



SICHA – 19 KISLEV 5732

The Midrash states on this verse: “Charm is false and beauty is naught” refers to the generations of Moshe and Yehoshua. Or, according to another opinion, the generation of King Chizkiyahu.

“A G-d-fearing woman is the one to be praised” refers to the generation of Rabbi Yehuda ben Ilai, which was a generation faced with terribly harsh decrees. “Six people would cover themselves with one garment and study Torah.”

Or, as the Midrash says, it was a generation of decrees of death. The Midrash explains; the connection between all of those generations is their level of dedication to Torah study. There is a level of Torah study that can be considered full of “charm,” and there is Torah study that can be considered “beautiful.”

Then there is a third level of Torah study, which is regarded as resulting from “fear of G-d.”

The Midrash tells us, however, that the first two levels are “false,” and “naught,” while the third one is “worthy of praise.” How can we call the Torah study of Moshe’s generation false— Moshe is the one who received the Torah from Sinai, and his entire generation is called “a generation of knowledge”?

It is explained, that the verse itself gives the reason why the verse calls such Torah study “false” and “naught.” It is false because it is “charm” —because they could feel the value of their Torah study— it was charming to them.

Moshe’s generation studied Torah on an extremely high spiritual level, to the extent that our Sages declare, “The Torah was given only to the generation that ate Manna.” However, it lacked human effort. Their Torah study was with such great vigor and such great success since there was “charm” involved; it found favor in G-d’s eyes, and as a result was charming to the people as well. It would have been a wonder if they had not achieved so great a level of Torah study!

How can we know that it became “true” to the person; that his entire being, from beginning to end, mind, heart, and even the feet —have all become a Torah existence? It is impossible to ascertain when the Torah study is on the level of “charm,” like in Moshe’s generation. For there is no need for the person to force himself intellectually;



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the head, which leads the entire body, instructs him to involve himself in studying Torah and to be a "Torah-Jew."

The same is true of the Midrash's second interpretation —that it refers to the generation of Chizkiyahu, King of Yehudah. During his reign, Torah study was very widespread. The Talmud records that they had "sent people and checked," and were unable to find a single boy or girl in that time who was not an expert in the complex laws of ritual purity.

But to consider such Torah study as "praiseworthy" is not quite possible. We cannot even call it "true," since there is no way of knowing; it has not been tested. As long as it was not tested and proven, there is no way to know how it would hold up under adversity.

By contrast, later on there was a situation which is considered "a G-d fearing woman": a person who has no explanation for his dedication —he does not see G-dliness; as described in Psalms, "our fathers told us," but "we did not see the miracles." He was born in that country, his father grew up there; he never saw a life of Torah in the open, never saw any aspect of Torah or Mitzvot that did not involve persecution. There was no way out, and no hope, through natural means, to ever be freed. Such was the situation five years ago, and more so, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, even fifty years ago. Fifty years is considered an "eternity" in Jewish law, and this situation has endured for more than fifty years.

There was no way out, no logical possibility, that there would be a way to be freed from it.

They were asked "Why? Do you see charm in it?" 'We did not see the miracles' —he has to admit that he saw no such thing. When he goes out to the street, he sees an enemy. Even in his own home, he has to be on guard, since they might be listening under the door or through the window. He cannot trust those who come in to his home, for if they will be forced to tell, they might not be able to withstand the test. He even has to be vigilant toward those living under the same roof. After all, the Talmud states that "if they had been tortured" —with regard to Chanania, Mishael, and Azariah, ho knows—actually we do know —what would have been.

Yet, he answers, he has no logical explanation. He does not see any "charm," he does not see any "beauty." He does not see any reward for his actions in this world. In fact, he does not even expect a reward in the World to Come, since he is only able to



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study Torah in a time that is 'neither day nor night.' After all, otherwise they'll arrest him and take away his child and send him away. He studies Torah—there are no books, there is no teacher, there is no Yeshiva, there is nothing at all. So he believes that his Torah study is far from perfect.

Could he say that his Torah study is "beautiful?" He must be honest; he sees no beauty in it. So we ask him, "If you don't see any beauty, and you don't see any charm, why are you endangering your life?" He replies: "I don't know of any reason," and he is not looking for any reason — "I fear G-d" — that he fears G-d!

Nevertheless, the Midrash says that not only is this the truest form of Torah study, but even more so: those around him continuously praise him.

When does the Torah study of the generations of Moshe and Yehoshua reach its ultimate completion and perfection? On their own, they can be considered "charm is false" and "beauty is naught." But when a generation comes along which is besieged and in captivity, a generation in which there is nothing left other than "fear of G-d"; Regarding the beauty of Torah, they do not see a Yeshiva or a Rosh Yeshiva, they do not see holy books; nobody gives them a pat on the back saying "You're doing very well in your studies, you asked a good question, and offered a good response." That is when we can see that these people are truly "a G-d fearing woman"; they study Torah in spite of all these hardships. That lends strength and "praiseworthiness," to the Torah study of King Chizkiyahu's generation and of the generation of Yehoshua, and even brings to perfection the Torah study of Moshe's generation.

