

# Toldot Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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## Chapter III – Mishnah 21

רבי אלעזר בן חסמא אומר, קינין ופתחתי נדה, הן הן גופי הלכות. תקופות וגימטריאות, פרפראות לחכמה.

**Rabbi Eliezer ben Chisma<sup>1</sup> said: [The laws of] mixed bird offerings and the [laws of calculating the] beginnings of menstruation—indeed, these are essential parts of the laws, [while] astronomical [calculations] and [calculating] gematrias are the appetizers of wisdom.**

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**"החכמה** תעזו לחכם", וישמו נאה לו לאות אמת, שמתחלה הנה תוכן גדול ובעל מספר ותשובות, אבל פנגד זה לא הנה ידע אפילו למפרס על שמע עד שבא אצל רבי עקיבא ונעשאו חכם גדול, ומשום הכי קרו ליה חסמא. וכא ללמד דעת את העם, שאף פשאינם עוסקים בתורה, יבחרו להם לימוד החכמות שמתחייבות את בעליהן, והוא מעיד על עצמו, שלפי שהנה שכלו מיוחד בחכמת ההנדסה והתשובות, זכה ליפגס בתדרים פנימיים של התורה, דכתיב בה "יהב חכמתא לחכימין".

**“Wisdom is more of a stronghold to a wise man,”<sup>2</sup> and his name is pleasant to him as a sign of truth. That is, initially [Rabbi Eliezer] was a great astronomer and a master of numbers and geometry, but in contrast to this, he did not know even know how to perform the spreading out of the *Shema*,<sup>3</sup> until he came to Rabbi Akiva and he made him a great sage, and because of this, they call him Chisma, viz, “he has grown strong.”**

**He came to teach the people via this Mishnah that even when they are not engaged in the Torah, they should choose for themselves the study of wisdom that makes wise those who master [the subjects], and he testified about himself, that he followed this practice. Since his mind was sharpened by the wisdom of engineering and geometry, he merited to enter into the inner chambers of the Torah, as it is written, “He gives the wise their wisdom.”<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> In some texts, the sage is referred to as Rabbi Eliezer ben Chisma, which does not mean “the son of Chisma,” but may mean “a native of [the town of] Chisma.” In other texts, he is referred to as Rabbi Eliezer Chisma, with “Chisma” being an adjective for “has grown strong.” While the *Toldot Shimshon* presents the reading “ben Chisma,” he apparently considers “Chisma” to be related to wisdom rather than a place name.

<sup>2</sup> Eccl. 7:19.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to leading part of the daily prayers, possibly the first blessing of the reading of the Shema. Commentaries on Megillah 23b discuss this further.

<sup>4</sup> Dan. 2:21.

ומה שאמר "הן הן גופי הלכות", מקשים המפרשים, וכי שאר הדינים אינם גופי הלכות. ולדין, חידושא קא משמע לן, וראיה מוכרחת על דבריו הראשונים, והיינו שפירוש דברי הרמב"ם ז"ל בדין מערוכת הקינין, העלה הרמ"ע בתשובותיו סימן כ"ג, שהפכה שאינו נמלך אלא שמעצמו ומסבתו הנה עושה כן, עם כל זה, להקמה תחשב לו, אף על פי שאם נמלך בבית דין, אין מורין בן. כהיה דסוף פרק הנשרפים, הגוב את הקסנה, והמקלל בקוסם, והבועל ארמית, קנאין פוגעין בו. ואין קנאין נמלכין בבית דין, ואם נמלכו בשעת מעשה, אין מורין להם בן, ואף על פי כן שבחיה חכמים. פדאשפסן גבי פינחס, דאמר ליה משה, קרינא דאגרתא, איהו ליהוי פרונוקא, והלקתא [1]דאי איסתיים ליה, ולא רשותא, דהא עדיין לא בא אחר זמרי "אלהקבה" ולא ראה את מעשיו. עכ"ל.

Regarding what he said, “Indeed, these are essential parts of the laws,” the commentators<sup>5</sup> ask **if the remaining laws are not essential parts of the laws? For us, the novelty wants to teach us something else indirectly, and there is compelling evidence for his first words, namely, in the explanation of the Rambam, of blessed memory, on the laws of the mingling of the mixed bird offerings,<sup>6</sup> raised by the Rema MiFano<sup>7</sup> in his responsa, siman 23.**

The Rema MiFano writes regarding **the priest who does not consult anyone** [regarding how to proceed with a complication in a mixed bird offering] **but on his own and by his own opinion he does [such-and-such an action], even though he’s considered to have wisdom, nevertheless, if he had sought advice from a court, they would not have instructed thus. This is as the one discussed at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Sanhedrin, entitled “And these are the ones who are burned”:** “[Regarding] **one who steals a vessel for a libation, and one who curses with a sorcerer, and one who engages in intercourse with an Aramean woman, zealots strike him [and kill him].**”<sup>8</sup> I.e., by acting without consulting anyone, the priest is acting as a zealot.

**Zealots do not consult a court, and if they were to consult at the time of the incident, they would not be instructed thus, but nevertheless the sages praised him. As we found concerning Pinchas, to whom Moses said, “Let him who reads the letter [of the Law] be the agent [for executing it].”<sup>9</sup> The halacha definitely is proved by him, and he does not have [advance] permission [to act from the court], because [prior to his zealous action] he has not followed Zimri into the chamber and hasn’t [yet] seen the action.**<sup>10</sup>

ומשום הכי קא משמע לן, שדיני קינים אפילו אם יעשה נגד הדין מסבתו, נקראו גופי הלכות, וזהו "הן הן" דקאמר.

**Because of this, [the Tanna] wants to teach us something indirectly, that the laws of mixed bird offerings, even if done in opposition to the law in accordance with [the priest’s] opinion, are called essential parts of the laws, and this is the meaning of “indeed, these,” as he said.**

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Rabbi Binyamin HaKohen (“Rabach”), *Avot Olam* (Venice, 1719).

<sup>6</sup> *Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishnah*, Kinnim 1:2; *Mishneh Torah*, Sacrifices Rendered Unfit 8:5.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Fano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud, *She’elot u’Teshuvot*.

<sup>8</sup> Sanhedrin 81b.

<sup>9</sup> Sanhedrin 82a.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Num. 25:8.

ואף בדיני פתחי גדה, אף על פי שגשגו באפשרי רחוק מאד, הן הן גופי תורה, שכתב שם הרב הנ"ל בתשובה סימן כ"ד, דכלהו פתחי גדה, באפשרי רחוק מאד מתני להו, וכמארעות הנזרים בתכלית. אלא שלא נמנעו חכמים ללמדנו גופי תורה בכל אופן שיעלה על הדעת, להמציא צורך ההוראה בכל חלקיה, וגם כדי לחדד את התלמידים. עכ"ל. ואף חכמת ההנדסה והתשבורת מחודדת את השכל, ומועלת להבין תורתנו הקדושה.

**Even in the laws of [calculating the] beginnings of menstruation, even though they were taught regarding a very remote possibility, indeed, these are essential parts of Torah.** A woman needs to avoid intimacy with her husband during menstruation, and needs to check herself, based upon her regular cycle, to see if menstruation has begun. However, when a woman's cycle becomes irregular, the laws can become very complex. This is what is being discussed, according to the Bartenura, who says that a woman might even be required to immerse 95 times, according to one who holds that immersion at its proper time is a commandment.<sup>11</sup>

**This is as the aforementioned rabbi, the Rema MiFano, wrote there in his responsa, siman 24, that all [the calculations of] menstruation days, he would teach the very remote possibility, and similar very strange events. Rather, the sages did not refrain from teaching us essential parts of the Torah in every way that comes to mind, to provide the need for instruction in all its parts, and also to sharpen the students.**

**Even the wisdom of engineering and geometry sharpens the mind, and is effective to understand our holy Torah.**

ואתי שפיר דלא נקט עירובין וכלאים, שבהן אין שום חידוש לומר שיהן גופי הלכות, דמלתא דפשיטא היא, הואיל שיהן במציאות קרוב ואפשרי.

**It's fine that [the Tanna] didn't take as an example the laws of Eruvin<sup>12</sup> and Kilayim,<sup>13</sup> for there is no novelty within them to say that they are essential parts of the laws, for this is obvious, since they are in reality close and possible.**

ומה שטרח עוד בתקופות וגימטריאות, גם אלו אינם הבלי עולם, אלא פרפראות להמשיך לבות בני האדם להפיר גדולת הבורא, כמו הפרפרת הממשיך אכילת הפת, כך מתוך ידיעת אלו הדברים, יהיו נמשכים כל אדם ללמוד התקמה, ו"ראשית חקמה יראת ה'". ועוד הם מגוון התורה ממש, שהתקופות צריכות לעיבור שנה וכיוצא. אלא שהם כמו פרפראות, לפי שאינו חובה על האדם שילמוד חישוב תקופות ומזלות, אלא שמי שיודעם, חובה עליו להודיע חקמתו לעיני העמים, כדאמרינו בפרק קלל גדול, כל היודע להשב בתקופות ומזלות ואינו חושב, עליו הכתוב אמר "ואת פעל ה' לא יביטו" וכו'.

**All the effort that he had expended in astronomical [calculations] and [calculating] gematrias, they are not vanities of the world, rather appetizers to arouse the hearts of man to know the greatness of the Creator. They are like the appetizers that arouse the eating of the bread, so from the knowledge of these [secular sciences], every man will be drawn to**

<sup>11</sup> Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro (c. 1445–c. 1515) ("The Bartenura"), Italian rabbi best known for his popular commentary on the Mishnah.

<sup>12</sup> Eruvin deals with carrying objects on the Sabbath and festivals.

<sup>13</sup> Kilayim deals with the prohibition against crossbreeding seeds, crossbreeding animals, and mixing wool and linen.

learn wisdom, and “the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the L-rd.”<sup>14</sup> Also, they are literally from the essential part of the Torah, that astronomical [calculations] requires instituting a leap year and the like.<sup>15</sup> But they are like appetizers, because there is no obligation upon a man to learn the importance of astronomical [calculations] and the movement of constellations, but for one who does know them, it is obligatory for him to make his wisdom known to the eyes of the nations, as it says in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Shabbat entitled “A significant principal”: “Anyone who knows how to calculate astronomical seasons and [the movement of] constellations and does not do so, [Isaiah 5:12] says about him: ‘They do not take notice of the work of the L-rd, and they do not see His handiwork.’”<sup>16</sup>

ואף הגימטריאות, כגון "אשה כשית", שפירש רש"י, גימטריא "יפת-מראה". היא פּרפּרת לחכמה, הגם שבלאו הכי היינו מוכרחים לפרש פה, שְהרי לא פושית היתה, אלא מדינית היתה, וכמה מקראות קוראים פושי אף למי שאינו, כגון "על-דברי-כוש בן-ימיני", ועיין בילקוט. אלא שבתקופות וגימטריאות אין לאבד זמנו בהם, שְהרי הם פּרפּרת, והתורה פת, ותנו, ברך על הפת, פטר את הפּרפּרת. על הפּרפּרת, לא פטר את הפת. ועיין בזוהר פּרשת פינחס דף ר"כ סוד תקופות וגימטריאות פּרפּרות לחכמה.

Even the gematrias are an appetizer of wisdom. For example, Num. 12:1 states that “Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had taken [into his household as his wife]: ‘He took a Cushite woman [אשה כשית],’ ” for which Rashi explained that the word Cushite<sup>17</sup> has the gematria of 736, the same as “a beautiful woman” [מראה יפת].<sup>18</sup> For without this teaching of Rashi that “Cushite” is synonymous with “beautiful woman,” we would be compelled to explain this, for [Moses’s wife] was not a Cushite, rather she was a Midianite. A number of readings state “Cushi” even for someone who is not, for example, “A song of David, which he sang to the L-rd, concerning Cush, a Benjaminite,”<sup>19</sup> and see in the Yalkut Shimoni.<sup>20</sup>

Rather, in astronomical [calculations] and [calculating] gematrias one shouldn’t waste his time, for they are an appetizer, while the Torah is the bread. It was taught in a Mishnah, “One who recited a blessing over the bread exempted the [need to recite a blessing over the] appetizers [as they are considered secondary to the bread]. [However, one who recited a blessing] over the appetizers did not exempt [the need to recite a blessing over] the bread.”<sup>21</sup>

See in the Zohar, parashat Pinchas, page 220b (paragraph 139), “the esoteric secret of astronomical [calculations] and [calculating] gematrias is [that they are] appetizers to wisdom.”

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<sup>14</sup> Ps. 111:10.

<sup>15</sup> The Hebrew calendar is a lunisolar calendar. I.e., it is based on lunar months, but it is also important for the holidays to fall in the proper (solar) season. Thus, a leap month is inserted seven times in 19 years.

<sup>16</sup> Shabbat 75a.

<sup>17</sup> With the pleine spelling [כושית], rather than the deficient spelling of Scripture [כשית] that excludes the vav.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 12:11.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 7:1.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps referring to Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Behaalotcha, remez 737:12

<sup>21</sup> Mishnah Berachot 6:5; Berachot 42a.