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להשלים צורת נפשו תשפ״ו

The Cut That Finishes

Dovid Kopel

The חינוך (*education*) says something strange about מילה (*circumcision*) — and the strange part is not in what he says, but in what he leaves out.

The plain way to understand מילה is as removal. You take a knife, you cut away the ערלה (*foreskin*), you take something extra off the body. That is the obvious picture, and the חינוך quietly refuses it. In the whole שורש (*root*) of the mitzvah he never once mentions removing anything — no פגם (*damage*) to fix, nothing bad to strip away. He speaks only of completing: להשלים צורת הגוף (*to complete the form of the body*). To him the knife does not take away. It finishes. And that silence — a חינוך writing about a knife who never once reaches for the language of cutting — is the whole דרשה.

Then he tells us why Hashem set it up this way:

> וְלֹא בְרָאוֹ שָׁלֵם מִבֶּטֶן

He could have made us finished. He chose not to. He left us חסר (*incomplete*) on purpose — and the חינוך says it is a רמז (*hint*):

> כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּשְׁלוּם צוּרַת גּוּפוֹ עַל יָדוֹ, כֵּן בְּיָדוֹ לְהַשְׁלִים צוּרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהֶכְשֵׁר פְּעֻלּוֹתָיו

Just as you finish the form of your גוף by your own hand, so too the finishing of your נפש (*soul*) is placed in your hand — through the מעשים (*deeds*) you do. The גוף left חסר is not a flaw; it is a מתנה (*a gift*). Hashem did not make you broken and demand that you repair yourself. He made you unfinished, and handed you the finishing. The gap is not your shame. It is His trust.

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אדם הראשון is the original exception. He was born שלם — our חכמים (*Sages*) teach that he יצא מהול (*came into the world already circumcised*), and they learn it from the very פסוק of his making — וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ He was created in the image of Hashem, and that image already carried within it that level of completion. His שלמות was not something added to him from without; it was part of what it meant to be made בְּצַלְמוֹ.

And then something changed. We cannot know with certainty that the חטא is the cause — אדם might have been created this way from the start, and that is hidden from us. But it is likely that it is not so. What changed was not the נשמה itself but his embodied condition — the state of אדם as a נשמה expressed through a גוף. חז״ל reveal a contrast between the כתנות אור and the כתנות עור, garments of light and garments of skin, and the מקובלים understand that contrast as the very

ירידה the חטא brought about. If his whole embodied being descended in that way, from אור to עור, it is hard not to think that the need for a physical completion is bound up with that same ירידה. The מעשה of מילה — a תיקון engraved into the עור itself — would then be the repair that binds us again, body and soul, where the first man had needed no such thing.

And here is the turn. What was forced upon us by the ירידה became, in Hashem's hand, the deeper עבודה. For a שלמות a person is simply born into is not yet truly his — it rests on him without a שרש in him, and what did not grow from within can be lost from without. But a שלמות a man completes with his own hand takes root. We are given the same מתנה — the צלם, the נשמה, the שרש of all קדושה (*holiness*) — but given it now as a זרע (*offspring*) and not a finished tree, so that the growing would be ours. The ירידה left us חסרים; the מצוה turns that חסרון into the very place where we build ourselves. What a man builds through his own עבודה takes root within him in a way that a passive שלמות never does.

None of this is simple, and it should not be made simple. We are also taught that צדיקים beyond אדם were themselves נולד מהול (*born already circumcised*) — among them משה, and יעקב, and others — so the ירידה did not fall on every man in the same measure, and the whole matter resists a neat accounting. We can only look carefully and say what seems likely, and hold the rest with humility.

There is a question here that reaches into the heart of who we are. A person carries a חֵלֶק אֱלוֹק מִמַּעַל (*a portion from Above*) within him. How, then, could such a person ever become distant, or soiled, through עבירה? The בית אלקים of the מבי״ט asks exactly this. The חלק אלוק itself is never soiled and never severed from its מקור. Yet עבירה leaves a real רושם upon the person. It damages the נפש — the point at which the נשמה is bound to the גוף and expressed through it — and so it conceals a closeness that remains intact at the שרש. The distance is real in the lived person, real in how the נשמה shows itself through him; it is only at the essential bond that nothing was ever broken. תשובה does not recreate a נשמה whose bond had been destroyed. It cleanses the person, repairs the connection between גוף and נשמה, and lets the nearness that was never extinguished be revealed once again.

And this is the key to what changed in אדם and what did not. Something in him truly changed — his embodied condition descended, אור to עור, and the ירידה was real. But the נשמה itself, the חלק אלוק, did not change and could not. What descended was not the שרש but the נפש — the binding of that שרש to the גוף, the point where nearness is lived and expressed. And that is precisely why the תיקון had to be a physical one. The essence needs no repair; it never does. What needs repair is the קשר of גוף and נשמה — and so the תיקון is engraved into the עור itself.

So when a person asks himself, in his honest hours, am I really holy — or only בשר ודם? — the answer is that he is holy, and always was. The צלם is his, with no condition, not earned and not at risk. He is holy בכח (*in potential*) the moment he exists. What is left to him is to be holy בפועל (*in actuality*) — to wake, בהכשר פעולותיו, what was placed in him whole. The שרש is never the question. The שרש is the gift. The waking is the עבודה, and it is the work of a life.

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Hashem did not entrust this finishing to lone individuals again. The first whole man stood alone, and alone he fell. So the completing was handed to widening bodies — each one, like the גוף itself, born חסר and made שלם by human hands.

A man alone is לא טוב (*not good*) — לֹא טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ — חסר by himself, completed only in another. Where an איש and אשה build their בית (*home*) in truth, the שכינה rests ביניהם (*between them*). The בית is the first מקדש, the smallest place the שכינה dwells — a בית made שלם by the two who tend it, and by the תורה that turns a household into a דירה (*a dwelling*) for Him.

The בית widens into a people, and the people are one גוף — כאיש אחד, bound each to each by ערבות (*mutual responsibility*), the limbs of a single body. This גוף too is born חסר; its שלמות is אהבת ישראל, and its fracture is no small thing. It was שנאת חנם (*baseless hatred*) — the גוף turned against its own limbs — that brought the חורבן (*destruction*); it is the pieces made whole again that will undo it. כלל ישראל, like the man, is finished by human hands.

And the whole גוף, in its place, builds the בית. Here ארץ ישראל enters, and the ארץ teaches the boldest form of the דרשה. ארץ ישראל is not made holy by our arrival; her קדושה precedes us. She is the ארץ uniquely prepared for the השראת השכינה (*resting of the Divine Presence*) and the full life of תורה. And yet even an inherent קדושה awaits its גילוי. In גלות (*exile*) the ארץ remains holy בשרש, while the fullness of that קדושה lies concealed, waiting for her children to return and awaken it through תורה, מצוות, and the בית built upon her soil. In this she mirrors the person exactly: the קדושה is already present at the שרש, but its revelation is entrusted to human עבודה. And where the whole people, made שלם, stand upon the ארץ and raise the בית, He rests among them — וְשָׁכַנְתִּי י בְּתוֹכָם — not in it, but in *them*.

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Completion does not mean adding as much as possible. It means giving the כלי precisely the צורה intended for it — and sometimes the final act of completion is therefore subtraction. My Rebbe, HaRav Nochum Lansky שליט״א, explained this in the name of the רמח״ל. The משכן is a מקום שני (*a second place*), built so that the גילוי שכינה (*revelation of the Divine Presence*) can rest in this world; everything in it is set toward that one end. And the rule that governs such a structure is כל המוסיף גורע — whatever is added, subtracts: add one thing beyond what belongs, and instead of more גילוי you create a כיסוי (*a covering*), a concealment. The addition does not enrich the vessel — it breaks it.

This is the nature of ערלה. It begins as something extra — an addition — and yet that very extraness is what marks it as needing to be removed. When you are building a כלי to hold קדושה, two things can ruin it: something out of place, and something merely added. Either one breaks the surface that was meant to hold, and the vessel cannot do its work. A כלי that cannot hold its contents breaks; a vessel with a crack lets everything poured into it fall through.

And here is the point that should not be softened. With the קדושה of the שכינה, the כלי must be ראוי (*fit*) from the very start. It is not that the שכינה *tries* to rest and cannot — as if the light were pressing against a wall. It is that an inadequate vessel is simply not a כלי for that קדושה at all. And this is the true בחינה of ערלה. So long as the bodily כלי remains incomplete, the קדושה of a person's מעשים cannot fully materialize within him in the form it was meant to take. The מצוות are קדוש —

they lose nothing of what they are. It is the אדם who has not yet been made fully ראוי to receive everything they are meant to impress upon him. מילה completes the כלי through which his פעולות can complete his נפש.

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Yet what gives all these separate acts of completion one form? What makes the finishing of a נפש, a בית, a people, an ארץ, and a בית המקדש stages of one עבודה rather than separate achievements?

The answer is תורה. It grows as it climbs. In the single נפש, תורה teaches, directs, and gives צורה to the בהכשר פעולותיו of which the חינוך speaks — it is the direction through which a person's מצוות, מידות, תפילה, and חסד complete the נפש; without it a deed finishes nothing. One rung up it does more than complete the person: it makes holy the space between two people, turning a house into a דירה and drawing the שכינה down between איש and אשה. One rung higher and it does more than sanctify a home: it is מתן תורה that forges a scattered crowd into a single גוף — for אין אומתנו אומה אלא בתורותיה; without תורה, כלל ישראל loses the very form through which its many members become one עם. And at the top, in the בית, תורה is no longer only the כלי (*vessel*) of שלמות; it is the center of it — the לוחות in the ארון, the point His voice speaks from מבין שני הכרובים, the concealed קדושה of the ארץ waking to the מצוות done on her. The same תורה that makes one man's deed fit is the תורה at the heart of the מקדש. It only grew as the גוף grew.

And it grows because of what it is. The מקובלים taught:

> יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאוֹרַיְיתָא וְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא חַד הוּא

ישראל, the תורה, and Hashem are one. That is why the שכינה comes wherever שלמות completes. The finishing is always done through תורה, and תורה is the very bond of the people to Hashem — so that every act of השלמה is, underneath, an act of דבקות (*cleaving to Hashem*). When a גוף is made שלם through תורה, the oneness of ישראל and Hashem becomes real in that place — and that realized oneness is the שכינה, resting. Between איש and אשה. Among the people. In the בית. The same Presence each time, drawn by the same מעשה, at every size of the one גוף.

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You began חסר. So did your בית, your people, and the ארץ beneath the בית. The ordinary human path is not to receive שלמות fully formed; Hashem gives the שרש and entrusts man with its growth. It was given into your hand — כן בידו — so that when it stands שלם at last, from the single נפש to the שכינה in the בית, it will be, in the fullest sense the word can hold, yours.

May we be זוכה (*merit*) to live up to our ברית and reveal its אות, recognizing the קדושה within us and the potential entrusted to us to bring it מן הכח אל הפועל (*from potential into actuality*). May we draw upon the generations of experience, love, מסירות נפש, and suffering that have made us into the people we are today. May we take all those נסיונות and grow through them, becoming a true עם אחד בלב אחד וברצון אחד, nullifying our will before His will.

May that growth, that closeness, that attentiveness, and that commitment to שמירת המצוות and עסק ויגיעת התורה usher in the dawn when we will once again sit as one nation in the presence of His greatness and His glory — when His House will once again be our house.

Dedicated to my son מאיר, *for learning this* סוגיא *with me — it is inspiring to see him grow into a* בן תורה.

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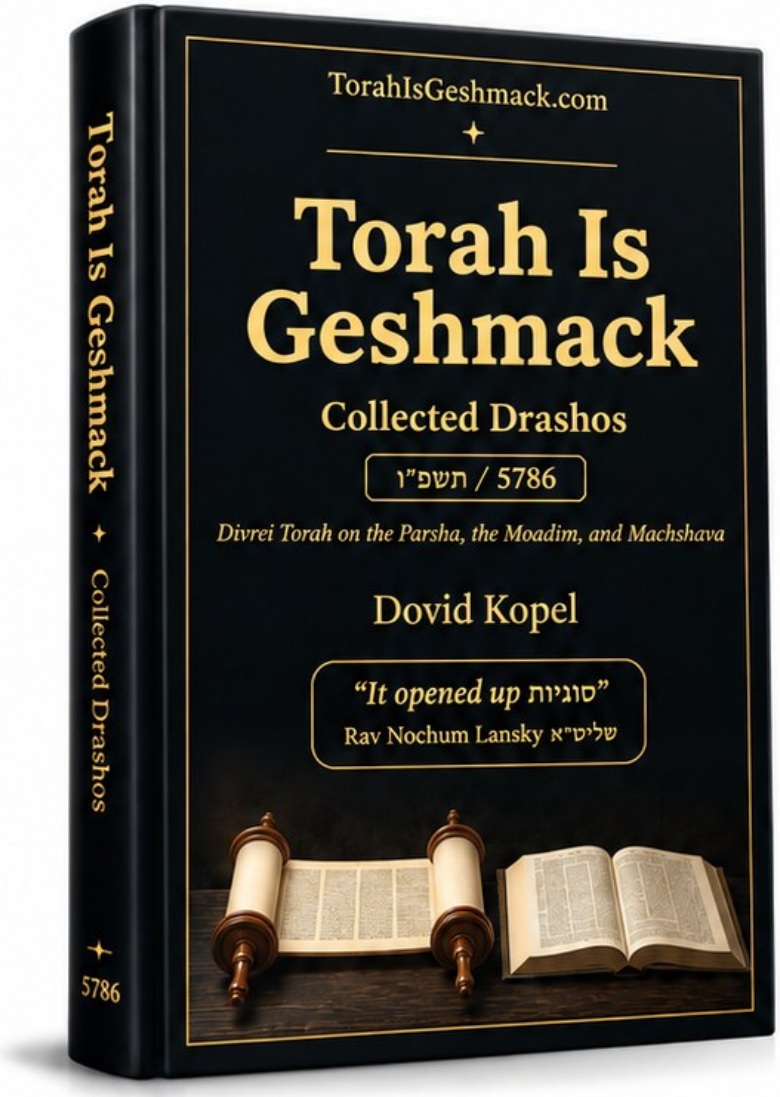
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