְּשִׁלְוָה. וְעוֹד, וְאִם לֹא בָּא לִיתָן דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן אִין זֶה הַפֶּךָ הַרִישָׁא וְהִנֵּה לֹא לֹמַר וְאִם לֹא יֵאבֹד שְׁתֵּי עוֹלָמוֹת.

One must analyze: how does [Rabbi Yochanan] say that he attains two worlds? On the contrary, in this world the righteous are judged with suffering, while the wicked are given tranquility.

Furthermore, “and if not, he comes to give judgment and accounting,” meaning that a person is judged not only for his actions, but also held to account for all the benefit and enjoyment he derived from this world, even where no formal transgression was committed. But this **is not the opposite of the first clause. [Rabbi Yochanan] should have said, “and if not, he loses two worlds.”**

* English translation: Copyright © 2026 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are available at <https://zstorah.com>

¹ Lev. 12:2.

² Ps. 139:5.

³ Job 13:21.

ונקדים מאי דאמרינן סוף פרק ב' דברכות כי מפטרי רבנן מבי ר' אמי ואמרי לה מבי ר' חנינא אמר להו עולמך תראה בתייה ואחרייתה לעולם הבא וכו', ופירשו המפרשים עולמך תראה בתייה כל צרכך תמצא עכ"ל, דלא יתכן לומר שיאכל זכות העולם הבא בתייה, ונודע כי "צדיק אכל לשבע נפשו" שאינו רודף אחר המותרות כמו הרשע דכתיב ביה "ויבטן רשעים תחטור".

We may preface with what we say at the end of chapter 2 of tractate Berachot (17a): “When the Sages would take leave from the house of Rabbi Ami—and some say from the house of Rabbi Chanina—they would say to them: ‘May you see your world in your lifetime, and your end be for life in the World-to-Come,’ etc.”

The commentators explained: “you shall see your world in your lifetime” means that all your needs will be provided.⁴ For it is not possible to say that one consumes the merit of the World-to-Come in his lifetime. It is known that “the righteous eats to satisfy his soul,”⁵ that he does not pursue luxuries like the wicked, of whom it is written, “but the belly of the wicked is empty.”⁶

ומעתה יש לומר שאין הכי נמי שהצדיק אין לו שלנה בעולם הזה ונידון בייסורין, אבל מקל מקום כל צרכו הוא מוצא בקלות בלי טורח, וכדאמרינן גמירי דצורבא מרבנן לא מעגי ואי מעגי אהדורי אפתתא לא מיהדר, וזהו החלק שנותל בעולם הזה, אבל אינו עולה לו לשכר מצותיו, שהרי אינו אוכל אלא הצריף לקיום גופו דנקא ומה שהוא מן ההכרח.

Now one may say that indeed the righteous has no tranquility in this world and is judged with suffering; nevertheless, he finds all his needs easily, without toil, as we say: it is established that a Torah scholar does not become poor, but if he does become poor, he will not remain in that state.⁷ This is the portion that he attains in this world, but it is not deducted from his reward for mitzvot, for he eats only what is necessary for the maintenance of his body, that which is strictly required. Thus, the righteous is able to benefit in this world without harming his portion in the World-to-Come.

אבל הרשע שהוא נהנה מהעולם הזה ורודף אחר המותרות, צריף לתת דין ממה שנהנה מהעולם הזה שלא פדיו, שהרי "כל-עמל האדם לפיהו וגם-הנפש לא תמלא", ואמרו במדרש רבה כל מצות ומעשים טובים שעושה האדם אינם מספיקין להקבל היוצא מפיו, ומכל שכן זה שהיתה הנאתו מרובה, וזהו ואם לאו בא ליתן דין וקשבון.

But the wicked, who enjoys this world and pursues luxuries, must give judgment for what he enjoyed from this world unlawfully; for “all the labor of a man is for his mouth, yet the soul is not filled.”⁸ They said in Midrash Rabbah: all the mitzvot and good deeds that a person does are insufficient even for the mere breath that comes from his mouth; all the more so this one, whose enjoyment was great.⁹ This is the meaning of: “If not, he comes to give judgment and accounting.”

⁴ Rashi on Berachot 17a.

⁵ Prov. 13:25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shabbat 151b.

⁸ Eccl. 6:7.

⁹ Lev. Rabbah 4:5.

ועדיין קשה מה ענין "אשה כי תזריע" עם "אחור וקדם צרתני" דקאמר הקדא הוא דכתיב "אחור וקדם" וכו'.

There is still a difficulty: What is the connection of “When a woman conceives” with “You have formed me behind and before,” that it says, “this is what is written, ‘You have formed me behind and before,’ ” etc.

והש' לומר שרבי יוחנן הרגיש קושיא על פסוק "אחור וקדם" והרגיש נמי קושיא אחרת על פסוק "אשה כי תזריע" ובהצטרפות שניהם מתורץ הכל, והיננו דעל "אחור וקדם" קשיא ליה שהיה לו לומר "קדם ואחור", ואינו יכול לתרץ ולפרש הפסוק על עולם הזה ועולם הבא, שהרי "אחור" משמעו על העולם הבא ו"קדם" משמעו על העולם הזה כמו שפירש שם בעל מתנות כהונה, והדרא קושיין לדוכתה שהיה לו לומר "קדם ואחור", שמתחלה יש העולם הזה ואחר כך העולם הבא.

It may be said that Rabbi Yochanan perceived a difficulty in the order of the verse “behind and before,” and he also perceived another difficulty in the verse “When a woman conceives,” as will be discussed below, but by combining them both everything was resolved.

That is, regarding “behind and before,” he found it difficult, thinking that [the verse] should have said “before and behind.” He cannot explain and interpret the verse as referring to this world and then the World-to-Come, for “behind” implies the World-to-Come and “before” implies this world, as explained there by the author of *Matnot Kehunah*.¹⁰ Thus the difficulty returns to its place, for in order to have that interpretation, [the verse] should have said “before and behind,” since first there is this world and afterward the World-to-Come.

ועוד קשיא ליה על פסוק "אשה כי תזריע", שבגמרא פתב הפסוק "ואם-גמבה תלד" בלשון שמה ובזכר כתיב "כי תזריע וילדה זכר", שגמרא מקפיד יותר על הנניית הזכר מהגמבה, וקשה דמאי אולמיה דזכר מהגמבה ונהרי על שניהם נאמר כל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל וכו', ועוד מצות פריה ורביה היא שיוליד זקא וזכר וגמבה.

Furthermore, he had a difficulty with the verse “When a woman conceives,” for regarding a female the verse says “and if she bears a female she shall be impure two weeks,”¹¹ using a conditional expression, whereas regarding a male it is written “when a woman conceives and bears a male,” from which it appears that the verse is more particular about the existence of the male than the female. It is difficult to understand this, for what superiority does the male have over the female? Behold, regarding both of them it is said, “whoever sustains one soul of Israel, it is as if he has sustained an entire world.”¹² Furthermore, the mitzvah of procreation is that one should produce specifically a male and a female.¹³

¹⁰ Issachar Berman ben Naphtali Ha-Kohen (16th century), *Matnot Kehunah* is a commentary on *Midrash Rabbah*.

¹¹ Lev. 12:5.

¹² Sanhedrin 37a; Bava Batra 11a.

¹³ Mishnah Yevamot 6:6; Yevamot 61b.

אֵלָא נִדְאֵי צְרִיף לֹמַר שְׁהִפְרִישׁ שְׁבִין זְכָר לְגַבְהָ הוּא זֶה שֶׁהַזְכָּר מְחַוֵּיב לְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּעֵסְקֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא וְהַנְּשִׂימ בְּעֵסְקֵי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וְהֵן זֹכוֹת לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא בְּכַף בְּמַה שֶׁהֵן מִתְעַסְקוֹת בְּעֵסְקֵי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, אָדָם מְבִיא חֲטִימֵי חֲטִימֵי כּוֹסֵס וְכוּ' לֹא נִמְצְאָת מְאִירָה אֶת עֵינָיו וּמַעֲמִידָתוֹ עַל רַגְלָיו, וְאִין לָהּ כְּשֶׁרָה בְּנָשִׁים אֵלָא הָעוֹשֶׂה רְצוֹן בְּעָלָהּ.

Rather, it must certainly be said that the difference between male and female is that the male is obligated to engage specifically in matters of the World-to-Come. In contrast, women are engaged in matters of this world, i.e., the practical and material responsibilities of life, and they merit the life of the World-to-Come thereby, through what they engage in matters of this world.

Rabbi Yosei encountered Elijah [the prophet and] said to him: It is written: “I will make him a helpmate.”¹⁴ In what does a woman help a man? [Elijah] said to him: [When] **a man brings wheat** [from the field, does he] **chew** [raw] **wheat?** [When he brings home] flax, [does he] wear [unprocessed] flax? [His wife turns them into bread and clothing.] **Does she not light up his eyes and stand him on his feet?**

- Yevamot 63a

“The most fitting among women is one who does the will of her husband.”¹⁵

וְאִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֵן זֹכוֹת לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא בְּכַף, מְפָל מְקוֹם חֲבִיבָה יוֹמֵר לִידַת הַזְכָּר מְלִידַת הַנְּקֵבָה, לְפִי שֶׁהַזְכָּר אֵף כְּשֶׁהוּא קָטָן וְאֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ לְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּעֵסְקֵי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְאֵינוֹ נִמְי בֵּר חֲיוֹנָהּ בְּמַצּוֹת, מְפָל מְקוֹם הוּא זֹכֶה וּמְזַכֶּה אֶת אָבִיו לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁמֵקָיִים בּוֹ מְצַנֵּת מִלֵּה וּמְחַנֵּף אוֹתוֹ לֹמַר שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּכְרַף שֶׁהַתְּחִיל לְדַבֵּר וּמְחַנֵּף אוֹתוֹ בְּהַכָּרַת אוֹתֵיּוֹת שֶׁל הַתּוֹרָה, מֵה שְׂאִין כֵּן הָאִשָּׁה שְׂאִינָה חַיִּיבַת בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כָּלֵל, וְלִפְיָהּ הַתּוֹרָה מְקַפְּדַת יוֹמֵר עַל לִידַת הַזְכָּר מְלִידַת הַנְּקֵבָה.

Even though [women] merit the life of the World-to-Come through this, nevertheless the birth of a male is more beloved than the birth of a female. This is because the male, even when he is small and does not yet know how to engage in matters of this world and is not yet of an age for education in mitzvot, nevertheless he merits and causes his father to merit the World-to-Come. For he fulfills in him the mitzvah of circumcision and educates him to say “Shema Yisrael” as soon as he begins to speak, and trains him in recognition of the letters of the Torah. This is something that is not so for the woman, who is not obligated in Torah study at all.¹⁶ Therefore, the Torah is more particular about the birth of a male than the birth of a female.

¹⁴ Gen. 2:18.

¹⁵ Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah 9:1; Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 42:12; Shulchan Arukh, Even HaEzer 69:7.

¹⁶ Cf. Sotah 21b. Of course, women are obligated to learn any Torah that they need in order to observe mitzvot properly.

ומעתה אתי שפיר נמי קרא ד"אחור וקדם", שמתחלה זוכה ומזכה לעולם הבא כדאמרין בפרק י"א דסנהדרין קטן בא לעולם הבא. משעה שנימול משעה שסיפר משעה שאומר אמן, נמצא שמשעת לידה מביא זכות עולם הבא עמו ואף לאביו שמתוכו, ואחר כך כשיגדל זוכה יותר לעולם הבא ומתעסק ונהנה אף מהעולם הזה.

Now the verse “behind and before” is also well explained, for at the outset he merits and causes merit for the World-to-Come, as we say in chapter 11 of Sanhedrin:

[With regard to] a minor [who dies], how [i.e., from what stage], **does he come into the World-to-Come?** [Some say] **from the time he is circumcised.** [Another opinion is] **from the time he speaks.** [Another opinion is] **from the time he says “Amen”** [in response to hearing blessings.]

- Sanhedrin 110b

It follows that from the moment of birth, he brings with him merit for the World-to-Come, and even for his father who educates him. Afterward, when he grows, he merits more for the World-to-Come and engages in—and benefits also from—this world.

אמנם הנקבה בנדאי שהוצרכה גם היא לצרכי העולם הזה כדאמרין בפרק ד' דמציעא איתתה גוצא וכו' היא במילי דשמאי והא במילי דעלמא. אבל בשעת לידה ובקטנותה אין להעולם שום הנאה ממנה, מה שאין כן הנזכר שבשעת לידה ובקטנותו מקיים העולם בהבל פיו שאין בו חטא.

However, the female certainly is also necessary for the needs of this world, as we say in chapter 4 of Bava Metzia:

And Rav says: Anyone who follows the counsel of his wife descends into Gehenna . . . Rav Pappa said to Abaye: But don't people say, “If **your wife is short**, stoop and whisper to her [and consult with her]?” This is not difficult, . . . as **this** [statement of Rav relates to] **Divine matters; and that** [proverb relates to] **general matters.**

- Bava Metzia 59a

But at the time of birth and in her youth, the world does not yet derive practical benefit from her, unlike the male, who at the time of birth and in his youth sustains the world with the breath of his mouth in which there is no sin.

ומשום הכי מלבד שהקדים הנזכר לנזכר כמו ששינינו האיש קודם לאשה וכו', עוד פתב בנזכר "כי תזריע וילדה זכר" ובנזכרה "ואם נזכרה תלד" וכו'. ועוד כדי שתהינה פל מחשבותיו לעולם הבא אף אם אינה פעם ינהגה מוכרח להתעסק בצרכי העולם הזה, ונעשה תורתו קבע ומלאכתו עראי.

Therefore, besides the fact that the male precedes the female, as we learned, “the man precedes the woman [when there is uncertainty with regard to which of them] to rescue or to return a lost item [to first],”¹⁷ it also writes regarding the male, “**when** a woman **conceives and bears a male,**” and regarding the female, “**and if she bears a female,**” etc.

¹⁷ Mishnah Horayot 3:7; Horayot 13a.

Furthermore, so that all his thoughts should be directed to the World-to-Come, even if at times he must engage in the needs of this world, therefore the law is established “and he should make his Torah fixed and his work temporary.”¹⁸

ואף על פי כן עשה הקב"ה הטבע כך שהאשה תזריע זכר ואיש נקבה, כדאמרינן תלה הכתוב הנקבות בזכרים לומר לה אשה מזרעת תחלה יולדת זכר וכו', להורות שאדם אינו יכול להיות בלא אשה, ואף עסקי העולם הבא אינם יכולים להתקיים מבלי עסקי העולם הזה, כדאמרינן הרבה עשו כרבי שמעון בר יוחאי ולא עלתה בידם.

Even so, the Holy One, Blessed be He, made nature such that the woman produces a male and the man a female, as we say:

The verse, “These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, with his daughter Dinah,”¹⁹ attributes the males to the females [as the males are called “the sons of Leah”] and the females to the males [as Dinah is called Jacob’s daughter], to teach you [that if the] woman emits seed first, she gives birth to a male, [and if the] man emits seed first, she gives birth to a female.

- Niddah 31a

This is to teach that a man cannot exist without a woman. Even the pursuits of the World-to-Come cannot be sustained without the pursuits of this world, as we say:

Many have acted in accordance with [the opinion of] Rabbi Yishmael [and combined working for a living and learning Torah], and were successful [in their Torah study]. Many have acted in accordance with [the opinion of] Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai [and focused exclusively on Torah study,] and were not successful.

- Berachot 35b

אמנם עוד יש לומר שידוע שאם לא חטא אדם היו לו בעולם הזה חיים נצחיים כמו העולם הבא והיה יושב בגן עדן כמלאכי השרת, ולאחר שחטא נתגרש מגן עדן ונגזרה עליו מיתה. ומשום הכי אמר הכתוב “אחור וקדם צרתני”, מתחלה “אחור” דהיינו העולם הבא ואחר כך “וקדם” דהיינו העולם הזה, שמתחלה היה הכל עולם הבא דהיינו “אחור”, ואחר החטא בא ההפך בין העולם הזה להעולם הבא והיינו “קדם”, וסמך דרשאי זו עם פסוק “אשה כי תזריע וילדה”, דפשיטיה דקרא משמע שתכף שתזריע תלד, כמו שיהיה לעתיד “הרה וילדת יחדו”, ואם לא היה חוטא אדם היה כך אף בעולם הזה, ולא היתה האשה טמאה לידה לפי שלא היתה טמאה בעולם, אמנם לאחר שחטא יש זמן בין עיבור ללידה ויש טמאה לאשה כמו שמסיים “וטמאה שבעת ימים”, והיינו ממש כמו “אחור וקדם” וכו’.

However, one may further say that it is known that if Adam had not sinned, he would have had eternal life in this world like the World-to-Come, and he would have sat in the Garden of Eden like the ministering angels. But after he sinned, he was expelled from the Garden of Eden and death was decreed upon him.

¹⁸ Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 246:21.

¹⁹ Gen. 46:15.

Therefore, the verse says, “You have formed me behind and before”: initially “behind,” meaning the World-to-Come, and afterward “before,” meaning this world. For at first everything was the World-to-Come, that is, “behind,” and after the sin came the separation and distinction between this world and the World-to-Come, namely “before.”

[Rabbi Yochanan] juxtaposed this exposition with the verse “When a woman conceives and bears,” for the plain meaning of the verse implies that as soon as she conceives she gives birth. This is as will be in the future, “the pregnant and the one giving birth together,”²⁰ and had Adam not sinned, so it would have been even in this world, and the woman would not have been impure in childbirth, for there would have been no impurity in the world. However, after he sinned, there is a period between conception and birth, and there is impurity for the woman, as it concludes, “and she shall be impure for seven days,” and this is precisely like “behind and before,” etc.

* * *

²⁰ Jer. 31:8.