

Toldot Shimshon

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Chapter V – Mishnah 22

בן הוא הא אומר, לפנים צערא אגרא.

Ben He He said: According to the labor is the reward.

שְׁנֵי צְמִידֵי זָהָב, יְלִידֵי אֵיתָן הָאֶזְרָחִי, יְחִדּוּ יְדוּבָקוּ, יִתְלַכְדוּ וְלֹא יִתְפָּרְדּוּ. זֶה מִתְחִיל וְזֶה מְשַׁלֵּם בְּתוֹרָה, וְ"הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד", לְיוֹם שְׁפוּלוֹ שֶׁבַת מְנוּחָה לְחַי הָעוֹלָמִים, וְכֵשֶׁם שְׁשִׁירוּ כְּפוּל, כִּךָּ מְשַׁנְתּוּ כְּפוּלָה.

Two golden bracelets,¹ offspring of Ethan the Ezrahite,² together they cleave, join, and do not separate.³ This one begins and this one completes in Torah,⁴ and “all goes to the same place,”⁵ “to the day that is entirely Sabbath, rest for everlasting life.”⁶ Just as his song is doubled,⁷ so too his teaching is doubled.⁸

Ben Bag Bag and Ben Heh Heh were converts. Ethan the Ezrahite is understood to be our patriarch Abraham, the “father” of converts, and thus they were his “offspring.” As converts, their Torah was acquired through exertion rather than inheritance. Their teachings are two inseparable parts of a single idea. Drawing on the formulation of “beginning” and “completing,” it presents their statements—“turn it over and over” and “according to the labor is the reward”—as a structured pair: the demand for total immersion in Torah, and the reward corresponding to that immersion, ultimately extending even to the World-to-Come.

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¹ In Gen. 24:22, Eliezer gifts Rebecca two golden bracelets. They make a pair, such as the previous Mishnah’s Ben Bag Bag and this Mishnah’s Ben He He. The men (or man with two names) are identified as converts by Tosafot on Chagigah 9b, Rambam in the introduction to the Mishnah, and other commentaries. For Ben Bag Bag, “Bag” is considered to be Ben Ger (“son of a convert”) or Bat Giyora (“daughter of a convert”). For Ben He He, the “he” refers to the “he” added to Abram’s name when he became Abraham.

² Author of Ps. 89, in I Kings 5:11 he is cited as a very wise man. In Bava Batra 15a, Rav identifies Ethan the Ezrahite as Abraham. As Abraham was the “father” of converts, we can understand the reference to Ben Bag Bag and Ben He He as “offspring of Ethan the Ezrahite.”

³ Even though Ben Bag Bag and Ben He He have two different names in the Mishnah, they were the same person according to: the Tosafot on Chagigah 9b; Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), *Nachalat Avot* (Venice 1545); and Abraham Zacuto (1452–c. 1515), *Sefer HaYuchasin* (1498).

⁴ Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 4:6 (Rosh Hashanah 32b) discusses the recitation of ten verses for the Kingship section. Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri said that one begins with verses from the Torah and concludes with verses from the Prophets, while Rabbi Yosei said that he could both begin and end with verses from the Torah.

⁵ Eccl. 3:20: “All go to the same place; all came from dust and all return to dust.”

⁶ In Mishnah Tamid 7:4, Ps. 92, “A psalm, a song for Sabbath day” is interpreted in this way.

⁷ Referring to the duplicative names Ben Bag Bag and Ben He He.

⁸ Having two different teachings.

יָפָה אָמְרוּ ז"ל, נוֹחַ לוֹ לְאָדָם שְׁלֵא נִבְרָא, יוֹתֵר מִשְׁנִבְרָא. וְכֵן הוּא הָאָמֶת, שְׁבֻכֵל מִכָּל כֹּחַ יָדוֹ עַל הַתְּחַתּוּנָה, שֶׁהָרִי כָּל כְּשָׁרוֹן מַעֲשָׂיו תְּלוּיִן בְּבַחֲרֵהָ שְׁנִיתָנָה בְּיָדוֹ, לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב אוֹ רַע כְּפִי רְצוֹנוֹ. וּסְבִיבָיו צָרִיו, הָעוֹלָם וְהַיָּצָר הָרַע הַמְּסִיתִים וּמְדִיחִים אוֹתוֹ מִדְּרָךְ הַטּוֹבָה. וְאִם יֹאמֶר שְׁלֵא לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר וְשְׁלֵא לְטָרוֹחַ, אֵינּוּ יָכוֹל, כִּדְאָמְרֵינוּ בְּקִידוּשֵׁינוּ דַּף ס"א ע"ב, סְלֵקָא דְעָתָא אָמֵינָא, אִם תֵּאבּוּ, טוֹבָה, וְאִם תִּמְאַנּוּ, לֹא טוֹבָה וְלֹא רַעָה. קָא מִשְׁמַע לָן.

[The rabbis] of blessed memory spoke well: **“It would have been preferable for a person not to have been created than to have been created.”**⁹ So it is true, that in every respect he has the weaker hand, for all the success of his deeds depends on the choice given into his hand, to do good or evil according to his will. Around him are his adversaries, the world and the evil inclination, which incite and lead him astray from the good path. If he should say that he will not receive reward and will not toil, he cannot, as we say in Kiddushin page 61b:

It is written: “If you are willing and obedient [you shall eat the good of the land]. But if you refuse and rebel [you shall be devoured by the sword].”¹⁰ . . . It might enter your mind to say: **“If you are willing”** [you will receive] **good**, **“but if you refuse”** [you will receive] **neither good nor bad**. [The verses therefore] **teach us** [that this is not the case, and one who rebels will receive punishment.]

- Kiddushin 61b

Given how difficult existence is, and given that one cannot opt out of it, the Mishnah comes to say that every dimension of that difficulty—the labor, the pain, even the distress of having no choice—generates its own corresponding reward.

וְאִם כֵּן, מִלְּבַד הַטּוֹרַח שְׁטוֹרַח בְּעֵשִׂיית הַטּוֹב, יֵשׁ לוֹ הַצָּעֵר שְׂאִין לוֹ הַבְּחִירָה, כְּמוֹ הָאִשָּׁה שִׁיכּוֹלָה לוֹמֵר, אֵינִי נִיזוֹנָת וְאֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה. וּמִצַּד אֶחָד מִחֻיָּב הוּא לְמֵאוֹס כְּרַע, וְלִבְחֹר בְּטוֹב כְּרַצוֹנוֹ וּבְבַחֲרֵתוֹ. וּמִשּׁוֹם הַכִּי קָאָמֵר הַתַּנָּא "לְפּוֹם צַעֲרָא, אֲגָרָא", שְׁמִלְּבַד הַשְּׂכָר שִׁיִּקְבֵּל עַל הַטּוֹרַח שְׁטוֹרַח לְכַבוֹשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ, יִקְבֵּל שְׂכָר נְמִי עַל הַצָּעֵר הַנִּזְנָךְ לְעֵיל.

If so, aside from the effort that he exerts in doing good, he has the distress that he has no choice, as he cannot simply opt out of the system of reward and punishment. **This is like the woman who may say, “I will not be sustained [by my husband] and I will not work [for his benefit].”**¹¹ Per halacha, a woman must either choose to be supported by her husband and to surrender her earnings to him, or choose to be independent of his support and to keep her earnings. She cannot choose to be supported by her husband and to also earn money and keep that money. Similarly, a person cannot opt out of the obligation to strive for good while also opting out of the system of reward and punishment. **On the other hand, he is obligated to despise evil and to choose good by his will and his choice. Therefore, the Tanna says, “According to the labor is the reward,” that aside from the reward he receives for the effort he expends to subdue his inclination, he also receives reward for the aforementioned distress.**

⁹ Eruvin 13b.

¹⁰ Isaiah 1:19–20.

¹¹ Ketubot 58b.

ועוד בדרך אחר, דכלפי מה שאמר התנא לעיל, דליכא שכר תורה בהאי עלמא, בא התנא לאשמעינן, שאפילו הכי, אם יצטער הרבה על דברי תורה, והיה לו שכר אריכות ימים אף בעולם הזה, דאיתא בשלחן ערוך אכן העזר סימן פ', דחקקה עצמה ועשתה יותר מהראוי לה, המותר לבעל. ויש אומרים, לעצמה. וכתב הב"ח, שהמנהג הוא שלא להוציא מיד האשה שום העדפה שעליהי הדחק. עכ"ל. וזהו לפום צערא, אגרא, שאם יצטער בתורה יותר מדאי, ההעדפה הראויה לו מצד הדוחק, תהא שלו, וינקה בה לחיים ארוכים אף בעולם הזה.

Furthermore, another way of understanding our Mishnah: in light of what the Tanna Ben Azzai said above, that there is no reward for Torah in this world,¹² the Tanna of this Mishnah comes to teach us that even so, if one greatly exerts himself over words of Torah, he will have the reward of long life even in this world. This is brought in the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, siman 80 (se'if 1), that if she exerted herself and did more than was fitting for her, the excess earnings belongs to the husband.

But some say the excess earnings belongs to herself, and the Bach wrote (note 10) that the custom is not to extract from the woman any excess earnings that came through exertion.

This is the meaning of, “According to the labor is the reward”: if he exerts himself in Torah beyond measure, the excess earnings that is fitting for him by virtue of that exertion will be his, and through it he will merit long life even in this world.

ובהכי ניקא, דקרא ד"כי הוא סניד", קאי נמי אף על לימוד התורה, אף לפי תירוץ התוספות הנזכרים לעיל בסמוך, דהיינו כשיטת הרבה וידחוק עצמו עליה. וזה אי אפשר באשה, שאינה יכולה לדחוק עצמה ולעסוק בתורה, שרשות אחרים עליה, ומשום הכי פטורה מלמוד תורה, ולא אמרינן בה בזה סברא דגברי בעו טיי וכו', כנזכר לעיל.

With this we can understand that the verse, “Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—by loving the L-rd your G-d, by heeding G-d’s commands, and by holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and live long,”¹³ also applies to the study of Torah. This is even so according to the answer of Tosafot mentioned above nearby,¹⁴ namely, when he toils greatly and presses himself in it. This is not possible for a woman, for she cannot press herself and engage in Torah, since others have authority over her. Therefore, she is exempt from Torah study, and we would not say about her the rejected argument “men require life, but women do not need life,” as discussed in Kiddushin 34a, which explains that since the reward for the performance of the mitzvah of mezuzah is extended life, and since women do require life, the mitzvah of mezuzah applies to women as well.¹⁵ This is as mentioned above.¹⁶

¹² Pirkei Avot 4:2: “the reward of a mitzvah is [the opportunity to perform] another mitzvah.”

¹³ Deut. 30:19–20.

¹⁴ Pirkei Avot x:y.

¹⁵ Kiddushin 34a.

¹⁶ Pirkei Avot x:y.

ובקשיית התוספות הנזכר לעיל, יש לומר לפי דרך זה, הואיל דקיימא לן אין לה פשרה בנשים, אלא העושה רצון בעלה. ונשים הפשרות, בנדאי שמתפללות על חיי בעליהן, וגמירי כל המתפלל על חבירו, הוא צריך לאותו דבר, הוא נענה תחלה, אם כן, בנדאי שיהיה לה אריכות ימים. ואין קפידא אם לא אמרינן שחייבת בתלמוד תורה מסברא דגברי בעו חיי, שיהרי כפר יש לה אריכות ימים מחמת בעלה ממש מצד אחר, בעשותה רצון בעלה. והיא הנותנת שתהיה פטורה מתלמוד תורה, הואיל שרשות אחרים עליה. מה שאין כן במזונה.

Regarding the difficulty of Tosafot mentioned above, one may say according to this following approach. It is established for us, “There is no worthy woman except one who does the will of her husband,”¹⁷ and worthy women certainly pray for the lives of their husbands; and it is a received principle that anyone who prays for his fellow, and he himself needs that matter, he is answered first¹⁸—if so, certainly she will have long life.

There is no objection if we do not say that she is obligated in Torah study by the rejected argument that “men require life,” as there ordinarily would be, for certainly women require life. **Rather, she already has long life on account of her husband, from another aspect, by doing the will of her husband. This itself is what allows that she be exempt from Torah study, since others have authority over her—unlike mezuzah, where she herself is obligated and promised long life.**

ועוד בדרך אחר, שפבר ידוע שעל ידי הטורח המלאכה של אדם בעשיית המצוה, הוא מגביר כח הקדושה, בסוד "נותן ליער כח", "וקוה' יחליפו כח". וכן פתבו המקובלים, שפזיעה שהאדם מזיע לבער החמץ ולתקן המצה, מתקן צון קרי, וכיוצא.

Furthermore, another way of understanding our Mishnah: it is already known that through the exertion of a person's labor in performing a commandment, he strengthens the power of holiness.¹⁹ This is the secret of “He gives strength to the weary,”²⁰ “and those who hope in the L-rd will renew strength.”²¹ Thus, the Kabbalists wrote, that through the sweat with which a person sweats to remove chametz and to prepare the matzah, he rectifies the sin of emission, and the like.²²

¹⁷ Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah ch. 9.

¹⁸ Bava Kamma 92a.

¹⁹ Elijah de Vidas (1518–1587), *Reshit Chochmah*, Sha'ar HaTeshuvah, ch. 6.

²⁰ Isaiah 40:29.

²¹ Isaiah 40:31.

²² Immanuel Chai Ricci (1688–1743), Italian rabbi and Kabbalist, *Mishnat Chassidim* (Amsterdam 1740), tractate Teshuvah, ch. 10, mishnah 11.

ועל זה אמרו "ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך", "בעל מלאכתך" דוקא, שעל ידי הטורח והמלאכה, פודה אותו הדבר מן הסטרא אחרא ומכניסו לקדושה, ואם כן, חלק הקדושה הוא ה"בעל" של אותו ה"מעשה", וישלם לו שכר הפעולה, לא כמו שכיר יום, אלא לפי השבח שהשבים הפעולה. ולפום צערא, אגרא, שעל ידי הצער שיהיה לו פדי להשלים המצנה כתיקונה, כך יתרבה שכר.

Regarding this they said, "And your Employer is faithful"²³ specifically "your Employer," for through the exertion and the labor, he redeems that matter from the *Sitra Achra*, "the Other Side," referring to the collective force of spiritual impurity, and brings it into holiness. Thus, the portion of holiness is the "owner" of that "deed," and it will pay him the wage of the act—not like a day laborer, but according to the enhancement that the act has been improved. "According to the labor is the reward," that through the labor he endures in order to complete the commandment properly, so will the reward increase.

וְעוֹד לפי דרכנו הנזכר לעיל, ההולך בגן עדן מקדם, ליום השביעי, יום שבת, יום מנוחה, בא להוסיף על דברי בן בג בג הנזכר לעיל, בחידוש אנדה בעולם הבא הנרמז ליום שבת שהוא יום מנוחה, כמו שאמרו ז"ל, לעולם שפולו שבת, שהוא מנוחה וכו'. ועל זה יש להקשות, מהאי דאמרינן בסוף ברכות, תלמידי חכמים אין להם מנוחה, לא בעולם הזה ולא בעולם הבא, שאמר "ילכו מחיל אל חיל" וכו'.

Further, according to our path mentioned above, the one who enters the primordial Garden of Eden, for the seventh day (i.e., the end of his life), the day of Sabbath (i.e., where there is a transition from the mundane to the holy), the day of rest (i.e., the cessation of the physical struggle), comes to add to the words of Ben Bag Bag mentioned above. That is, someone who has finished his "labor" and is now walking back into the original state of spiritual perfection, his soul returning to the Garden of Eden.

[Ben Bag Bag's words] add an Aggadic insight regarding the World-to-Come, which is alluded to by the Sabbath day, which is a day of rest. This is as the Sages said, a world that is entirely Sabbath, which is rest, etc.²⁴

And yet, regarding this, we can ask, from that which we say at the end of Berachot (64a), that Torah scholars have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come! They are in constant spiritual motion. This is as it is said, "They go from strength to strength, appearing before G-d in Zion."²⁵ How do we explain this apparent contradiction? Is the World-to-Come a state of static, eternal rest for Torah scholars, or a state of continuous, tireless ascent?

²³ Pirkei Avot 2:16.

²⁴ Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah, ch. 2.

²⁵ Ps. 84:8.

ותרץ שם מהרש"א, במה שפרש רש"י על פסוק "ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי", מה הנה העולם חסר, מנוחה, בא שבת, באה מנוחה, קלמה ונגמרה המלאכה. והמנוחה זו היא כילוי וסילוק מלאכה ופעולה. וקאמר הכא בתלמיד חכם שהיא פעולת השכל והעיון בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, דאין לו מנוחה וכילוי מזאת הפעולה של עיון השכלי, אלא שתמיד פועל בה, והיא בעצמה פעולת המנוחה דלעולם הבא, שהצדיקים יושבים ונהנים מזיו השכינה בעיון השכלי. עכ"ל.

The Maharsha answers there, based on what Rashi explained on the verse “On the seventh day God finished His work that He had undertaken.”²⁶ Rashi wrote: “What was the world lacking? Rest. When Sabbath came, rest came; the work was completed and finished.”²⁷

This rest is the cessation and removal of labor and action. Here it says regarding the Torah scholar that it is the activity of intellect and contemplation in this world and in the World-to-Come, that he has no rest and cessation from this activity of intellectual contemplation. Rather, he is constantly engaged in it, and it itself is the activity of rest in the World-to-Come, that the righteous sit and enjoy the radiance of the Divine Presence through intellectual contemplation.

- Chiddushei Aggadot on Berachot 64a

ונהו שאמר התנא, לפום צערא, אגרא, כלומר, מן הדין הנה ראוי שהעולם הבא יהיה כולו מנוחה גמורה, וכן הדין נותן, ש"היום לעשותם", ולמחר ליטול שכרם. וממה שעושה האדם בעולם הבא, אינו מן הראוי שיקבל ממנו שכר. אכל פינן שהתלמידי חכמים אין להם מנוחה גמורה בעולם הבא, שאצריכים לטרוח בעיון פנזכר לעיל, פנגד זה יתרבה שכרם אף מטורח העיון שעושים בעולם הבא, לפום צערא, אגרא, אפילו בעולם הבא.

This is the intent of what the Tanna said, “According to the labor is the reward,” meaning: according to strict justice it would have been fitting that the World-to-Come be entirely complete rest. Thus logic dictates, that “today is for doing them,”²⁸ and tomorrow for receiving their reward.²⁹ Indeed, it would not be fitting that a person receive reward from what he does in the World-to-Come.

That is, in this world, we have a physical body, an evil inclination, and worldly distractions. When we choose to learn Torah or do a mitzvah, it is “a labor,” as we are fighting against our nature. Therefore, we deserve “a reward.” In contrast, in the World-to-Come, there is no physical body, no evil inclination, no worldly distractions. The soul is in the presence of the Divine light, and it is the soul’s natural state, like a flame rising upward, to learn Torah and ascend “from strength to strength.”

But Torah scholars do not have complete rest in the World-to-Come, for they must toil in contemplation, as explained above. Thus, their reward increases even from the toil of contemplation that they do in the World-to-Come. Thus, for the Torah scholar, “according to the labor is the reward,” even in the World-to-Come.

²⁶ Gen. 2:2.

²⁷ Rashi on Gen. 2:2.

²⁸ Deut. 7:11.

²⁹ Eruvin 22a.

ובדברך זה דניק לשון הפנא לעיל סוף פרק ב', ודע מתן שְׁכָרוֹן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים לְעֵתִיד לְבָא. שְׁהִיָּה לוֹ לֹאמֹר, וְדַע "שְׁכָרוֹן" שֶׁל צְדִיקִים, וּמֵהוּ "מִתֵּן". וַיּוֹבֵן, בְּמֵאֵי דְסִמְיֻד לִיָּה, וְנִצָּמֵן הוּא בְּעַל מְלֹאכְתָּהּ שְׁיִשְׁלֵם לָהּ וְכוּ', וְשִׂאָף עַל מֵה שְׁמַצְטַעַר בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְתִהְיֶה טוֹרַח לְלָקֵחַ מִחֵיל אֵל חָיִל, יִתְרַבֶּה שְׁכָרוֹהּ. וּלְפִי שְׁבַעֲוֹלָם הַבָּא לֹא שְׁיִיָּד שְׁכָר, מִשּׁוּם הֵכִי אָמַר "מִתֵּן שְׁכָרוֹן", שְׁנֵה הַמִּתֵּן בָּא מִחֲמַת הַשְׁכָּר הַרְאִוִי לָהּ מִמֵּה שְׁטַרְחָתָּ בְּעוֹלָם הַנֵּה, שְׁמִי שְׁלֹא טַרַח בְּעָרְבַּ שְׁבַת, לֹא יֵאכַל כָּלֵל בְּשְׁבַת.

In this way, the language of the Tanna above at the end of chapter 2, is precise: “Know that the grant of reward unto the righteous is in the future-to-come.”³⁰ For he could have said, “know that the reward unto the righteous is in the future-to-come,” so what is the meaning of “the grant of their reward”? It is understood from what follows it: “Faithful is your Employer, Who will pay you the reward of your labor”—that even for what one suffers in the World-to-Come, and the toil of going from strength to strength, your reward increases. Since in the World-to-Come, reward does not properly apply, therefore he said “the grant of their reward,” that this grant comes by virtue of the reward fitting to you from what you toiled in this world—for one who did not toil on the eve of Sabbath will not eat at all on the Sabbath.

וְהַטַּעַם שְׁנִקְרָאוּ "בֶּן בַּג בַּג", "בֶּן הֵה הֵה", כְּתִב הַחֲוֹסְפוֹת יוֹם טוֹב, שְׁגָרִים הָיוּ, וּכְדִי לְהַסְתִּירֵם מִן הַמְּלַשְׁיָנִים, קָרְאוּם כֹּה, וְהֵם בְּנֵי אֲבֵרָהֶם וְשָׂרָה, שְׁנִיחְוֹסְפָה ה"א עַל שְׁמוֹתֵם וְכוּ', וְעִי"ש.

The reason they were called “Ben Bag Bag” and “Ben Heh Heh,” the Tosafot Yom Tov wrote, is that they were converts. In order to conceal them from informers they called them thus; and they are children of Abraham and Sarah, for a “*heh*” was added to their names, which were originally Abram and Sarai, and see there.

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לֹאמֹר, שְׁנִשְׁמֹת הַגָּרִים בָּאוֹת מִקְלִיפַת "נוגה" הַמְּעוֹרְבָת מִטוֹב וְרַע, שְׁמַחְצִיָּה וּלְמַעְלָה טוֹב, וּמַחְצִיָּה וּלְמַטָּה רַע, וְעַל יְדֵי לִימּוּד הַתּוֹרָה וְקִיּוּם הַמִּצְוֹת שְׁעוֹשִׂים יִשְׂרָאֵל, מְבָרְרִין הַטוֹב מִהַרְע. וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהַנוֹגַהּ הוּא טוֹב וְרַע, אִם יִתְגַּבֵּר הַרַע, יִתְבַּטֵּל הַטוֹב שָׁבוּ, וְנַעֲשֶׂה קְלִיפָה גְמוּרָה. וְלָכֵן "שְׁמוֹר" עַל מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, כִּי הֵם חֲלָב טָמֵא, וְהִיא קְלִיפָה. וְכַשְׂאֲדָם אוֹכֵל חֲלָב אוֹ שְׂאֵר אִיסוּרִין, יִתְגַּבֵּר עָלָיו הַרַע, וְיִחְזוֹר כָּל לְבוּשׁ הַנוֹגַהּ, רַע, וְיִתְדַבֵּק בְּשִׁלְשׁ קְלִיפוֹת הַרְעוֹת. וְנִמְצָא כִּי בְּשְׁמוֹר שֵׁס"ה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, גֹּרֵם שְׁלֹא יִתְגַּבֵּר הַרַע וְלֹא יִתְדַבֵּק בּוֹ, וְזֶהוּ עֲנִין "סוֹר מְרַע". וְאַחַר כֹּה "יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב" עַל יְדֵי רַמ"ח מִצְוֹת עֲשֶׂה, וְהַרַע שֶׁבְּנוֹגַהּ מִתְהַפֵּד לְטוֹב מִמֶּשׁ. וְעִינֵין כָּל זֶה בְּאֶרְבַּ בְּדִירוּשׁ מִרְכַּבַּת יְחִזְקֵאל פְּרָק ה'.

Furthermore, one may say that the souls of converts come from the “*kelipah of Nogah*,” which is mixed of good and evil, whose upper half is good and whose lower half is evil. Through the study of Torah and the performance of the commandments, Israel separate the good from the evil.

The vision of the Divine chariot in Ezek. 11:4 describes “a stormy wind” [רְיוּחַ סְעָרָה], “a great cloud” [עָנָן גְּדוֹל], “flashing fire” [אֵשׁ מְתַלַּקְחַת], “and a radiance surrounding it” [וְנוֹגַהּ לוֹ סְבִיב]. Lurianic Kabbalah, such as *Etz Chayyim* identify the first three elements as *kelipot* that are completely impure. The fourth element is identified as the *kelipa of Nogah*, containing a mixture

³⁰ Pirkei Avot 2:18.

of good and evil. The first three *kelipot* cannot be elevated; they can only be nullified. In contrast, the *kelipa of Nogah* can be elevated. *Nogah* is the source of a convert's soul, and it can either be elevated through Torah or degraded through sin. Thus, the convert must take care to distance himself from the evil *kelipot*, and to transform and elevate *Nogah* through Torah and mitzvot.

Since *Nogah* is good and evil, if the evil strengthens, the good within it is nullified and it becomes a complete *kelipah*. Therefore “guard” the prohibitive commandments, for they are impure fat, and it is *kelipah*. When a person eats forbidden fat or other prohibitions, the evil strengthens over him, and the entire garment of *Nogah* returns to evil and cleaves to the three impure *kelipot*. It follows that by guarding the 365 prohibitions, one causes that the evil not strengthen and not attach to him. This is the intent of “turn from evil.”³¹ Afterward, “do good” through the 248 positive commandments, so that the evil within *Nogah* is transformed into actual good. See all this at length in the discourse of the Chariot of Ezekiel, chapter 5.³²

וְלִכְּוֹן אֱלוֹי הַגֵּרִים וְשָׂבְאוֹ מִקְלִיפַת נוּגָה, נִתְפָּוּנוּ לְהִתְרַחֵק מִשְׁלֵשׁ קְלִיפּוֹת אַחֲרוֹת שְׁמִתְדַבֵּק בָּהֶן מִי שְׁנוּטָה אַחַר הָרַע. וְעוֹד נִתְפָּוּנוּ לְהִתְזַיֵּר הָרַע, טוֹב, עַל יְדֵי שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים, דְּהֵינּוּ שְׁמִירַת מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה וּמִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה. וְלִכְּוֹן קְרָאוּהוּ "בֶּן בֶּג בֶּג", שְׁנִיתְרַחֵק מִן הַשְּׁלֵשׁ וְנִדְבֵק בְּשֵׁמִים. וְקָרְאוּהוּ בְּלִשׁוֹן כְּפוּל, לְפִי שְׁכַפְשֵׁם שְׁחֻשְׁב לְתַקֵּן אֶת עֲצָמוֹ מִתְחַלָּה, כִּד בְּנֻדְאֵי עֲשֵׂה וְתִיקֵן אַחֲרֵיהֶם, כִּי כוֹ דָּרָךְ הַטוֹב לְהֵטִיב.

Therefore, these converts who came from the *kelipah of Nogah* intended to distance themselves from the three other *kelipot* to which one who inclines after evil attaches himself. Furthermore, they intended to transform the evil into good through two matters—namely, guarding the positive commandments and the prohibitions. Therefore, they called him “Ben Bag Bag,” who distanced himself from the three impure *kelipot* and attached himself to the two, the positive and negative commandments. They named him in doubled language, for just as he intended to perfect himself at the outset, so certainly he acted and perfected others, for such is the way of the good—to do good.

וְ"בֶן הֵא הֵא" הוּא רְמֵז, שְׁהִתְזַיֵּר אַף חֲצֵי הָרַע שְׁלֵמְטָה שֶׁל נוּגָה, טוֹב, כְּמוֹ הַחֲצֵי שֶׁל מַעֲלָה. אוֹ שְׁגָרַם הַמִּיתוּק שֶׁל הַחֲמֵשׁ גְּבוּרוֹת, בְּחֲמֵשׁ חֲסָדִים, בְּסוּד הֵה"א שֶׁל אֲבָרָהֶם וְשָׂרָה, שְׁאֲבָרָהֶם מְגִייר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים, וְשָׂרָה מְגִיירַת הַנָּשִׁים, כְּנֻדְעָ בְּ"סוּד ה' לִירְאִיו".

“Ben Heh Heh” is a hint that he transformed even the lower half of the evil of *Nogah* into good, like the upper half. Or that he effected the sweetening of the five severities within the five kindnesses.

“The sweetening of the severities” is a central concept in Lurianic Kabbalah referring to the mitigation or transformation of Divine judgment (*din*) through its union with Divine kindness (*chesed*). In Kabbalistic thought, the five *Gevurot* (“severities”) are manifestations of the Divine

³¹ Ps. 34:15.

³² Chaim Vital, *Sefer Etz Chaim*. “Chariot of Ezekiel, chapter 5” refers to the “Palace” groupings in some editions of *Etz Chaim*. For other editions, see Gate 49, chapters 3–4, and especially Gate 50, chapter 4.

attribute of strict judgment, rooted in the sefirah of *Gevurah*. The five *Chasadim* (kindnesses) are corresponding manifestations of Divine mercy, rooted in the sefirah of *Chesed*. When the severities are “sweetened” by the kindnesses, harsh judgment is transformed into a more merciful expression.

This was done **through the secret of the letter *heh* of Abraham and Sarah³³—that Abraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women,³⁴ as is known in the esoteric secret of “the counsel of the Lord is for those who fear Him.”³⁵**

In the context of converts, the *heh* added to Abraham’s name represents the five *Chasadim*, with Abraham being the archetype of *Chesed*, while the *heh* added to Sarah’s name represents the five *Gevurot*, Sarah being associated with *Gevurah*. The convert, as a spiritual descendant of both Abraham and Sarah, embodies the process of sweetening: the severity and struggle inherent in the convert’s spiritual origins in *Kelipat Nogah* are transformed and elevated through attachment to the kindness represented by Abraham, the father of converts.

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³³ The letter *heh* is not merely a phonetic component of the names of Abraham, Sarah, or the Tanna Ben He He, but a functional spiritual “vessel.” Since the numerical value of *heh* is five, it serves as the formal container designed to hold and manifest the Five Chasadim (Kindnesses) and the Five Gevurot (Severities). The transition of the converts’ souls from *Kelipat Nogah* to holiness is mirrored in this structure: by attaching themselves to the “double *heh*,” they created the necessary vessels to receive and balance these five-fold Divine lights, effectively “sweetening” the harsh judgments of their origins through the expansive kindness of the Torah.

³⁴ Gen. Rabbah 39:14.

³⁵ Ps. 25:14.