

SEPARATION ANXIETY

**The Chevra Kadisha's Role in
Comforting The Soul As It Exits The Body**

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The philosophers have already explained that the bodily faculties impede in youth the attainment of most of the moral virtues, and all the more that of pure thought, which is achieved through the perfection of the intelligibles that lead to passionate love of Him, may He be exalted. For it is impossible that it should be achieved while the bodily humors are in effervescence. Yet in the measure in which the faculties of the body are weakened and the fire of the desires is quenched, the intellect is strengthened, its lights achieve a wider extension, its apprehension is purified, and it rejoices in what it apprehends. The result is that when a perfect man is stricken with years and approaches death, this apprehension increases very powerfully, joy over this apprehension and a great love for the object of apprehension become stronger, until the soul is separated from the body at that moment in this state of pleasure. Because of this the *Sages* have indicated with reference to the deaths of *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam* that *the three of them died by a kiss*. They said⁴⁷ that the dictum [of Scripture], *And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab by the mouth of the Lord,*⁴⁸ indicates that he died by a kiss. Similarly it is said of *Aaron: By the mouth of the Lord, and died there.*⁴⁹ And they said of *Miriam* in the same way: *She also died by a kiss*. But with regard to her it is not said, *by the mouth of the Lord*; because she was a woman, the use of the figurative expression was not suitable with regard to her. Their purpose was to indicate that the three of them died in the pleasure of this apprehension due to the intensity of passionate love. In this dictum the *Sages, may their memory be blessed*, followed the generally accepted poetical way of expression that calls the apprehension | that is achieved in a state of intense and passionate love for Him, may He be exalted, *a kiss*, in accordance with its dictum: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, and so on.*⁵⁰ [The *Sages*], *may their memory be blessed*, mention the occurrence of this kind of death, which in true reality is salvation from death, only with regard to *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam*. The other prophets and excellent men are beneath this degree; but it holds good for all of them that the apprehension of their intellects becomes stronger at the separation, just as it is said: *And thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be at thy rear.*⁵¹ After having reached this condition of enduring permanence, that intellect remains in one and the same state, the impediment that sometimes screened him off having been removed. And he will remain permanently in that state of intense pleasure, which does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures, as we have explained in our compilations and as others have explained before us.

the time of death, it is likewise in a state of PURITY, unsullied by sin.

The Baraisa elaborates:

IT IS ANALOGOUS TO a situation where A KING OF FLESH AND BLOOD - שחלק בגדי מלכות לעבדיו - DIS-TRIBUTED ROYAL APPAREL TO HIS SERVANTS. פקחין שבהן קיפלום - THOSE AMONG [THE SERVANTS] WHO WERE WISE FOLDED the clothes AND PLACED THEM IN A BOX for safekeeping¹⁵¹ - והניחום בקופסא - And THOSE AMONG THEM WHO WERE FOOLISH donned these garments and WENT AND PER-FORMED LABOR WITH THEM. לימים - SOMETIME LATER, ביקש - THE KING REQUESTED that HIS GARMENTS be returned to him. פקחין שבהן החזירו לו כשהן מנוהצין - THOSE servants WHO HAD BEEN WISE RETURNED THEM TO [THE KING] clean and NEATLY PRESSED, for they had properly safeguarded these garments and had seen to it that they remained pristine. טפשין שבהן החזירו לו כשהן מלוכלכין - THOSE WHO HAD BEEN FOOLISH, however, RETURNED THEM TO [THE KING] SOILED, for the garments had become dirty while they labored in them. שמח - THE KING GREETED THE WISE servants WITH HAPPINESS, וקעס לקראת טפשין - AND GREETED THE FOOLISH servants WITH ANGER. על פקחין אמר - CONCERNING THE WISE servants HE SAID: ינתנו כלי לאוצר - LET MY GARMENTS that I entrusted to these people BE PLACED directly IN my CHEST, for their royal stature is undiminished.¹⁶¹ והם ילכו לבתיהם לשלום - AND as for the wise servants themselves, LET THEM GO back TO THEIR HOMES IN PEACE. ועל טפשין אמר - BUT CONCERNING THE FOOLISH servants HE SAID: כלי ינתנו לכובס - LET MY GARMENTS that I entrusted to these fools BE GIVEN TO A LAUNDERER, for in their present state they are unbecoming royalty.¹⁷¹ והן יתחבשו - And as for these servants themselves, LET THEM BE CONFINED IN PRISON for their irresponsible behavior.

The Baraisa concludes:

SO IT IS WITH THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED IS HE. אף הקדוש ברוך הוא - CONCERNING THE BODIES OF THE RIGHTEOUS, He is pleased with the way they safeguarded their souls, and HE SAYS:¹⁸¹ ויבוא שלום ונוחו על משכבותם... - LET HIM COME IN PEACE; LET THEM REST UPON THEIR COUCHES; i.e. their bodies shall rest peacefully in the grave. ועל נשמתן הוא אומר - AND CONCERNING THE SOULS [OF THE RIGHTEOUS], HE SAYS: והיתה נפש אדני צרוּרָה בצרוּר החיים... - MAY THE SOUL OF MY MASTER BE BUNDLED IN THE BUNDLE OF LIFE.¹⁹¹ על גופן של - However, CONCERNING THE BODIES OF THE WICKED, HE SAYS:²⁰¹ אין שלום אמר ה' לרשעים... - THERE SHALL

BE NO PEACE, SAYS GOD, FOR THE WICKED. ועל נשמתן הוא אומר - AND CONCERNING THEIR SOUL HE SAYS:²¹¹ ואת נפש איבך יקלענה בתוך כף הקלע... - AND AS FOR THE SOUL OF YOUR ENEMY, MAY [GOD] SLING IT AS FROM THE HOLLOW OF A SLING!

The Gemara explores further aspects of the soul's experience after death.

A כל שאומרים בפני המת - R' Abahu said: אמר רבי אבהו - Everything that [people] say in the presence of a corpse יודע - עד שיסתם הגולל - until the top of the casket is closed over the body prior to burial.¹⁰¹ Once this occurs, the soul no longer perceives what is said by the living.

A dispute is presented concerning this point:

R' Chiya and R' Shimon the son of Rabbi disagree concerning this. פליגי בה רבי חייא ורבי שמעון ברבי - One says that until the top of the casket is closed, the deceased is aware of what is said in the presence of his corpse. הגולל - And the other one says that the deceased remains aware of these things until the flesh of his corpse decomposes in the grave.

The Gemara finds a Scriptural allusion to each of these views: The one who says until the flesh decomposes can claim the support of Scripture, דכתיב - for it is written: אך-בשרו עליו יכאב ונפשו עליו תאבל... - But his flesh will be pained over its [demise], and his soul shall mourn itself.¹²¹ And the one who says until the top of the casket is closed can likewise adduce Scriptural support, דכתיב - for it is written: וישב העפר על-הארץ כשהיה גוי... - The dust shall return to the earth as it was etc., and the spirit returns to God, Who gave it.¹³¹

The second part of this verse is expounded:

B והרוח תשוב... - The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: תנו רבנן - Scripture states:¹⁴¹ AND THE SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD, WHO GAVE IT. From the seemingly superfluous phrase "Who gave it," we expound: תנה לו כמו שנתנה לך - Be careful to GIVE IT [the soul], back TO HIM [God] LIKE HE GAVE IT TO YOU. בטקרה - Just as when God gives a soul to a person at birth, it is in a pristine state OF PURITY. אף אתה בטקרה - SO TOO, YOU must see to it that when you return this soul at

DEVARIM (32:39) (8) דברים (לז:ט)

²⁶ the fat of whose offerings they would eat,
they would drink the wine of their libations?
Let them stand and help you! Let them be a shelter for you!
²⁷ See, now, that I, I am He — and no god is with Me
I put to death and I bring life, I struck down and I will heal,
and there is no rescuer from My hand.

אשר חלב זבחימו יאכלו
ויקומו וייעזרכם
ראו עתה כי אני הוא
אני אמות ואחיה
ואין מידי מציל:

ישתו יין נסיכם
יהי עליכם סתרה:
ואין אלהים עמדי
מחצתי ואני ארפא

BERESHITH (3:19) (9) בראשית (ג:יט)

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to
the ground, from which you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust shall you
return.

בועת אפיק תאכל לחם עד שובך אל האדמה כי ממנה לקחת כי עפר
אתה ואל עפר תשוב:

KOHELES (12:7) (10) קהלת (יב:ז)

⁷ Thus ~~the~~
dust returns to the ground, as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it

עפר על הארץ כשהינה והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה