

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

In loving memory of seven yahrtzeits in our family during Nisan: Simon Franks (Uncle), 1 Nisan; Ben Sherman (Uncle), 4 Nisan; Maureen Tyson (sister), 10 Nisan; Yetta Franks (Aunt), 25 Nisan; Nathalie Morrison (Hannah's mother), 26 Nisan; Leonard Franks (cousin), 27 Nisan; Anne S. Fisher (Alan's mother), 28 Nisan – plus Yom HaShoah, 27 Nisan.

One can easily become lost in Sefer Vayikra when the Torah moves across many legal sections, often without an obvious transition. Vayikra, Tzav, and Shemini present the laws of korbanot and the story of the dedication of the Mishkan. Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, approach the Mishkan without permission, to perform a korban at their own initiative (one not prescribed for them). At the end of Sefer Shemot, we learn that once Hashem brings His presence to the Mishkan, even Moshe could not approach the Holy of Holies (and survive) without Hashem giving him permission. Both Har Sinai during the Revelation and the Mishkan with Hashem's presence are holy – and therefore dangerous for any human to approach. The Torah therefore starts a lengthy section of the conditions and preparations required for one to approach the Mishkan safely.

After the death of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe asks why Aharon and his two younger sons do not eat from the korban as he tells them to do (10:17-20). Aharon explains that as an onen (one with a death in the immediate family, until after the burial), he and his sons could not eat from the korban. From this exchange, the Torah moves to a thematically related subject, the laws of kashrut (chapter 11).

Since the laws of kashrut involve contact with dead animals, the Torah immediately moves into a lengthy discussion of tumah and tahara – ritual purity and impurity. (Contact with a dead person or animal is the classic situation that causes ritual impurity.) To approach the area around the Mishkan or to participate in any of the korbanot, a person must be tahor, ritually pure. Tazria presents the laws of tahara (ritual purity) and situations that make one tamai (ritually impure). I discussed the specific laws in more detail in my remarks two years ago (available at PotomacTorah.org). The basic types of impurity are one day and one week (or longer). Among the types of ritual impurity, much of the discussion involves tzaraat, a condition that only a Kohen may diagnose. Any person (even a Kohen) with a sign that could indicate tzaraat has to go to a Kohen for a diagnosis. (Even a Kohen could not diagnose his own case of possible tzaraat.) Tazria discusses diagnosis of the condition. Metzora (next week) discusses how to recover from tzaraat.

Tzaraat is part of a topic that Rabbi Ovadia raised last week. What do the numbers seven and eight mean in the Torah and in Judaism? One form of ritual impurity is childbirth. A woman who gives birth to a baby boy is tamai for the first week after his birth but becomes tahor (ritually pure) on the eighth day (so she may attend her son's bris). Although the mother is still bleeding, the blood is considered pure (tahor) blood while many other forms of bodily discharge make a person tamai. From the eighth day (a week later after the birth of a daughter), a mother may participate in all religious rituals even while still bleeding.

Eight also arises with respect to the diagnosis of tzaraat. A kohen looks at a skin blemish to give an initial evaluation. If the mark has characteristics of tzaraat, the kohen tells the person to go outside the camp and isolate for a week. On the

eighth day, the person returns for the kohen to make a further evaluation. If the mark is spreading, the kohen calls it tzaraat and sends the person back into isolation. If the mark is improving or has not spread, the kohen calls it not tzaraat. (I am providing only a short summary – for details, see the parsha or my 1980 remarks.) Tzaraat is not a medical condition, and it is not closely related to any medical disease. Chazal have always considered tzaraat to be a spiritual disease. The Torah directs a kohen, not a physician, to diagnose a case of possible tzaraat, monitor its progress, and indicate if and when the person recovers. As Rabbi Lam observes (below), tzaraat is a blessing in disguise. It is an advance warning that a person must improve himself spiritually, or something worse will happen to him. Steinsaltz (below, following Ramban) adds that tzaraat only afflicts a tzadik. If a community is worthy enough, then those who do not live up to the standards of the community, who are not reaching their potential, may receive tzaraat as a “gift” (direct message) from Hashem. One reason for tzaraat is haughtiness – a person who believes that his views are better than those of others, one who is not open to learning from his fellows. The classic sin that causes tzaraat is lashon horah – evil speech – and the classic situation is Miriam’s speaking evil of Moshe and his wife (Bemidbar ch. 12).

Once we can rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, ritual purity will again be a requirement to participate in daily rituals near the Temple. The lessons from Tazria go far beyond the details of skin conditions – the issues of spiritual worthiness apply to all aspects of a person’s life. Anyone who looks at Tazria and believes that he is reading about medicine misses the entire point of this section of the Torah. As Dennis Prager observes, man tends to be evil from birth (Hashem’s observation after Noah’s flood). An important lesson for parents is that we must educate our children with proper Torah values. Rabbi Angel concludes that genuine Torah scholars, those who seek truth, have no peace, because they are always seeking to learn and grow spiritually.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, loved a parsha like Tazria, because he greatly appreciated opportunities to teach his congregation some of the depths of meaning in what initially seem to be boring legal details. I share this love of Tazria and Metzora. If asked to present a Dvar Torah on any parsha, Tazria and Metzora would be near the top of the list of those I would most enjoy discussing.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Tazria Metzora: Good News and Bad News by Rabbi Label Lam © 2007, 2012

And the person with Tzaraas in whom there is the affliction – his garments shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to his lips; he is to call out, “Contaminated, contaminated!” All the days the affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

Tzarass is woefully misunderstood. It is seen as an archaic matter, a form of leprosy that for some reason is no longer applicable or relevant. The truth is that Tzarass, according to the sainted Chofetz Chaim was a blessing in disguise. How so?

I went through half a dozen clunker cars until I learned two important words that have served me in good stead. Actually it was not until I bought a more expensive vehicle and realized that I was not comfortable making payments for a car that no

longer functioned that I bothered to take the user's manual out of the glove compartment of the car and discover this two word phrase that has granted longer and healthier life to every one of my automobiles ever since. By the way, those two words are, "Oil change!"

Now, though, the newer cars have something the older ones did not and that is the proverbial, "Amber light!" Once the amber light goes on, or the "check engine" sign on the dashboard it's time to ask. Without that earlier warning system we are at a real disadvantage. Tzarass was a sort of earlier warning system, an amber-light to alert us that spiritual deficiencies were starting wreak havoc on our system. We operate now at a distinct disadvantage without Tzarass!

There's an old country folksy phrase that goes like this, "You can hide the fire, but what are you gonna do with all the smoke?!" Tzarass is like smoke bellowing out from the engine of our being, a scent of danger to remind us repair our ways. Although, Tzarass, technically, is no longer active the concept of Tzarass is still very much alive!

Guilt also got a bad rap for similar reasons but it's also good in a way that needs explanation. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. Although nobody likes to experience pain it can be extremely beneficial. A person without the ability to feel pain would certainly be likely to be missing digits and whole limbs. While making a salad they might realize a little too late that the red in the bowl is not from tomatoes, pardon me! Both guilt and pain if properly responded to, serve to guide us away from certain damage.

Another signal that helps us figure out what might be wrong is in the arena of raising children. In a class I have been giving for a while called, "The Ten Commandments of Parenting". The first of the "big ten" is "I am HASHEM your G-d Who took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage!" The first commandment of parenting is that parents too stand before their children, whether aware or not, and say with their actions, "This is who we are and this is what we do!" It's no wonder that in the first paragraph is written, "And these words that I command you today you shall place upon your heart and you should teach them to your children." First they must be on your heart and then to be taught because children read the heart. They have a sincerity meter that's extremely sensitive! In the second paragraph of "Shema" it says, "And you should teach your children to speak in them (Torah)" and then it continues to tell us how to teach this lesson, "with your sitting in your house, and your- going on your way and the way you go to bed and the way you rise up". Children are following their primary role models, their parent!

A young lady was asked by a Rabbi at a general lecture, "What is your parents' greatest source of pleasure?" A broad smile came across her face and she replied, Me!" The Rabbi continued his line of questioning, "What's your parents' greatest source of pain?" Now with in a more somber tone she responded, "My sister!" Why are kids both the greatest source of pleasure and the greatest source of pain? I believe we all realize intuitively that they are "us- (mother and father) playing out our real selves on the big screen of life.

Many things are a form of Tzarass, in that they can lead us to make critical adjustment before it's too late. All of life is a self-portrait and the canvass on which we operate grabs our undivided attention, all too often only when we witness vivid pictures of good news and bad news.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-tazria/>

Tazria -- Rumble, Don't Grumble

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

When Moshe taught the details of the various afflictions related to Tzaraas, the people were terrified. Moshe calmed them by saying, "The afflictions are there so that you will eat, drink, and be happy." These words are confusing; were they meant to be a comfort? The afflictions include ostracizing a sinner, and other painful situations. What exactly did Moshe mean when he said their purpose is that we will "eat, drink, and be happy?"

A few weeks ago, I was in the car with a friend who was driving. My friend was consistently making mistakes despite having a GPS system. Each time he missed a turn or turned onto the wrong highway, the GPS would emit a jarring sound, as the screen read: "Recalculating." After a few mistakes, the jarring sound of the GPS rebuke was getting on his nerves. I asked him if he wanted me to turn the volume down. He wisely responded, "No, that would be worse. Then I wouldn't even know that I made a mistake."

Negative feedback can be painful, but it serves a purpose. We appreciate it because it helps us get where we want to go. Similarly, Moshe was telling the people that the afflictions are not meant as punishments. They are meant to alert people that they are not on track. By providing an alert, Hashem enables us to redirect ourselves towards the goals of goodness. This is much as a coach who may provide negative feedback but does so because he really believes in his charge. He is confident that with the right feedback we can have a successful outcome.

A great example of this is the rumble strips which are often placed on the side of a highway to awaken a drowsy driver who is veering out of his lane. The sound of the tires on the rumble strips is loud, ominous, and scary. But society views it as a gift because it alerts the driver that he is going off course. Those rumble strips save lives.

The conversation between Moshe and the Jewish people isn't just about Tzaraas. The conversation is equally applicable in any case of negative feedback. As the verse in Tehillim (73:1) states, "Hashem does only good for the Jewish people, for those who are of pure heart." If one's heart is in the right place -- focused on growth and excellence -- then all communication is good. Either the communication affirms what we are doing, or it offers us the feedback needed for correction.

I once read a memoir from a man who dreaded the day that his father would pass away. No one looks forward to that, but this man had a uniquely personal reason. Besides the fact that he loved his father, he dreaded the day that, as a mourner, he would have to lead the prayers. He knew that his Hebrew reading wasn't so good, and that he would be making many mistakes which would be most embarrassing.

Indeed, eventually his father passed away, and this man led the service, made mistakes, and was corrected. It bothered him, but he persevered. In fact, he reframed the situation in a wonderful way. He began to give a dollar after the service to anyone who corrected him. He gave out the dollar bills with a smile and with genuine appreciation. "Thanks for helping me get it right," he would say. With time his pronunciation improved, all the result of seeing the critique as an opportunity to help him reach a newfound goal of excellence.

Sometimes in observance we may notice laws that seem to be an imposition. On Shabbos, for example, a person might feel like they are "chafing at the bit" – just dreaming and craving all things forbidden to be done on Shabbos. In fact, there are Jews who have attempted to reject all Rabbinic safeguards because those safeguards restrict things which would have been permitted according to Biblical law.

The reality is that these safeguards are not something to grumble about. Like rumble strips, they alert us if we are too close to danger. If we find ourselves running up against laws or safeguard-restrictions too often, we might just be too close to the edge. One who walks right up against the fence, will regularly bump against the fence, sometimes quite painfully. Instead, it is best to heed the warning: Move closer to a place of safe travel. Similarly, one can move away from the fence, to enjoy the garden. One can even come into the home, where we can drink, eat, and be happy.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Seeking Truth: Thoughts for Parashat Tazria

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

How important is it to admit the truth when one is wrong?

In his book of sermons (*Tokhahat Hayyim*), Rabbi Hayyim Palachi of 19th century Izmir opens his discussion of Parashat Tazria, with a reference to Uzziah, a generally successful king of Judah during the 8th century BCE. King Uzziah

eventually became arrogant with power, and decided that he could serve as a priest (cohen) and bring an offering in the Temple.

Uzziah was warned by the priests and a prophet to desist from this flagrant violation of religious law, but the King proceeded in spite of the warnings. The Bible reports that King Uzziah was stricken with leprosy as punishment for his sinful arrogance. Although it was clear to everyone that Uzziah had acted wrongly, the King himself did not admit his sin. He lived the rest of his life with leprosy, never repenting for his error in judgment.

Rabbi Palachi cites the example of King Uzziah to stress the importance of admitting one's mistakes. Indeed, the wiser a person is, the greater the desire to adhere to truth.

In a remarkable passage, Rabbi Palachi wrote: "Anyone who comes to refute me in any of my teachings or rulings, whether something I wrote or spoke, let him refute and correct me with heavenly intent, to clarify the truth; he should not be ashamed or embarrassed [to disprove my teachings], for this is my wish and desire, especially for my children and students. They should not be concerned that I will take offense [at being proven wrong]; on the contrary, this is my honor." (p. 45).

Rabbi Palachi was emphasizing a vital concept: we must pursue truth; we must allow — and welcome — honest criticism and admit when we are wrong. Our goal must not be to promote our views at any cost; our goal must be to arrive at truth.

The search for truth entails several basic features. Diligence: one needs to pursue truth with single-minded devotion and thoroughness. Honesty: one must be as objective as possible and consider a range of facts and opinions. Humility: one must be willing to admit error.

Beware of those who propound views that are not factually correct or that are based on biased or faulty reasoning. Beware of those who insist on their views, without taking into consideration the valid criticisms against them. Beware of those who promote their ideas, even when their ideas and policies have been demonstrated to be misguided and wrong.

Arrogant and egotistical people are not essentially interested in truth. Rather, they engage in propaganda, mind-control, and stubborn adherence to their own opinions regardless of how erroneous, biased, or dangerous. Like King Uzziah, they would rather suffer than admit personal error.

Professor Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner in Economics, has coined the phrase "illusion of validity." He points out that people tend to think that their own opinions and intuitions are correct. They tend to overlook hard data that contradict their worldview and to dismiss arguments that don't coincide with their own conception of things. They operate under the illusion that their ideas, insights, intuitions are valid; they don't let facts or opposing views get in their way.

The illusion of validity leads to innumerable errors, to wrong judgments, to unnecessary confrontations. If people could be more open and honest, self-reflective, willing to entertain new ideas and to correct erroneous assumptions — they would find themselves in a better, happier and more humane world.

The illusion of validity does not just affect arrogant and egotistical people, although it surely is most pronounced in such individuals. The problem affects all human beings, even the wisest and most humble. It is all too easy to become complacent with our "truths" and not maintain clarity of thought. Genuine seekers of truth maintain alert and critical minds; they are open to new ideas and new perspectives.

The Talmud at the end of tractate Berakhot teaches that Torah scholars have no peace, not in this world and not in the next world. Why not? Because they are always searching and growing, asking new questions and finding new answers. They are never content that they have mastered the whole truth and nothing but the truth. They go from one intellectual struggle to the next.

Rabbi Palachi taught that genuine seekers of truth are characterized by humility, the willingness to admit imperfection, the desire to learn and to grow. Those who follow the model of King Uzziah are destructive to themselves, their families and society.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/seeking-truth-thoughts-parashat-tazria>

Review of Dennis Prager on Genesis **

A Blog by Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Dennis Prager is far better known as a political commentator than a Bible Scholar. Nonetheless, he is animated by his belief in the Torah and its enduring moral messages for humanity. His commentary, as the book's title suggests, is rooted in a rationalist approach to the Bible.

Whether or not one agrees with all of his politics or individual interpretations of the verses, Prager's commentary is strikingly relevant when he emphasizes the moral revolution of the Torah and the vitality of its moral teachings to today's overly secularized Western world. Rather than serving as bastions of moral teachings and American values, universities are increasingly at the vanguard of attacks against God, the Bible, family values, Israel, and the very notion of an objective morality. Prager pinpoints several of the major differences between the Torah's morality and the dangerous shortcomings of today's secular West.

Throughout his commentary, Prager makes his case for belief in God, providence, the divine origins of the Torah, and the eternal power of the Torah's morality. He also offers a running commentary on the Torah, bringing insights from a wide variety of scholars and thinkers, as well as from his personal experiences. In this review, we will focus exclusively on the former, as it is here that the commentary makes its greatest contributions.

God's creation of the world teaches that there is ultimate purpose to human existence. Atheists reject God's existence. If all existence is random happenstance, however, there is no ultimate purpose. Additionally, the Torah posits that God is completely separate from nature. God gave human beings a special role, and the moral God demands morality from humanity. Science teaches science, but it cannot teach right from wrong, or even if there is a right or a wrong. Science cannot provide ultimate purpose, since it studies only the physical universe)7-8(.

The world began as chaotic)tohu va-vohu, Genesis 1:2(, and God created order through a process of distinctions. According to the Torah, the primary responsibility of humanity is to preserve God's order and distinctions. The creation narrative in Genesis distinguishes between God and the universe, humans and animals, and sacred and profane. Elsewhere in the Torah, God distinguishes between people and God, good and evil, life and death, and many others. The battle for higher civilization essentially is the struggle between biblical distinctions and the human desire to undo many of those distinctions. Prager concludes with a chilling assertion about the contemporary West: "As Western society abandons the Bible and the God of the Bible, it is also abandoning these distinctions. I fear for its future because Western civilization rests on these distinctions")14(.

Pagans believed that the gods inhere in nature. This belief led to the need for people to propitiate the gods and offer sacrifices. By stressing that God is outside of nature, the Torah revolutionizes the role of humanity vis a vis the world. People must rule and conquer the earth, meaning that the world was created for human use)1:28(. People must not abuse nature or inflict unnecessary suffering on animals, but people rule the world. Among other things, this belief led to the invention of modern medicine to fight diseases. Prager warns of a relapse to the pagan worldview: "Many secular people in our time romanticize nature, perhaps not realizing — or not wanting to realize — that either humans rule over nature or nature will destroy humans")27(.

Without the values of the Bible, people lose their uniqueness as being created in God's image)1:26(, and instead become insignificant parts of nature. British physicist and atheist Stephen Hawking said, "We humans]are[mere collections of

fundamental particles of nature.” When God is diminished and nature is elevated, human worth is reduced)104(. Finally, without God, people are simply another part of nature. There cannot be any good or evil behavior for humanity, just as we would not call an earthquake evil. “Therefore, as ironic as it may sound to a secular individual, only a God-based understanding of human life allows for free will”)505-506(.

It is not good for man to be alone)2:18(. People ideally were meant to marry and to live together in a community. In the secular West, there has been a dramatic decrease in marriage rates, and more people live by themselves than at any time in recorded history. Consequently, loneliness has become a major social pathology. A meta-analysis of 70 studies covering over three million people published in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science* concludes that “loneliness is now a major public health issue and represents a greater health risk than obesity and is as destructive to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.” Prager also quotes the moral benefits of participating in a religious community. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks summarizes the research of Robert Putnam: “Regular attendees at a place of worship were more likely than others to give money to charity, engage in volunteer work, donate blood, spend time with someone who is depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, help someone find a job...Regular attendance at a house of worship is the most accurate predictor of altruism, more so than any other factor, including gender, education, income, race, region, marital status, ideology and age”)39-41(.

God expressed grave concern over Adam and Eve’s eating from the Tree of Knowledge, lamenting that “man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil”) Genesis 3:22. (Prager frames the sin in Eden as the struggle over who determines morality. The Torah teaches that God does, but human sin is when people determine good and evil. When people usurp that right, people become god. “And it is precisely what has happened in the West since the French Enlightenment. Man has displaced God as the source of right and wrong. As Karl Marx wrote, ‘Man is God.’ And as Lenin, the father of modern totalitarianism, said, ‘We repudiate all morality derived from non-human)i.e., God (and non-class concepts”) 59.

Human conscience alone cannot bring about a just society. Conscience can be easily manipulated when serving a cause. Conscience can be dulled when people do more and more bad. Conscience also is not usually as powerful as the natural drives — greed, envy, sex, alcohol and others can overpower the conscience. And finally, conscience does not always guide someone properly to do what is right. We need God to teach objective moral values)108-109(. “Even Voltaire)1694-1778(, a passionate atheist and the godfather of the aggressively secular French Enlightenment, acknowledged: ‘I want my lawyer, my tailor, my servants, and even my wife to believe in God because it means that I shall be cheated, and robbed, and cuckolded less often. If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him”)239(.

Those who admire the achievements of successful people likely will strive to emulate them. Those who are jealous and resentful of the success of others become destructive. Rather than improving his offering, Cain instead envied Abel’s successful sacrifice and murdered him. The Philistines envied Abraham and Isaac, and therefore destructively filled up Abraham’s wells and persecuted Isaac)Genesis 26(. Economist George Gilder)a non-Jew(wrote about this phenomenon in his book, *The Israel Factor*. He demonstrates that a society’s reaction to Israel’s successes is a predictor of their success or failure. Those who resent the outsized achievements of Israel are likely to fail morally, economically, and socially. Those who admire Israel and seek to emulate its achievements are likely to create their own free and prosperous societies)65(. Prager draws a lesson for contemporary America: “The most notable exception to this unfortunate rule of human nature has been the American people. Until almost the present day, Americans tended to react to people who had attained material success not by resenting them but by wanting to know how they could emulate them. This seems to be changing as more Americans join others in resenting the economic success of other people”)308(.

The Torah describes Noah as “a righteous man, blameless in his age.” The Sages of the Talmud debate whether the Torah’s addition of “in his age” diminishes his objective righteousness, or whether it makes Noah all the more impressive for standing above his wicked society. Although both positions are valid, Prager supports the latter view, observing that few people have the moral courage to reject their environment. Prager adds a more important point: Many are tempted to judge people of the past by our contemporary moral standards, rather than in the context of their time. As a result, we would conclude that virtually nobody who lived before us was a good person. For example, many of the founding fathers of America owned slaves, and America allowed slavery at the time of its founding. Since slavery is indeed evil, we may conclude that America’s founders were bad men and America itself was a bad place. However, it is vital to judge America in 1776 “in its age,” and not by the standards of our time. At that time, virtually every society practiced slavery. It was the values of America’s founders and Western Bible-based civilization that led to the abolition of slavery, and the thriving of freedom-loving and freedom-spreading society)91-93(.

After the flood, God concludes that He never again will destroy humanity, “since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth”)8:21(. Prager uses this verse as a springboard to attack a modern Western belief, that people are basically good and corrupted by society. The belief emerges from the West’s abandonment of the Bible, and is associated with philosophers of the French Enlightenment such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau)1712-1778(. No rational person can believe that people are basically good. All children need moral teachings to learn the most basic decency. The unjust wars, slavery, child abuse, and so many other horrors of world history down to the present should be ample evidence that people must actively build a good society. The wrongful belief that people are basically good also is dangerous. Parents and schools will not invest time and energy teaching goodness if they assume that children are naturally good. God and religion become irrelevant to teaching goodness. Society, not the individual, is blamed for evil. Those who blame society try to change society, rather than teaching individuals to be better. “The Torah teaches that, especially in a free society, the battle for a good world is not between the individual and society but between the individual and his or her nature”)109-115(.

Making good people is the single most important thing parents can do. Loving children without teaching them moral responsibility turns children into narcissists. Parents must constantly emphasize goodness, integrity, and honesty, and praise these traits as most important. Parents also must morally discipline their children, rather than ignoring that responsibility. Teaching the Bible only can help, both because the Bible is unparalleled in its moral wisdom, and it is valuable for children)and their parents(to recognize God as the source of morality)132-133(.

Through these and so many other religious-moral teachings, the Torah was a revolution in world history, and continues to bring relevant teaching to the modern world.

* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

** A review of Dennis Prager, *The Rational Bible: Genesis*)Regnery Faith, 2019(

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/review-dennis-prager-genesis>

Parshas Hachodesh – Our First Mitzvah

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

This week, as we begin the month of Nissan we read Parshas Hachodesh, the mitzvah to count the months beginning from Nissan. This was the very first mitzvah given to us as the Jewish people. While we were still in Egypt, just before instructing us in the original Pascal Lamb, G-d gave us the mitzva to count Nissan as the first month. In recognition of this, we read this Parsha this Shabbos as the Maftir.

The Ramba”n (Shemos 12:1) explains that this seemingly mundane and perhaps even odd mitzvah is in fact a fundamental mitzvah which defines our identity as Jews. We initially did not give the months names, and only referred to them by numbers, with Nissan being first and Adar being twelfth. This numbering system seems strange, being as Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, is in Tishrei, and Nissan is in fact the sixth month of the year. The reason for this, explains the Ramba”n is that Nissan is the month when we were initially redeemed from Egypt and became a nation. G-d wants us to count the months from Nissan so that whenever we mention dates in the calendar – for holidays, meetings, business documents or any other purpose - we will always be reminded that our nation began its existence through the great miracle of the Exodus in the month of Nissan. Each of us must always remember that history which enabled our existence.

This mitzvah is not simply a mitzvah to have a Jewish calendar following the lunar cycle. Rather, this mitzvah is a requirement to recognize that we are only here today because of G-d’s great miracles redeeming our ancestors from Egyptian bondage. We must always remember that our nation should not be here today. Our very existence as a nation, as an entity, defies the laws of nature. No other slave nation ever escaped en masse and reestablished themselves as a sovereign nation in a different country. Although, this event was ancient history, Hashem is instructing us to understand that we exist today because of that miracle. Each and every Jew exists miraculously because of G-d’s intervention. This mitzvah is teaching us that those miracles were more than just a means to begin our nation. They are a message of G-d’s

eternal love and of the great value and importance that G-d has for each and every one of us and for our service as a member of His nation.

The Ramba"n adds that our Rabbis taught us that the names which we currently use for the lunar months were Babylonian names which we adopted after the redemption from the Babylonian exile. This, too, was in order that we should always remember that there was a Babylonian exile, and we are free now because G-d redeemed us from them. Here, too, our redemption was a great miracle. We had been delivered into the hands of the Babylonians and then in turn to the Persian Empire. During that time, Haman and Achashverosh nearly succeeded in annihilating our ancestors. Through Hashem's intervention, we were spared and shortly thereafter returned to Israel and began the building of the second Temple. To this day, the Jewish calendar uses these names to remember that redemption, as well.

This idea is echoed in the Haggadah. As we sit at the Seder, the author of the Haggadah takes us through our history by analyzing a particular set of verses from Devarim. These are the verses recited by a farmer when he would bring *Bikkurim* - the first fruits of his crop - to the Temple. The Ramba"n explains (Devarim 26:2) that the farmer's declaration is an acknowledgement that G-d has kept His promise and delivered our nation from Egypt and brought this farmer to the land of Israel to serve G-d. Although, the farmer bringing his fruits to the Temple was born a thousand years after the Exodus, he must recognize that the Exodus occurred for him and thank G-d for fulfilling His promise to redeem us.

When we sit at the Seder and review the story of the Exodus, we must each recognize that the ancient miracles are personal and that G-d redeemed us then, out of His love for each and every one of us today.

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Shemini/Tazria – Parasha Pointers [see note below]

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

1. The inauguration of the Mishkan took eight days [Lev. 9:1]. Consider the appearances of cycles of seven and eight in the biblical calendar and in events and rituals. Question to ponder: What do the numbers seven and eight represent in the Torah?
2. The number seven appears in the creation of the world, Shabbat, Pesah, seven weeks leading to Shavuot, Shavuot itself, Sukkot, the seven-year Shemita cycle, and seven times seven years leading to the jubilee year. It also appears in many sets of sacrifices, blood-sprinkling on the altar, and the seven branches of the Menorah.
3. The number eight appears in Berit Milah, the inauguration of the Mishkan, Shemini Atzeret, and the purification process of the leper.
4. Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, are struck and killed for bringing an alien fire [10:1-2]. The commentators debate the reason for their punishment. The following paragraph is a warning against entering the Mishkan while drunk [10:8-11]. It seems that Nadav and Avihu were drinking wine to achieve a joyous state of mind. Using external substances for such a purpose is detrimental and dangerous. The spiritual experience should be internal and not one which is achieved by substance abuse.
5. This also explains why the warning against serving in the Mishkan while drunk is followed by this description of the Kohen's role, which is to distinguish between the holy and unholy, the pure and impure, and teach the laws of God to the Israelites. The power of distinction evaporates when one is drunk, and the drunkard cannot be an educator or an inspirational guide, which is the principal purpose of the Kohanim.
6. Aharon and his surviving sons are instructed to carry on with the inauguration and let the rest of the nation mourn the death of Nadav and Avihu [10:6-7]. This seems very harsh, and there is no doubt that it required a tremendous sacrifice for Aharon and his sons to obey that order. This perhaps could be analogized to an extremely important mission in which some of the crew members lost their lives. The survivors must keep the momentum and bring the mission to fruition.

7. Moshe loses his temper and rebukes Aharon for not eating of the meat of a certain sacrifice. Aharon calmly responds that in light of the tragedy that befell him, eating of that sacrifice would be inappropriate. Moshe accepts Aharon's explanation [10:16-20]. We learn for this that even when the program is created by God, there is room for last-minute changes made by people on the ground.

8. In chapter 11 [1-47] we have an extensive list of kosher and non-kosher animals. Keeping the laws of Kashrut helps us in several ways. We are aware of what we eat and inquire about its origin. We learn to delay gratification [see *The Marshmallow Test*, by Walter Mischel]. Sparing some of the non-kosher animals is also important for the ecology since they are nature's sanitary corps.

Enjoy reading and learning. Shabbat Shalom.

[ed.: I do not yet have a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia. Meanwhile, several of the Devrei Torah this week discuss the significance of seven and eight in the Torah – a subject that Rabbi Ovadia raises here. For this reason, I am running his Dvar Torah from last Shabbat again.]

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**

The Healing Power of Seeing Each Other

By Rabbi Dr. Eli Yoggev *

This week's and next week's Torah portions deal with a skin disease called tzara'at. Our parsha speaks about diagnosing the ailment. The healing process begins with the kohen, the priest, coming and assessing the situation, and deeming the suffering individual's status that of a metzorah (a leper). What always stands out to me when I read these verses is the repeating verb ראה, which means "see." The Torah says many times over that the kohen must come and see (ראה, ראו,) (ראה, מראה) the person and their ailment.

I love this idea because it hints at a first stage of healing for people who may be going through difficult times, similar to the metzorah. To begin helping our loved ones heal, we, like the kohen, must first see them. When someone is in pain, it's upon us to make sure they feel seen — to sit with them, to really listen, to let them know we see them and accept them where they are.

One of my rabbis modeled this for me when I first became religious at the age of 18. I had just arrived at an Israeli yeshiva and I felt afraid and confused. I didn't know the language, nor was I very familiar with the religion for that matter. Everything was new! I had many rabbis at that yeshiva, learned many texts, and graced many Shabbos tables. It wasn't, however, until my rabbi arrived at my yeshiva and "saw" me that I really began to flourish. He took me and my friends out to eat baguettes at the corner kiosk (which seemed like such a cool thing at the time!), he listened intently to my problems, and he just made me feel appreciated, supported, and seen. Without this initial support, I honestly am not sure I would be a rabbi today.

The metzorah is in a tough position in our parsha, but our Torah portion reminds us that there is hope! The metzorah can be healed and reintegrated into society. Similarly, we can draw others close who are struggling and enable them to grow and feel supported. Healing begins with a caring heart and loving eyes!

Shabbat shalom.

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<https://library.yct Torah.org/2022/03/tazria22/>

Note: Hebrew words sometimes become backward in translation from one software to another. Please make allowances in case you see Hebrew words spelled backward.

Freeing Ourselves With Metaphors

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Unless you know someone who lives on a sphere of existence other than our own, I don't think you would correct me if I would say that everyone has what would typically be called "problems" or "issues." Some are small. Some are big. Some take the form of finances. Some take the form of social situations.

Sometimes we even create issues for ourselves just for the fun of it like when we play a game and charge the defending team to set up an obstacle which would be difficult for us to surpass. (Think about soccer goalies or a defensive line.)

Unless we like having problems or issues though, we tend to search for things we call "solutions" to help us "solve" the problem.

How interesting that we've chosen this word "solution" to represent our ultimate search for our path through this life journey.

Did you find that last sentence strange? Allow me to quote from the text of *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (a philosopher and a linguist), where they recount a tale of misunderstanding concerning this metaphor of "solutions."

"An Iranian student, shortly after his arrival in Berkeley, took a seminar on metaphor from one of us and told us that among the wondrous things he heard at Berkeley was the beautifully sane metaphor, "the solution to my problems." He understood this to be a large volume of liquid, bubbling and smoking, containing all of your problems either dissolved or in the form of precipitates with catalysts constantly dissolving some problems (for the time being) and precipitating out others.

He was disillusioned to find that the students at Berkeley had no such chemical metaphor in mind. As well he should be, for the CHEMICAL metaphor of problems has beauty and insight. It gives us a view of problems as things that never disappear utterly and that cannot be solved once and for all. The best you can hope for is to find a catalyst that will make one problem dissolve while not making another precipitate out.

And since you do not have complete control over what goes into this bubbling and smoking life liquid, we constantly find old problems precipitating out and present problems dissolving, partly because of your efforts and partly despite anything you do.

This CHEMICAL metaphor gives us a new view of problems as things that cannot be made to disappear forever, which matches our lived experience better than other metaphors. To treat problems as things that can be solved once and for all is pointless.

Better you should direct your energies to finding out which catalysts will dissolve your most pressing problems without precipitating out worse ones. The reappearance of a problem is viewed as a natural occurrence rather than a failure on your part to fully solve it.

To live by the CHEMICAL metaphor would mean that your problems have a different kind of reality for you. A temporary solution would be an accomplishment rather than a failure. Problems would be a part of the natural order of things rather than disorders to be cured."

Notice that their point is not that this is the "correct" metaphor for problems. Only that to adopt such a perspective would change the way we live life. It's not the only one we can adopt. We can see our problems instead as a PUZZLE that has definite and permanent solutions. The point is we have a choice and we have the freedom to go back and forth between perspectives based on the problems we face.

Of course I can't tell you any specifics about how to make such a choice. Only you can delve into that richness of how changes in the metaphors you live by can change how you live. Only you can choose how to use the land given to you to till. Only you get to explore the caverns of your perspectives. (Did you like those metaphors comparing life to land and minds to caves?)

Maybe having the freedom of having more metaphors or more perspectives to choose from can be a way we define freedom? With Passover on the horizon, the idea of freedom has begun to shine its light in our daily thoughts.

Our Sages say that "Only someone who studies Torah can be called a Ben Chorin (child of freedom)".

What does this mean? How does Torah bring us to freedom?

Because when we study Torah we encounter a multitude of perspectives and metaphors through which to frame and act out our Jewishness. As we encounter more halachic perspectives, different customs, and different historical Jewish communities, we see the multiplicity of Jewish life and scholarship. We become unstuck from feeling that we have to do it only in the way we're used to. We become unstuck from only seeing our Judaism through one metaphor. Torah knowledge gives us the freedom to choose. Or at least the freedom to understand.

After all, who can make it through one page of the Talmud without encountering our favorite metaphor for Jewish discussion, "Two Jews. Three opinions"?

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Almost Pesach,

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah Tazria/Metzora: A Return to Ritual Purity

These Torah readings discuss at length topics that are among the most challenging for us to relate to. What relevance do the laws of ritual purity and impurity — after childbirth, for lepers, and for various types of male and female discharges — hold for us? Why does the Torah place such emphasis on these matters? Why do we feel so far removed from them?

The Taharah Axiom

In his book *Orot*, Rav Kook posited the following principle: "The degree of purity required is a function of the comprehensiveness of the spiritual framework." The more inclusive a framework is, encompassing more aspects of life, the more rigorous are the requirements for taharah, ritual purity.

The Temple and its service are a classic example. The Temple projected an ethical and holy influence on a wide range of life's aspects — from the noble heights of divine inspiration and prophecy, through the powers of imagination and the emotions (the outbursts of joy and awe in the Temple service), all the way down to the physical level of flesh and blood (the actual sacrifices). Because its impact reached even the lowest levels of physical existence — which are nonetheless integrally connected to all other aspects of life in an organic whole — the Temple and its service required an exact and precise purity.

By contrast, a spiritual and moral influence that is directed only towards the intellect does not require such a refined degree of physical purity. Thus, the Sages taught, Torah may be studied even when impure.

"Is not My word like fire? says the Lord' (Jer. 23:29) — Just as fire does not become impure, so too, words of Torah cannot become impure." (Berachot 22a)

Changes throughout History

As the Jewish people returned from exile in Babylonia and rebuilt the Temple, it was necessary to revive the Temple's strict requirements of taharah. For this reason, Ezra enacted a series of enactments stressing the need for greater ritual purity during this period.

The long exile that followed the Second Temple period, however, greatly weakened the emotive and imaginative abilities of the people. The intensity and aesthetic quality of spiritual life became impoverished, and the corresponding need for a

rigorous degree of purity was accordingly diminished. Thus we find that one of the six orders of the Mishnah (compiled in the Land of Israel) is Taharot, dealing exclusively with matters of ritual purity. Of the 37 tractates of the Talmud (composed in the Babylonian exile), however, only one belongs to this order. Similarly, the Talmud repealed Ezra's decree obligating immersion before Torah study.

What remained for the Jewish people in exile? Only the Torah and its intellectual influence. It still involved the physical realm through the practical observance of mitzvot, but the intermediate stages of imagination and feeling were bypassed. In exile, we lament, 'Nothing remains but this Torah' (from the Selichot prayers).

In the long centuries of exile, meticulousness in matters of ritual purity lost its obligatory nature. It became associated with idealistic longings, the province of the pious few.

A Return to Taharah

The Hasidic movement of the 1700's aspired to restore the concepts of physical purity to the masses. Hasidism places a greater emphasis on the imaginative and emotional faculties — particularly through prayer and song — than the intellectual. As a result, it awakened a greater need for personal and physical purity. This objective certainly contains a healthy kernel, although it needs additional direction and refinement.

Especially now, with the national renaissance of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, these aspirations for physical taharah should be renewed and expanded. Our national renewal complements the renewed yearning for spirituality; and the healthy desire to restore the nation and heal its national soul applies to all aspects of life, including physical purity.

It is precisely in the camps of the Jewish army that the Torah demands a high level of purity:

"For the Lord your God makes His presence known in your camp, so as to deliver you and grant you victory over your enemy. Your camp must therefore be holy." (Deut. 23:15)

Together with the renewal of our national strength and vitality, there must be a corresponding reinforcement of emotive and physical purity. This will help prepare the basis for an integrated national life that encompasses a complete rebirth of the people: from the highest intellectual pursuits, to the simple joy in life and living.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Orot, p. 81 (Orot HaTechiyah, section 35).)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/TAZRIA64.htm>

The Eighth Day (Tazria 5776)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Our parsha begins with childbirth and, in the case of a male child, "On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev. 12:3). This became known not just as milah, "circumcision," but something altogether more theological, brit milah, "the covenant of circumcision." That is because even before Sinai, almost at the dawn of Jewish history, circumcision became the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14).

Why circumcision? Why was this from the outset not just a mitzvah, one command among others, but the very sign of our covenant with God and His with us? And why on the eighth day? Last week's parsha was called Shemini, "the eighth [day]" (Lev. 9:1) because it dealt with the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, which also took place on the eighth day. Is there a connection between these two quite different events?

The place to begin is a strange Midrash recording an encounter between the Roman governor Tyrannus Rufus^[1] and Rabbi Akiva. Rufus began the conversation by asking, "Whose works are better, those of God or of man?" Surprisingly, the Rabbi replied, "Those of man." Rufus responded, "But look at the heavens and the earth. Can a human being make anything like that?" Rabbi Akiva replied that the comparison was unfair. "Creating heaven and earth is clearly beyond human capacity. Give me an example drawn from matters that are within human scope." Rufus then said, "Why do you

practise circumcision?" To this, Rabbi Akiva replied, "I knew you would ask that question. That is why I said in advance that the works of man are better than those of God."

The rabbi then set before the governor ears of corn and cakes. The unprocessed corn is the work of God. The cake is the work of man. Is it not more pleasant to eat cake than raw ears of corn? Rufus then said, "If God really wants us to practise circumcision, why did He not arrange for babies to be born circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva replied, "God gave the commands to Israel to refine our character."^[2] This is a very odd conversation, but, as we will see, a deeply significant one. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of time.

The Torah tells us that for six days God created the universe and on the seventh he rested, declaring it holy. His last creation, on the sixth day, was humanity: the first man and the first woman. According to the Sages, Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit already on that day and were sentenced to exile from the Garden of Eden.

However, God delayed the execution of sentence for a day to allow them to spend Shabbat in the garden. As the day came to a close, the humans were about to be sent out into the world in the darkness of night. God took pity on them and showed them how to make light. That is why we light a special candle at Havdallah, not just to mark the end of Shabbat but also to show that we begin the workday week with the light God taught us to make.

The Havdallah candle therefore represents the light of the eighth day – which marks the beginning of human creativity. Just as God began the first day of creation with the words, "Let there be light," so at the start of the eighth day He showed humans how they too could make light. Human creativity is thus conceived in Judaism as parallel to Divine creativity,^[3] and its symbol is the eighth day.

That is why the Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. As Nechama Leibowitz and others have noted, there is an unmistakable parallelism between the language the Torah uses to describe God's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. The Mishkan was a microcosm – a cosmos in miniature. Thus Genesis begins and Exodus ends with stories of creation, the first by God, the second by the Israelites. The eighth day is when we celebrate the human contribution to creation.

That is also why circumcision takes place on the eighth day. All life, we believe, comes from God. Every human being bears His image and likeness. We see each child as God's gift: "Children are the provision of the Lord; the fruit of the womb, His reward" (Ps. 127:3). Yet it takes a human act – circumcision – to signal that a male Jewish child has entered the covenant. That is why it takes place on the eighth day, to emphasise that the act that symbolises entry into the covenant is a human one – just as it was when the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7).

Mutuality and reciprocity mark the special nature of the specific covenant God made, first with Abraham, then with Moses and the Israelites. It is this that differentiates it from the universal covenant God made with Noah and through him with all humanity. That covenant, set out in Genesis 9, involved no human response. Its content was the seven Noahide commands. Its sign was the rainbow. But God asked nothing of Noah, not even his consent. Judaism embodies a unique duality of the universal and the particular. We are all in covenant with God by the mere fact of our humanity. We are bound, all of us, by the basic laws of morality. This is part of what it means to be human.

But to be Jewish is also to be part of a particular covenant of reciprocity with God. God calls. We respond. God begins the work and calls on us to complete it. That is what the act of circumcision represents. God did not cause male children to be born circumcised, said Rabbi Akiva, because He deliberately left this act, this sign of the covenant, to us.

Now we begin to understand the full depth of the conversation between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman governor Tineius Rufus. For the Romans, the Greeks and the ancient world generally, the gods were to be found in nature: the sun, the sea, the sky, the earth and its seasons, the fields and their fertility. In Judaism, God is beyond nature, and his covenant with us takes us beyond nature also. So for us, not everything natural is good. War is natural. Conflict is natural. The violent competition to be the alpha male is natural. Jews – and others inspired by the God of Abraham – believe, as Kathryn Hepburn said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, that "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above."

The Romans found circumcision strange because it was unnatural. Why not celebrate the human body as God made it? God, said Rabbi Akiva to the Roman governor, values culture, not just nature, the work of humans not just the work of

God. It was this cluster of ideas – that God left creation unfinished so that we could become partners in its completion; that by responding to God’s commands we become refined; that God delights in our creativity and helped us along the way by teaching the first humans how to make light – that made Judaism unique in its faith in God’s faith in humankind. All of this is implicit in the idea of the eighth day as the day on which God sent humans out into the world to become His partners in the work of creation.

Why is this symbolised in the act of circumcision? Because if Darwin was right, then the most primal of all human instincts is to seek to pass on one’s genes to the next generation. That is the strongest force of nature within us. Circumcision symbolises the idea that there is something higher than nature. Passing on our genes to the next generation should not simply be a blind instinct, a Darwinian drive. The Abrahamic covenant was based on sexual fidelity, the sanctity of marriage, and the consecration of the love that brings new life into the world.[4] It is a rejection of the ethic of the alpha male.

God created physical nature: the nature charted by science. But He asks us to be co-creators, with Him, of human nature. As R. Abraham Mordecai Alter of Ger said. “When God said, ‘Let us make man in our image’, to whom was He speaking? To man himself. God said to man, Let us – you and I – make man together.”[5] The symbol of that co-creation is the eighth day, the day He helps us begin to create a world of light and love.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Quintus Tineius Rufus, Roman governor of Judaea during the Bar Kochba uprising. He is known in the rabbinic literature as “the wicked.” His hostility to Jewish practice was one of the factors that provoked the uprising.

[2] Tanhuma, Tazria, 5.

[3] This is also signalled in the Havdallah prayer which mentions five havdalot, “distinctions”, between sacred and profane, light and darkness, Israel and the nations, Shabbat and the weekdays, and the final “who distinguishes between sacred and profane.” This parallels Genesis 1 in which the verb lehavdil – to distinguish, separate – appears five times.

[4] That, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is why Genesis does not criticise idolatry but does implicitly criticise, on at least six occasions, the lack of a sexual ethic among the people with whom the patriarchs and their families come into contact.

[5] R. Avraham Mordecai Alter of Ger, Likkutei Yehudah.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/the-eighth-day/>

The Subtle Signals of the Tzaraat: An Essay on Parshat Tazria

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)* © Chabad 2022

A sign and a wonder

As it sometimes happens, this parshah is called Parshat Tazria even though practically all of it deals with matters relating to the metzora, while Parshat Metzora itself deals with those matters to a much lesser extent.

Maimonides writes that we do not actually know what tzaraat, as it is described in the Torah, is.¹ In modern Hebrew, the word tzaraat refers to leprosy, which may be what the Talmud calls “baalei raatan.”² To this end, Maimonides writes that, according to his medical understanding, tzaraat does not resemble any known disease.³

Since this is not a medical matter, it becomes easier to understand the strangest part of this phenomenon – tzaraat on houses and garments. When it appears on human flesh, it is at least possible to think of tzaraat as a disease, but this is certainly not the case when it appears on inanimate objects. Moreover, houses and garments stricken with tzaraat are burned, a much harsher treatment than people who are similarly afflicted receive.

Another puzzle regarding tzaraat is the nature of its tumah, especially in comparison with other types of tumah. Generally, only living things that stopped living, either entirely or partially, can produce tumah. Indeed, among plants and inanimate

objects, nothing is intrinsically tamei. Garments or other objects are generally only rendered tamei, but are not intrinsically so. In the laws of tzaraat, however, there exists an anomaly: A garment or house is itself an av hatumah (primary source of impurity), a phenomenon that is unique to tzaraat.

Maimonides' conclusion is that tzaraat is really not a disease. He says that tzaraat should be regarded not as an illness that is designated as tamei, but as "a sign and a wonder" that G d uses to mark someone. [emphasis added]

A discriminating affliction

As we mentioned in the previous essay, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi writes that tzaraat is an affliction that strikes only the most exalted individuals.⁴ He cites the Zohar's statement that there are four spiritual levels that a person can reach, in ascending order: enosh, geveir, ish, and – highest of all – adam.⁵ Similarly, the talmudic statement that "only you are called 'adam'"⁶ is based on the assumption that adam is the noblest possible term for a human being. In light of this, it is curious that the term adam is used in connection with the mark of tzaraat: "If a man (adam) has on the skin";⁷ "If a tzaraat mark appears on a man (adam)."⁸ The answer is that an ordinary person is not worthy of tzaraat. G d does not bother to put a special mark on a person of no importance to show that he has acted improperly; that would be obvious even without the tzaraat. If a person is known to have serious faults and shortcomings, G d does not need to let people know that he has sinned, nor does the person himself need a warning from heaven; he knows this on his own.

Only someone who is on a high spiritual level is eligible for and in need of such a sign. The Talmud says that the tzaraat marks are an "altar of atonement."⁹ Hence, to receive such a mark is truly indicative of a high level, of which the receiver must be worthy. In this connection, our sages note that in principle, the nations of the world should never be afflicted with boils. In practice, though, non-Jews nevertheless do experience this malady, so that they should not be able to claim that the Jews are "a nation of people afflicted with boils."¹⁰

Clearly, not everyone who speaks slander gets tzaraat; for if that were the case, it would be very hard to find people who are tahor. The list of people in Tanach who experienced tzaraat is quite impressive, ranging from Moses and Miriam to Naaman, Gehazi, and Uzziyahu. When Miriam speaks slander, she gets tzaraat, and when Moses slanders Israel, he, too, perhaps deserves tzaraat. Naaman "was important to his master and held in high esteem, for through him G d had granted victory to Aram. He was a mighty man of valor, but a metzora."¹¹ Uzziyahu was a great king "who did what was right in G d's sight," and "G d made him prosper."¹² Gehazi not only attended Elisha but was a great man in his own right.¹³

Spread of the mark

Since tzaraat is not a disease but a mark and a sign, clearly there is something to learn from it. So let us focus on a few of the detailed laws connected with tzaraat.

The first point to consider is this: At what moment does an ordinary blemish become a tzaraat mark, which renders a person tamei? The surest sign that a blemish is considered tzaraat is that the mark continues to spread. If it stops immediately after it appears, it remains pure. This is true of all types of tzaraat described in the Torah. When a mark appears, this signals that perhaps there is something in the person's life that must be rectified. But it becomes tzaraat only when it begins to grow.

In the Tochechah section in Leviticus, in which G d reproves the nation, we read: "If you remain indifferent with Me, I will be indifferent to you with a vengeance."¹⁴ Analogously, the preceding section states, "If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his hereditary land,"¹⁵ followed by, "If your brother becomes impoverished and loses the ability to support himself beside you,"¹⁶ until finally, "If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you."¹⁷

The Talmud says that these verses in chapter 25 recount one story that unfolds progressively: A person can act improperly without realizing this, in which case G d then causes him to suffer a minor blow. If he still does not realize that he is in the wrong, G d brings upon him another blow. And if he still does not realize this, G d brings upon him yet another blow.¹⁸

The same is true of tzaraat and its causes: So long as a person does not stop acting improperly, the tzaraat continues to spread. This applies to many different areas. Every person sins at some point in his life, for "there is no one so perfectly righteous on earth who does [only] good and never sins."¹⁹ But when this happens, the sinner must recognize his error

and stop himself from sinning further. If, however, he allows the stain to grow, it will become malignant tzaraat, which must be burned, destroyed, and eradicated.

“Let her not be like one dead”

Another central element in the laws of tzaraat is that the mark contains dead flesh. [emphasis added] The blood – the life – drains out, and therefore the flesh and the hair upon it turn white. When we say that “the wicked in their lifetime are called dead,”²⁰ this refers to tumah. A wicked person’s tumah derives from the fact that he is essentially a dead creature. The element of death in the tumah of tzaraat shows that a person can die before coming to the end of his physical life; he can continue walking among us and nevertheless be a corpse. Like a corpse, a metzora conveys tumah by being together with someone or something under the same roof. The implication is that the metzora has already begun to die, and therefore even now renders everything that is under the same roof with him tamei. He may appear to be alive and kicking, but in truth he is a walking, breathing corpse.

It happens to people – both young and old – that they take upon themselves the fear of G d, whether in a dramatic change or in a gradual process of spiritual growth. Such a person experiences a spiritual awakening and becomes like a new being. But this same person who was so inspired can sometimes begin to feel that he is partially dead. There is a respiratory disease called pulmonary fibrosis in which the lungs stiffen, becoming hard like wood. Even people who do not suffer from physical ailments can sometimes feel like a block of wood. A person who used to smile stops smiling; a person who used to be sensitive in so many ways suddenly turns cold.

Why does this happen? Justifications can always be found. A person may choose to be wary, thinking that to act otherwise would lead to sin or frivolity. One who continues along this path finds that each day another part within him dies. A person who was creative, or who was always joyful, bringing joy to others, now has become a sort of crushed creature, sulking in a corner. He dwells in isolation, outside the camp; it is a sign that something has gone wrong. In the past, he had experienced beauty, and it filled him with feeling; now, he feels nothing.

Such a person, who is dying little by little, continually reinforces this downward spiral by telling himself that the more dead he becomes, the more he deserves such a fate. He thinks that his dark, morose attitude to life is a form of devoutness, as we read in Malachi, “We have walked mournfully because of God.”²¹

There is a concept in the Talmud that can often be difficult to comprehend: the notion of “movable reality.”²² Slaves, for instance, are considered “movable reality” – they are human beings who possess the same legal status as one’s land or one’s house. In Parashat Tazria, we see something very similar – a dead man who continues to move around as if he is alive. The metzora is dead, and therefore conveys the same tuma that a corpse conveys. The only difference is that the metzora has not been buried yet. He is “movable reality.” Holiness and all that stems from it are characterized by energy and vitality, while **tzaraat is a form of death mark, sapping the very life force from the metzora who bears it.** [emphasis added]

“The healthy skin is a sign of impurity”

Another law of tzaraat is very strange even in the context of other forms of tuma: “On the day that healthy skin appears on it, he becomes impure. When the Priest sees the healthy skin, he shall declare him impure. The healthy skin is a sign of impurity; it is tzaraat”²³ – and the same law applies in all other types of tzaraat.²⁴ Normally, healthy flesh would seem to be a sign of recovery. But the Torah says the precise opposite: Healthy flesh is a sign of tumah, and he is sent back outside the camp.

The meaning of this law is that **if vitality begins to emerge from the tzaraat itself, if the life that a person experiences flows from the mark, this, too, is a sign of tumah. Before, the tzaraat was merely a blemish; now, he is vitalized by it. This resembles a common sequence of events in a person’s spiritual journey.** [emphasis added] At first, one simply cannot tolerate people who are unscrupulous regarding certain laws. He may react scornfully to people who neglect to perform the ritual washing of the hands, or who are careless when they trim their fingernails. As a result, he doesn’t want to be around them, so he removes himself from society. After a while, this scorn for others becomes a source of vitality and pleasure for him. Before, he may have slandered others simply because he was haughty, whereas now all of his vitality comes from this vice. When one’s fault becomes a flag and a banner, this is a much more serious problem. At first he viewed this character trait as a vice; now that he indulges in it enthusiastically, it is like putting a stamp of spiritual approval on an evil attribute. While beforehand he engaged in slander occasionally, now it is his whole life.

“The healthy skin is a sign of impurity.” When healthy flesh begins to grow within the mark, when the affliction itself starts to become his life, this is not the vitality of recovery; it is vitality in which the affliction becomes a remedy, in which death becomes life.

Seeing one's own faults

An examination of the vices that, according to our sages, cause tzaraat yields a long list: haughtiness, arrogance, miserliness, lashon hara (spreading an evil report), and many others.²⁵ Their common denominator is that they are all subtle evils. Regarding such subtleties it is appropriate that some kind of sign should be given from above, marking the sinner and indicating that the sin requires rectification.

Why is it so difficult to perceive these faults on one's own? Why does G d have to mark them? It seems that these are all faults for which it is very easy to find some kind of justification, and that is why it is so difficult to identify them and rid oneself of them. When someone commits a blatant sin with full knowledge that what he is doing is wrong, he may experience pangs of guilt that prevent him from repeating such a sin. But what happens to someone who commits a sin and feels that it is a mitzvah?

This is precisely the case of Miriam. Miriam wanted to give a reproof, feeling that her words should and must be said. Hence, if she had not been stricken with tzaraat, she would not have understood that she was out of line. The same is true of the other vices on the list. **Haughtiness is often confused with pride, but they are actually quite different.** [emphasis added] Haughtiness pertains only to people of great stature, whereas pride can apply to anyone. A person can be covered in filth and be despised by all who meet him, and still think of himself as the greatest person in the world – this is the sin of pride. In the case of haughtiness, however, we are talking about someone who has ample reason to believe that he is on a high level, that he is a true tzaddik, but this perspective makes it impossible for him to see his own faults. Uzziyahu was a great king who was victorious in wars, built up the country, and was surrounded with honor and glory; he certainly had reason to believe that he was growing ever greater. The same was true of Naaman, “a mighty man of valor, but a metzora,”²⁶ who was the most important man in the kingdom.

The Mishnah says, “A person may examine all tzaraat marks except his own.”²⁷ What is the reason for this? After all, one may examine his own slaughtering knife; to be sure, a rabbi usually performs this examination, but this is only out of respect, or because a rabbi is generally more familiar with the relevant halachot. One can also render halachic decisions for oneself regarding the laws of kashrut if one has the requisite knowledge. In the case of tzaraat, however – where one would think that a certain measure of expertise would suffice – one may not examine the marks for oneself.

An additional oddity in the laws of tzaraat is the following: The Torah decrees that one must show the marks to a Priest, who must be the one to declare if the mark is tamei. But how does the Priest know? After all, not all Priests are Torah scholars! If, indeed, the Priest is unfamiliar with the laws of tzaraat, a Torah scholar stands at the Priest's side and instructs him to say “tamei” or “tahor” when appropriate.²⁸ Thus, in a situation where the metzora is himself a Torah scholar, the following interaction is plausible: The metzora shows his tzaraat to the Priest; the Priest looks at the mark and asks the metzora, “Rabbi, what is the law in such a case?”; the metzora responds, “In my opinion, the mark is tamei”; and on that basis the Priest declares, “The mark is tamei,” or, “The mark is tahor,” rendering the person tamei or tahor respectively. According to halachah, this is a perfectly legitimate arrangement. Why, then, can't a person examine his own tzaraat?

The rule that “a person may examine all tzaraat marks except his own” applies not only to marks that appear on the skin; it applies even more to the marks that appear on the soul. This is because **marks or faults, by their very nature, prevent one from seeing that he is afflicted.** [emphasis added] No matter how egregious the fault, one will still be certain that everything is all right. For him to become aware of his own fault, someone from the outside must tell him that he is tamei. For the same reason, one also cannot purify oneself. It is very difficult to determine when one's fault is gone, just as it is difficult to determine when it sets in. The nature of “marks” of this type is that they apply to the entire person, and it is very difficult to correctly assess them, especially when their meaning is unclear. Even after one knows what the signs are, the most one can say is: “There appears to be something like a mark on my house.”

In all these matters, from slander and miserliness to haughtiness and the rest of the list, the question of ethical subtleties is so serious and complicated that there is almost no way of determining where the truth lies.

Speaking slander is a serious prohibition; on the other hand, it is a mitzvah to expose hypocrites.²⁹ And if, by warning people that a certain person is a sinner, one performs a mitzva, it then becomes possible to constantly engage in the “mitzvah” of slander. A circular pattern begins: If a person seems wicked, one may slander him; the more slander that is spoken about him, the more wicked he seems, and the more one may continue to slander him. Even in the Chafetz Chayim’s book *Shemirat HaLashon*, there are a few sub-paragraphs discussing the various loopholes by which one may slander a person in a permissible manner. An ordinary person will likely never come to this, but a great man sometimes does.

Pride, too, can be a very important trait, and can serve a lofty purpose. The Talmud says that a Torah scholar should possess “an eighth of an eighth” of pride,³⁰ and of King Jehoshaphat it is written that “his heart was elevated in the ways of G d.”³¹ Some people possess a small measure of pride – “an eighth of an eighth” – while others possess a larger, “elevated” measure.

“He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp”

The remedy for tzaraat is that the metzora must remove himself from all categories. The metzora does not go to a doctor in order to be cured. Rather, he is thrown out of the camp, out of human society – at most, he may interact with one other metzora – so that he should be entirely alone and engage in introspection.

Some of the ways in which people erroneously categorize themselves are based on social structures. If one constantly contrasts himself with others, then it will always be possible to find someone who is smaller and more contemptible than he is, someone who deserves to be vilified and slandered. It may then seem praiseworthy to oppress this other person physically, financially, and in any way possible.

When one is isolated with his tzaraat, one remains alone, and only then can one truly ponder one’s own faults. Only after one is told that he is beset with faults and he is isolated with them can he begin to grapple with them until they disappear. If one remains isolated in this way for many years, it is because he has not dealt with his faults sufficiently. King Uzziyahu, for example, remained isolated until the day of his death, because he continued to feel that he was not at fault.

On the other hand, when a person is isolated, he is also liable to lose his sense of proportion. Hence, the Talmud says that one should not study alone, because one who studies alone is liable to err and then repeat the error over a long period of time.³² Faults, however, relate to subtleties in one’s personal conduct that cannot always be measured against someone else. What is more, another person’s counsel is helpful only up to a certain point and cannot reach the root of the matter.

Once, a group of Hasidim approached the Maggid of Mezeritch and told him that they lived far away and needed someone to be their guide and teacher. They suggested Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (who in fact became a kind of successor to the Maggid after his death) and asked how they could determine whether he was the right man. What are the criteria by which to measure whether he is truly a great man? The Maggid responded, “Ask him whether there exists any method of avoiding pride. If he gives you such a method, you will know that there is no substance to him.” When they posed the Maggid’s question to Rabbi Menachem Mendel, he answered, “What can I tell you? One person might wear sackcloth and filthy clothing, and his heart might still be full of pride, whereas someone else may walk erect and dress elegantly, yet his heart may be broken inside him. There is no method for this.”

There are some ailments for which a remedy exists, and there are some for which this is impossible. One who has become tamei by contact with a corpse must go to the Priest in order to be purified; one who has a different problem must go to the elders and sages for a solution. In the case of tzaraat, however, if one is already great enough to receive such an affliction, this type of treatment does not help him. Indeed, the metzora does not go to the Priest to be cured; he goes to the Priest only after he is cured, so that he should look at the mark and issue a ruling. In all the stages of the process that precedes this ruling, even the Priest cannot offer him any help.

The only recourse for the metzora is to sit alone. He must keep sitting for as long as it takes to discover what is wrong and to set things right. [emphasis added] The metzora is sent out to think, to relieve him of his preoccupation with business, to stop him from giving public sermons. Until he rectifies his problems on his own, he remains a metzora, and if the mark intensifies, his tzaraat spreads.

To remain alone is one of the best ways to attain self-rectification. One begins to reflect more and more on oneself and on one's path, the outer shells of one's personality begin to fall off, and sometimes parts of a person that were hidden behind these shells are revealed.

In the course of Jewish history, mainly in the time of the First Temple, there were many prophets, all of who were extraordinary personalities who performed wonders in heaven and on earth, and yet none of this helped avert the destruction of the Temple and the exile. People sat and listened to the prophets and exclaimed, "What a wonderful derashah! What language! What Hebrew! What a pleasure to hear!"³³ – and then they went to sleep. Only during the transition between the First Temple period and the Second Temple period can one see a change in Israel's attitude toward the prophets. During the Second Temple period, there was a fundamental change for the better – Judaism began to deal with other matters. Why did this happen?

Apparently, the period of destruction and exile, the period characterized by the verse, "How does the city sit solitary,"³⁴ gave better moral instruction than all of the prophets combined. Apparently, solitude is incredibly effective. Then as now, people feel complacent, as long as they are in their own place, with an army to protect them and diplomatic relations with their neighbors – whether these neighbors are the Assyrians and the Egyptians or the Americans and the Russians – and with a great deal of money to build palaces across the country, all in accordance with national protocol. When the prophet comes and cries out in protest – it is easy to ignore him. But seventy years of "How does the city sit solitary" accomplished what all the prophets were unable to do.

Parshat Tazria does not conclude with the metzora's complete rectification; only in the next parshah do we reach this stage. In this parashah we are still dealing primarily with the "isolated metzora," a metzora who has been given a warning. In the next parshah we learn how one who has gone through this entire period, who has experienced all that he needs to experience, can eventually make a full recovery.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Laws of the Impurity of Tzaraat 16:10; Guide for the Perplexed III:47.
2. Ketubbot 77b.
3. Commentary on the Mishnah, Nega'im 12:5.
4. Likkutei Torah, Tazria 22b.
5. Tazria 48a.
6. Bava Metzia 114b.
7. Lev. 13:2.
8. Lev. 13:9.
9. Berachot 5b.
10. Genesis Rabba 88:1.
11. II Kings 5:1.
12. II Chr. 26:4–5.
13. Y. Sanhedrin 10:2.
14. Lev. 26:27–28.
15. 25:25.

16. 25:35.
17. 25:39.
18. Kiddushin 20a.
19. Eccl. 7:20.
20. Berachot 18b.
21. 3:14.
22. Bava Kamma 12b.
23. Lev. 13:14–15.
24. see Rashi on Lev. 13:10.
25. see Tanchuma, Metzora 10.
26. II Kings 5:1.
27. Nega'im 2:5.
28. Nega'im 3:1.
29. Midrash Psalms 52.
30. Sotah 5a.
31. II Chr. 17:6.
32. Berachot 63b.
33. See Ezekiel 33:30–32.
34. Lam. 1:1.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), one of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud. © Chabad 2022.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5105728/jewish/The-Subtle-Signals-of-the-Tzaraat.htm

Why Doesn't the Chabad Haggadah Have the Post-Seder Songs?

By Yehuda Shurpin © 2022

Many have the custom to sing various post-Seder songs at the conclusion of the Passover Seder. Some of the classics include *Chad Gadya* ("One Goat") and *Echad Mi Yodea* ("Who Knows One").

The mix of songs is quite eclectic, and many were not originally connected to the Seder.

For example, *Vayehi Bachatzi Halaila* ("And It Was at Midnight") was originally composed by Yannai (c. 5th–6th century) as an occasional addition to the Shabbat morning service, and it was only appended to the Seder much later.

Echad Mi Yodea and *Chad Gadya*, said to have been composed by Rabbi Elazar of Worms (c. 1176–1238), became associated with the post-Seder singalong in the 16th century.

On a basic level, these songs are sung to keep the children awake. At the same time, each song has its own specific purpose. Some give perspective to our current long and bitter exile and remind us that, ultimately, our oppressors will get their comeuppance. Others serve to invoke our merits and reinforce our fundamental beliefs.

Many have asked: Why are these songs not included in the Chabad Haggadah?

“Made for All”

The reason why these songs aren’t included in the Haggadah is similar to why many additional liturgical hymns and songs aren’t included in the Chabad siddur.¹

While there are many versions of the prayer book, they all follow the same basic format, presenting the prayers formulated and ordained by the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah (Men of the Great Assembly). There are variations with regard to the order of specific prayers, minor textual differences, and additional hymns that are not part of the core prayer service.

The kabbalists explain that the universal elements of the text correspond to our shared divine service, while the minor differences reflect the modes of divine service unique to each community. In fact, according to the kabbalists, there are twelve versions of the prayer book — one for each tribe of Israel, in accordance with each tribe’s unique spiritual qualities.

Since most people don’t know which tribe they belong to, the Arizal (Rabbi Isaac Luria, foremost teacher of the 16th-century Safed school of Kabbalists) formulated his prayer book so that the text would be fitting for all souls and all modes of divine service.

It is for this reason that he didn’t include many of the relatively late liturgical hymns and songs. Although many of them were composed by great rabbis and contained deep meanings, they aren’t necessarily universal and compatible for all.

The Chabad siddur, which was edited by the first Chabad Rebbe, was based on this formulation of the Arizal. (For more on the uniqueness of this siddur, see *The Chassidic Prayer Liturgy*.)

The same reason applies to the supplemental liturgical hymns and songs in the Haggadah.

Even though he presumably did not chant these songs, the Rebbe would at times discuss the meanings and explanations contained therein.

The “Seder Never Ends”

Among the songs not included in the Chabad Haggadah is Chasal Suddur Pesach, “*The Passover Seder Has Been Completed*,” which many say just before completing the official part of the Seder.

There is good reason for this, the sixth Rebbe explained. For in truth, we are never really finished with the Seder, as the process of leaving Egypt is ongoing.²

We are meant to infuse our daily lives with the remembrance that G d took us out of Egypt, gave us His Torah and mandated us to transform the world and make it a dwelling place for the divine.

We pray that just as we were redeemed from Egypt, so too we will be redeemed from this exile. May it be speedily in our days!

FOOTNOTES:

1. See Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar 1; Magen Avraham, preface to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 68.

2. See Sefer Hasichot, 5703 pg 75; the Lubavitcher Rebbe at end of Haggadah Shel Peasach, Im Likkutei Ta'amim Minhagim U'Biurim. See also Torat Menachem, vol. 14, p. 6, fn. 19, regarding the Haggadah.

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https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/5466044/jewish/Why-Doesnt-the-Chabad-Haggadah-Have-the-Post-Seder-Songs.htm#utm_medium=email&utm_source=1_chabad.org_magazine_en&utm_campaign=en&utm_content=content

Tazria: Purging Negativity

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky * © Chabad 2022

A garment that has the lesion of tzara'at on it (Leviticus 13:47)

Our skin, clothing, and homes are three increasingly external layers that envelop us. Tzara'at first affected the outermost "garment," the house, because at first, gossip is a totally superficial symptom.

If the individual did not take this cue, neglecting to purge himself of his hidden negativity, tzara'at broke out on his clothing.

This indicated that his hidden flaws had started to seep into him from the outside. If he ignored this cue as well, tzara'at broke out on his skin, indicating that his inner evil, although still superficial, was now part of him. At this stage, he had to be ostracized from society, with the hope that this demonstration of the consequences of his misbehavior would inspire him to mend his ways.

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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Note: Since untimely passing over a year ago of Rabbi Sacks, z"l, LDT has included his articles which were either prepared by Rabbi Sacks before his passing or previously not included in LDT. LDT will continue to include his articles which have not yet appeared in LDT. Where this is not possible, LDT will include the past articles issued by his staff but will place these at the end of LDT to so indicate.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The major subject of this week's as well as next week's Torah portion is ritual purity and impurity (tuma and tahara) – to the modern mind, one of the most esoteric and puzzling aspects of our Scriptures.

What is even more disturbing is that, in the very midst of the Biblical discussion of a childbearer's state of impurity comes the command of circumcision—a subject that has little to do with the matter at hand. Its proper placement belongs in the book of Genesis, when the Almighty entered into a covenant with Abraham through the ritual of circumcision. Yet the Bible here records: “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be ritually impure for seven days, just as she is impure during the time of separation when she has her period. On the eighth day (the child's) foreskin shall be circumcised, then, for thirty-three additional days, she shall sit on blood of purity.” (Lev. 12:2-4).

Why is the command of circumcision placed right in between the impure and pure periods following childbirth? Our Sages specifically derive from this ordinance that the ritual of circumcision overrides the Sabbath: “On the eighth day, (the child's) foreskin shall be circumcised – even if it falls out on the Sabbath” (B.T. Shabbat 132a). Why express this crucial significance of circumcision within the context of ritual impurity? Is there a connection?

Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel links the two issues by interpreting: “And on the eighth day, when (she) is permitted (to have sexual relations with her husband), on that (day) is (the baby) to be circumcised.” He is thereby citing the view of our Sages in the Talmud, who understand that the circumcision must be on the eighth day following the birth “so that everyone not be happy while the parents will be sad” if they cannot properly express their affection towards one another (B.T. Niddah 31b).

It seems to me that there is a more profound connection. When a woman is in a state of

ritual impurity, she and her husband are forbidden from engaging in sexual relations until she immerses in a mikveh (ritual bath of rain or spring water). Obviously, this restriction demands a great deal of self-control and inner discipline. The major symbol which graphically expresses the importance of mastering one's physical instincts is the command of circumcision: even the sexual organ itself, the physical manifestation of the male potency and the unbridled id, must be tempered and sanctified by the stamp of the divine.

A well-known midrash takes this one step farther: “Turnus Rufus the wicked once asked Rabbi Akiva: Whose works are better, the works of God or the works of human beings? He answered him, the works of human beings... (Turnus Rufus) said to him, why do you circumcise? (Rabbi Akiva) said, I knew you were asking about that, and therefore I anticipated (the question) and told you that the works of human beings are better. Turnus Rufus said to him: But if God wants men to be circumcised, why does He not see to it that male babies are born already circumcised? Rabbi Akiva said to him... It is because the Holy One Blessed be He only gave the commandments to Israel so that we may be purified through them” (Midrash Tanhuma, Tazria 5).

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama (author of the Akedat Yitzhak Biblical Commentary) explains this to mean that there are no specific advantages or necessary rationalizations for doing the commandments; they are merely the will of God, and we must see that as being more than sufficient for justifying our performance of them.

It seems to me, however, that the words of the midrash as well as the context of the commandment reveal a very different message. The human being is part of the physical creation of the world, a world subject to scientific rules of health and illness, life and death. The most obvious and tragic expression of our physicality is that, in line with all creatures of the universe, we humans as well are doomed to be born, disintegrate and die. And therefore, the most radical example of ritual impurity is a human corpse (avi avot hatuma); an animal carcass, a dead reptile, and the blood of the menstrual cycle (fall-out of the failed potential of fertilization) likewise cause ritual impurity. A woman in childbirth has a very close brush with death—both in terms of her own mortality and during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

Avoid Disappointment! Reserve dedications as soon as possible. Please note that due to my schedule, dedications for the weeks after Pesach through Shavuot will need to be submitted now. It may be difficult for me to add them later during this period. Thank you for your encouragement and support of Likutei Divrei Torah.
sgreenberg@jhu.edu

God's gift to the human being created in the divine image, however, is that in addition to physicality there is also spirituality; in addition to death there is also life eternal; in addition to ritual impurity there is also ritual purity. Hence, the very human life which emerges from the mother's womb brings in his wake not only the brush with death (tuma) but also the hope of new life (tahara)—and whereas the tuma lasts for seven days, the tahara goes on for thirty-three! The human being has the power to overcome his physical impediments and imperfections, to ennoble and sanctify his animal drives and instincts, to perfect human nature and redeem an imperfect world.

This was the message which Rabbi Akiva attempted to convey to Turnus Rufus the wicked. Yes, the world created by the Almighty is beautiful and magnificent, but it is also imperfect and incomplete. God has given the task of completion and redemption to the human being, who has the ability and capacity to circumcise himself, to sublimate his sub-gartelian (beneath the belt or gartel) drives, to sanctify society and to complete the cosmos. Indeed, the works of the human being are greater! And the command of circumcision belongs within the context of impurity and purity.

And this is also what our Sages were trying to convey when they taught that circumcision overrides the Sabbath. The Sabbath testifies to God's creation of the world: impressive but imperfect, awesome but awful, terrific but tragic. Circumcision testifies to the human being's challenge to redeem himself and perfect the world. Indeed, circumcision overrides the Sabbath.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

My Earliest Memory

Have you ever been asked the question, “What is your earliest memory?” I have been asked that question many times. There was a time,

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long ago, when I was a graduate student in psychology, when that question was posed. The answer was considered very revealing of the respondent's deeper psyche.

Such exceptionally early memories were known in psychoanalytic circles as "screen memories" and were considered quite significant diagnostically. The scientific significance of such memories is now considered to have no basis, but they are certainly interesting and make for great conversation.

Considering the question posed, I had a clear image of my first memory. I was standing outside a brick building, looking up at my father, may he rest in peace, surrounded by a small crowd of other men. Everyone was looking at the moon.

This may have been my first experience, at age three or four, of Kiddush Levana, the monthly ceremony during which the congregation exits the synagogue and acknowledges the first appearance of the new moon.

I have another memory of the religious significance of this ceremony. I remember being told that the Hebrew word for "month" is "chodesh" and the Hebrew word for "new" is "chadash." It was then that I learned of the significance of the new moon which commences a new month, and became aware for the first time that the Jewish people follow the lunar, not solar, calendar.

This week, we read the Torah portion of Tazria. But since it is also the very last Sabbath before the new moon of the month of Nisan, the month of Passover and spring time and the beginning of the new calendar year, we will also read an additional portion from Exodus 12:1-20, known as Parshat HaChodesh. Famously, according to Rashi, these verses are the true beginning of the Torah.

The theme of newness and the constant potentiality for renewal is the central theme this Shabbat. It is also the central theme in the Jewish calendar, and, one might say, in Jewish tradition in general. The symbolism of the moon constantly renewing itself is coupled this week with the symbolism of springtime and nature's renewal.

This Shabbat, we herald the approaching holiday of Passover, but not as a holiday of freedom and redemption. Not just yet. This week, we recognize that Passover is chag ha'aviv, the festival of springtime. Passover has a myriad of symbolic meanings, one of which is the perennial opportunity for personal and national rejuvenation.

When I focus on my earliest memory with extra effort, I remember what the men who surrounded me under that moon so long ago were saying to each other. Each man addressed three others with the traditional Jewish

greeting, "Shalom aleichem." I remember being puzzled by why Daddy was greeting friends that he saw daily with this special welcome, generally reserved for those whom one hadn't seen in a while.

I didn't ask him about it then; after all, it was still the era when "children were to be seen and not heard". But I have since answered the question for myself, and have explained it to my children and to my students as follows:

"The new moon is a symbol for renewal. It is a time for each of us personally to begin again, to forget past mistakes, to 'turn over a new leaf'. It is also a time for us to renew and recharge our relationship with others. It is a time to begin a new slate, to forgive each other, and to appreciate each other anew. Hence, we greet at least three friends, even old friends, with a 'Shalom aleichem,' as if they were newcomers in our lives."

And so, the supplemental reading this week teaches us about newness, and about, to borrow Lincoln's famous phrase, "...a new nation, conceived in liberty..." Is there any connection between the supplemental Parshat HaChodesh and this week's main Torah portion, Tazria?

I would say so, for this week's Torah portion begins, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be unclean seven days... and on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.'" (Leviticus 12:1-3) The opening theme this week is also one of a new beginning, of a birth of a new baby. It is a time for the celebration of the entry of a new member into the Jewish people.

Hence, there is surely a connection between Tazria and Parshat HaChodesh. They both adumbrate the centrality of the new in our tradition.

It is at this point that you, dear reader, might well ask, "If we are celebrating not just newness in general, but the arrival of a new human being into this world and of a new member of the Jewish faith, then why does the mother enter the realm of tumah, ritual uncleanness? Should she not, rather, enter the realm of kedushah v'taharah, sanctity and cleanness?"

I found a most thought-provoking answer to this oft-asked question recorded in the name of that most profound of the Chassidic masters, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk. He cites the passage in the Talmud which states that the "keys of childbirth" are kept by the Almighty Himself. It is He who presides, as it were, over "labor and delivery." Once the baby is born, His Presence departs as well. Just as when the soul of man departs, tumah descends, so too when the Divine Spirit departs, tumah ensues.

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The Kotzker once again teaches a very deep, albeit existentially pessimistic, lesson. Perhaps one must be Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk to truly understand why he forces us to face darkness even at the moment of joyous celebration of birth.

For most of us, on the other hand, this week's lesson is of light, and not of darkness. It is an occasion to contemplate all that is new in our natural and interpersonal environments, especially at this time of year. It is an opportunity to seize the moment by taking advantage of the constantly available potential for renewal of ourselves and of our friendships and relationships.

Is this just a Jewish message? Of course not. It is a message for all of humanity. And it is so well expressed by the famous adventurer and explorer of the sea, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, in his book *The Silent World*, when he writes:

"Sometimes we are lucky enough to know that our lives have been changed, to discard the old, embrace the new, and run headlong down an immutable course. It happened to me at Le Mourillon on that summer's day, when my eyes were opened to the sea."

This Shabbat, our eyes open to a different kind of sea. May we embrace the new and run, headlong and happy, down a different and better course.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Metzora Brings Himself to the Kohen

The pasuk in Parshat Tazria says, "If a person (Adam) will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eis or a sapachas, or a baheres, and it will become a tzaraas affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aaron the Kohen..." [Vayikra 13:2] The majority of Parshat Tazria (and for that matter Parshat Metzora as well) deals with the laws of Tzaraas.

The Netziv in his Ha'Amek Davar Chumash commentary quotes a Zohar that notes four different ways the Torah refers to human beings. The highest and most complementary of those terms is the term Adam.

If that is the case, it is somewhat strange that the Torah begins the section dealing with the laws of Tzaraas using the terminology of Adam. A person who receives Tzaraas as a punishment has not been behaving 100% properly. The Talmud [Eruchin 15b] lists all the sins that can cause these skin blemishes (negaim). The primary sin that causes Tzaraas is slander (lashon ha'rah). In fact, the Hebrew term Metzora (someone who has Tzaraas) is a contraction of the words Motzi Rah [he speaks evil]. The Talmud there also links the word Tzaraas with the term Tzaar Ayin [stingy] and says that gasus ha'ruach [haughtiness] is also a cause of Tzaraas. It is for this reason that the atonement ritual for one who has been stricken with Tzaraas is to bring a cedar tree and a

moss (Etz Erez v'Eizov), to blend that which was so tall and majestic with that which is so lowly. Birds are also part of the Metzora's sin offering, since birds are constantly chirping, (indicating to him that he too has been constantly using his mouth more than is appropriate).

Therefore, we are not dealing here with a Tzadik Yesod Olam [righteous person who represents the foundation of the world]. Out of all the expressions for a human being, we would have expected a less prestigious term than Adam. The Torah could have used the words Ish or Gever. Adam refers to "the glorious man," yet the person who is smitten with Tzoraas is "inglorious man."

Rav Nissan Alpert, in his sefer Limudei Nissan, offers a beautiful thought on this question: The difference between an Adam Chashuv [a distinguished person] and a non-Adam Chashuv [a non-distinguished person] is not whether from time to time he slips and commits sins. A person can be an "Adam" and he can be a distinguished individual who the Torah considers "Adam" despite the fact that he may be guilty of slander, haughtiness, and stinginess. Rather, the difference that distinguishes the "Adam" from the "Ish" [the less distinguished individual] is the willingness on his part to admit that he has made a mistake and that he is willing to improve.

The Torah speaks of the person who has been stricken with Tzaraas and says "v'huuva el Aharon HaKohen" [he shall be brought to Aharon the Priest]. The word "huuva" utilizes the Pual conjugation – meaning, "He is brought..." Who is bringing him? Is he not bringing himself? The answer is that he does not really want to go, but he knows that he needs to go.

We can compare this to someone who is not feeling well. He knows he needs to go to the doctor, but he is afraid to go to the doctor. The doctor will tell him he is overweight and stressed out and his cholesterol is too high. The doctor will read him the riot act for his unhealthy behaviors and life style. The doctor will put him on a diet, and he will not be able to eat his favorite deserts. He does not want to go. This is a fact of life. Many people are afraid to go to the doctor. They do not want to hear what the doctor is going to say. The same is true for someone who has a toothache. He is afraid to go to the dentist.

The pasuk is talking about a person who realizes that he is not feeling well and that he needs to do something about it. "It is difficult, but I am going to go to the doctor!" Similarly, "Adam" – yes, he has fallen; he has sinned; he has sinned seriously; but he wants to get better. He knows he is sick and wants to do something about it. That distinguished the "Adam" from the "non-Adam." Even though it is difficult for someone to admit he is wrong and needs improvement, he is brought to

Aharon the priest. You know who brings him? He brings himself! Because of that, the Torah affords him the special title of Adam.

Talmud in One's Soul? [excerpted]

In the beginning of Parshas Tazria, Rabbeinu Bachaye has a lengthy discussion on the life of the embryo in the mother's womb. It is a most unique existence during which the embryo sees from one end of the universe until the other. One of the facets of that existence is something the Talmud says in Tractate Niddah [30b] namely, that the fetus is taught the entire Torah in utero. The Gemara there says that when the baby is about to be born, an Angel appears, slaps the baby on the mouth, and he forgets all his Torah.

This would then seem like an exercise in futility. The commentary of Rav Bezalel Ronsburg asks that very question on that Gemara: Why did Hashem see fit to teach a child the entire Torah before he comes into the world, only to make him forget everything right before he is about to be born? The Ribono shel Olam did us all a great favor. Before we come down to this world of physicality, we learn all the Torah, because were it not for that experience of having learned Torah at a prior time, we would have no chance to relate to Torah in this world when we would again be exposed to it. It is because we already had Torah implanted within us, and because our brain waves have been hard-wired to grasp Torah thought processes, that we can hope to relate to and appreciate Torah when we again come into contact with it.

It is essential to have been inculcated with Torah prior to in any way becoming corrupted by the physicality and coarseness of this world, so that our pristine souls may absorb the spiritual nature of supernal Torah studies and make them suitable receptacles for its later reabsorption after our coming into contact with the impurities of this world.

Our purest existence is those nine months in our mother's wombs. There we are saturated with all of Torah's depth, beauty and holiness. Later, when we learn Torah in this world, the soul will remember what it once learned in that pristine state of being.

When we sit down today – as an adult or a child – and study Torah, we can have the sensation "Hey, I learnt this already!" Therefore, I can now understand it, because I already learned it. People remember something they already learned previously better than something that is brand new.

He beautifully uses this idea to interpret the statement in Tractate Megillah [6b] "If you have studied diligently and find, believe" (ya'gaata u'matzata – ta'amin) – meaning if you persevere and study Torah over and over, you will eventually certainly gain understanding of it. We refer to something we once had and we lost as a "metziah". If we

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persevere in our quest of Torah, we can always get it back....

I saw this teaching of Rav Bezalel Ronsburg. The only way a person can understand Torah is because he had it while yet in his mother's womb. I am very very doubtful that the Angel teaches the Nations of the World Torah. We can get Torah because the Malach taught it to us while we were yet in our mothers' wombs.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

When Jewish people are born we are already looking forward to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the wedding.

The actual mitzvah to perform a brit, is given in the parasha of Tazria. And once we have performed this mitzvah and we have given a name to the baby, we say a prayer, "k'sheim shenichnas la'brit", in the same way that this child has entered into the covenant with Hashem, "ken yikanes l'torah l'chupa ul'ma'asim tovim", so too, may he come to Torah – which is Bar Mitzvah, Chupah – stand under the chupah as a married man, and engage in 'ma'asim tovim' – acts of kindness. And for girls, we have a similar prayer.

I think we can all understand this. We live for simchas. God forbid, on sad occasions we greet people by saying 'please God, we should meet on simchas', how much more so on happy occasions! Once we are blessed with a child, we look forward to the next stage and the stage after that, to always celebrate important milestones in their lives.

But I have a question. Isn't the order wrong? Torah, which is Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Chuppah – wedding, and only afterwards 'ma'asim tovim'. Surely the 'ma'asim tovim', the good deeds should come right at the beginning, because we want this child to grow up, immersed in a world of loving kindness, from the word 'go'.

Of course that is the case. But this particular order adds another dimension to 'ma'asim tovim', to acts of kindness. It tells us that it is when one is married that one is provided with the thrilling experience of a partner to perform acts of loving kindness alongside. Within one's home, one can generate so much hospitality and so much chessed (acts of kindness) to the world.

Then there is a further lesson. 'Ma'asim tovim' relates specifically to those who have stood beneath a chuppah because once married, they need to dedicate themselves to kind deeds towards their spouse and members of their family. Hence two of the Ten Commandments which relate to infidelity; not to covet the spouse of another person, and not to commit adultery. On the tablets, the 'issur', the prohibition of adultery comes alongside idolatry, indicating that when one is unfaithful towards one's spouse, it's analogous to being unfaithful to the Almighty.

Therefore, at the very earliest moments of a child's life, we bless them: may God bless and protect you to enable you to lead a life full of Torah and mitzvot, to stand one day under a chupah and always to be an outstanding individual full of 'ma'asim tovim' (kind deeds) for all. But let's start at home – with that loyalty and kindness to the members of one's family – to be faithful and loyal to those who are part of your mishpacha.

Yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place at the commencement of the seventh month of the year. This anomaly is a feature of our Jewish calendar thanks to a portion in the book of Shemot, which we will be reading this coming shabbat – Parshat HaChodesh. The Torah says: "HaChodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadashim." – "This month of Nissan shall be for you the head of the months of the year."

So Nissan starts the months of the year while Tishrei starts the year itself.

Freedom - Why is Nissan so central and significant for us? It is because in this month we attained our freedom from slavery in Egypt. This unusual phenomenon on our calendar comes to teach us four important lessons:

First of all, 'zecher lemaasei Bereishit' – remembering the acts of creation – takes us back to the commencement of life on earth. In a similar way, 'zecher leytziat Mitzrayim', remembering the Exodus from Egypt, during Nissan, takes us back to the commencement of the Jewish nation.

Secondly, we are reminded here of the greatness of Hashem, who against the odds was able to deliver our people. And as is very often the case, Hashem asks us to have 'bitachon', trust in Him. He also calls upon us to do 'hishtadlut' – to try our best to attain our own freedom. Moshe went back to Egypt; he stood before Pharaoh; he devised a plan – and all the miracles that transpired in Egypt for our people came about in the context of the Jewish people trying our best.

The third lesson – the month of Nissan, reminds us of the persecution of our people in Egypt. Here, there is a call for us always to speak out; to try our utmost to neutralise the forces of persecution and never to be silent when we witness the suffering of others. Here too there is a further reminder that no nation on earth, however powerful, should ever presume that it can indefinitely persecute innocent people, because ultimately history shows us that what is right will prevail.

The fourth lesson – we attained our freedom from Egypt in Nissan not merely just to exist as a people but as a means towards leading a responsible way of life. That is why the counting of the Omer serves as a bridge between Pesach and Shavuot – taking us from Nissan through to Mount Sinai where we received the Torah. We are privileged not just to have a physical existence – to have

something to live with – but in addition, to have something wonderful to live for. And as a result, thanks to our Torah, we can inspire others and have a joyous and meaningful life always.

Nissan - So yes, it is true. Rosh Hashanah takes place in the seventh month of the year but Nissan is the head of the months of the year, and from Shabbat Parshat HaChodesh we learn so many important lessons for our lives.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Not Wanting to Have Children

In this week's Parsha, the Torah describes "Jewish" childbirth in Temple times. After birth, the woman would become ritually impure for a certain number of days (depending on if it was a boy or a girl), and then bring a sacrifice to "atone for her sin" (Leviticus 12:7). The Talmud (Nidah 31b) asks what was her son? It answers that many/most women vow during the pain of childbirth not to have any more children. This sacrifice atones for that vow. What if indeed it was not a "false" vow, and later the mother indeed refuses to have more children because of the pain? Is that valid from a Jewish perspective? What about couples who do not wish to have children at all, not to bring them into this "evil" world? What about observant Jewish families who say, "I cannot afford the tuition for so many children"? Are there any valid reasons, from the Jewish viewpoint, for not having children? These are not mere hypotheticals, and we will explore the Jewish response.

Every Western country on the planet already produces fewer children than is needed to replace its population, including, in the last few years, the United States. But the situation is getting worse. According to a recent survey, which was conducted in October 2021, Pew found that about 44% of nonparents ages 18 to 49 deem it "not too likely" or "not at all likely" they will have kids, compared to 37% who said the same in 2018. And three-fourths of adults younger than 50 who have children said they are not likely to have more. The reasons vary, including Climate Change and overpopulation, but most simply said "I just do not want to", putting themselves first. This dilemma is not new. Beginning with Malthus in the 1800's, numerous predictions have stated that overpopulation will cause the impending food shortages, causing some not to have children. But somehow, each time the world population soars and the need for food increases dramatically, the scientific technology necessary to augment food production also has increased.

When conditions do warrant worldwide action and other nations are indeed complying in helping to reduce population, is there then a Jewish precedent for minimizing population growth? The Talmud (Ta'anit 11a) states that a person should not have sexual relations (and children) in times of a famine, when food is unavailable. This concept is derived from the

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placement of the verse describing the birth of Joseph's sons in the Torah during the years of plenty, just prior to the famine in Egypt, when Joseph was aware the years of famine were imminent (Genesis 41:50). Maimonides codifies this concept (Maimonides, Hilchot Ta'anit 3:8) by stating that a Jewish couple should not have children during a famine, but only if they have previously fulfilled the Mitzvah of bearing the minimum of two children. Therefore, by having only two children during the famine, the population would not increase, as the parents would simply be replenishing their own numbers, but not adding to the worldwide population.

The Importance of Having Children in Judaism

- Before the reader infers that Judaism advocates limiting the number of children or that progeny is of little consequence in Jewish thought, he or she should examine the issue more closely. The importance of having children in Judaism cannot be overemphasized. In a number of statements, the Talmud demonstrates how important having children is in Jewish thought. A person who intentionally does not have children is considered dead (because that person intentionally did not add souls to the world) (Nedarim 64b). The reason for this, according to Eliyahu Kitov (Eliyahu Kitov, The Jew and His Home, pp. 200-201) is that a person can continue to live on even after physical life has ended through his or her children if the children continue the values and lifestyle of the parent. One may never sell a Torah except in two instances: to obtain money to learn Torah (an equivalent Mitzvah-commandment to possessing or writing a Torah), or to marry, i.e., to eventually have children (Megillah 27a). There is no other Mitzvah that merits the importance of having children. One who does not have children is equated to a murderer or one who diminishes the image of God (Yevamot 63b). This comparison might be apt, as refusal to create life may be compared to destroying (potential) life, and since each person is born in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), denying children to come into the world denies more of the image of God in the world. Of course, ultimately, all successful births of children are due to the help of God. Sometimes, for reasons unknown, parents who desire to have children cannot fulfill this desire, but if they try and are unsuccessful in their attempt to have children, they are blameless both in the eyes of Judaism and God.

Despite this lack of culpability, nevertheless, the inability to have children is grounds for divorce in Jewish law after ten years (Maimonides, Hilchot Ishut 15:10), to allow the spouses to remarry and bring children into the world. The Torah itself reverses one of the most stringent prohibitions of adultery to allow more children to come into the world. Normally, a brother-in-law is forbidden to marry a sister-in-law, and is considered an act of adultery, even after the death of the husband (Leviticus 18:16). However, if the husband dies and the couple was childless, the Torah says (Deuteronomy 25:5-6)

that it a mandatory for the brother-in-law to marry his childless sister-in-law. This is one of the 613 commandments of the Torah called Yibum-Levirate marriage -- all for the purpose of having a child (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #598). Trying to bring children into the world is so important in Jewish life that immediately after death, when a person is judged in heaven, one of the first questions that person will be asked is "did you involve yourself with having children?" (Shabbat 31a). This demonstrates the prominence that this concept plays in Jewish belief.

Refusal To Have Children Because of the Cost
Today, the idea of not having children because of the enormous cost of bringing up children has permeated even the observant Jewish community. Specifically, the cost of Jewish education in day school, over \$50,000 a year per child in some institutions, has caused many parents to pause and reconsider having a large family. Is there any validity to this type of thinking in Judaism? If the money issue is merely one of selfishness, where the parents want to use the money for leisure activities, then there is no philosophical or moral Jewish leg to stand on, as leisure is certainly not a legitimate Jewish value or priority. But if the money is needed for legitimate essentials such as clothing, food, and Jewish education, can that be a legitimate Jewish reason to limit family size? Rambam (Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 5:11) addresses this concern by laying out the order that should be followed in achieving financial stability. First a person should secure a job, then buy a house and only then get married. This is the order mentioned in the Torah when mentioning the exemptions from army service (Deuteronomy 20:5-7). Foolish people first get married, then buy a home and only then try to find proper work. This is the order of action mentioned in the curses of the Torah (Deuteronomy 28:30), as the path not to follow. However, says Rambam, if a person structures his or her life in the correct order, he will not have such large financial worries. This may be mere good advice or specific advocacy of a particular Jewish lifestyle by Maimonides. However, in scanning the sources, other than what was mentioned about lack of food during a famine, there does not seem to be any other valid financial reason in Jewish thought for abstaining from procreation.

Specific Jewish Obligation To Have Children -
Although the general commandment to procreate was originally given to all nations of the world, like the very first commandment (Genesis 1:27), regarding Shabbat, this Mitzvah later became a uniquely Jewish commandment when the Torah was given, and today there is a specifically Jewish commandment to have Jewish children. This can be demonstrated by an interesting law codified by Rambam (Maimonides, Hilchot Ishut 15:6). If a person converts to Judaism and his non-Jewish children convert with him, he is not obligated to have any more children after conversion. However, if his non-Jewish children do not convert, then this

convert is obligated to have additional children, to fulfill the commandment to procreate as a Jew. This law ensures that there is a specific obligation to cause Jewish children to come into the world. Thus, if non-Jewish children convert, that obligation is fulfilled. But by having non-Jewish children alone does not fulfill a person's Jewish obligation to procreate, even though the person has brought additional people into the world (Maggid Mishnah commentary on Maimonides, Hilchot Ishut 15:6).

Because of many massacres and bloodshed throughout Jewish history, instead of a Jewish population that should today have been in the hundreds of millions (or even billions), there are less than fifteen million Jews in the world. Of course, there were always some Jews who assimilated and converted, but the vast majority of "lost" Jewish population is due to the intentional killing of so many Jews. One does not have to be a mathematician to figure out the natural geometric progression of this loss to Jewish population. If each couple today has only three children, and those three children have three children, etc., it will take but fifteen generations for 2.4 million Jews to be born – to one family. Therefore, Jews have a special obligation to "right the balance" after all the Jews who were killed throughout history and increase the Jewish population of the world. Through this act of not having enough "replacement" children (2.2) and contributing to the diminishing world Jewish population, many Jews today are themselves accomplishing what others have tried to do for generations, i.e., limit or even eliminate Jews from the world. The Talmud (Bava Batra 60b) acknowledges that even at that time, there were some Jews who were afraid to have children, thus diminishing the Jewish population in the world. On this passage, the Tosafot (Tosafot, commentary on Bava Batra 60b) state that having only two children will eventually wipe out the Jewish population and the Jewish people.

Specifically, in our generation, the generation following the Holocaust, some believe that Jews have an "extra" obligation to have children. After six million Jews were murdered by Hitler, a few modern Rabbis have stated that Jews today have a special moral obligation to bring one more child into the world than they would have normally, to try to restore, in some small way, the Jewish population so brutally destroyed in the Holocaust.

Thus, Jews have a special obligation to populate the world and have children, and today's generation has an even greater obligation in this regard. When quoting above the statistic regarding all Western countries that do not have enough children for replacement, the author was not entirely correct. There is one country that is the exception to the rule: the State of Israel, which continues to increase dramatically in its population and childbirth. And not only among religious Jews. Apparently, Israelis have absorbed the Jewish value of the importance of

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having children, and, unlike their Western counterparts, are optimistic about the future

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Parshat HaChodesh: The Power of Storytelling on Pesach - Na'ami Sturm Nagel

As a lover of books and stories, Pesach has always spoken to me because it performs the complicated task of connecting future generations to an ancient past through the medium of storytelling. In Pesachim it says:

"In every generation, a person is obligated לראות את עצמו / to view himself as if he went out of Egypt" (Talmud Pesachim, 116a).

This is the central mitzvah of the chag. The Rambam codifies this mitzvah by saying: "מצוות עשה של תורה לספר בניסים ונפלאות שעשו אבותינו במצרים / It is a positive commandment to tell [the stories] of the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt." The mitzvah is in the storytelling, לספר.

While there are many curious elements about this commandment, I have always wondered why storytelling is the medium through which we fulfill this mitzvah, especially since reenactment seems to be at the heart of the biblical commandment. In reading Parshat HaChodesh this week we see how even while Moshe and Aharon are being given the instructions for how to put the blood on the doorposts during makot bechorot, the next pasuk tells them how they will commemorate the action they are doing as chukat olam, "an institution for all time." One sees how the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim became symbolic in the very moment it was happening. While enacting the korban Pesach, Moshe and Aharon already had to learn about how that action was going to have lasting resonance through the future symbolic reenactment of eating matzah.

As a result, one might have expected the Talmud to ask us to fulfill the mitzvah mentioned in Parshat Hachodesh— "היום הזה לכם / this day shall be to you one of remembrance"— in a different way. On Succot we build a Succah, on Shavuot we stay up and learn, on Chanukah we light a menorah, so why not have us bake matzah, pack our bags and flee our suburban neighborhoods on the Seder night?

Chazal, however, were in tune to the human psyche and realized that stories can impact people more than performance. When you read or listen to a story, you are not retracing the steps of the characters or people in their

stories; rather, you are seeing the world through their eyes. Our sages knew there was something uniquely powerful and empowering about storytelling.

In fact, modern researchers have found quantifiable evidence that stories have a unique ability to change people's points of view and that much of what we know about life comes from reading stories. Daniel Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA, explains how storytelling "not only weaves together all the details of an experience when it's being encoded but enhances the network of nodes through which all those details can be retrieved and recalled. Research shows that we remember details of things much more effectively when they are embedded in a story. Telling and being moved to action by them is in our DNA." If we are to feel as if "we" ourselves went out of Mizrayim, we must incorporate that experience into who we are as people.

The power of storytelling lies in the way that the listener or reader plays an active role. On Seder night we do what I do with my English class when we read novels: we analyze the text to understand it on a deeper level. We closely read the language of the pesukim starting with "Arami oved avi," to think about what is below the surface meaning of the text. We talk about the deeper meaning behind the story's symbols, Pesach, Matzah and Maror. We think about the various places that could be the beginning of our story when it comes to Rav's opinion that our story starts with "מתחילה עובד" / At first our ancestors were idol worshippers..., whereas Shmuel believes we must begin with: "עבדים היינו" / We were once slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt..." We try both beginnings so that we can piece the narrative together. We even engage in a game of mathematics for people who connect more with numbers than words. The authors of the Haggadah made the telling of the story an active process, rather than making us passive listeners.

This close reading is all the more powerful because it enables you to feel as if you have experienced the communal Exodus story of a nation by personalizing the narrative. Some argue that Moshe was actually purposefully left out of the Seder narrative so that the story would not work around one specific central protagonist (which in Tanakh it does). Instead, the authors of the Haggadah wanted each individual person to be able to be the protagonist of the story by engaging in it in their own unique way.

The story has left room for modern day Jews to both experience a piece of their history, and also connect that history to their modern lives. The adaptability of the narrative also allowed Passover metaphors, motifs, and rituals to become part of many different movements. The efforts of the American Jewish political movement to free Soviet Jewry during the

1970s and 1980s used this narrative, as did African Americans struggling under slavery in America. These cases are evidence of the transformative power of storytelling as a means of creating agency amidst disempowering world events.

This Pesach, we should challenge ourselves, לראות, to see ourselves, as if we went out of Egypt by really personalizing the story of the Haggadah and placing ourselves in the narrative while telling the story of B'nei Yisrael's redemption.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

The Freedom to Choose

"If a man (adam) will have on his flesh...a tzara'as affliction...he shall be brought to Aaron the Kohen or to one of his sons the Kohanim" (Tazria 13:2.) Why does the Torah begin its discussion of the laws of tzara'as with the word adam? It should have used the more common word ish.

Chazal (Arachin 16a) identify seven different aveiros that can cause tzara'as, the most famous of which is lashon hara. Why does a person speak lashon hara if he knows that it is forbidden? Sometimes he simply loses control. Before he realizes, the words just tumble out of his mouth. Perhaps that is why the Torah begins its discussion of tzara'as with the term adam because adam is often used in contrast to beheimah (animal), as in "Adam u'beheimah toshiya, Hashem - Hashem, You save man and animal" (Tehillim 36:7.) When a person speaks lashon hara, he acts instinctively and impulsively like an animal. By not exercising control over himself, he loses his special quality of adam and lowers himself to the level of beheimah. The Torah uses the term adam to indicate that to be cured of tzara'as, a person must act like an adam once again, to make the right choices in his actions and his speech.

The importance of acting like an adam and making the right choices in life is the very first message Hashem gives to Klal Yisrael in Mitzrayim. "Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodoshim, rishon hu lachem l'chadshai hashana - this month (of Nissan) is for you the first of all months, the first of all the months of the year" (Shemos 12:2.) The Seforno explains that Hashem was saying, "From now on the months will be yours, to do with them as you choose. This is the first of all the months of the year because in this month you begin your bechirah (free will) existence." Hashem was telling Klal Yisrael, "Now that you are no longer slaves, you are not beholden to anyone. You have the free will to choose your direction in life! Use your freedom properly, to elevate yourself, not to satisfy every whim and desire of your heart."

This is what Chazal meant when they said, "Ein lecha ben chorin ela mi she'oseik b'Torah, v'chol mi she'oseik b'Torah mis'aleh - a person

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is not truly free unless he engages in Torah study, and whoever engages in Torah study becomes elevated" (Avos 6:2.) One who pursues his Torah study with dedication, and whose life is shaped and guided by a Torah perspective, is a true ben chorin because he understands that the ultimate purpose of freedom is to elevate himself through the choices that he makes.

While non-Jews can certainly elevate themselves by fulfilling the seven mitzvos of the bnei Noach, only Klal Yisrael have the ability to achieve the highest level of freedom by engaging in talmud Torah and observing all 613 mitzvos. Perhaps this is why only Klal Yisrael are subject to the rules of tumas tzara'as (Negaim 3:1, 12:1). The Tosafos Yom Tov (ibid) and the Ohr Hachayim (Tazria 13:2) explain this halacha based on the statement of Reb Shimon that only Klal Yisrael are referred to as adam in the context of tumas ohel. "Atem kruyim adam - only you are called adam" (Bava Metzia 114b.) Since the Torah also uses the term adam regarding tumas tzara'as, that halacha as well must be limited to Klal Yisrael.

This does not mean that non-Jews are never called adam. The fact is the Mishna (Avos 3:14) declares "Chaviv adam she'nivra b'tzelem - man is beloved because he was created in the image of G-d." The Tosafos Yom Tov and the Tiferes Yisrael both explain that even non-Jews are called adamin this context because they also have mitzvos. But Klal Yisrael have an elevated status of adam because they have a larger group of mitzvos to fulfill, and consequently they have the potential to rise to an even higher spiritual level.

Yet that privilege does not come without responsibility. If a Jew chooses to develop his neshama, to perfect his middos, to dedicate his life to talmud Torah and spiritual pursuits, he can rise to the highest levels. But if he fails to live up to his spiritual potential, and he allows his physical side to dictate his actions and his speech, then he falls to an even lower level than a non-Jew, and he is subject to the laws of tumas tzara'as.

The yom tov of Pesach, zman cheiruseinu, is a time to rediscover the essence of true freedom. When we liberate our neshamos from their physical limitations, and we allow them to express themselves through mitzvos and ma'asim tovim, we infuse our lives with meaning and purpose, and we become truly worthy of being called adam in the fullest sense of the word.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

That Kiss

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...On the

eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (Vayikra 12:1-2)

On the eighth day the flesh of his skin shall be circumscribed: It's not written here that there should be any expense for the event of the circumcision. Come and see how dear this Mitzvah is to Israel that they go through great expense to guard and rejoice in it... (Midrash Tanchuma)

It is a wondrous phenomenon that of all Mitzvos, Bris Mila should remain as a lasting symbol of Jewish loyalty. What's the great joy associated with making a Bris? It's a surgery! The kid is crying and all the adults are wishing "mazel tov" and eating lox. What's going on here? Why have Jews remained so tenaciously loyal to the Mitzvah of Bris Mila for thousands of years?

The truth is that I don't think there is a logical explanation. It transcends logic as we know it. That doesn't make it illogical. Rather it's supra-logical. Maybe that's why Bris Mila is performed on the 8th day. It is connected to and it connects us to a world beyond the universe of seven in which we reside. The biggest proof is that Jews have always willingly and joyfully celebrated this ceremony that afflicts a wound on a newly born baby with song and good food. Is this behavior consistent with the people who specialize in Rachamim- mercy and empathy!?

Almost 35 years ago I was driving to work and listening to a tape from the Agudah Convention. Rabbi Donner was telling over some of his experiences in Russia when it was still hemmed in by an iron curtain, Yiddishkeit and the practice of religion had been all but stamped out by 70 years of brutish communist rule. He met a couple, not at all learned in Torah and Mitzvos but still filled with profound longing for what they did not understand.

This was their story, the story of simple unlearned Jews. The wife was expecting a child and at her doctor visits she received stern warnings from the physician who recognized her as a Jew.

He cautioned her repeatedly not to mutilate her child if it would be a boy. She knew exactly what that meant. She delivered a healthy baby boy. Eight days later they were ready to perform a secretive Bris but they sensed that they were being observed by KGB agents.

Making a Bris might result in imprisonment or worse. It was deemed too risky and so the Bris was postponed. Thirty days later they were hoping to accomplish their holy task but still the enemies of holiness were keeping a keen eye on this potential "crime scene". It didn't happen.

Now eleven months later they felt the coast was clear and a Bris was surreptitiously organized. People came in through different doors at varied times so as to not attract attention. In the small apartment of this Russian couple ten men gathered with a Mohel and the baby. A circumcision was dutifully performed and the baby received his Jewish name.

Quietly the guests sat down to some food to celebrate the joyous occasion and the baby was wrapped up and returned his mother in an adjacent room so she could nurse him. Suddenly there was a thud and a shrieking cry from the baby. People came running and there was the mother fainted out cold on the floor and the baby sprawled out nearby and crying. Immediately they picked up the child and calmed him while others were reviving the mother. Everyone was speculating as to what had happened. Some said it must have been the excitement of the Bris. Others suggested that the wound was bigger than usual and that must have triggered her fainting.

When she was back to senses the mother explained exactly what happened. When she realized that it may not be possible to make a Bris for her son on the 8th day she was afraid that she may pass up on the Mitzvah altogether and never give her son a Bris, so she vowed that she would never kiss her child until the day he had a Bris.

When they handed her the baby of 11 months and she gave him a kiss for the first time and all of that stored up motherly love came rushing forward. That is what caused her to faint. From where does a simple Jewish mother get such superhuman strength to withhold that kiss?!

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

On Blossoms, Spring, and the Season By Yaakov Levinger¹

In a *baraita* in the *Tosefta* and the Babylonian Talmud² it says: Our Rabbis taught: A year may be intercalated on the grounds of [the absence of—Y.L.] three signs (Talmud: things): on account of *aviv* [the barley crops

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ripening]; on account of the fruit of the trees; or the *Tekufah* [season]. Any two of these reasons can justify intercalation, but not one alone... The year may not be intercalated on the ground that the kids or the lambs or the doves are too young. But we consider each of these circumstances as an auxiliary reason for intercalation.

Rashi, commenting on this passage in the Talmud, says: "*of the fruit of the trees*—if the fruit is going to ripen later than *Atzeret* (the Feast of Weeks), then the year is intercalated." Most of the *rishonim*, associate the signs for intercalating the year with the three pilgrimage festivals: late ripening of the barley crop with *Pesah*, late ripening of the fruit trees with the *Shavuot*, and late onset of the [fall] season with *Sukkot*.

Maimonides takes a unique approach, relating all three indications for intercalation of the year, including late ripening of the fruit trees, solely to their condition and degree of ripeness at Passover.³ The decision whether or not to add an extra month is taken by the Sanhedrin no later than the end of the month of *Adar*, right before *Nisan*, at which time all three indicators for intercalation are supposed to be at hand for Passover, without having to surmise anything as to their future readiness (as Rashi and his followers did), months later, e.g., surmising the condition of the fruit trees by *Shavuot*. Maimonides states his ruling thus (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Kiddush ha-Hodesh* 4.2,3):

There are three indicators for intercalating the year: the season, the ripening [of the barley crop], and the fruit of the trees. How so?

The court calculates and determines if the vernal equinox (season of *Nisan*) will fall by the sixteenth of Nisan [but nothing is said about when the autumnal equinox would fall with respect to the month of *Tishre*,⁴ Y.L.]... Similarly, if the court sees that *aviv* has not yet come [the barley crop is as yet not ripe, Y.L.], but [the barley] is late in sprouting [so as to be elevated as *omer* on Passover, Y.L.], or that the fruit trees that usually grow at the time of Passover have not yet grown, on the basis [of the absence, Y.L.] of these two indicators the year is intercalated.

Commentators searched hard and wide to find another view akin to Maimonides' as well as a source to prove his position that the fruit trees being late referred to the state of the fruit during the month of *Nisan*, in the time of the Passover festival, when the fruit is not yet ripe but still at the blossoming stage.

¹ For details on this distinction see *Hiddushei R. Y. Z. Soloveitchik on Hilkhos Kiddush ha-Hodesh*, par. 2 (s.v. "ve-ha-nir'eh lomar"). The author can be contacted at judithl@post.tau.ac.il to receive the full file of R. Y. Z. Soloveitchik's article (only for private use).

² See the expression of surprise by Rabbi Meir Simhah ha-Cohen of Dvinsk (*Or Same'ah on Mishneh Torah*, Riga 1926, on Maimonides' ruling here). We have not found any support in the manuscripts for his surmise that the law pertaining to the season of *Tishre* was omitted by "the scribes proofing our Rabbi's [Maimonides'] words."

³ Rabbi Eleazer Kalir, 6-7th century land of Israel, *Kerovah* for *Shaharit—Parashat ha-Hodesh*, in the *Kedushah* benediction (s.v. "*Adon mi-kedem techno rosh*"), before the *siluk* (as it appears in the prayer book *Avodat Yisrael*, by Yitzhak ben Aryeh Yosef Dov [Behr], Roedelheim 1868, and photocopies).

⁴ There is no textual foundation for surmising that the original wording of the liturgical poem read *pri* (= fruit) instead of *perah* (= blossom). See the wording of the poem in the historical lexicon of the Academy for the Hebrew Language: <http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il>.

A liturgical poem by Kalir for the Sabbath preceding Passover, however, seems to parallel Maimonides' approach. This is how the poem goes:

Ibbur me'abberim (A leap month is added) *le-shomro be-mo'ado* (to keep it [the month of Nisan and the festival of Passover] at its proper season);

Perah (Blossoming), *ve-aviv* (ripening [of the barley crop]), *tekufah* (season) *bam* (by means of these) *le-va'ado* (to set it, i.e., when Nisan and Passover will fall),

Tziyyun (To the reliance on) *shloshtam* (these three principle indicators for adding a month), *yetzarfu* (is added [also the absence of kids and lambs for the Passover offering and the doves not having matured sufficiently to be used for sacrifices, etc., in order] *le-sa'ado* (to assist in determining whether to add a leap month).

Kalir refers to the indicator for declaring a leap year the as the "fruit of the trees," as in the *baraitha*, when the "fruit" is still at the stage of blossoming, during the Passover season. He also discusses the role of these three indicators only with respect to determining when Passover will fall (Kalir uses the singular, "to keep it," "to set it," and "to assist [in determining] it"), as does Maimonides (and not when all three pilgrimage festivals come out, each in due season. If the poet had been following the approach used by Rashi and his adherents, he should have used the word "fruits" or "fruit" instead of "blossom"—words which would still have suited the acrostic of the poem [since they all begin with the letter *peh*]).

Indeed, even according to Rashi's approach, the condition of the fruit trees is assessed at the end of *Adar*, but with a view to predicting their condition come the Feast of Weeks, when the fruit is supposed to have ripened sufficiently to be fit to bring as first fruits, when the term "fruits" (not "blossoms") would apply to them. Of course, Kalir's poem cannot be said to be the source for Maimonides' ruling, for there is no proof Maimonides ever saw this poem, and even if he knew of the poem he could hardly have considered it a halakhic source. Both of them, however, appear to have been drawing on the same sources and interpretive traditions for understanding the tannaitic *baraitha* at hand. [Translated by Rachel Rowen]

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Circumcision of Desire (5775)

It is hard to trace with any precision the moment when a new idea makes its first appearance on the human scene, especially one as amorphous as that of love. But love has a history.[1] There is the contrast we find in Greek, and then Christian, thought between eros and agape: sexual desire and a highly abstract love for humanity in general.

There is the concept of chivalry that makes its appearance in the age of the Crusades, the code of conduct that prized gallantry and feats

of bravery to "win the heart of a lady". There is the romantic love presented in the novels of Jane Austen, hedged with the proviso that the young or not-so-young man destined for the heroine must have the right income and country estate, so as to exemplify the "truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." [2] And there is the moment in Fiddler on the Roof where, exposed by their children to the new ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia, Tevye turns to his wife Golde, and the following conversation ensues:

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know! But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his...

Tevye: Shh!

Golde: If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me!

Golde: I suppose I do!

The inner history of humanity is in part the history of the idea of love. And at some stage a new idea makes its appearance in biblical Israel. We can trace it best in a highly suggestive passage in the book of one of the great Prophets of the Bible, Hosea.

Hosea lived in the eighth century BCE. The kingdom had been divided since the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom in particular, where Hosea lived, had lapsed after a period of peace and prosperity into lawlessness, idolatry, and chaos. Between 747 and 732 BCE there were no less than five Kings, the result of a series of intrigues and bloody struggles for power. The people, too, had become lax:

There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder.

Hos. 4:1-2

Like other Prophets, Hosea knew that Israel's destiny depended on its sense of mission. Faithful to God, it was able to do extraordinary things: survive in the face of empires, and generate a society unique in the ancient world, of the equal dignity of all as fellow citizens under the sovereignty of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Faithless, however, it was just one more minor power in the ancient Near East, whose chances of survival against larger political predators were minimal.

What makes the book of Hosea remarkable is the episode with which it begins. God tells the Prophet to marry a prostitute, and see what it feels like to have a love betrayed. Only then will Hosea have a glimpse into God's sense of betrayal by the people of Israel. Having liberated them from slavery and brought them into their land, God saw them forget the past, forsake the covenant, and worship strange

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gods. Yet He cannot abandon them, despite the fact that they have abandoned Him. It is a powerful passage, conveying the astonishing assertion that more than the Jewish people love God, God loves the Jewish people. The history of Israel is a love story between the faithful God and His often faithless people. Though God is sometimes angry, He cannot but forgive. He will take them on a kind of second honeymoon, and they will renew their marriage vows:

"Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert

and speak tenderly to her . . .

I will betroth you to Me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,

in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness,

and you will know the Lord."

Hos 2:16-22

It is this last sentence – with its explicit comparison between the covenant and a marriage – that Jewish men say when they put on the hand-tefillin, winding its strap around the finger like a wedding-ring.

One verse in the midst of this prophecy deserves the closest scrutiny. It contains two complex metaphors that must be unraveled strand by strand:

"On that day," declares the Lord,

"You will call Me 'my Husband' [ishi];

You will no longer call Me 'my

Master' [baali]."

Hos. 2:18

This is a double pun. Baal, in biblical Hebrew, meant 'a husband', but in a highly specific sense – namely, 'master, owner, possessor, controller.' It signalled physical, legal, and economic dominance. It was also the name of the Canaanite god – whose prophets Elijah challenged in the famous confrontation at Mount Carmel. Baal (often portrayed as a bull) was the god of the storm, who defeated Mot, the god of sterility and death. Baal was the rain that impregnated the earth and made it fertile. The religion of Baal is the worship of god as power.

Hosea contrasts this kind of relationship with the other Hebrew word for husband, ish. Here he is recalling the words of the first man to the first woman:

This is now bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called "woman" [ishah],

Because she was taken from man [ish].

Gen. 2:23

Here the male-female relationship is predicated on something quite other than power and dominance, ownership and control. Man and woman confront one another in sameness and difference. Each is an image of

the other, yet each is separate and distinct. The only relationship able to bind them together without the use of force is marriage-as-covenant – a bond of mutual loyalty and love in which each makes a pledge to the other to serve one another.

Not only is this a radical way of reconceptualising the relationship between man and woman. It is also, implies Hosea, the way we should think of the relationship between human beings and God. God reaches out to humanity not as power – the storm, the thunder, the rain – but as love, and not an abstract, philosophical love but a deep and abiding passion that survives all the disappointments and betrayals. Israel may not always behave lovingly toward God, says Hosea, but God loves Israel and will never cease to do so.

How we relate to God affects how we relate to other people. That is Hosea's message – and vice versa: how we relate to other people affects the way we think of God. Israel's political chaos in the eighth century BCE was intimately connected to its religious waywardness. A society built on corruption and exploitation is one where might prevails over right. That is not Judaism but idolatry, Baal-worship.

Now we understand why the sign of the covenant is circumcision, the commandment given in this week's parsha of Tazria. For faith to be more than the worship of power, it must affect the most intimate relationship between men and women. In a society founded on covenant, male-female relationships are built on something other and gentler than male dominance, masculine power, sexual desire and the drive to own, control and possess. Baal must become ish. The alpha male must become the caring husband. Sex must be sanctified and tempered by mutual respect. The sexual drive must be circumscribed and circumscribed so that it no longer seeks to possess and is instead content to love.

There is thus more than an accidental connection between monotheism and monogamy. Although biblical law does not command monogamy, it nonetheless depicts it as the normative state from the start of the human story: Adam and Eve, one man, one woman. Whenever in Genesis a patriarch marries more than one woman there is tension and anguish. The commitment to one God is mirrored in the commitment to one person.

The Hebrew word *emunah*, often translated as "faith," in fact means faithfulness, fidelity, precisely the commitment one undertakes in making a marriage. Conversely, for the prophets there is a connection between idolatry and adultery. That is how God describes Israel to Hosea. God married the Israelites but they, in serving idols, acted the part of a promiscuous woman (Hos. 1-2).

The love of husband and wife – a love at once personal and moral, passionate and responsible – is as close as we come to understanding God's love for us and our ideal love for Him. When Hosea says, "You will know the Lord," he does not mean knowledge in an abstract sense. He means the knowledge of intimacy and relationship, the touch of two selves across the metaphysical abyss that separates one consciousness from another. That is the theme of The Song of Songs, that deeply human yet deeply mystical expression of eros, the love between humanity and God. It is also the meaning of one of the definitive sentences in Judaism: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deut. 6:5

Judaism from the beginning made a connection between sexuality and violence on the one hand, marital faithfulness and social order on the other. Not by chance is marriage called *kiddushin*, "sanctification." Like covenant itself, marriage is a pledge of loyalty between two parties, each recognising the other's integrity, honouring their differences even as they come together to bring new life into being. Marriage is to society what covenant is to religious faith: a decision to make love – not power, wealth or force majeure – the generative principle of life.

Just as spirituality is the most intimate relationship between us and God, so sex is the most intimate relationship between us and another person. Circumcision is the eternal sign of Jewish faith because it unites the life of the soul with the passions of the body, reminding us that both must be governed by humility, self-restraint, and love.

Brit milah helps transform the male from baal to ish, from dominant partner to loving husband, just as God tells Hosea that this is what He seeks in His relationship with the people of the covenant. Circumcision turns biology into spirituality. The instinctive male urge to reproduce becomes instead a covenantal act of partnership and mutual affirmation. It was thus as decisive a turn in human civilisation as Abrahamic monotheism itself. Both are about abandoning power as the basis of relationship, and instead aligning ourselves with what Dante called "the love that moves the sun and other stars." [3] Circumcision is the physical expression of the faith that lives in love.

[1] See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Also Simon May's, *Love: A History*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

[2] The famous first line of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

[3] The *Divine Comedy*, 33:143-45.

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PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA

Anyone who understands the opening pasuk of Parshat Acharei Mot immediately realizes that this entire Parsha belongs in Parshat Shmini! Why then do Parshiot Tazria/Metzora 'interrupt' this logical sequence?

In case this sounds a bit complicated, don't worry; we'll begin this week's shiur by first explaining this question. Then we'll use its answer to help us arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and theme of Sefer Vayikra.

INTRODUCTION

Recall that the first half of Parshat Shmini included the story of tragic death of Aharon's two sons - Nadav & Avihu (see 10:1-9). Recall as well that Parshat ACHAREI MOT (several chapters later) opens with God's commandment to Moshe & Aharon in the aftermath of that event:

"And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon AFTER THE DEATH of the two sons of Aharon..." (16:1)

Hence, it would have been more logical for the Torah to include this commandment in Parshat Shmini - immediately after the story of their death. [In other words, Vayikra chapter 16 should follow immediately after chapter 10!]

However, we find instead that chapters 11 thru 15, detailing numerous laws concerning various types of "tumah" [spiritual uncleanness], form an 'interruption' to this logical flow.

To explain why, Part One of our shiur will explore the thematic relationship between these laws of "tumah" and the story of Nadav & Avihu's death. In Part Two, we will build an outline that will summarize these laws of "tumah" that will help us appreciate their detail.

PART ONE - WHAT DID NADAV & AVIHU DO WRONG?

As you are probably aware, there are numerous opinions concerning what Nadav & Avihu did wrong. The reason for this difference of opinions is simple; the Torah only tells us WHAT they did, but does not explain WHY they were punished. Therefore, each commentator looks for a clue either within that pasuk (see 10:1) or in the 'neighboring' psukim in search of that reason.

[For example, the word "aish zarah" in 10:1 implies that Nadav & Avihu may have sinned by offering the wrong type of fire. Alternately, the 'parshia' that follows discusses laws that forbid the kohanim to become intoxicated (see 10:8-11), thus implying that they may have been drunk. (See Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, etc.) In fact, each commentary on this pasuk is so convincing that it is truly hard to choose between them.]

However, in contrast to that discussion concerning what specifically Nadav & Avihu did wrong (and why), our shiur will focus instead on the more general connection between this incident and the overall structure (and theme) of Sefer Vayikra.

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

Even though the Torah does not tell us specifically WHY Nadav & Avihu were punished, the pasuk that describes their sin does provide us with a very general explanation:

"va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" - and they offered a 'foreign fire' that GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM (see 10:1)

However, finding this phrase "asher lo tzivah otam" should not surprise us. In relation to the construction of the Mishkan, we found this phrase repeated numerous times in our study of Parshiot Vayakhel & Pekudei.

[To refresh your memory, just note how "ka'asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe" [As God has commanded Moshe] concludes just about every "parshia" in Parshat Pekudei. See not only 35:29; 36:1; & 36:5 but also 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43 & 40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32!]

Furthermore, this phrase first appeared at the very introduction of the Mishkan unit that began in Parshat Vayakhel:

"And Moshe said to the entire congregation of Israel [EYDAH] ZEH HA'DAVAR - ASHER TZIVAH HASHEM - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED saying..." (see 35:1,4, see also 35:1)

Finally, thus far in Sefer Vayikra we have found this same phrase when the Torah describes the story of the Mishkan's dedication. First of all, in the the seven day "miluim" ceremony:

"And Moshe said to the entire EYDAH [gathered at the Ohel Moed:8:3] - ZEH HA'DAVAR - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED to do..." (Vayikra 8:4-5, see also 8:9,13,17,21,36.)

And in Moshe Rabeinu's opening explanation of the special korbanot that were to be offered on Yom ha'Shmini:

"And Moshe said: ZEH HA'DAVAR - THIS is what GOD HAS COMMANDED that you do [in order] that His KAVOD [Glory] can appear upon you [once again]..." (9:6, see also 9:1-5)

Carefully note how Moshe declares this statement in front of the entire "eydah" [congregation] that has gathered to watch this ceremony. [See 9:5! Note also in 9:3-4 that Moshe explains to the people that these korbanot will 'bring back' the "shchinah".]

In fact, when you review chapter 9, note how the Torah concludes each stage of this special ceremony with this same phrase. [See 9:5,6,7,10,21.]

Therefore, when the Torah uses a very similar phrase to describe the sin of Nadav & Avihu on that day - "va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" (see 10:1), we should expect to find a thematic connection between that sin and this phrase.

To find that connection, we must consider the reason why the Torah uses this phrase so often in its details of the Mishkan's construction.

EMPHASIZING A CRITICAL POINT

Recall that Nadav & Avihu's sin took place on the 'eighth day'. Earlier on that day (as the ceremony was about to begin) Moshe had gathered the entire nation to explain the PRECISE details of how the korbanot would be offered on that day.

[Note again, the key phrase: "zeh ha'davar asher tzivah Hashem..." / see 9:4-6.] In fact, Moshe made two very similar remarks before the entire nation before the Mishkan's original construction (Shmot 35:1,4), and before the seven day MILUIM ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1).

Why must Moshe, prior to offering these special korbanot, first explain the details of these procedures to the entire congregation who have gathered to watch?

The Torah appears to be sending a very strong message in regard to the Mishkan. God demands that man must act precisely in accordance to His command - without changing even a minute detail.

NADAV & AVIHU'S PUNISHMENT

With this background, we can better understand why Nadav & Avihu are punished. On the day of its public dedication - on Yom ha'Shmini - they decide (on their own) to offer KTORET. Note the Torah's description of their sin:

"And Nadav & Avi each took their firepan, put in it fire and added KTORET, and they brought an alien fire in front of God which He HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM ['asher lo tzivah"]

Their fire is considered "aish zarah" [alien] simply because God 'did not command them' to offer it. [Note the special emphasis upon the word "lo" according to the "taamei mikra" (cantillation). See also commentary of Chizkuni on 10:1.

Nadav & Avihu may have had the purest intentions, but they made one critical mistake - they did not act according to the precise protocol that God had prescribed for that day. Considering that the entire EYDAH gathered at the Ohel Moed recognize that Nadav & Avihu have strayed from protocol, they must be punished; for the lesson of that day was exactly this point - that in the Mishkan man must meticulously follow every detail of God's command.

[Note, this interpretation does not negate any of the other opinions which suggest that Nadav & Avihu had done something else wrong [such as drinking or disrespect of Moshe, etc.]. It simply allows us to understand the severity of their punishment EVEN if they had done nothing 'wrong' at all (other than doing something that God had not commanded). See also commentary of Rashbam on 10:1 in this regard.]

From a thematic perspective, their punishment under these circumstances is quite understandable. Recall the theological dilemma created by a MISHKAN - a physical representation (or symbol) of a transcendental God. Once a physical object is used to represent God, the danger exists that man may treat that object [and then possibly another object] as a god itself. On the other hand, without a physical representation of any sort, it becomes difficult for man to develop any sort of relationship with God. Therefore, God allows a Mishkan - a symbol of His Presence - but at the same time, He must emphasize that He can only be worshiped according to the precise manner "as God had commanded Moshe".

[See also Devarim 4:9-24 for the Torah's discussion of a similar fear that man may choose his own object to represent God [a "tavnit..." / compare Shmot 25:8-9 "v'akmal".]

THE PROBLEM OF 'GOOD INTENTIONS'

This specific problem of 'following God's command' in relation to the Mishkan takes on extra meaning on Yom ha'Shmini.

Recall our explanation of Aharon's sincere intentions at the incident of "chet ha'egel", i.e. he wanted to provide Bnei Yisrael with a physical symbol of God, which they could worship. [See previous shiur on Ki-tisa.] Despite Aharon's good intentions, his actions led to a disaster. The sin of "chet ha'egel" caused KAVOD HASHEM [God's Glory (= "shchina")], which had appeared to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, to be taken away (see Shmot 33:1-7).

Due to Moshe's intervention, God finally allowed His SHCHINA to return to the MISHKAN that Bnei Yisrael had built. But when Nadav & Avihu make a mistake (similar to Aharon's sin at chet ha'egel) on the very day of the Mishkan's dedication, they must be punished immediately.

[Not only can this explain why they are so severely punished, it may also help us understand their father's reaction of: "va'YIDOM Aharon" [and Aharon stood silent] (see 10:3).]

Finally, this interpretation can help us understand Moshe's statement to Aharon: "This is what God had spoken -B'KROVEI E'KADESH..." (see 10:3). Recall the parallel that we have discussed many times between Har Sinai and the Mishkan. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael AND the Kohanim were forewarned:

"And God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people that they must not break through [the barrier surrounding] Har

Sinai, lest they gaze at Hashem and perish. The KOHANIM also, who COME NEAR HASHEM, must sanctify themselves ("yitkadashu" - compare "b'krovei akadesh"/10:3), lest God punish them." (Shmot 19:21)

As this inaugural ceremony parallels the events of Har Sinai, God's original warning concerning approaching Har Sinai, even for the KOHANIM, now applies to the Mishkan as well. Therefore, extra caution is necessary, no matter how good one's intentions may be. [See sim]

BACK TO SEFER VAYIKRA

Now we can return to our original question. In Sefer Vayikra, the story of the sin of Nadav & Avihu (chapter 10) introduces an entire set of laws that discuss improper entry into the Mishkan (chapters 11->15). Then, immediately after this tragic event, the Sefer discusses the various laws of "tumah v'tahara", which regulate who is permitted and who is forbidden to enter the Mishkan. Only after the completion of this section discussing who can enter the Mishkan, does Sefer Vayikra return (in chapter 16) to God's command to Aharon concerning how he himself can properly enter the holiest sanctum of the Mikdash (on Yom Kippur).

In Part Two, we discuss the content of this special unit of mitzvot from chapter 11->15.

PART II

WHO CAN ENTER THE MISHKAN / TUMAH & TAHARA

INTRODUCTION

We often find ourselves lost in the maze of complicated laws concerning "tumah" and "tahara" which the Torah details in Parshiot TAZRIA & METZORA. Even though it is not easy to understand the reasoning for these laws, the internal structure of these Parshiot is quite easy to follow.

In Part II, we outline the flow of parshiot from Parshat Shmini through Metzora and attempt to explain why they are located specifically in this section of Sefer Vayikra.

THE UNIT

As the following table shows, each of these five chapters deals with a topic related in one form or manner to "tumah" (spiritual uncleanness).

CHAPTER "TUMAH" CAUSED BY:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 11 | eating or touching dead animals |
| 12 | the birth of a child |
| 13 | a "tzaraat" on a person's skin or garment |
| 14 | a "tzaraat" in a house |
| 15 | various emissions from the human body |

Not only do these parshiot discuss how one contracts these various types of TUMAH, they also explain how one can cleanse himself from these TUMOT, i.e. how he becomes TAHOR. For the simplest type of TUMAH, one need only wash his clothing and wait until sundown (see 11:27-28,32,40). For more severe types of TUMAH, to become TAHOR one must first wait seven days and then bring a set of special korbanot.

This entire unit follows a very logical progression. It begins with the least severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah erev" - one day TUMAH (lit. until the evening), and then continues with the more severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah shiva", seven day TUMAH. Within each category, the Torah first explains how one contracts each type of TUMAH, then it explains the how he becomes TAHOR from it.

The following OUTLINE summarizes this structure. Note how each section of the outline concludes with a pasuk that begins with "zot torat...":

VAYIKRA - CHAPTERS 11 -> 15

I. ONE DAY TUMAH - 11:1-47 / "v'tamey ad ha'erev"

[known as "tumat erev" (or "tumah kala")]

Person is TAMEY until nightfall/ see 11:24,25,27,31,32,39]
because he ate, touched, or carried the dead carcass of:

- A. (11:1-28) forbidden animals and fowl
 - B. (29-38) one of the eight "shrutzim" (swarming creatures)
 - C. (39-40) permitted animals that died without "shchita"
 - D. (41-43) other creeping or swarming creatures.
- TAHARA for the above - washing one's clothes/ 11:28,32,40]
FINALE psukim (11:44-47)

...ZOT TORAT HA'BHAYMA etc.

II. SEVEN DAY TUMAH - 12:1-15:33 ("tumah chamurah")

- A. TUMAT YOLEDET - a mother who gave birth (12:1-8)
 - 1. for a boy : 7+33=40
 - 2. for a girl : 14+66=80

TAHARA - korban chatat & olah

...ZOT TORAT HA'YOLEDET etc.

B. TZARAAT HA'ADAM

TUMAH / based on inspection by the kohen

- 1. on one's body / 13:1-46
- 2. on one's "beged" (garment) /13:47-59

TAHARA / 14:1-32

- 1. special sprinkling, then count 7 days
- 2. special korban on eighth day

...ZOT TORAT ASHER BO NEGA TZARAAT etc.

C. TZARAAT HA'BAYIT / 14:33-53

TUMAH / based on inspection by kohen

- 1. the stones of the house itself (14:33-45)
- 2. secondary "tumah" (14:46-47) for one who:
 - a. enters the house
 - b. sleeps in the house
 - c. eats in the house

TAHARA - a special sprinkling on the house (14:48-53)

summary psukim for all types of TZARAAT (14:54-57)

...ZOT HA'TORAH L'CHOL NEGA HA'TZRAAT

... ZOT TORAT HA'TZARAAT.

D. EMISSIONS FROM THE BODY (chapter 15)

- 1. MALE - TUMAT ZAV - an abnormal emission of "zera"
 - a. he himself (15:1-4) - 7 days
 - b. secondary "tumah" / 1 day (15:5-12)
for one who either touches what the ZAV is sitting on, or
sits on an item that the ZAV sits, and other misc. cases.

TAHARA (15:13-15)

waiting 7 days, then washing with "mayim chayim"
on 8th day a special korban

- 2. MALE - TUMAT KERI - a normal emission (15:16-18)
one day "tumah" (until evening)
requires washing clothing.

- 3. FEMALE - TUMAT NIDA - a normal flow (15:19-24)
 - a. she herself - seven days
 - b. secondary "tumah" - one day
for person or items that she touches

- 4. FEMALE - TUMAT ZAVA - an abnormal flow (15:25-30)
 - a. she herself and what she sits on - 7 days
 - b. secondary "tumah" for someone who touches her or
something which she is sitting on.

TAHARA -

waiting seven days...

on 8th day a special korban

A FINALE and summary psukim (15:31-33)

...ZOT TORAT HA'ZAV etc.

ABOUT THE OUTLINE

I recommend that you review this outline as you study the Parsha. Note that even though the details are very complicated, the overall structure is actually quite simple.

Note also how the Torah summarizes each section with a phrase beginning with ZOT TORAT... - this is the procedure (or ritual) for... [See the previous shiur on Parshat Tzav/Parah in which we discussed the meaning of the word TORAH in Sefer Vayikra.] The repetition of key phrases such as these is often helpful towards identifying the internal structure of parshiot in Chumash.

Our division of the outline into TWO sections, ONE-DAY tumah and SEVEN-DAY tumah may at first appear to be a bit misleading for we also find many cases of one day tumah in the second section. However, the cases of one-day TUMAH in the second section are quite different for they are CAUSED by a person who had first become TAMEY for seven days. Therefore, we have defined them as 'secondary' TUMAH in that section.

[TUMAT KERI (15:16-18) may be another exception since it is an independent one-day TUMAH, however it could be considered a sub-category within the overall framework of TUMAT ZAV.]

[See also further iyun section for a discussion why the one-day TUMAH section includes KASHRUT laws.]

WHY THE INTERRUPTION?

Now that we have established that chapters 11->15 form a distinct unit, which discusses the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA; we can return to our original question - Why does this unit interrupt the natural flow from Parshat Shmini (chapter 10) to Parshat Acharei Mot (chapter 16)?

The concluding psukim of this unit can provide us with a possible explanation.

As we have noted in our outline, this entire unit contains an important FINALE pasuk:

"V'HIZARTEM ET BNEI YISRAEL M'TUMATAM... And you shall put Bnei Yisrael on guard [JPS - see further iyun regarding translation of "vhizartem"] against their TUMAH, LEST THEY DIE through their TUMAH by defiling My MISHKAN which is among them." (see 15:31)

This pasuk connects the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA to the laws of the Mishkan. Bnei Yisrael must be careful that should they become TAMEY, they must not ENTER the Mishkan. In fact, the primary consequence for one who has become TAMEY is the prohibition that he cannot enter the MIKDASH complex. There is no prohibition against becoming TAMEY, rather only a prohibition against entering the Mishkan should he be TAMEY.

Hence, the entire TAHARA process as well is only necessary for one who wishes to enter the Mishkan. If there is no Mishkan, one can remain TAMEY his entire life with no other consequence (see further iyun section).

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for the first 16 chapters of Sefer Vayikra - the ability of Bnei Yisrael to enter the Mishkan, to come closer to God.

Let's explain:

The first section of Sefer Vayikra, chapters 1->7, explains HOW and WHEN the individual can bring a korban and HOW they are offered by the kohen. The next section, chapters 8->10, records the special Mishkan dedication ceremony, which prepared Bnei Yisrael and the Kohanim for using and working in the Mishkan. As this ceremony concluded with the death of Nadav & Avihu for improper entry into the Mishkan (when offering the "ktoret zara"), Sefer Vayikra continues with an entire set of commandments concerning TUMAH & TAHARA, chapters 11->15, which regulate who can and cannot ENTER THE MISHKAN. This unit ends with laws of Yom Kippur, which describe the procedure of how the "kohen gadol" (high

priest) can enter the most sacred domain of the Mishkan - the Kodesh K'doshim.

Even though these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA may have been given to Moshe at an earlier or later time, once again, we find that Sefer Vayikra prefers thematic continuity over chronological order (see shiur on Parshat Tzav). First, the Sefer discusses who cannot enter the Mishkan. Then it explains who can enter its most sacred domain.

ZEHIRUT - BEING CAREFUL

Up until this point, we have discussed the technical aspects of the structure of this unit in Parshiot Shmini, Tazria & Metzora. Is there any significance to these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA today as well?

The simplest explanation is based on our parallel between the Mishkan and Har Sinai. Just as Bnei Yisrael's encounter with God at Har Sinai required special preparation, so too man's encounter with God in the Mishkan. It would not be proper for man just to 'hop on in' whenever he feels like entering the Mishkan. Instead, each time an individual plans to offer a korban or enter the Mishkan for any other reason, he must prepare himself by making sure not to come in contact with anything which would make him TAMEY. Should for any reason he become TAMEY, he must wash his clothes and wait until the next day. Should he himself contract a major type of TUMAH such as TZARAAT or ZAV, then he must wait at least seven days and undergo a special ritual which will make him TAHOR.

All of these complicated laws cause the man who wishes to visit the Mishkan to be very careful and constantly aware of everything he touches, or carries, etc. during the entire week prior to his visit, thus enhancing his spiritual readiness for entering the Mishkan.

Today, even without a Mishkan, man must still make every effort to find God's Presence, even though it is hidden. Therefore, man's state of constant awareness and caution concerning everything that he says and does remains a primary means by which man can come closer to God, even though no Bet Ha'Mikdash exists.

An important thought to keep in mind as we prepare ourselves during the seven weeks of Sefirat ha'Omer in preparation for our commemoration of Ma'amad Har Sinai on Shavuot.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In relation to the translation of the word "v'hizartem et Bnei Yisrael..." (15:31), see Ibn Ezra. He explains that the word does not stem from "azhara"=warning, but rather from the word "nazir", to separate oneself ["zarut"]. Then "nun" simply falls which is noted by the dagesh in the "zayin". See Ibn Ezra inside!

B. Since this section of chapters 11->15 discuss various laws of TUMAH & TAHARA, one would expect it to include the laws of TUMAT MEYT (caused by touching a dead person). Instead, the Torah records these laws in Parshat Chukat, Bamidbar chapter 19. It appears as though that parsha was 'spliced' from this unit and 'transferred' to Sefer Bamidbar. This parsha is one of many parshiot in Sefer Bamidbar which would appear to 'belong' in Sefer Vayikra instead. Iy"h, we will explain the reason for this in our shiurim on Sefer Bamidbar - "v'akmal".

C. At first glance, the section in our unit which discusses 'one-day' TUMAH (chapter 11) appears to be discussing "kashrut" (dietary laws) more than TUMAH, for it details which animals are permitted or forbidden to be eaten. However, the dietary laws which are mentioned here because one becomes TAMEY should he eat the meat of an animal which is TAMEY.

To prove this, simply compare this parsha to the dietary laws in Parshat Re'ay (see Dvarim 14:1-21). There we find only dietary laws and not laws of TUMAH & TAHARA. Therefore, laws such as "basar v'chalav" are mentioned in that parsha, while the laws of TUMAH are not!

D. These laws which discuss who can and cannot enter the Mikdash are sometimes referred to as HILCHOT BIYAT MIKDASH (see Rambam Sefer Avodah). Obviously, these laws apply only when a Mikdash exists, as there is no other consequence of 'becoming tamey' other than limited entry to areas containing shchinah.

Nonetheless, there are several circumstances when it is still necessary to know these laws. For example, entering HAR HA'BAYIT even when there is not Mikdash requires that one not be TAMEY. These laws also relate to eating TRUMOT & MAASROT.

E. See 11:44-45

"...v'hitkadishtem, v'yehiytem KDOSHIM, ki KADOSH ani"
v'lo t'TAMU et nafshoteichem...."
"ki ani Hashem ha'maale etchem m'eretz mitzrayim,
l'hiyot l'chem l'Elokim, v'heyitem KDOSHIM ..."
"... l'havdil bein ha'tamey u'bein ha'tahor..."

This finale of the section explaining 'one-day' TUMAH connects the theme of Sefer Shmot, that Hashem took us out Egypt in order that we become His nation, to the laws of "tumah & tahara". To become God's nation, we must be like Him. Just as He is "kadosh" (set aside, different), we must also be "kadosh".

Man's spirituality begins with his recognition that he is different than animal. Although man and animal are similar in many ways, man must realize that he was set aside by God for a higher purpose. God blessed man with special qualities in order that he fulfill that purpose. [See Rambam in Moreh Nvuchim I.1 regarding the definition of tzelem elokim. It is not by coincidence that the Rambam begins Moreh Nvuchim with this concept.]

These laws of "tumot ochlim" teach Am Yisrael that they must differentiate between man and animal, and between different types of animals. By doing so, man will learn to differentiate between divine and mundane, between "tamey & tahor", and finally between good and bad, right and wrong etc.

D. In previous shiurim, we explained how the cycles of seven found in Chumash relate to our need to recognize the hand of God behind nature. Why do you think that we also find cycles of seven in the laws of TZARAAT, ZAV, and ZAVA that appear to be the exact opposite, that is abnormalities in nature?

PARSHAT TAZRIA - From 7 to 8 [& for Shmini Atzeret]

What is so special about the number 'eight' in Chumash? Is it only coincidental that:

- * In Sefer Breishit - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for Brit Milah;
- * In Parshat Shmini - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for the dedication of the Mishkan;
- * In Parshat Metzora - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the day on which the cleansed Metzora, Zav, and Zavah bring their special korbanot;
- * In Parshat Emor - the final holiday is "SHMINI atzeret" - the 'eighth day' of Succot!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why the number eight is so special, based on the Biblical significance of the number seven.

INTRODUCTION

In previous shiurim we have discussed the special relationship between the Number SEVEN and 'nature', especially in regard to the "shalosh regalim" [the three pilgrimage holidays]. For example, in our shiur on Parshat Emor we noted that is not by chance that the Torah commands us to:

- * Celebrate specifically SEVEN days of Chag Ha'matzot in the **spring**; and then -
- * To count SEVEN weeks until the **grain harvest** holiday of Shavuot; and finally -
- * To celebrate our **fruit harvest** during the SEVEN days of Succot.

The fact that each of these holidays include either seven days or seven weeks suggests a connection between the number seven and agriculture. By emphasizing SEVEN in relation to these agricultural holidays, the Torah highlights our need to recognize that the powers of nature are indeed God's creation, and we must thank Him accordingly.

Similarly, our shiur on Parshat Breishit discussed how the Torah presents of the story of Creation as taking place in SEVEN days – to emphasize how the very creation of 'nature' itself was a willful act of the One God - and not the result of conflicts among a pantheon of many gods, each exerting its power over a certain part of nature.

In the following shiur, we return to Sefer Breishit in search of the biblical significance of the number 'eight', to show how and why it should relate to those 'seven' days of Creation.

EIGHT & BRIT MILAH

In some of the examples quoted above from Sefer Vayikra, 'eight' appears to be significant simply because it follows a sequence of 'seven' days. For example:

- * "Yom Ha'shmini" follows the SEVEN days of the "miluim";
- * The korbanot on the eighth day of the Metzora and Zav follow their minimum SEVEN day "tahara" period;
- * "Shmini Atzeret" follows the SEVEN days of Succot.

However, when God first commanded Avraham Avinu that "brit milah" must be performed on the 'eighth day' after a child's birth (see Breishit 17:12) - there is no apparent reason why God chose specifically the 'eighth day'. Certainly, it had nothing to do with a prior period of 'seven days' (as did the other examples of a special 'eighth day' mentioned above).

[Even though we are told in Parshat Tazria that the mother is "tameh" (spiritually unclean) for the first seven days after her son's birth (see Vayikra 12:2-5), there does not appear to be any logical connection between these seven days and the commandment to perform "milah" on the eighth day that was first given way back in Sefer Breishit. In fact, it seems quite the opposite - that because brit milah needs to be performed on the eighth day, her 'tumah' period is 'truncated' from 14 days to seven days.]

In the following shiur, we re-examine this covenant between God and Avraham Avinu [17:1-11/ better known as "brit milah"] in the 'wider' context of Sefer Breishit - to uncover a thematic connection between the 'eighth day' and the 'seven days' of Creation. [Hopefully, it will help us understand not only why "milah" is on the 'eighth day', but also why the holiday of "Shmini Atzeret" is so important.]

As you most probably recall, the Torah uses several names to describe God (e.g. Elokim, Havaya, kel-shaddai, etc.). However, when the narrative of "brit milah" begins in chapter 17, something very peculiar takes place, as God introduces Himself to Avraham Avinu for the first time as "kel-shaddai" - after which the Torah consistently refers to God as "Elokim" (until the end of that chapter).

To appreciate the thematic importance of this observation, we must first undertake a quick review of all the previous instances in Sefer Breishit when God spoke to man, paying special attention to when the Torah uses "shem Elokim".

IN WHAT 'NAME' DOES GOD SPEAK TO MAN?

In our shiur on Parshat Breishit, we explained how Chumash presents two parallel stories of God's creation of the universe:

- 1) "b'shem ELOKIM" (1:1 -2:4) - [or 'perek aleph'] which focused on God's creation of NATURE, i.e. a structured universe, in SEVEN days.
- 2) "b'shem HAVAYA" (2:5-4:26) - [or 'perek bet'] which focused on God's special relationship with Man, i.e. the creation of Gan Eden, and man's banishment from that environment after he sinned.

Without going into the complex details and deeper meaning of this 'double presentation', we will simply posit that God's relationship with man develops along the lines of each of these two perspectives, as each of these divine Name will reflect a different perspective of the developing relationship between man and God.

For example, in perek aleph, God - b'shem Elokim - blesses man that he be fruitful & multiply, master the earth and rule over all other living creatures (see 1:26-28). In contrast to this perspective of man as ruler over God's Creations, in perek bet - b'shem Havaya -man is created in order to become God's servant, whose job is to tend and watch over His Garden (see 2:15-17).

This 'double perspective' is found once again in the Torah's account of the Flood, as God's decision to destroy the generation of the Flood (due to their sinful behavior) is presented according to both of these perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 6:9-6:22.
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 6:5-8 & 7:1-5.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the MABUL, God redefines His relationship with man, again from both perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 9:1-17
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 8:18-21

After the flood, the Torah describes ["b'shem Elokim"] how the children of Noach multiply and disperse into seventy nations (10:1-32), but immediately afterwards details God's punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel while referring to God using "shem Havaya" (see 11:1-10).

At this point in Chumash (i.e. at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha) this pattern (of 'double presentation') seems to end - for the Torah uses exclusively "shem Havaya" as it describes all the conversations between God and Avraham Avinu, from chapter 12 thru chapter 16. The Torah's exclusive use of "shem Havaya" to describe these encounters is thematically consistent with our assertion that God's Name of "Havaya" relates to the special relationship between man and God - where man is expected to act as a servant of God.

For example, God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation is described b'shem Havaya (see 12:1-9); so too His re-iteration of that promise after Lot's departure (see 13:14-17).

Similarly, when God formalizes that promise into a covenant in "brit bein ha'tarim" (see 15:1-20) - again we find the Torah's employs "shem Havaya" in its description of God.

For some reason, this exclusive (and logical) use of "shem Havaya" in the Torah's description of God's relationship with Avraham Avinu changes in chapter seventeen - when the Torah

first uses "shem Elokim" to describe how God speaks to Avraham Avinu at "brit milah"!

To understand the reason for this sudden change, let's take a closer look at how that chapter begins, noticing how God first introduces Himself as "kel sha-dai" before speaking to him b'shem ELOKIM:

"When Avram was ninety-nine years, God [HAVAYA] appeared to Avram and said to him: "ANI KEL SHA-DAI", walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My COVENANT between Me and you... Avram fell on his face, and God [ELOKIM] spoke to him saying... This is my COVENANT with you..." (17:1-4)

As you study these psukim, and the ones that follow, note how God (b'shem Elokim):

- a) changes Avram's name to Avraham;
- b) blesses him that he will multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- c) promises that he will become a great nation;
- d) promises him and his future generations Eretz Canaan;
- e) promises to be his God ("le'hiyot l'cha l'ELOKIM");
- f) commands him to circumcise his male children, etc.

In addition to these details in these psukim, pay attention as well to their style - as they share some very interesting similarities to the only two earlier instances where Chumash uses "shem Elokim" to describe God speaking to man:

- (I) After the creation of man on the sixth day (1:27-30);
- (II) After the Flood (see 9:1-17).

To verify this, review those two sets of psukim, noting the parallels to the narrative of "brit milah":

- I) On the sixth day, after man is created b'tzelem ELOKIM, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses him that he should:
 - a) be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
 - b) be master and ruler of the living kingdom;
 - c) eat from the plants and fruit of the trees.
- II) Some ten generations later, after the Flood, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses Noah and his children in a very similar fashion (9:1-7), including:
 - a) to be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
 - b) to be master of the living kingdom;
 - c) permission to eat living creatures (not only plants);

However, the most striking parallel to "brit milah" is found in the special covenant that God ["b'shem Elokim"] makes with Noah immediately after these blessings as described in 9:8-12: "vhakimoti et briti itchem... [9:11/ compare 17:7-8]

"va'yomer Elokim, zot ot ha'brit..." [19:12/ compare 17:9-10]

This covenant, better known as "brit ha'keshet" (the rainbow covenant), reflects the establishment of a special relationship between God and mankind, as God promises that He will never again bring about the total destruction of His Creation. [See 9:11-15 / see also Ramban on 6:18, especially his final explanation of the word "brit", based on the word "briya"!]

It is rather amazing that the next time that God speaks to man b'shem Elokim is only some ten generations later - at Brit Milah, when He challenges Avraham Avinu to accept yet another covenant. Note the striking textual similarities between these two covenants, i.e. "brit Milah" and "brit ha'keshet":

- a) to be fruitful and multiply 9:1 / 17:2,6;
 - c) "v'hakimoti et briti..." 9:11 / 17:7;
 - d) "ha'aterz" // "eretz canaan" 9:13,16,17 / 17:8
 - e) "ot brit": "ha'milah // ha'keshet" 9:13,17 / 17:12;
- [to verify this, open your Tanach & compare them yourself]

However, in addition to these similarities, in "brit Milah" we find an additional, yet very important promise - "li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" [to be a God for you] - reflecting a much CLOSER relationship with God. In fact, this key phrase is repeated twice, for it emphasizes and defines the purpose of Brit Milah (read 17:7-8 carefully!).

ONE STEP 'ABOVE' NATURE

With this background, we can suggest a reason for why God [b'shem Elokim] commands Avraham to perform "brit milah" specifically on the eighth day.

Note the progression that has emerged as we followed God's relationship with man, from the perspective of 'shem Elokim': STAGE 1) The Creation of NATURE in SEVEN days (1:1-2:4); STAGE 2) The covenant with Noach after the Flood (9:1-17); STAGE 3) The "Brit Milah" covenant with Avraham Avinu to be performed on the EIGHTH day (17:1-14).

One could suggest that circumcision on the EIGHTH day relates to this elevation of man's spiritual level, ONE step above the level of his original creation in SEVEN days.

Let's explain this statement, based on the three stages of this progression b'shem Elokim:

(1) During the first seven days, God brought the universe to a stage of development where it appears to 'take care of itself'. Be it vegetation, animal, or man, all species of life secure their existence by their ability to reproduce; they become fruitful and multiply (e.g. "zo'ray'ah zerah", "zachar u'nekeyvah", "pru u'rvu", etc.). Man's mastery of this creation, his desire to conquer and his ability to harness it, are all part of this phenomenon that we call NATURE. The first chapter of Breishit teaches us that [what we refer to as] nature, did not just happen by chance, rather it was a willful act of God. [By resting on Shabbat, once every seven days, we remind ourselves of this point.]

(2) After the "mabul", God (b'shem Elokim) 'starts over' by re-establishing His relationship with mankind in a covenant with Noach, known as "brit ha'keshet". This covenant reflects a relationship very similar to that in God's original creation in seven days, with some 'minor' changes: Man remains master of His universe (9:2), with a 'small change' in his diet (9:3-5), and a commandment that it is forbidden to murder a fellow human (9:6-7). However, the basic laws of nature remain the same (see 9:8).

(3) Up until Brit Milah, man's relationship with God b'shem Elokim remained distant. Although Man was the pinnacle of God's creation with certain minimal expectations of moral behavior, he was basically just part of nature. Man was given power; he acted like God (b'tzelem Elokim), but was not CLOSE to Him. At Brit Milah, Avraham is raised to a higher level. He and his offspring are chosen to represent God as His special nation, and towards that purpose, they are awarded a special relationship with God, as they are now destined to represent Him, i.e. -"li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim".

Then, as an "ot" [a sign] to symbolize this relationship, they are commanded to circumcise their children on the 'eighth day'. Hence, "milah" specifically on the EIGHTH day may reflect this additional level in the creation process, which first took place in SEVEN days. [What the Maharal refers to as "m'al ha'teva - above nature!]

In other words, the eighth day can be understood as representative of one final stage of the creation process. Just as the seven days of Creation - b'shem Elokim] - included a progression from "domem" (the inanimate objects / i.e. "shmayim v'aretz"); to "tzomayach" (vegetation); to "chai" (the animal kingdom); to "adam" (man) - the 'eighth day' reflects how man has been elevated to a higher level in his relationship with God.

To elevate Creation to a higher awareness of God's existence, a special covenant is made with the offspring of Avraham, and we remind ourselves of this covenant specifically by performing "brit Milah" on the eighth day after a child's birth.

[This interpretation could reflect a statement made by Reish Lakish, explaining the meaning of God's name "kel sha-dai" which is first introduced at Brit Milah (see 17:1-2):

What's the meaning of "ani kel-sha'dai"? God said: I am the One who said to the world "dai" - enough, or stop]."

(see Yalkut Shimoni siman 81, Chagiga 12a)

[See also commentary of the "Torah Tmima" on this pasuk.]

This explanation may help us understand the complexity in the opening lines of the Brit Milah narrative: God, b'shem Havaya - the Name of God which Avraham is familiar with up until this point - informs Avraham that He is "kel sha-dai", the God who had 'stopped' His process of creation after seven days (17:1-2). Now, b'shem Elokim, the Name of God that orchestrated the creation in seven days, intervenes yet one more time. He establishes a covenant with Avraham, to command him with the mitzvah of "brit milah", to raise him ONE level higher, i.e. closer to God.

Thus, God's commandment that we perform Brit Milah on the eighth day is not incidental. Rather, it reflects the very nature of our special relationship with God. In fact, one could suggest that God's relationship with His nation now becomes part of 'the nature of the universe'. Just as the sun will always rise and set, so too, Am Yisrael will always be His nation to represent him (see Yirmiyahu 33:19-26); as reflected by the Torah's use of "shem Elokim".:

With this background, let's return to the various examples of this '7 - 8' relationship in Sefer Vayikra, as "brit milah" on the eighth day was only one example.

SEVEN DAYS "MILUIM" / "YOM HA'SHMINI":

As explained in our shiur on Parshat Shmini, the seven days necessary to dedicate the Mishkan reflect the parallel between Bnei Yisrael's construction of the Mishkan to serve God, to God's creation of nature in seven days, to serve Him. [See Tehillim 104 - "borchi nafshi...!"]

Then, on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], God commands Bnei Yisrael to offer a special set of korbanot - in anticipation of His "shchinah" that will descend upon the Mishkan - reflecting the return of God's presence. In this manner, the Mishkan now becomes the focal point for the development of the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael, just as "brit milah" on the eighth day was a sign of that special covenant.

SEVEN DAYS "TAHARA" / EIGHTH DAY "KORBANOT"

(Metzora, Zav, Zava):

Different types of "tumah" are caused by some abnormal behavior of the body. Seven days of "tahara" are required to return the "tamei" person back to the 'camp' - to his normal existence, his natural habitat. Then on the eighth day, he must bring a special korban to allow his entry into the Mishkan.

[Note the parallel between this process, and its korbanot, to that of the kohanim during the seven-day miluim and Yom ha'Shmini.]

SEVEN DAYS OF SUCCOT / SHMINI ATZERET:

As agriculture and nature go hand in hand, all of the agricultural holidays follow cycles of seven (see Vayikra chapter 23). In the spring (chag ha'aviv), as the grain harvest begins, we bring "korban ha'omer" and celebrate chag ha'matzot for SEVEN days. Then we count SEVEN WEEKS until the completion of the wheat harvest, bring "korban shtei ha'lechem", and celebrate chag ha'SHAVUOT. On succot, "chag ha'asif", at the end of the agricultural year ("b'tzeit ha'shana /see Shmot 23:16), we thank God for our fruit harvest by celebrating for seven days and bringing the "arba minim" to the Mikdash.

At the very end of this cycle of agricultural holidays, we add SHMINI ATZERET, a special gathering with no special agricultural mitzvah. It is simply a time to stop and reflect on the holiday season and year that has passed. On this 'eighth day', we focus on the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

This special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael that began with Brit Milah, reaches its fullest expression with Matan Torah with Brit Sinai.

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable why Chazal chose this holiday to celebrate as SIMCHAT TORAH, and to conclude on this day the yearly 'cycle' of reading the Torah.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In what way could Shavuot be considered the "eighth", after seven cycles of seven. Compare this to the din of the Yovel year in parshat B'har. Why do you think that Chazal refer to Shavuot as "chag ha'atzeret". In what way is it similar to "Shmini Atzeret".

B. Based on the above shiur, why do you think that prior to Brit Milah, God changes both Avraham's and Sarah's names by adding a "hey"? Relate your answer to Hashem's name and His introduction in 17:1-4.

C. Based on the parallels between creation and brit milah, why do you think God chose to make the "ot" of this covenant on the part of the body which performs "pru u'rvu".

Explain why we thank God in birchat ha'mazon for the "aretz", then "britcha asher chatamta bi'bsareinu", and then toratcha sh'limad'tanu"

D. Note in Sefer Yirmiyahu that even the Creation itself is considered a covenant: see 33:25-26, and relate these psukim to the above shiur.

E. Relate the above shiur to the minhag of "sheva brachot" at a wedding, and the seven days of mourning after death.

F. See Rambam Hilchot M'lachim chapter nine [the laws concerning the SEVEN mitzvot of Bnei Noach]. Relate this Rambam to the above shiur.

Weekly Parsha TAZRIA 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's Torah reading, we are informed, almost in passing, of the commandment regarding circumcision of male children at the age of eight days. This commandment, which has existed forever in Jewish life, is the symbol of the covenant with our father Abraham between the Lord of Israel and the people of Israel and is one of the core rituals of Judaism.

The circumcision ceremony itself is called a brit – a covenant. It is the dedication of Jews to their faith and tradition that has remained, despite all the various attempts to destroy it in each century of Jewish existence. Throughout Jewish history, this ritual of circumcision, like the Jewish people itself, has always been under attack and criticism from the outside world.

The Romans and the Greeks, who worshiped the human body in its physical form and for its prowess, abhorred the idea of circumcision. They felt that it was a mutilation that defiled the body and its perfection. Jews, however, felt that circumcision sanctified the body, and represented the better nature of human beings – the spiritual and eternal side of human life.

Jews always believed that inevitably the body weakens, withers, and eventually disappears, and it is only the intangible parts of our existence – memory, spirit, and creativity, that endure and can be passed on from generation to generation. As such, circumcision was not so much a defilement of the human body, as it was and is a testimony to the enhancement and eternity of the human spirit. Every circumcision was a statement of renewal of the original covenant with our father Abraham, and is a testimony to the values of monotheism, human kindness, and hospitality that he represented and introduced into a pagan and hostile world environment.

Even today, there are many forces in the world that seek to deny the rights of the Jewish people to perform this core basic commandment. These groups always cloak themselves in the piety of self-righteousness. They claim to represent the eight-day-old infant, who apparently has no say in the matter. Mixed into this specious argument is the old Roman and Greek idea of the holiness of the human body and the necessity to protect it from mutilation, which still exists.

There are so-called democratic countries that even have legislated against circumcision, all in the name of some higher good and greater morality, that only they possess and understand.

It must be noted that in the Moslem world, also claiming the heritage from our father Abraham, circumcision is also an enshrined ritual and one of its tenets of faith, but it is usually performed only when the child is much older than eight days. One of the decrees against Judaism instituted by the tyrannical Soviet Union government of the past century was the banning of circumcision. Yet, when the Soviet Union collapsed, an enormous number of Jews who were already adults, chose to undergo circumcision, to show their solidarity with their people and with the tradition of our fathers.

This phenomenon attests to the strength and permanence of this commandment amongst all Jews, no matter what their status of religious observance may be. It is this supreme act of loyalty and commitment that binds the Jewish people together with each other, and with our past, our present and our eternity.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

TAZRIA - The Circumcision of Desire

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

It is hard to trace with any precision the moment when a new idea makes its first appearance on the human scene, especially one as amorphous as that of love. But love has a history.[1] There is the contrast we find in Greek, and then Christian, thought between eros and agape: sexual desire and a highly abstract love for humanity in general.

There is the concept of chivalry that makes its appearance in the age of the Crusades, the code of conduct that prized gallantry and feats of bravery to “win the heart of a lady”. There is the romantic love presented in the novels of Jane Austen, hedged with the proviso that the young or not-so-young man destined for the heroine must have the right income and country estate, so as to exemplify the “truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”[2] And there is the moment in Fiddler on the Roof where, exposed by their children to the new ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia, Tevye turns to his wife Golde, and the following conversation ensues:

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: I'm your wife!

Tevye: I know! But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his...

Tevye: Shh!

Golde: If that's not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me!

Golde: I suppose I do!

The inner history of humanity is in part the history of the idea of love. And at some stage a new idea makes its appearance in biblical Israel. We can trace it best in a highly suggestive passage in the book of one of the great Prophets of the Bible, Hosea.

Hosea lived in the eighth century BCE. The kingdom had been divided since the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom in particular, where Hosea lived, had lapsed after a period of peace and prosperity into lawlessness, idolatry, and chaos. Between 747 and 732 BCE there were no less than five Kings, the result of a series of intrigues and bloody struggles for power. The people, too, had become lax:

There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Hos. 4:1-2

Like other Prophets, Hosea knew that Israel's destiny depended on its sense of mission. Faithful to God, it was able to do extraordinary things: survive in the face of empires, and generate a society unique in the ancient world, of the equal dignity of all as fellow citizens under the sovereignty of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Faithless, however, it was just one more minor power in the ancient Near East, whose chances of survival against larger political predators were minimal.

What makes the book of Hosea remarkable is the episode with which it begins. God tells the Prophet to marry a prostitute, and see what it feels like to have a love betrayed. Only then will Hosea have a glimpse into God's sense of betrayal by the people of Israel. Having liberated them from slavery and brought them into their land, God saw them forget the past, forsake the covenant, and worship strange gods. Yet He cannot abandon them, despite the fact that they have abandoned Him. It is a powerful passage, conveying the astonishing assertion that more than the Jewish people love God, God loves the Jewish people. The history of Israel is a love story between the faithful God and His often faithless people. Though God is sometimes angry, He cannot but forgive. He will take them on a kind of second honeymoon, and they will renew their marriage vows:

“Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert

and speak tenderly to her . . .

I will betroth you to Me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness,

and you will know the Lord.” Hos 2:16-22

It is this last sentence – with its explicit comparison between the covenant and a marriage – that Jewish men say when they put on the hand-tefillin, winding its strap around the finger like a wedding-ring.

One verse in the midst of this prophecy deserves the closest scrutiny. It contains two complex metaphors that must be unraveled strand by strand:

“On that day,” declares the Lord,

“You will call Me ‘my Husband’ [ish];

You will no longer call Me ‘my Master’ [baali].” Hos. 2:18

This is a double pun. Baal, in biblical Hebrew, meant ‘a husband’, but in a highly specific sense – namely, ‘master, owner, possessor, controller.’ It signalled physical, legal, and economic dominance. It was also the name of the Canaanite god – whose prophets Elijah challenged in the famous confrontation at Mount Carmel. Baal (often portrayed as a bull) was the god of the storm, who defeated Mot, the god of sterility and death. Baal was the rain that impregnated the earth and made it fertile. The religion of Baal is the worship of god as power.

Hosea contrasts this kind of relationship with the other Hebrew word for husband, ish. Here he is recalling the words of the first man to the first woman:

This is now bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called “woman” [ishah],

Because she was taken from man [ish]. Gen. 2:23

Here the male-female relationship is predicated on something quite other than power and dominance, ownership and control. Man and woman confront one another in sameness and difference. Each is an image of the other, yet each is separate and distinct. The only relationship able to bind them together without the use of force is marriage-as-covenant – a bond of mutual loyalty and love in which each makes a pledge to the other to serve one another.

Not only is this a radical way of reconceptualising the relationship between man and woman. It is also, implies Hosea, the way we should think of the relationship between human beings and God. God reaches out to humanity not as power – the storm, the thunder, the rain – but as love, and not an abstract, philosophical love but a deep and abiding passion that survives all the disappointments and betrayals. Israel may not always behave lovingly toward God, says Hosea, but God loves Israel and will never cease to do so.

How we relate to God affects how we relate to other people. That is Hosea’s message – and vice versa: how we relate to other people affects the way we think of God. Israel’s political chaos in the eighth century BCE was intimately connected to its religious waywardness. A society built on corruption and exploitation is one where might prevails over right. That is not Judaism but idolatry, Baal-worship.

Now we understand why the sign of the covenant is circumcision, the commandment given in this week’s parsha of Tazria. For faith to be more than the worship of power, it must affect the most intimate relationship between men and women. In a society founded on covenant, male-female relationships are built on something other and gentler than male dominance, masculine power, sexual desire and the drive to own, control and possess. Baal must become ish. The alpha male must become the caring husband. Sex must be sanctified and tempered by mutual respect. The sexual drive must be circumscribed and circumscribed so that it no longer seeks to possess and is instead content to love.

There is thus more than an accidental connection between monotheism and monogamy. Although biblical law does not command monogamy, it nonetheless depicts it as the normative state from the start of the human story: Adam and Eve, one man, one woman. Whenever in Genesis a patriarch marries more than one woman there is tension and anguish. The commitment to one God is mirrored in the commitment to one person.

The Hebrew word emunah, often translated as “faith,” in fact means faithfulness, fidelity, precisely the commitment one undertakes in making a marriage. Conversely, for the prophets there is a connection between idolatry and adultery. That is how God describes Israel to Hosea. God married the Israelites but they, in serving idols, acted the part of a promiscuous woman (Hos. 1-2).

The love of husband and wife – a love at once personal and moral, passionate and responsible – is as close as we come to understanding

God’s love for us and our ideal love for Him. When Hosea says, “You will know the Lord,” he does not mean knowledge in an abstract sense. He means the knowledge of intimacy and relationship, the touch of two selves across the metaphysical abyss that separates one consciousness from another. That is the theme of The Song of Songs, that deeply human yet deeply mystical expression of eros, the love between humanity and God. It is also the meaning of one of the definitive sentences in Judaism:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deut. 6:5

Judaism from the beginning made a connection between sexuality and violence on the one hand, marital faithfulness and social order on the other. Not by chance is marriage called kiddushin, “sanctification.” Like covenant itself, marriage is a pledge of loyalty between two parties, each recognising the other’s integrity, honouring their differences even as they come together to bring new life into being. Marriage is to society what covenant is to religious faith: a decision to make love – not power, wealth or force majeure – the generative principle of life.

Just as spirituality is the most intimate relationship between us and God, so sex is the most intimate relationship between us and another person. Circumcision is the eternal sign of Jewish faith because it unites the life of the soul with the passions of the body, reminding us that both must be governed by humility, self-restraint, and love.

Brit milah helps transform the male from baal to ish, from dominant partner to loving husband, just as God tells Hosea that this is what He seeks in His relationship with the people of the covenant. Circumcision turns biology into spirituality. The instinctive male urge to reproduce becomes instead a covenantal act of partnership and mutual affirmation. It was thus as decisive a turn in human civilisation as Abrahamic monotheism itself. Both are about abandoning power as the basis of relationship, and instead aligning ourselves with what Dante called “the love that moves the sun and other stars.”[3] Circumcision is the physical expression of the faith that lives in love.

[1] See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Also Simon May’s, *Love: A History*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

[2] The famous first line of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

[3] *The Divine Comedy*, 33:143-45

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Insights Parshas Tazria - Nissan 5782

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rachel bas Yosef. “May her Neshama have an Aliya!”

All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain impure. He is impure and he shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside of the camp (13:46).

In this week’s parsha, the Torah introduces the laws of tzora’as – commonly mistranslated as leprosy due to the fact that tzora’as shares a similar symptom where white splotches appear on the skin of the afflicted.

In fact, tzora’as isn’t merely a disease caused by a bacterial infection (which is what leprosy is); it is a very specific punishment sent from heaven for the sin of loshon hora (see Rashi in his comments on this possuk). The Torah first introduced this concept in Parshas Shemos when Moshe’s hand turned white “like snow” from tzora’as (Shemos 3:6) and Rashi (ad loc) explains that it was because he spoke loshon hora on the Jewish people. Similarly, Miriam is afflicted with tzora’as when she speaks negatively about Moshe at the end of Parshas Beha’aloscha (Bamidbar 12:10).

Loshon hora is considered one of the worst sins a person can commit, as heinous as murder, adultery, and idol worship (Talmud Arachin 15b). Yet the punishment, tzora’as, seems to be a minor one. After all, the size of the tzora’as discoloration can be relatively small, around the size of a nickel. While the consequence of having tzora’as is related to the sin of loshon hora (see Rashi 13:46), it is difficult to understand how a relatively small mark on one’s body is a fitting punishment. We know

that Hashem punishes in a very strict system of quid pro quo, nothing more and nothing less than a transgression deserves. How is this small discoloration a proper punishment for the terrible sin of loshon hora?

One of the most famous photos of the 20th century was taken by famous war photographer Eddie Adams. The photo, named "Saigon Execution," depicted a general in the S. Vietnamese army (America's ally) killing, in appalling cold blooded fashion, a Vietcong prisoner. Beyond the Pulitzer Prize that Eddie Adams won, this photo deeply contributed to the American public's conflict as to whether or not to support the Vietnam war.

The New York Times (when they still had a conscience) was extremely hesitant to publish his photo for it depicted the brutality of America's ally, and only consented to run it side by side with a photo of a child slain by the Vietcong. Nonetheless, Eddie Adams' photo was the one burned into the American psyche.

Yet, Adams himself lamented, "Two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. The general killed the Vietcong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths."

The actual circumstances from the incident (obviously not captured on film) were that the prisoner had just ambushed this general's regiment and murdered three of his soldiers. It was a hot and miserable day and tempers were running very high. The general, who actually had a reputation for compassion, made the decision to execute the prisoner for he feared he would lose control of his regiment who were furious that this Vietcong had just murdered three of their fellow soldiers. Because of the terrible backlash from that photo, the general was stripped of his command and discharged from the army. Eddie Adams felt so guilty that he supported him and his family until the end of his life.

Loshon hora, while technically true, is actually the most horrible kind of lie. Loshon hora is exactly like a photograph – a fleeting glimpse of a terrible act that a person committed. But what are the circumstances? Who is that person in reality? Is it fair to paint that person's entire being by that fleeting act; is that who they really are? No one is proud of every moment of his life (there is a well-known saying that no one growing up in the digital era will ever be elected to public office because there are photographs of just about everyone in compromising circumstances).

This is why the punishment for loshon hora is tzora'as. A little discoloration, even the size of a nickel, comes to define the whole person as a metzora. This is the perfect quid pro quo; for it is exactly what the person speaking loshon hora did – took a relatively small (when compared with a person's entire life) and embarrassing vignette and portrayed that to be the entirety of an individual's identity. So too tzora'as, a small discoloration, comes to define the entirety of the sinner. Partners in Creation

This week we read Parshas Hachodesh, the last of the four parshios that were instituted to be read on Shabbos in the weeks prior to Pesach. Parshas Hachodesh discusses the mitzvah of blessing the new moon, Kiddush Hachodesh. Moshe was instructed to set the Jewish calendar by the new moon and to regard Nissan as the head of all the months of the year. Hashem even showed Moshe exactly the standard by which the new moon is to be identified and gave him the exact calculation of a lunar month (29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, 3 and 1/3 seconds).

This mitzvah holds a special significance as it was the first one given to the Jewish people as a nation. In fact, the very first Rashi at the beginning of the Torah points out that the Torah should have logically begun with this very mitzvah instead of the story of creation. Maharal explains Rashi's rationale: the Torah is a book of mitzvos. For this reason, Rashi questions if perhaps it would be more sensible for the Torah to begin with the first mitzvah given to Bnei Yisroel.

Still, this assertion seems odd for a few reasons. Based on the assumption that the Torah is a book of mitzvos; wouldn't it be more logical for the Torah to begin with the mass revelation at Sinai, when the entire Jewish people received Hashem's commandments? The Torah could have begun with the Ten Commandments, which encapsulate all

of the 613 mitzvos, and then filled in the remaining information afterward.

This would seem to be far more appropriate than beginning with a revelation experienced by two individuals (Moshe and Aharon). After all, every religion in the world is based on a supposed "revelation" experienced by a single individual or a small group of people. However, the very foundation of our knowledge of the Torah's truth is based on the fact that the giving of the Torah was witnessed by millions of people. Following Maharal's explanation of Rashi's reasoning, it would be much more logical to begin the Torah with the story of the revelation at Mount Sinai. So what does Rashi mean that the Torah should have begun with this mitzvah?

The answer lies in understanding what the significance of this mitzvah is and why Hashem chose it to be the first one given to the newly formed nation of Bnei Yisroel.

In fact, the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh, that of establishing the new month, really goes far beyond merely establishing a Jewish calendar. This mitzvah establishes Hashem's intention for Bnei Yisroel to be His partners in running the world. The mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh is the very definition of the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people.

Hashem created the world and everything in it, but the management of this world, and Hashem's interaction with it, is in the control of the Jewish people. Giving the Jewish people the power (and responsibility) to establish the calendar and to determine when each month begins means that we have control over time.

In other words, if we decide that today is Rosh Chodesh, Yom Kippur falls out on one day. If we determine that tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh, Yom Kippur falls out on a different day.

This is incredibly significant. In essence, we are the arbiters of how and when Hashem interacts with the world because we hold power over time. We can actually imbue days with holiness based on our decisions. This is a profound statement of the trust Hashem has in the Jewish people and defines the depth of our relationship with Him.

This is why it was the first mitzvah given to the Jewish nation; it defines our role within creation and the role Hashem expects us to play within His divine plan for the world. It is for this reason that Rashi suggests that the Torah should have begun with the section of the Torah known as Parshas Hachodesh.

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Tazria

So Far Away

"The Kohen shall look, and behold! the affliction has covered his entire flesh, then he will declare the affliction to be pure." (13:13)

Tzara'at, frequently mistranslated as leprosy, was a disease caused by spiritual defects, such as speaking lashon hara (slander). (Nowadays we are on such a low level spiritually that our bodies do not reflect the state of our spiritual health in this way.)

The verse here is puzzling for if "the affliction has covered the entire flesh" of the person that must mean that he is far from pure, and yet the Torah tells us that the Kohen shall "declare the affliction pure". How can he be pure if the affliction covers his whole body?

The answer is that he is so far from being cured, having ignored all the warnings to do teshuva repentance, that the disease ceases to perform any further purpose. Thus the Torah specifically says not that the Kohen shall declare him pure, rather that "the affliction is pure" he, on the other hand, is as far from purity as is possible.

Based on the Ha'amek Davar and Rabbi S. R. Hirsch

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Drasha Parshas Tazria - Self Destruction
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

There is an underlying theme to the message of the Metzora. This spiritual disease that causes discoloration of the skin or of hairs upon the skin, in unpredictable patches is caused by sins of speech - gossip, slander and the like. When a person notices the discoloration, he is to immediately approach a kohen and show him the abnormality. It is up to the kohen to not only to determine the status of the affliction, but to actually invoke the status of impurity on the man through his rendition of his adjudication on the matter.

The physical affliction of tzora'as is definitely not a contagious one. In fact, the Torah teaches us that there are times that the kohen can hold off on his declaration; e.g. a groom during the week of wedding festivities is spared the humiliation of isolation. If tzora'as were a communicable disease it would surely warrant immediate isolation despite the circumstances. Yet when a man is declared as tamei (impure) he is kept in isolation. The Torah explicitly explains: "All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:46).

The question is simple. If the sins of anti-social behavior cause the malady, why is the man isolated? Would it not be better if he is embarrassed within the community and learns to better himself through communal interaction? How will solitude help him cure his societal ills? There is a classic tale of the gentleman who purchased a plane ticket from New York to Los Angeles. The man was quite finicky about traveling, and asked the agent for a window seat. Somehow, he was not placed by the window, rather in the aisle.

During the entire trip, he fidgeted and squirmed. Immediately after the long journey the man went straight to complain.

"I specifically asked for a window seat," he exclaimed. "Your agent in New York assured me that I would be getting a window seat. Look at this stub. It placed me right in the aisle!"

The customer relations agent in Los Angeles was not fazed. Unfazed she asked the man, "Did you ask the person in the window seat to trade places?"

This time the man was irate. "I was not able to!"

"And why not?"

"There was no one in the seat."

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, in his classic work *Emes L'Yaakov* explains. People often blame the ramifications of their doings on everyone else but themselves. Truth be told, a person who is afflicted can circumvent confinement by not reporting the negah to the Kohen, or even by pulling out the hairs that are discolored. It is akin to a man who is sentenced to house imprisonment. His hands are tied together with the rope attached to his teeth. He is told to watch himself and not escape.

In essence, a negah is merely a Divine wake-up-call. It is heaven's way of letting an individual know that there is something wrong. It is a personal message and must be taken personally. And so in solitude the man sits and ponders what exactly needs correction.

If a person wants to correct himself, he need not cavort with others to do so. If one can remove the barriers of false flattery and social mendacity, he can do a lot better for himself: because self-improvement is dependent upon self-motivation. Without the truth meeting the self, any attempt toward self-improvement may lead to nothing more than self-destruction.

Dedicated in memory of Judah Leib (Jerry) Lipschitz by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Lipschitz.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tazria
Why Was the Metzora Put Into Solitary Confinement?

Tzora'as – which is one of the primary topics of this week's parsha – is a consequence of a variety of sins, such as Lashon HaRah (gossip), Tzarus Ayin (miserliness), and Gayvah (arrogance). But for whatever reason, when a person has become a Metzora – "his clothes must be torn, he must let the hair of his head grow long, he shall cloak himself up to his lips; and he is to call out: 'Contaminated, contaminated!'" (Vayikra 13:45). There are many parallels here to the halacha of mourning. A person who is a Metzora goes into a form of Aveilus, similar to an Avel.

The next pasuk continues: "All the days that the affliction is upon him, he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." (Vayikra 13:46). Beyond everything else, the Metzora is placed into solitary confinement—outside the camp—until his Tzora'as is cured.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, in his sefer *Emes L'Yaakov*, wonders why isolation is an appropriate punishment for a Metzora. Rav Yaakov suggests that perhaps solitary confinement does not seem appropriate for a Metzora. The halacha is (even though this is Biblically prohibited to do) that if a Metzora rips off his signs of Tzora'as, he is no longer Tameh. This means that if a Kohen will examine him again and there is no more Tzora'as, he will be proclaimed Tahor. So perhaps if we put this fellow in confinement, we should maintain some kind of surveillance such as a video camera to ensure that he does not surreptitiously peel off his Tzora'as and try to be m'Taher himself! Why do we leave him out there in the middle of nowhere where he can do anything he wants?

Rav Yaakov rejects the possibility that he is placed in confinement because he has a contagious condition that we are concerned might spread to others. He insists that Tzora'as is not contagious. It is a spiritual disease, not a physical disease that we might consider as contagious.

Ironically, I found that the Meshech Chochma in Parshas Tazria in fact says that Tzora'as is a communicable disease. He brings several proofs from the Talmud and the Medrash that this is the case. The Meshech Chochma points out that this is why it was the Kohanim who had to deal with the Metzora—because the Kohanim were on a higher spiritual level and had elevated merit, which would hopefully grant them added protection from such contamination.

Be that as it may, Rav Yaakov says that Tzora'as is not a communicable disease, which leads him to the problem: Why was the Metzora put into solitary confinement? Rav Yaakov explains that the purpose of this confinement is that we want to send the Metzora a message from Heaven that based on his behavior, he should be incommunicado. The Ribono shel Olam is not happy with him. He is in a form of excommunication—the Ribono shel Olam does not want him around. By putting him in solitary confinement in this world, we are actualizing what is happening in Heaven. The hope and intent are that his isolation and confinement should bring him to Teshuva. Sitting in solitary confinement should help him recognize why he is in this type of situation.

I was thinking that perhaps there is another approach which might explain why the Metzora must be placed in confinement "outside the camp." A person who is a Metzora, who has engaged in Lashon HaRah is a menace to society. His presence harms the community. We always think of a "danger to society" as someone who attacks or harms other people. But a Metzora is just as much a menace to society. He destroys society because when people speak ill of one another and spread rumor—whether true or not true—about other people, it destroys the fabric of interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, his punishment is "You cannot be in society." I heard an interesting chiddush in the name of Rav Yaakov Galinsky. If we consider the Ten Plagues, we may ask ourselves, "Which was the worst of the Makos?" A case could be made that Makas Bechoros was the worst of the plagues. But what was the most difficult plague to withstand—not in terms of the numbers who were killed or the damage, but simply the most difficult maka to endure?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky says the most difficult maka was the Plague of Darkness. The reason for that, he maintains, is that it says by Makas Choshch that “One man could not see his brother” (Shemos 10:23). This means that it was impossible to commiserate with someone else. By all the other makos, everyone suffered together. Everyone experienced Blood. Everyone experienced Lice. Everybody experienced Wild Animals.

Everyone complains about their problems. There was a city-wide blackout a couple of years ago due to a major storm. Everyone complained how tough they had it. I lost my freezer, I lost this, I lost that. Everyone commiserates with each other. When there is a blizzard... “Oy! It was gefairlich! I had so much snow on my drive way, I could not move my car for two weeks!” But at least you could talk to people about it, and everyone could share their personal problems. “You think that was bad? You should have seen what happened by me!”

Misery loves company. By every other plague, as bad as it was, at least there was company. However, during the plague of Darkness, people sat alone for three days and could not talk to anyone! It was impossible to tell anyone how bad it was! Nobody could tell you that he had it worse than you! “One man did not see his brother.” They all had to sit alone by themselves! To deal with a maka and not be able to share it with anyone is the most difficult maka to take.

This is what we do to the Metzora. We tell the person “You are a menace to society. You do not belong among people. You cannot have the comfort of being with other people to console you and commiserate with and comfort you. That is your punishment.” We deny the Metzora, who is a menace to society, the benefit of society—which is to have someone else there to comfort him.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Tazria – 5782

Life and Death Are in The Power of Speech!

Parashat Tazria deals extensively with tzara'at (a progressive skin disease that can take on many forms). When the Temple stood, a person afflicted with tzara'at would come to the kohen (priest) who would determine if the affliction was pure or impure. If it was determined to be impure, the afflicted person would remain outside the camp until enough time passed for him to be pure.

The Talmud reveals that the affliction of tzara'at we learn about in our parasha came as punishment for speaking lashon hara (slander or libel) about another person:

Reish Lakish says: What is that which is written: “This shall be the law of the leper (metzora)?” This means that this shall be the law of a defamer (motzi shem ra). (Arachin 15B)

This saying of Reish Lakish joins those of Chazal who added a different layer to our ordinary understanding of tzara'at. While in the ancient world, tzara'at was a known disease, according to our sages, it was not a natural phenomenon or bodily impurity, but rather it appeared as punishment for speaking ill of others.

The Talmud continues to explain that someone who slanders is punished with tzara'at because he separates people, therefore he should be separated from people.

The Ba'al Shem Tov reveals another layer in the relationship between the sin – lashon hara, and the punishment – tzara'at.

A person who guards their tongue shows that he is good to the core. However, a person who speaks maliciously about others reveals that there is evil inside him. That evil is so strong that it causes him to let it out in the form of speaking badly of others. There are those who are physically sick and those who are spiritually sick. The person who speaks badly of others reveals that his soul is ill. It is so full of evil that it leaks out.

A person who sees the shortcomings in others actually is seeing the shortcomings in himself, but since he cannot admit to them, he seemingly identifies them in someone else. Based on this, it is clear that someone who speaks badly of someone else is revealing his own evil. Therefore, this inner flaw manifests itself as a physical affliction – tzara'at.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (rabbi of Frankfurt and one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of his generation, 1808 – 1888) explained the sin and punishment in a different way. The skin is where the person comes in contact with the outside world. Whoever has a problematic and faulty encounter with the outside world, and instead of seeing the good around him, keeps focusing on the bad, becomes afflicted with tzara'at – rot that spreads through the body.

What kind of repair does the Torah suggest for someone who sinned in lashon hara? How can a person be cured of tzara'at?

If a man has...on the skin of his flesh, and it forms a lesion of tzara'at on the skin of his flesh, he shall be brought to Aaron the kohen... The kohen shall look at the lesion... the kohen shall quarantine the [person with the] lesion... the kohen shall pronounce him clean... The kohen shall pronounce him unclean... (Leviticus 13, 2-8)

The kohen is the one who diagnoses tzara'at and is the only one who can cure it. Usually, when someone suffers from an illness, it is a doctor who cures it. The fact that tzara'at was both diagnosed and treated by a kohen teaches us that it was a somatic/spiritual illness. It manifested itself physically in the body, but it was a spiritual person who treated it.

The kohens, the sons of Aaron who loved peace and pursued peace, were noted for using the power of speech positively. Therefore, a person who used his power of speech detrimentally by speaking badly of others is forced to meet the kohen in order to learn from him what is allowed and what is forbidden in speech, what is constructive and what is destructive, and from that to learn to use the power of speech in a positive and constructive manner.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Tazria: Man versus Mosquito

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

Why does the Torah discuss the laws of taharah (ritual purity) for humans only after teaching the analogous laws concerning animals, differentiating between those animals which may be eaten and those which are unclean? Should not humanity, the crown of creation, come first?

Third-century scholar Rabbi Simlai explained:

“Just as mankind was created after all the animals... so too, the laws pertaining to mankind were given after the laws regarding animals.” (Vayikra Rabbah 14:1)

In short, the order here in Leviticus parallels the account of Creation in Genesis. But is there a deeper significance to this order? The Midrash elaborates the lesson to be learned from this:

“If one is deserving, he is told: ‘You came before all of creation.’ But if not, he is reminded: ‘[Even] the mosquito preceded you.’”

What sort of a contest is this, between man and mosquito?

Quantity versus Quality

We find in Psalms two nearly identical verses, but with small - and significant - differences:

מַה־רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂי־ה' בְּלִם־בְּחִכְמָה עֲשִׂיתָ מְלָאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנָהּ:

“How many are Your works, God! The earth is full of Your creations.” (Psalms 104:24)

מַה־גָּדֹל מַעֲשֵׂי־ה' מֵאֵד עֲמָקוֹ מִחֲשַׁבְתֵּיהֶם:

“How great are Your works, God! Your thoughts are very profound.” (Psalms 92:6)

What is the difference between these two similar verses? The first verse expresses our wonder at the variety and diversity of God's works. “How many are Your works!” The second verse expresses our amazement at their greatness and profundity. “How great are your works!” The first verse refers to quantity; the second, quality.

In other words, we may look at the world in two ways. We can be amazed by its detailed, multifaceted nature - its abundance of species and life forms, the remarkable diversity in the world of nature. This viewpoint focuses on the diverse physical aspect of the universe. "The earth is full of Your creations."

Or we may reflect on the universe's inner side. We may perceive its wonderful sophistication and delicate balance, a reflection of the profundity of its design and purpose. This view perceives the underlying spiritual nature of the universe, focusing on the preliminary design - God's 'thoughts' - which preceded the physical creation. "Your thoughts are very profound."

Back and Front

The Midrash which contrasts man and mosquito opens with the verse, "You formed me back and front" (Psalms 139:5). What does it mean that humanity was formed with two aspects, "back and front"?

'Back' refers to the culmination of the world's physical manifestation. This is the process of creation by contraction (tzimtzum), step by step, until a detailed physical universe, filled with multitudes of diverse creatures, was formed. From this viewpoint, the ubiquitous mosquito is the superior species. If we are not deserving - if we lack our qualitative, spiritual advantage - then we are reminded: "The mosquito preceded you." In a contest of numerical strength and survival skills, the mosquito wins hands down. From the viewpoint of "How many are Your works," even the lowly mosquito comes before us.

'Front,' on the other hand, refers to the conceptual design that preceded the actual physical creation. If we are deserving - if we put our efforts into developing our spiritual side - then we belong to the realm of God's thoughts that transcend the physical world. On the qualitative basis of "How great are Your works," we may take our place before the rest of creation.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Tazria (1929))

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Tazria

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

פרשת תזריע תשפ"ב

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (12:3)

The eighth day following birth plays a critical role concerning both a human male and a sacrifice. It also is the day that the *Kohanim* were inducted into service at the Sanctuary. [Aharon and his sons were instructed to wait in the *Ohel Moed* for seven full days while Moshe *Rabbeinu* performed the inauguration service. The inauguration service concluded with the induction of Aharon and his sons as *Kohanim* on the eighth day.] What is so special about the eighth day? *Horav Moshe Feinstein*, zl, cites the *Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 27:10)* which states that both an animal and a human must live through a *Shabbos* before achieving offering/circumcision status. Apparently, *Shabbos* plays a pivotal role in the preparation of both the child and the *korban*. *Rav Moshe* explains that *mitzvah* performance, if it is to have any value, must be predicated upon our belief in Hashem. Indeed, if one who does not believe in Hashem were to recite a *berachah*, blessing, we may not answer *amen*. Such a person believes that Hashem is merely a term, a word without significance. Furthermore, *Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei Torah 6:8)* writes that a *Sefer Torah she'kasvah min*, a Torah scroll written by an apostate, should be burned. It lacks intrinsic sanctity. The term *min*, apostate, applies not only to one who completely denies the existence of Hashem, but also applies to one who (like Aristotle) believes that Hashem is the Master of the world, but not its Creator.

Shabbos attests to Hashem as the Creator of the world. Thus, the requirement is that a sacrifice must experience a *Shabbos* prior to its being offered up to Hashem. This implies that a *korban* is acceptable only from one who realizes and acknowledges that the offering is not his per se, but actually belongs to Hashem, the Creator of the world. This

idea applies to all *korbanos*. One must affirm his belief in Hashem as Creator.

Likewise, the *kedushah*, sanctification, of the *Kohanim* and the *Mishkan* is contingent upon the belief that everything belongs to Hashem, because He is the Creator. To support this, we see that Hashem commanded the Jews (*V'yikchu Li terumah*; "And take for Me a portion" *Shemos 25:8*) without specifying its purpose. If everything that one has belongs to Hashem, however, it is not necessary for Hashem to state the reason that He wants the contribution. After all, it has always been His money. The *Mishkan* can be built only if people realize that Hashem is the true owner of all one's possessions. [We may suggest that this concept applies to any *davar she'b'kedushah*, holy endeavor. If it is to achieve success, the contributor should realize that, in this endeavor, he is paying back, channeling back that which belongs to Hashem. The problem begins when he thinks that his check licenses him to offer an opinion, exert control and make demands.]

The same concept of acknowledging Hashem as Creator applies with regard to *Bris Milah*, at which time the *chinuch*, Torah education, of a Jewish boy, commences. The message is clear and unequivocal: A child must be made aware of the fundamentals of Judaism, specifically that Hashem created the world *ex-nihilo*. Whatever exists is from Him. Whatever we succeed in creating/making is only with His "assistance." [If such a term even applies, since Hashem does not assist, He does it all! He allows us to think that we are doing something.] Hence, *Bris Milah* is performed once a child has experienced a *Shabbos*, which attests to Hashem's creation of the world.

והובא אל אהרן הכהן או אל אחד מבניו הכהנים

He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim. (13:2)

Aharon *HaKohen* was destined to live another forty years at the most. The chances are that in the future the *metzora* will present himself to one of Aharon's descendants. Why is Aharon mentioned here for posterity, when, in fact, his tenure was short? The *Tiferes Shlomo* explains that the achievements of *tzaddikim* inspire for generations to come - long after they have left this world. He relates an incident that occurred concerning the *Arizal*, one time when he was sitting surrounded by his students. In came *Horav Shmuel DiOzida*, zl, author of the *Midrash Shmuel*, who was a young man at the time. He came to speak with the *Arizal*. When the *Arizal* saw him, he immediately rose from his chair and stood up for the young *Rav Shmuel*. He sat him down by his side and spoke with him endearingly and with great respect. When *Rav Shmuel* left, *Horav Chaim Vital*, zl, primary student of the *Arizal*, asked his revered *Rebbe* why he had shown favor to the young man. He had observed many distinguished *Rabbanim* come and go and never did the holy *Arizal* express himself in such a manner. The *Arizal* explained that it was the *neshamah*, soul, of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair that had entered into *Rav Shmuel*, so he deferred to him. Apparently, *Rav Shmuel* had performed a *mitzvah* in such a special manner that was consistent with the way in which Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair acted. Therefore, it was decided that the *neshamah* of the holy *Tanna* had transmigrated into *Rav Shmuel*, so that he would be inspired to continue acting in such a manner.

Rav Chaim immediately took leave of his *Rebbe* and pursued *Rav Shmuel*. "What *mitzvah* did you perform that created such a stir in Heaven?" he asked. *Rav Shmuel* explained, "My practice is to go to *shul* early, so that I can be among the first ten worshippers to form the *minyan*, quorum. As I was on my way, I walked by a house from which I heard loud weeping. I entered immediately to see a family without clothes on. (They were obviously concealing themselves behind whatever makeshift furniture they had.) They said that robbers had broken in, ransacked their house and taken anything of value. They even took their clothing off their backs. I took pity on them and removed my clothing which I gave to the head of the household. I ran home to put on my *Shabbos* clothes which you can see I am now wearing." When *Rav Chaim* heard this story, he immediately kissed *Rav Shmuel* and returned to the *Arizal*, who verified the story.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* explains that (according to the *Zohar HaKodesh*) Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair exemplified himself in the performance of *chesed*. When one follows in the ways of our Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, and reaches out with love and kindness to others, the Patriarch arises and stands in his behalf before Hashem. Aharon *HaKohen* was a paradigm of *chesed*, pursuing peace and reaching out to his fellow Jews to bring them closer to Torah. This is the epitome of *chesed*. Thus the nomenclature, *ish chasidecha*. (*Tumecha v'urecha l'ish chasidecha*; "Your *Tumim* and *Urim* benefit Your devout one") (*Chasidecha* is translated here as devout) [*Devarim* 33:8, Moshe *Rabbeinu's berachah* to *Shevet Levi*]. Their every focus was on seeking and pursuing peace and reaching out to others with acts of lovingkindness. Whoever follows Aharon's lead will have his support. This is what it means to be of the *talmidim*, students, of Aharon *HaKohen*. Therefore, one who has reason to go to a *Kohen* – a student of Aharon – is as if he is going to Aharon, because Aharon assists those who emulate his acts of lovingkindness.

נגע צרעת כי תהיה באדם

If a tzaraas affliction will be in a person. (13:9)

Tzaraas, spiritual leprosy, is visited upon a person who fails to curb his tongue. *Lashon hora*, slanderous speech, is the rubric under which sins of verbal expression fall. Veritably, it does not have to be verbal; it may be a non-verbal expression, such as a turn of the nose, a "hrrumph" negatively dispatched with enough venom behind it to destroy a person: all this falls under the *lashon hora* classification. We also recognize such a phenomenon as *lashon tov*, good, complimentary speech, words that soothe, embrace, empower, ennoble and show that someone respects and cares about you. Sadly, the negative trumps the positive in random interchange. It requires a greater degree of effort to think positively than to denigrate. Most who minimize the achievements of others, who disparage their characters, who seek avenues to vilify their goals and objectives, are people whose envy of others has compromised their cognitive abilities, leaving them with nothing but hostility and vindictiveness – all the products of self-loathing.

I would much rather write about something pleasant – a positive action performed sincerely – an action that saved the present and established the foundation for a wonderful, secure future. The following story related by Rabbi Henech Teller is inspiring. It shows how a well-placed word at a critical moment elevated a person's self-worth and enabled him to continue his journey to live a Torah life.

It was *Erev Yom Kippur*, the busiest time of the year for *mikvah* goers. It is crowded all day, as Torah Jews from all walks of life and every religious persuasion immerse themselves in the water in preparation for the holiest day of the year. Understandably, most *mikvaos* are not built for the crowd that comes en masse on this special day. People make do with some of the inconveniences, hygienic and physical, which are the inevitable consequences of being at the *mikvah* on *Erev Yom Kippur*. No one seems to care, because it is *Erev Yom Kippur*. Included in the crowd was a young man who was "trying out" Yeshiva Ohr Sameach to see whether he was willing to adopt this lifestyle. He looked different, being that he was the only male in the room sporting a long ponytail. He felt self-conscious about his hair, especially when he removed his rubber band that kept it all in place. There was, however, more.

People do not immerse themselves fully-clothed in a *mikvah*. Our young man had recently been a member of a cult that was into physical gratification of every sort. As such, he had various tattoos on his body declaring his affiliation with this cult. [This is often part of the baggage that a *baal teshuvah* brings to the fore. With love and sensitivity, it can be addressed and ameliorated.] When his tattoos were exposed, a hush pervaded the crowded *mikvah*. The people did not want to be rude. It is just that they were not accustomed to such an artistic display – especially on the human body, the repository of the Divine soul and the manifestation of the *Tzelem Elokim*, Divine Image. He had impressive artwork, the pride and joy of the finest Asian body artists. The silence continued, as the young man slowly made his way to the steps going down to the *mikvah*. To say that he felt self-conscious would

be an understatement. He felt like going into the water and staying there, rather than face humiliation. Suddenly, an elderly Jew made his way to the steps and went over to the young man who was about to descend. The elderly man took hold of the shoulders of the young fellow and, with glistening eyes, said, "Look here, young fellow, I, too, have a tattoo." He then pointed to the row of numbers that were tattooed on his arm, courtesy of the Nazi murderers: "Just in case I ever forget what those monsters did to me, I have the tattoo. You, too, have come a long way. You have something to remind you how far you have come."

As soon as the elderly Jew said his piece, the sounds of lively conversation returned to the *mikvah*. The young man was now one of them – all because someone said a kind, thoughtful word to the "visitor" from a different culture who was returning "home" to where he belonged.

וטמא טמא יקרא ... בדד שב מחוץ למחנה משבו

He is to call out: "Contaminated, contaminated" ... He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (13:45,46)

Shlomo *Hamelech* writes (*Sefer Mishlei* 18:21), *Maves v'chaim b'yad lashon*; "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." We can understand that slander defames a person; it can be viewed as character assassination, but murder? The victim that has been disgraced, slandered, is alive and well. Why is the act of speaking evil considered tantamount to murder? The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, make a powerful statement, one which we rarely think about. When one is slandered, when one is the subject of *lashon hora*, he is no longer viewed in the same manner – even if it is a blatant lie! Subconsciously, we look at that person differently – even when we know that what we have heard is not true. The old maxim, "They don't say those things about me/you," is very apropos. Thus, the person that he was yesterday, before he became a *lashon hora* victim, no longer exists. He is gone from the face of the earth. A new person who has the exact same features as he does has taken his place.

I remember many years ago attending a *simcha* out-of-town. At the table were guests from various cities and stripes of religious observance. Someone whom I did not know made a casual derogatory statement about someone else, whose acquaintance I had never made. Years passed, and I met the subject of the slander. I still did not know him, but I looked at him through a different lens. That is human nature. For all intents and purposes, the *baal lashon hora*, slanderer, had years earlier murdered that person. I was looking at the mirror image of that original person, but, in my mind, he was not the same. *Lashon hora* transforms the victim. No one will ever look at him in the same manner. That is a fact.

It is for this reason that the *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, punishment meted out to the slanderer is *badad yeisheiv*, "he shall dwell in isolation"; even other contaminated people may not be in his proximity. Also, he must call out to whomever walks by "*Tamei! Tamei!* I am contaminated! Stay away, You do not want to go near me." He transformed his victim into another person, so his punishment is that he, too, should become another person, one with whom no one wants to be. One caveat exists, one difference between him and his victim. He can do *teshuvah*, repent, and revert to his former self. His victim is finished. No one will ever look at him in the same way. He will always have a pall hanging over him.

וראה הכהן אחרי הכבס את הנגע והנה לא הפך הנגע את צינו

The Kohen shall look after the affliction has been washed and behold! The affliction has not changed its color. (13:55)

The *Zohar Hakadosh* notes that the words *nega* and *oneg* are comprised of the same Hebrew letters, but in different sequence: *nun, gimmel, ayin* – *nega*; *ayin, nun, gimmel* – *oneg*. The difference between them is where the *ayin* is placed – at the beginning of the word (as in *oneg*, pleasure) or the end of the word (*nega*, affliction). The *metzora* is to derive a powerful lesson therein. If he expiates his hurtful speech and changes his life, he transforms his present state of *nega* to *oneg*. As long as he is afflicted, however, it indicates that he has not yet repented.

Horav Leib Lopian, zl, expands on this idea. As mentioned, the difference between *oneg* and *nega* is the placement of the *ayin*. The

Rosh Hayeshivah extrapolates this thought to one's approach to life and living. If, at an early age, one uses his eyes and heart to understand what Hashem asks of him and he conforms to it, he merits that his life will be one of *oneg*, pleasure. He knows where he is going; he is focused on what is appropriate; he lives life with Torah and *mitzvos* as his lodestar. If, however, he comes to his senses only during his twilight years, and then takes time (because, now, he has so much of it) to look back on his life, he sadly will see *nega*. While one can repent later in life and go forward with hope, it will not undo what has been done. The *nega* is present. Therefore, it is best that he place his life on the proper track, so that he will not only arrive safely at his "destination," but he will look back on his "trip" as being meaningful and pleasurable.

Horav Avraham Gurvitz, Shlita, quotes *Horav Eliezer Lopian, zl*, who cites the *Midrash Rabbah Shir HaShirim* 1:10, that Shlomo *Hamelech* wrote *Shir HaShirim* in his youth, *Sefer Mishlei* later on in life (but still young), and, *Sefer Koheles* in his old age. The *Rosh Yeshivah* (Toras Emes, London) explained that when one who comes to Torah i.e. studies, lives and is guided by it, at an early stage in his life, in his early youth, his life is one of *Shir HaShirim*, of song and joy. It is a life of purpose and meaning. One who arrives at the decision to live a Torah life later on, once he has reached young adulthood, when he has formed his habits and adopted a different lifestyle, his life is one of *Mishlei*, cognitive, common sensical realization that change is imperative. He is guided by the logic that he refused – or of which he was unaware during his youth. He certainly can change, but it will be a thoughtful process. The one who lives a life of physical privilege, squandering his time and prowess toward the base and ephemeral will be like *Koheles*, who understood that life as is, without direction and enduring meaning, is *hevel*, nothing, *haveil havalim*, futility of futilities. He must now make every attempt to salvage whatever he can of what is left of his life, before it is too late.

Life has purpose; otherwise, Hashem would not have created us. Hashem has assigned each of us a life mission to fulfill. One of the underpinnings of Jewish belief is that Hashem created this world with purpose. The cornerstone of Judaism is that each of us has a Divine mission to fulfill. It is that mission and its execution which give our life meaning and fulfillment. It is that sense of mission from which we derive our strength and resilience. It is what makes us go forward, to build and create – despite being plagued with tragedy and grief. Torah and *Chassidus* in America were built by *udim mutzolim mei'eish*, firebrands plucked from the fire, survivors of the European Holocaust, who did not defer to grief, but instead used it as the foundation for building the future for us. How sad it is when people wait/waste an entire life before they realize that their lives have purpose, that they have been charged with fulfilling a Divine mission.

Time is a Divine gift. How we use it defines who we are and how we view this gift. I saw an inspiring thought concerning the idiom, "killing time," which in my opinion, is tantamount to murder. Only, with murder a perpetrator and a victim are involved. The perpetrator is the victim when one kills time. The following poem/essay (cited by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg) is especially inspiring. The author chose to remain anonymous. Its message is like its author, faceless. This allows for each of us to attach our life and identity to its message.

"To realize the value of one year: Ask a student who failed his exam.

"To realize the value of one month: Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

"To realize the value of one week: Ask the editor of a weekly newspaper (or *Peninim*).

"To realize the value of one day: Ask a daily wage earner who has ten mouths to feed.

"To realize the value of one hour: Ask those who are waiting for a loved one in surgery.

"To realize the value of one minute: Ask the person who missed the train.

"To realize the value of one second: Ask the person who survived an accident.

"To realize the value of one millisecond: Ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics."

Every moment is precious. A moment wasted is irretrievable. We might make up what we wanted to accomplish, but the moment in time is lost forever.

Va'ani Tefillah

ד' אל באפך תוכיחני ואל בחמתך תיסרני – *Hashem, al b'apcha sochicheini v'al b'chamascha s'ysreini.*

Hashem, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chastise me in Your rage.

The *Malbim* distinguishes between *af*, anger, and *cheimah*, rage. While on the surface they each express anger, they reflect two varied forms of expression. *Cheimah* is internal. The individual harbors anger within himself. *Af* is external anger which is not concealed. It is possible to have *af* without *cheimah*, if the one who is expressing his anger bears no ill will against the subject of his expressed emotions. Within our hearts, however, we harbor no bad feelings. *Cheimah* without *af* occurs when the anger is kept festering within. For whatever reason, the individual who is angry does not express his feelings, either by choice or due to an external force that prevents him from doing so.

Radak writes that a duplication of the terms, i.e. *af*, *cheimah*, is in accordance with the idiom of the language. [Apparently, the use of synonyms is common fare.]

In memory of our beloved parents

Rabbi Dr. Avrohom Yitzchok Wolf, Rebbetzin Anna Moses

Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family, Ari and Rivky Wolf and Family

Abba and Sarah Spero and Family, Pesach and Esther Ostroy and Family

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The Bracha on Blossoming Trees

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: How Many?

"May I recite birkas ilanos when I see only one blossoming tree?"

Question #2: What Type?

"Must it be a fruit-bearing tree?"

Question #3: When?

"Must I recite this bracha in the month of Nissan? I live in Australia!"

Foreword:

Since Chodesh Nissan is arriving, we will discuss birkas ilanos, the special bracha that Chazal instituted to be recited when observing trees in bloom. As an introduction, I note the words of the Aruch Hashulchan about this bracha, "The observance of reciting this bracha is weak among the common people. Furthermore, the Bedek Habayis (notes that Rav Yosef Karo, himself, added afterward to his Beis Yosef commentary) writes that the custom is not to recite this bracha. However, all talmidei chachamim and G-d-fearing people are meticulous about observing this bracha."

Introduction:

The Gemara that provides the source of this bracha is extremely brief and in an unusual location. Whereas other similar brochos recited upon items that one sees are discussed in the last chapter of mesechta Brochos, birkas ilanos is discussed in the sixth chapter of Brochos, which is the source for the brochos recited before eating and drinking. In the midst of a discussion of the brochos on fragrances, the Gemara inserts the following passage:

Rav Yehudah said, "Someone who goes out during the days of Nissan and sees trees that are blooming, says 'Blessed (is Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe) Who did not leave anything lacking in His universe, and He created good creations and good trees so that mankind can have pleasure from them'" (Brochos 43b).

As we will soon see, although the Gemara mentions only the first word of the bracha, Boruch, it means that we should recite a full bracha. The Gemara then resumes its discussion on fragrances, without any further mention of birkas ilanos.

The wording of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 226) is remarkably and unusually similar to that of the Gemara. To quote the Shulchan Aruch: "Someone who goes out during the days of Nissan and sees trees that are blossoming, recites, 'Blessed is Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who did not leave anything lacking in His universe, and He created good creations and good trees so that mankind can have pleasure from them.' This bracha is recited only once each year, and if he waited until after the fruits are grown, he should no longer recite it." (See also Mishnah Berurah 225:12.) The wording of the bracha

as quoted in Shulchan Aruch is Boruch Attah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha'olam shelo chisar be'olamo kelum, uvara bo beriyos tovos ve'ilanos tovos leihanos beham benei adam.

It is surprising that there is very little Mishnah Berurah on this halacha, and no Biur Halacha at all, but there is much discussion on this bracha in the writings of other halachic authorities, such as the Kaf Hachayim, who lived shortly after the Mishnah Berurah.

Required?

The wording of the Gemara implies that there is no requirement to look for a blooming tree – if you happen to notice one, you should recite a bracha. This sounds similar to the bracha we recite upon hearing thunder, seeing lightning or a rainbow, or seeing something very unusual. There is no requirement to look for them, but a bracha praising Hashem is recited when you see any of these natural phenomena. This is as opposed to the bracha on kiddush levanah, which is a requirement. Perhaps this explains why the common people were not so concerned about reciting birkas ilanos, as the Aruch Hashulchan reports.

However, notwithstanding this point, the sifrei kabbalah assume that this mitzvah is an obligation, or, at least, a very important bracha to recite. The fact that this bracha assumes a greater role in kabbalistic sources than in halachic sources may explain another phenomenon that I will discuss shortly.

Season or date?

Reading the Gemara carefully, we should ask several questions. For example, the words of the Gemara say that you should recite this bracha “in the days of Nissan.” If this means during the month of Nissan, then the Gemara should say “the month of Nissan,” not the “days of Nissan,” which implies that the season is important. On the other hand, if the season is the most important factor, then the Gemara should have said, “in the spring,” and not mentioned Nissan at all.

This question results in a dispute among halachic authorities. The Birkei Yosef writes that it is preferred to wait until Nissan to recite birkas ilanos. On the other hand, the Mishnah Berurah rules that the Gemara mentions Nissan only because it was written in a place where fruits usually began blossoming then, but that you should recite the bracha whenever you first see trees blossom in your climate and place. Thus, the Mishnah Berurah rules that you should recite it whenever you see the first blossoms, and the Aruch Hashulchan, who also lived in a cold climate, notes that, where he lived, the bracha was usually not recited until Iyar or even Sivan, when it finally became warm enough for fruit trees to blossom. The Kaf Hachayim quotes several sources who contend that this bracha should not be recited before Nissan. Specifically, he quotes authorities who rule that birkas ilanos should not be recited when seeing the blossoming of almonds, which bloom well before Nissan; the same is true of the loquat, called shesek in Modern Hebrew, which also blossoms in the middle of the winter.

The conclusion of most authorities is that it is preferred to wait until Nissan in order to recite the bracha according to all opinions, but not required. Based on the conclusion of these authorities, we can answer one of our opening questions:

“Must I recite this bracha in the month of Nissan? I live in Australia!”

Australia, South Africa and most of South America are located in the southern hemisphere, where the month of Nissan is in the fall and Tishrei occurs in the spring. The answer to the question is that you can recite the bracha of birkas ilanos in whatever season fruits blossom, in your climate. If you live in a place where there are blossoming trees readily available in the month of Nissan, but some trees already blossom earlier, there are authorities who suggest waiting until Nissan to recite the bracha.

One or more?

The Gemara states that birkas ilanos is recited when a person sees “trees.” Does he recite this bracha if he sees only one blossoming tree?

The Birkei Yosef mentions that there must be at least two blossoming trees, and this is quoted subsequently by the Kaf Hachayim. However, I note that the Mishnah Berurah does not quote this halacha, although he had ready access to the Birkei Yosef and quotes him innumerable times in the context of many other laws.

Among those who require that there be at least two trees, the Kaf Hachayim mentions that there is no requirement that there be trees of more than one species.

Two date palms

While researching materials for this article, I found the following curious question, raised by Rav Yitzchok Zylberstein, son-in-law of Rav Elyashiv and a well-respected rav in Bnei Brak.

“Do you recite birkas ilanos if you see two date palms?”

What is the question? The Gemara (Pesachim 111a) rules, ha'oveir bein shenei dekalim damo berosh venishchayov benafsho, “someone who walks between two palm trees, his blood is on his head and he is obligated for the damage that he will bring upon himself.” Rashi and the Rashbam there explain that the concern is because of ruach ra'ah.

A question regarding birkas ilanos is that since the wording of the bracha states “for mankind to benefit,” perhaps it should not be recited over two palm trees, since this might be harmful for someone who walks between them. The case in question was when there is a path running between the two trees that individuals

walk through. Rav Yitzchok Zylberstein suggests that, since the halacha is that you may recite this bracha when you see only one tree, and one palm is not dangerous, you may recite it. Then he asks that since the two trees together are dangerous, one of them should be removed, so that they not continue to present a hazard to people walking between them. Since we are not sure which tree will ultimately be removed, perhaps you cannot recite the bracha!

We should note that this question is probably theoretical. Dates do not usually blossom until late in the season, and, since are other fruit trees that blossom much earlier. Someone concerned about reciting the bracha would have recited it already -- unless he lives in an area where there are few other species of trees that blossom.

As many as possible?

Some authorities quote that, according to kabbalah, you should try to recite this bracha in a place where there are as many trees as possible. I have been told that even among those who do practice according to the kabbalah, most do not follow this approach. There are also opinions quoted that you should not recite this bracha while in the city, but should go outside the city (Kaf Hachayim quoting Rav Chayim Palagi). I personally do not know of anyone who observes the bracha this way. Again, Mishnah Berurah does not mention this.

Many Sefardim make it a lengthy procedure, including going as a group. They recite several chapters of Tehillim, then an extensive lesheim yichud, some other kabbalistic prayers, and a tefillah that our bracha should be valued as if we had all the deep kabbalistic ideas that are included in this bracha that Chazal implemented. They also recite the verses of Ve'yitein lecha and Vihi noam (recited on Motza'ei Shabbos), before making the birkas ilanos (Kaf Hachayim). After reciting birkas ilanos in a very loud voice, each person sets aside three coins for tzedakah. They then recite several more chapters of Tehillim, a tefillah that is taken from the middle of the musaf shemoneh esrei of Yom Tov, a tefillah that moshiach come, and the part of the Zohar that begins with the words Patach Eliyahu that many Sefardim recite daily before davening mincha. They conclude the procedure with the passage that begins with the words Rabbi Chananya ben Akavyah omer, and then recite a kaddish derabbanan. This is the procedure that I saw followed in the Kaf Hachayim. In the Sefardic siddurim that I examined, I found similar procedures. All of this means that it is a far more elaborate procedure than that followed by Ashkenazim, who simply recite the bracha without any fanfare.

Edible fruits?

There is no mention in the Gemara that the bracha is recited only if the tree bears edible fruit. However, this halacha could perhaps be inferred from the wording of the bracha, since it implies that mankind receives some direct pleasure from this tree, which is the case when people will enjoy eating its fruit. The halachic conclusion of the late authorities is that it should be recited on a tree whose fruit is edible (Be'er Heiteiv, Mishnah Berurah, Kaf Hachayim).

How many species?

Do we recite this bracha for each species that we see blossoming, just as we recite a bracha for each species of new fruit we observe or eat in the course of the year, or is this bracha recited only once each year? The Mordechai, a rishon, implies that this bracha is recited only once each year, and when the Mishnah Berurah discusses this question, he reaches the same conclusion.

Missed first time?

If someone did not recite birkas ilanos the first time he saw a blossoming tree, can he still recite the bracha the next time he sees one? The halachic conclusion of the Mishnah Berurah is that he can still recite the bracha, even if the blossom has already developed into a fruit, as long as the fruit is not fully grown.

Shabbos or Yom Tov

The prevalent custom is not to recite this bracha on Shabbos or Yom Tov, although the Mishnah Berurah makes no mention of such a rule. The Kaf Hachayim does, prohibiting it because of a gezeirah that you might pull off leaves or flowers. He also mentions that there are kabbalistic reasons not to recite this bracha on Shabbos or Yom Tov.

Prohibited fruit

Can you recite this bracha on a tree planted (or transplanted) within the previous three years, whose fruit, when it grows, will be prohibited because of orlah? The Kaf Hachayim rules that you should not. The reason is, presumably, because the wording of the bracha is that these blossoms are for mankind to benefit from, and any benefit from the fruit of this particular tree is prohibited. Nevertheless, I note that the Mishnah Berurah does not mention anything about this ruling.

Grafted trees

Can you recite birkas ilanos on a grafted tree? Several late authorities discuss whether you can recite this bracha for a tree that is grafted from different species, such that it would be forbidden for a Jew to graft these trees. (The fruit of this tree may be eaten, so this is a different question from the previous one, regarding a tree producing orlah fruits.)

There is a dispute among earlier acharonim regarding whether you can recite a shehecheyanu on a fruit from a tree that was grafted. Quoting the Halachos Ketanos (1:60) as his source, the Be'er Heiteiv (Orach Chayim 225:7) rules that

you cannot recite shehecheyanu on a fruit from a grafted tree. However, the She'eilas Yaavetz (#63) disagrees and rules that you may. Among later authorities, several discuss how we rule between these authorities. Biur Halacha 225:3 s. v. Peri quotes both opinions, but implies, slightly, that the bracha can be recited. (See also Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:58.) Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 3:25 concludes that it is better to find something else on which to recite the shehecheyanu.

Regarding birkas ilanos, I found one responsum among the late halachic authorities, which concluded that it is preferred not to recite the bracha on a tree grafted in a way that would violate halacha (Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 3:25). This case is actually quite common, since most fruit trees today are grafted, and frequently from one species onto another. There is an article on this subject on RabbiKaganoff.com

From a passing vehicle

If you see the blossoming tree while you are in a passing vehicle, can you recite the bracha? Rav Yitzchok Zylberstein, whom we quoted above, discusses this question. He compares it to a Biur Halacha (218:1 s. v. Bimkom), which is based on the law regarding the bracha recited upon hearing thunder (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 227:3). The Biur Halacha concludes that you can recite the bracha on a place where a miracle occurred only as long as you see the place. Rav Zylberstein adds that the Shulchan Aruch rules that you can recite the bracha for thunder, as long as it is within the period of time of toch kedai dibbur, enough time either to say shalom alecha rebbe, or shalom alecha rebbe umori (this is a dispute among halachic authorities), which is only a few seconds after you heard the thunder. The same halacha, concludes Rav Zylberstein, should be true regarding someone who sees the blossoming trees while traveling – if it is within

a few seconds, he may still recite birkas ilanos, but if more time has elapsed since he saw the blossoms, he may not (Chashukei Chemed, Pesachim 111a).

Ripping up a tree

Rav Zylberstein has another teshuvah about the following question: An ailing father wants desperately to recite birkas ilanos, but cannot physically be taken outdoors to see a tree. Is it permitted to rip up a blossoming tree by its roots and bring it to the ill man, so that he may recite the bracha? Since this question is not about birkas ilanos, but about the issue of bal tashchis (destroying fruit trees), we will not discuss it in this article.

Conclusion

In a monumental essay, Rav Hirsch (Bereishis 8:21) explains that the expression rei'ach nicho'ach that we find in the context of korbanos, usually translated as "a pleasant fragrance," should more accurately be rendered "an expression of compliance." He demonstrates that the word nicho'ach means "giving satisfaction" and the concept of "rei'ach" is used, because fragrance implies receiving a very slight impression of something that is distant. Thus, when a korban is offered as a rei'ach nicho'ach, it means that it shows a small expression of our fulfilling Hashem's will.

Similarly, the concept of birkas ilanos is that we thank Hashem, not only for the essential things in life, but also for the extras – the things that we can live without, but that Hashem gave us as extra pleasures. Fruits are usually not essential for life, but make our sojourn through earth a bit more pleasurable. And for that also, we must be sure to thank Hashem.

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

Parshas Tazria/Metzora: Jewish Statehood (I)

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. TZARA'AT HABAYIT

After presenting the various laws dealing with Tzara'at (scale diseases) and the purification rituals which accompany them, the Torah presents the laws of Tzara'at haBayit (scale diseases on the walls of houses):

And Hashem spoke to Mosheh and to Aharon, saying, When you come to the land of K'na'an, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the disease of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession; And he who owns the house shall come and tell the Kohen, saying, It seems to me there is a disease in the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they empty the house, before the Kohen goes into it to see the disease... And the Kohen shall come again the seventh day, and shall look; and, behold, if the disease has spread over the walls of the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they take away the stones in which the disease is, and they shall throw them into an unclean place outside the city; And he shall cause the house to be scraped inside around, and they shall pour out the dust that they scraped outside the city into an unclean place; And they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other mortar, and shall plaster the house. And if the disease comes again, and break out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, and after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered; Then the Kohen shall come and look, and, behold, if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant Tzara'at in the house; it is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones, and its timber, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them out of the city into an unclean place... This is the Torah for all kinds of Tzara'at, and patch, and for the leprosy of a garment, and of a house, and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot; to teach when it is unclean, and when it is clean; this is the Torah of Tzara'at. (Vayyikra 14:33-57)

The first statement which strikes any student about this Parashah is that, unlike the Torah of Tzara'at presented relating to persons and clothes (chapter 13), the Tzara'at haBayit seems to be a "promise", rather than a contingency (When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a swelling, a scab, or bright spot, and it is on the skin of his flesh like the disease of Tzara'at; then he shall be brought to Aharon haKohen...).

The Midrash (cited, with variations, by Rashi at 14:34) explains the "promise" as follows:

R. Hiyya taught: Was this a harbinger for them, to tell them that they would have plagues in their houses? R. Shim'on bar Yohai taught: Once the K'na'anim heard that Yisra'el are coming to war against them, they hid their money in their homes and fields. HaKadosh Barukh Hu said: I promised their fathers that I would bring them into a Land filled with all manners of good, as it says: And houses full of all good things; what did haKadosh Barukh Hu do? He causes plagues to come into the [Yisra'eli's] house, whereupon he razes it, finding a treasure there. (Vayyikra Rabbah 17:6)

There is something a bit disconcerting about this explanation: If God's intent was merely to expose the K'na'ani's hidden treasure to His people, thus fulfilling the promise of bringing us to a Land of houses full of all good things, why the need for a scaly plague in the house? Why not simply command us to destroy the houses, or to remove the stones etc. in order to find the treasures? (See Hizkuni at 14:34; in a diametrically opposite perspective of that suggested by the Midrash, he associates the command to destroy these houses with the command to uproot pagan worship sites. To wit, God is showing us where the "secret" worship sites are and helping us to uproot them by bringing a scabrous plague on those houses.)

I'd like to ask two further questions on this Parashah:

2) What is the rationale behind the sequence of Tzara'at presented in the Torah: personal scale-disease, Tzara'at haBegd (scale disease on clothes) and finally Tzara'at haBayit?

3) Why must the owner of the house turn to the Kohen for help in ferreting out the Tzara'at of the house (or, for that matter, of his person or his clothes)?

Since the direction we will adopt in responding to these questions relates both to the unique nature of Eretz Yisra'el and the special demands of Jewish Statehood, we will take a long detour and examine some of the more recent developments (the last couple of centuries worth) in the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisra'el. Although this essay will cover three Mikra postings, each issue will focus on a separate component of the issue as it relates to that week's Parashah (or Parashiot); those questions will be "provisionally" answered at the end of each issue, with a summary of all of

the points in the final installment.

II. FROM MOURNING TO CELEBRATION

The season between Pesach and Lag b'Omer has, of late, become a time not only for celebration (in some circles), but also of reflection and commemoration (also, sadly, only in some circles – more on this anon). Since the modern state of Israel was declared on that historic Erev Shabbat of May 15, 1948, the twinned days of Yom haZikaron (Israel Memorial Day – Iyyar 4) and Yom ha'Atzma'ut (Iyyar 5) have been the occasion for many intense feelings among the citizens of our State. Heart-wrenching visits to military cemeteries and moments in silence throughout the country mark the former; while great celebrations involving communal dancing and singing highlight the latter – along with appropriate national ceremonies to accompany each day.

A significant segment of the religious population has fully participated in the “new rituals” associated with each of these commemorative days – along with enhancing each of them with Halakhically-oriented “old rituals” to express, more traditionally, the great and deep feelings which each of these monumental days evokes.

I would like to address two issues in this essay which relate, very directly, to the tone of these commemorative days as we prepare to move into our second half-century of Statehood.

First of all, as noted above, it is only a segment of the Torah-committed population which identifies with (and participates in) these national celebrations. It is worth our while to investigate why the “Torah world” has not fully embraced the opportunity to mark these days in a significant manner. This question itself will be dealt with in two separate – yet interdependent – studies. Why does a significant plurality (if not outright majority) of the “Shomer Shabbat” community in Israel virtually ignore the significance of these days? In responding to this question, we will see that there is no one answer which accurately reflects the Hashkafah of the many schools of thought which are, by dint of their non-celebration, grouped together in the eyes of the Israeli public (religious as well as secular). Independently, we may wish to ask why so much of the Orthodox community outside of Israel (especially in North America) allow these two days to go by without so much as a mention? To so many members of the religious community (including a not-insignificant portion of our readership), this question is a non-starter. We will investigate why this is the case further on, along with suggesting why the question, at the very least, needs to be asked, specifically within those communities.

The second issue, which may appear to be totally unrelated to the first, is the spirit which animates the State, the Zionist movement (if such could be said to exist at all) and the celebration of Statehood in this, the 52nd year of Medinat Yisra'el. How far have we come towards realizing the dreams which drove our brothers and sisters of the last two generations to drain swamps, pave roads, patrol borders and make the desert bloom? Is there anything left of that dream today? Has the contemplative sobriety of Yom haZikaron invaded the celebratory tone of Yom ha'Atzma'ut so that we no longer feel that we have anything to celebrate?

This may sound like a curious question; unfortunately, a recent change in the “public face” of Israel nearly provides an automatic response in the negative to the former question and an affirmative one to the latter.

Succinctly put, how close is the vision which created our State to the reality experienced by her citizens today? Is it at all possible to speak of a “shared vision” within the various segments of the Jewish population? (a proper analysis of the role of the Arab population in Medinat Yisra'el is beyond the scope of this essay – as well as beyond the ken of the author). Is there a vision which can include the entire “world of Torah”?

As noted, these questions do not necessarily seem to be of one cloth and one would rightly anticipate separate analyses. I believe, however, that there is an underlying question which informs all of these issues, the resolution of which, more to our point, may be the foundation around which a satisfactory (and satisfying) direction may be found.

At the outset, let me admit that this undertaking is too great for even Mikra-postings. I readily confess that it seems presumptuous to suggest that a “great foundation” can be presented in these pages which will accomplish what no end of pundits, rabbis, political advisors and community leaders have failed to generate. Yet every one of us is called to contribute our best to K'lal Yisra'el, even if it falls short of the contributions made by others. Perhaps the suggestions raised in these pages will provide some food for thought which will stimulate further discussion in the cause of Am Yisra'el b'Eretz Yisra'el...t'he zot s'chari.

III. POLITICAL ZIONISM AND ITS RECENT PRECURSORS

Generally speaking, when we refer to the “Zionist dream”, reference is made to that specific vision shared by the progenitors of the Zionist movement of the late 19th century. Ardent socialists who found that they could not build their utopia in Eastern Europe, they directed their energies towards our ancient homeland, Palestine. They were avowed secularists, whose Zionism was as much the product of their disaffection from the established (read: religious) Jewish community (as they were swept along in the exhilaration of the Enlightenment) as it was an outgrowth of their “Jewish roots”. They envisioned a Jewish state that would offer all that is noble about Judaism – essentially the finest of Western culture and academia – to the world and would be a haven where all Jews could come to participate in that great enterprise. The great ideals of socialism would be realized on Jewish native soil, as the Jewish people would achieve their destiny of being a “light unto the nations.” Since this is not chiefly a historic piece, I will not include here a summary of the development of the Zionism movement, the various Congresses etc. Suffice it to say that the vision shared by these early Zionists was not infused with – or even informed by – Torah sensibilities. Political Zionism was very much the daughter of the Zeitgeist of the second half of the last century and, as such, was caught up with the heady arrogance of that exciting time. There was no need for the “old ways”, so closely identified with the mentality of “Galut”. A “new Jew” was going to be created; a Jew unbound by centuries of tradition and belief, a “modern” Jew who would be able to sit at the table (literally as well as figuratively) with the member of any other nation and look at him as an equal.

Surprising as most Jews would find it, these hardy socialists were not the only Jews to “make Aliyah” in the 19th century – nor were they the first.

Religious Jews had been living in Eretz Yisra’el for nearly a century before the first Zionist Congress took place in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. Truth to tell, there were small (but not at all insignificant) communities of Jews in Israel who had been there for countless generations – some claiming that they never left!

At the beginning of the 19th century, followers of the Vilna Ga’on (d. 1797) and R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe – d. 1813) made Aliyah. In both cases, unlike the communities which had been there for several centuries, these new Olim saw themselves as the vanguard of the Mashiach. In a lengthy treatise, Kol haTor, authored by R. Hillel of Sh’klov, the Vilna Ga’on’s many teachings regarding the special nature of the times and the steps needed to be taken to inspire the coming of the Mashiach are outlined. The students of the Ga’on settled in Tz’fat and Yerushalayim; whereas the main Habad community was in Hevron.

Along with these “Messianic activists” (more on this term later), there were communities of representatives of many of the European communities in Yerushalayim. As their representatives, their task was fully devotional – to study and pray in the holy city, accepting their material support from their home/host community abroad. Although this system had only become popular in the 1700s, there are examples of this type of “representative/devotional” Aliyah dating back to the Middle Ages.

In any case, it is clear that both a personal connection with the Land of Israel and a sense that this was an auspicious time to settle the Land were not sentiments exclusively felt within the secular community of Jewish socialists.

So far, we have seen three motivating factors for people to want to move to Eretz Yisra’el – only one of which would necessarily involve political sovereignty and statehood:

- 1) A place for Jews to implement the socialist visions sweeping across Western and Central Europe – in a Jewish milieu;
- 2) As a somewhat mechanistic activity designed to both hasten the coming of Mashiach and to be properly prepared for his advent.
- 3) To reside in the Holy Land, preferably within the Holy City, studying Torah and praying to God.

(To be sure, there were always Jews who were motivated to “make Aliyah” for other reasons. The story is told that R. Hayyim Brisker, one of the most ardent and outspoken opponents of Political Zionism desired to move to Israel, plant an orchard and, thereby, be able to fulfill the various Mitzvot which obtain exclusively in the Land. He never realized his dream.)

With the organization of “Zionism” as a political movement at the end of the century, however, religious sentiments regarding the Land of Israel decidedly cooled. That is not to say that interest in the fate of Eretz Yisra’el waned; but vehement opposition to the Zionists and anything associated with their program led to an almost wholesale refusal on the part of rabbinic authorities to have anything to do with their efforts. Whatever judgment the Ribono Shel Olam may have

passed on this question – He is, after all, the sole arbiter in historic questions (see Rav Yoseph D. Soloveitchik, Hamesh D'rashot, p. 23), the outspoken antagonism of most of the Rabbinic collegium throughout Eastern Europe is easily understood. Not only were the Zionists avowedly secular, they also planned to build their own (avowedly secular) state on holy ground!

Although the “Messianic activist” school continued to have capable spokesmen, (e.g. R. Yehudah Alkalai, R. Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer), the influence of this movement had waned by the time Political Zionism's message was publicized. This set the scene for the two leaders – one political and the other a visionary – who did more than anyone (before or since) to change the relationship between Zionism and the world of Torah-committed Jews: Rabbi Yitzchak Ya'akov Reines and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook. We will begin next week's installment with a brief survey of their programmatic and policy agenda relating to the resettlement of Eretz Yisra'el. In the meantime, here are the “provisional” answers to the questions posited above.

IV. THE UNIQUE DEMANDS OF JEWISH STATEHOOD

The Rishonim note that, unlike personal Tzara'at and that afflicting clothing, Tzara'at haBayit is directly and exclusively related to houses in Eretz Yisra'el. Ibn Ezra (14:34) states that: “For this only applies in the Land, on account of the superior nature of the Land, because the Mikdash is among them and the Glory is in the Mikdash.” In other words, the afflictions which plague the houses are only considered significant in the Land, due to the Glory of God manifest there.

The Land is, indeed and just as God promised us, filled with all manner of good things. And the gold of that Land is good – teaching that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisra'el and there is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisra'el. (B'resheet Rabbah 16:4) But those great goods can only be realized when Am Yisra'el achieves its destiny, not operating as an amalgamation of pious individuals, but as a kingdom of Kohanim and holy nation. Building a nation, overcoming the tribal and sectarian considerations which animate a nation of recently liberated slaves (or a people long exiled from their Land) takes much serious work and there are no easy solutions to the many dilemmas which face national leaders:

It has been taught: R. Shim'on b. Yohai says: haKadosh Barukh Hu gave Yisra'el three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are: The Torah, Eretz Yisra'el and the world to come. (BT Berakhot 5a)

The goodness of Eretz Yisra'el, the beauty of a national entity which reflects most perfectly the ideals of God's Torah, is a job which takes much digging and hard work – and necessitates the overcoming of great afflictions and obstacles. Had God merely directed us to the hidden gold of the K'na'anim, we would have mistakenly thought that nation building – “building our house” – is an easy task. We would not even have had to build, just inherit a previously built house, with gold and silver waiting for us. Tzara'at haBayit teaches us that it is specifically when we are faced with plagues, with scaly walls and moldy bricks, that we are called not to look away but to root them out – for that is exactly how our firmest foundations will be built and the greatest riches will be unearthed.

Who is qualified to direct this search for national treasures? Which type of leader has the mandate to address the “plagues of the house” and identify how best to clean them out? It is the Kohen, whose function is most eloquently described by Malakhi as follows:

For the Kohen's lips should guard knowledge, and they should seek the Torah from his mouth; for he is a messenger of Hashem T'zakot. (Malakhi 2:7)

Why, then, does the Torah first present “personal” afflictions, then afflictions relating to clothing, only concluding with Tzara'at haBayit? Great nationalist movements have often placed such an overwhelming stress on the success and weal of the group that the moral development of the individual – as well as his welfare – have no place in the national agenda. Jewish nation-building, conversely, is a process of balancing the needs of the individual (the P'rat) against those of the community (the K'lal).

In order to build a righteous nation, which can serve as a theistic-ethical beacon for the nations of the world, we need to insure that the individual members of the group are successfully facing their own “plagues” (“personal” Tzara'at), as well as those which affect their interactions with others (Tzara'at haBeged).

We now understand why the Torah presents the various forms of Tzara'at in this order – for we must first develop righteous individuals and a holy society if we are to have any hope of creating and maintaining the nation which carries God's Name

and enshrines Him in their midst.

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OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

So Far Away

"The Kohen shall look, and behold! the affliction has covered his entire flesh, then he will declare the affliction to be pure." (13:13)

T_{zara'at}, frequently mistranslated as leprosy, was a disease caused by spiritual defects, such as speaking *lashon hara* (slander). (Nowadays we are on such a low level spiritually that our bodies do not reflect the state of our spiritual health in this way.)

The verse here is puzzling for if "the affliction has covered the entire flesh" of the person that must mean that he is far from pure, and yet the Torah

tells us that the Kohen shall "declare the affliction pure". How can he be pure if the affliction covers his whole body?

The answer is that he is so far from being cured, having ignored all the warnings to do *teshuva* repentance, that the disease ceases to perform any further purpose. Thus the Torah specifically says not that the Kohen shall declare him pure, rather that "the affliction is pure" he, on the other hand, is as far from purity as is possible.

- Based on the *Ha'amek Davar* and Rabbi S. R. Hirsch

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Q & A

TAZRIA

Questions

1. When does a woman who has given birth to a son go to the *mikveh*?
2. After a woman gives birth, she is required to offer two types of offerings. Which are they?
3. What animal does the woman offer as a *chatat*?
4. Which of these offerings makes her *tahor* (ritual purity)?
5. Which of the sacrifices does the woman offer first, the *olah* or the *chatat*?
6. Who determines whether a person is a *metzora tamei* (person with ritually impure *tzara'at*) or is *tahor*?
7. If the *kohen* sees that the *tzara'at* has spread after one week, how does he rule?
8. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
9. Why is the appearance of *tzara'at* on the tip of one of the 24 "limbs" that project from the body usually unable to be examined?
10. On which days is a *kohen* not permitted to give a ruling on *tzara'at*?
11. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair is indicative of ritual impurity?
12. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow, what color hair is indicative of purity?
13. If the *kohen* intentionally or unintentionally pronounces a *tamei* person "*tahor*," what is that person's status?
14. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
15. Why must a *metzora* call out, "*Tamei! Tamei!*"?
16. Where must a *metzora* dwell?
17. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?
18. What sign denotes *tzara'at* in a garment?
19. What must be done to a garment that has *tzara'at*?
20. If after washing a garment the signs of *tzara'at* disappear entirely, how is the garment purified?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 12:2 - At the end of seven days.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 12:6 - A *tor* (turtle dove) or a *ben yona* (young pigeon).
4. 12:7 - The *chatat*.
5. 12:8 - The *chatat*.
6. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
7. 13:5 - The person is *tamei*.
8. 13:12 - Poor vision.
9. 13:14 - The *tzara'at* as a whole must be seen at one time. Since these parts are angular, they cannot be seen at one time.
10. 13:14 - During the festivals; and ruling on a groom during the seven days of feasting after the marriage.
11. 13:29 - Golden.
12. 13:37 - Any color other than golden.
13. 13:37 - He remains *tamei*.
14. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow wild, and cover his lips with his garment.
15. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
16. 13:46 - Outside the camp in isolation.
17. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech), which creates a rift between people, the Torah punishes measure for measure by placing a division between him and others.
18. 13:49 - A dark green or dark red discoloration.
19. 13:52 - It must be burned.
20. 13:58 - Through immersion in a *mikveh*.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Haircut Time

The term *giluach* (“shaving,” “haircutting”) and its cognates appear some twenty-three times in the Bible, thirteen of which are in the Pentateuch. The plurality of such appearances is in the passages concerning the *metzora* (roughly, “leper”) and the Nazirite, whose respective completion ceremonies require ritual tonsuring, in which he must shave his hair (Lev. 14:8-9, Num. 6:9, 6:18-19). In this essay we will explore various Hebrew roots related to the act of haircutting, including *giluach*, *gizah*, *galav* and *sapar*. In doing so we will examine the etymologies of these various synonyms and try to better understand how they might actually differ from one another.

Let’s begin with the term *giluach*, whose root is GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET. Predicated on the interchangeability of the letters HEY, AYIN, and CHET, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 9:21) sees a common theme among words derived from the roots GIMMEL-LAMMED-HEY (*gilui*, “reveal”), GIMMEL-LAMMED-AYIN (*gala*, “open”), and GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET (*giluach*, “shaving”). He understands that they all refer back to “exposing” something and bringing something new to the forefront. Thus, in Rabbi Hirsch’s understanding, the word *giluach* primarily refers to cutting hair as a means of *exposing* the surface of one’s skin that had until now been covered by hair. This idea bears a close resemblance to Rabbi Hirsch’s understanding of how the word *ta’ar* (“razor”) derives from the root AYIN-REISH-HEY (“laying bare, exposing”), as I discussed in a previous essay (“Razor’s Edge,” May 2018).

Rabbi David Golumb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* (to Lev. 14:9) writes that the root GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET is related to the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED by metathesis, and that latter root is another form of the root AYIN-GIMMEL-LAMMED (“round”), by way of the interchangeability of CHET and AYIN. Accordingly, he explains that when the Bible uses

the word *giluach*, it implies both a connection to *gilui* (i.e., “revealing” skin that was previously covered in hair, per Rabbi Hirsch above), as well as a connection to *igul* (i.e., the “circular” motion of cutting the hair on one’s head).

As an aside, although Rabbi Golumb mentioned the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED, no words from this root actually appear in the Bible. But in rabbinic literature, the rabbis say that a widowed woman who is *chaglah* (“goes around”), acquires for herself a bad reputation (*Yerushalmi Sotah* 3:4), and the *Sefer HaAruch* even has an entry for this root based on his version of *Bereishet Rabbah* 18:3. Nevertheless, the Biblical personal name Chaglah (Num. 26:33, 27:1, 36:11, Joshua 17:3) – given to one of Zelophechad’s daughters – and the place-name Bet Chaglah (Joshua 15:6, 18:19, 18:21) seem to be derived from this root. Rabbi Avraham Abulafia (1240-1291) writes that the given name Chaglah is derived from the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED, which he explains as a permutation of AYIN-GIMMEL-LAMMED.

Interestingly, the word *galach* came to mean “(Christian) priest” in Medieval Hebrew and Yiddish, because such priests typically shaved their head hair. As far as I know, Rashi was the first to use this term in this way (see my earlier essay, “Holy Priests vs. Unholy Priests,” Dec. 2019).

Another Biblical term for “cutting hair” is *gizah/gezizah* (verb form: *gozez*), whose root is GIMMEL-ZAYIN-(ZAYIN). In his work *Yeriot Shelomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that both *giluach* and *gizah* refer to “haircutting,” but the difference between these terms lies in *whose* hair is cut. He explains that *giluach* in the Bible always refers to cutting a *person’s* hair, while *gizah* typically refers to cutting an *animal’s* hair (wool). Thus, for example, when the Bible refers to Joseph getting a haircut before meeting Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14), or shaving the *metzora* as part of his purification process (Lev.

14:9), or a Nazirite as part of his completion ceremony (Num. 6:18), or the prohibition against shaving one's beard (Lev. 21:5), the word used in these cases is *giluach*. On the other hand, when Judah went to shear his sheep (Gen. 31:19) and when the Torah commands presenting one's animal's first shearing to a Kohen (Deut. 18:4), the word used in these instances is *gizah*. That said, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that *gizah* can also refer to a *human* haircut, albeit in a borrowed sense (for example, see Iyov 1:20).

In his work *Cheshek Shlomo*, Rabbi Pappenheim takes a different approach in differentiating between *giluach* and *gizah*. There, he explains that *giluach* refers to a cut that severs the hair as close as possible to the skin from which it sprouted. This is what we would call in English “a close shave.” On the other hand, the term *gizah* refers to the act of cutting in a way that leaves some remnants of that which is cut in its place. This is what we would call in English, a way of shaving that leaves “stubble.” In fact, Rabbi Pappenheim sees the core meaning of the biliteral root GIMMEL-ZAYIN as “shaving/trimming something in a way that leaves some parts attached and some parts detached.” Other words derived from this root include: *geiz* (Psalms 72:6), the grass remaining after trimming; *gozez* (Gen. 38:12, 31:19), the act of shearing wool from sheep; *gazam*, a type of grasshopper which eats some produce and leaves over the rest; *geza*, a tree with a truncated top; and *gazit*, hewn stone (i.e. some parts of the stone are shaved down, while the rest of the stone remains intact).

Another Hebrew root related to “hair cutting” is GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET, but derivatives of this root appear only once in the Bible – thus making it a *hapax legomenon*. When G-d told the prophet Yechezkel to get a haircut, He said: “Take for yourself a sharp sword, a razor of a *galav* shall you take for yourself, and you shall pass over your head and over your beard...” (Yechezkel 5:1). Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), also known as the Radak, explains that “a razor of a *galav*” refers to an especially sharp razor that was used by barbers to quickly cut people’s hair. He thus explains that *galav* means “barber.”

The Midrash (*Bereishet Rabbah* 41:2) relates that when Pharaoh abducted Sarah, G-d sent her an

angel with a *maglev* in his hand to be at her disposal. Whenever Sarah would say “hit,” the angel would hit Pharaoh, and whenever Sarah would say “stop,” the angel would stop hitting Pharaoh. But what is a *maglev*? Rabbi Nosson of Rome (1035-1106) in *Sefer HaAruch* seems to explain that *maglev* is a bridle that was used for reining a donkey. However, Radak (to Yechezkel 5:1 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) relates the word *maglev* to the root GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET, seemingly explaining it as a barber’s razor.

The Targum known as Yonatan (to Lev. 19:27, Num. 6:19) uses variations of *galav* when rendering cognates of the Hebrew *giluach* into Aramaic, and again (to Num. 8:7) uses *galav* as a translation of the Hebrew word *ta'ar* (“razor”). Elsewhere, the Targum (to Joshua 5:2, Jer. 48:37, see also *Bereishet Rabbah* 31:8) again uses variants of *galav* in this context of razors and cutting. All of this suggests that perhaps *galav* is an Aramaic word. However, Rashi and Mahari Kara (to Yechezkel 5:1) explain that *galav* actually comes from Greek. After much searching, I have not found any Greek word which fits this description, but I did find that Dr. Alexander Kohut (1842–1894) suggests changing Rashi’s wording to refer to Arabic instead of Greek. That said, Dr. Chaim Tawil notes that *galav* is clearly a loanword from the Akkadian *gallabu* (“barber”).

Other scholars connect the trilateral root GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET to similar Hebrew roots. For example, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ps. 74:6) connects this root to KUF-LAMMED-PEH (via the interchangeability of GIMMEL and KUF, and that of BET and PEH), which means “to peel” in Rabbinic Hebrew. Indeed, “haircutting” which reveals one’s previously-covered epidermis can be similar to “peeling” away the skin or covering of something. Rabbi David Golumb in *Targumna* (to Num. 21:29) argues that *galav* is a metathesized form of *gvul* (“border”), which may be better understood in light of the possible connection between *sapar* and *sfar* (see below).

Speaking of the word *sapar*, although this term does not appear in the Bible, it has become the most popular term for the topic that we are discussing, because in Modern Hebrew, *sapar*

means “barber” and *tisporet* means “haircut.” But where does this word come from?

If you look closely at Targum Oneklos and Targum Yonatan, you will notice an inconsistency in how they render the Hebrew *giluach* into the Aramaic: Sometimes they translate *giluach* into *sapar*, and sometimes they simply leave the verb in its original Hebrew form as a cognate of *giluach*. Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Meturgaman* notes this inconsistency and also points out that the Targumic term *maspar* for “razor” (see Targum to Num. 6:5, Judges 13:5) is also derived from this root. Interestingly, Targum Neofiti is more consistent than the other Targumim in always rendering *giluach* as *sapar*.

Cognates of *sapar* also appear in the Mishna, such as when codifying the law that the Kohanim who served in the Temple (*anshei mishmar*) or the non-Kohanim who represented the entire nation at the Temple (*anshei ma'amad*) were not allowed to get a haircut (*l'saper*) during the week they officiated, but would do so beforehand (*Taanit* 2:7). The Mishna also offers several prohibitions related to haircuts: it is forbidden to get a haircut during the week of Tisha B'Av (*Taanit* 4:7), to see a Jewish king while he is getting a haircut (*Sanhedrin* 2:5), and to get a haircut from a non-Jew under certain circumstances (*Avodah Zarah* 2:2). In all of these cases, the Mishna uses forms of the word *sapar* to refer to “haircutting.” The Mishna also uses the term *sapar* as a “barber” (*Kilayim* 9:3, *Sheviit* 8:5, *Shabbat* 1:2, *Pesachim* 4:6, *Moed Katan* 3:2, *Keilim* 13:1, 24:5), *misperet* as a “razor” (*Keilim* 13:1, 16:8), and *misparayim* as “a pair of scissors” (*Keilim* 13:1). Either way, the term *sapar* clearly entered the Jewish lexicon from the Mishna and the Targumim.

Dr. Chaim Tawil sees the etymological forebear of this term in the Neo-Babylonian word *sirpu/sirapu* (“shears,” or “scissors”), which shares the same consonants as *sapar*, although in a metathesized order. Interestingly, though, Tawil notes that this Neo-Babylonian term was used specifically for shearing *animals*, while the Hebrew/Aramaic *sapar*

was used for cutting *human hair*, cutting *animal wool*, and even cutting *vegetables* (see *Tosefta Beitza* 3:19, *Beitza* 34a, and *Keilim* 3:3). Tawil also notes that metathesis of a root’s consonants is especially prevalent when the letter REISH is involved.

Earlier we noted an inconsistency in the Targumim over whether they render the Hebrew *giluach* as *sapar* or leave it as it. Rabbi David Golumb in *Targumna* (to Lev. 14:9) attempts to reconcile this contradiction by explaining that when it comes to Joseph’s haircut in anticipation of meeting Pharaoh, Onkelos translates *giluach* as *sapar* because in Egypt they typically used “scissors” (*misparayim*) to give haircuts. But when the Torah says that a *metzora* must undergo *giluach*, Onkelos leaves the word *giluach* as is, because the law is that the *metzora* must be shaven “like a gourd” (*Sotah* 16a). This means that the *metzora* requires a very smooth and close shave – the sort of which cannot be achieved with mere scissors, but rather requires a razor. In order to accentuate that *misparayim* is not sufficient, Onkelos did not translate the *metzora*’s *giluach* into a cognate of *sapar*, as he did with Joseph’s *giluach*.

What is fascinating about the word *sapar* is how Rabbi David Golumb in *Targumna* (to Ex. 9:29, Lev. 14:9) connects it to other words that use the SAMECH-PEH-REISH string, whose core meaning he sees as “circle/round.” He asserts that all these words are related to the Greek word *sphere* (“circle”). The verb *l'saper* (“telling”) and the noun *sippur* (“story”) refer to the way that a story gets traction as people go “around and around” telling the tale to all their acquaintances. A city that sits near the border is called one that is on the *sfar*, because such cities are typically “surrounded” all around by a city wall that serves to protect them from enemy invasions. Finally, a barber is called a *sapar* because he cuts the hair on one’s head from one ear to the other in a round or circular motion.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life.

The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara'at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *tzara'at* or not. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a

week. If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara'at*. One whose *tzara'at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *tzara'at* on clothing is described in detail.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 10) — BLESSING OF REDEMPTION

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The seventh blessing reads: “Behold our affliction, take up our grievance, and redeem us speedily for Your Name’s sake, for You are a powerful redeemer. Blessed are You, Hashem, Redeemer of Israel.”

Once we have accepted upon ourselves to purify ourselves, and have asked Hashem to forgive us, we are now able to entreat Him to take us out of exile. The opening words of our blessing are paraphrased from *Tehillim* (25:18), which states, “Look upon my affliction and my toil.” Now, we are asking Hashem to see how weak we are, and how much we are suffering at the hands of others. We are telling

Hashem, and perhaps, ourselves, that we, the Jewish nation, cannot ensure our survival. Only He can.

That is why we ask Him to fight against our enemies. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1090-1165) was one of the most prominent and illustrious scholars from Spain. He was truly multifaceted, publishing one of the most significant commentaries on the Torah in his era. He also wrote commentaries on *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). He authored works on Hebrew grammar, mathematics, astronomy and astrology. He was also an accomplished poet, writing many beautiful poems. In recognition of his enormous contribution to science, a crater on the moon — Abenezra — was named after him. In his

commentary on *Tehillim*, the Ibn Ezra explains that “my affliction and my toil” refers to King David’s battle against the Evil Inclination. He is describing his unceasing struggle to prevent the Evil Inclination from dragging him into sin. Rabbi Aharon Kotler was the legendary founder of the famed Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, and the undisputed spiritual leader of the Yeshiva world in America at the time. He points out that King David is one of only three people who are granted the title of *gever*, man, in Tanach. Rabbi Kotler explains that King David earned such a remarkable title because no one fought the Evil Inclination as King David did. Just as the Evil Inclination never stops trying to trip us up, so, too, King David never gave up his battle against it.

Rabbi Baruch from Rika was still running around trying to raise money for poor families when in his eighties. His friends did their best to try getting him to slow down. But he told them, “My dear friends, you are not first to tell me to take it easy. The Evil Inclination has been telling me that for a long time! And I always told him, ‘You are much older than I am, and yet you have not retired. When you give up doing your work, I’ll give up doing mine!’”

The second part of the blessing is based on a verse in *Mishlei* (22:23), “Hashem will take up their grievances.” The commentaries explain that Hashem protects the weak against the powerful and the wealthy. In our blessing, we depict the Jewish nation as being persecuted and tormented. We anticipate the moment when Hashem will redeem us from this interminable exile. But, in the meantime, we entreat Hashem to “redeem us speedily” from the dangers and oppression that befall His Chosen nation every single day.

There is a delightful tale told about a Chassid who went to his Rebbe to ask for advice about a matter that greatly disturbed him. The Rebbe took both of his hands in his own, and while gently squeezing them he told him in Yiddish that Hashem would help — “*G-t von helfen.*” The Chassid left the Rebbe’s room feeling very relieved. Just outside the door, the

Rebbe’s young son was playing, and when he saw the Chassid, he asked him what his father had told him that caused him to look so happy. The Chassid told him that the Rebbe promised him that Hashem would help. The child looked at the Chassid and asked him if his father had told him *when* Hashem would help. The Chassid seemed confused and answered in the negative. So, the Rebbe’s young son told the Chassid to go back to his father to ask what he was supposed to do until Hashem helps him. The Chassid proceeded to do so, and when he came out again, the Rebbe’s son asked him what his father had said. The Chassid answered that the Rebbe told him that until Hashem helped... Hashem would help!

Our blessing concludes with the words, “Redeemer of Israel.” The word redeemer is written in the present because, as we await the long anticipated redemption, Hashem is constantly protecting us from the virulent hatred and derision from the other nations of the world.

Numbers are always extremely significant in Judaism and contain profound lessons. Our blessing is the seventh blessing in the *Amidah*. The Maharal (*Ner Mitzvah*) writes that the number seven represents nature and the natural cycle. For example, there are seven days in the week because Hashem created the world in seven days. The blessing for redemption being the seventh blessing teaches that however difficult any era might be, the redemption will certainly take place. It has been built into the natural cycle of world history. And, until it happens, may it be very, very soon, Hashem will always watch over us. It is fascinating to note that in our blessing we do not ask Hashem to bless us with tranquil lives, devoid of any difficulties or hardships. However perfect such a life may sound, our Sages teach that it would offer less opportunity for personal growth. The difficulties and imperfections that we encounter in life — on both an individual and national scale — help us develop and flourish in becoming productive members of the Jewish nation.

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE FIG TREE

The fig-tree says: “The protector of the fig tree shall eat its fruit.” (Mishlei 27:18)

The fig is a particularly fragile fruit in that each needs to be carefully picked as soon as it ripens in order to avoid infestation. This is an analogy for the study of Torah. One who wishes to truly acquire it must diligently keep to his studies daily.

Life is a quest for knowledge of Hashem and a training ground to emulate His ways. This does not take place overnight. Man is granted many decades because he needs much time to accumulate the vast wisdom of the Torah and to slowly perfect himself. The key is to “harvest” one day at a time, to safeguard its gains, and to build on more in consistent succession. Only one who dances to this tune will enjoy the fruits of his labor.

▪ Sources: Malbim

**In loving memory of Harav Ze'ev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 9-15

Separate But Equally True

“Do not make yourselves into separate groups”

The Torah states, “You are children of Hashem, your G-d. You may not cut yourselves (*lo titgodedu*)... for the dead.” (Devarim 14:1) Rashi, in his commentary on Chumash, explains the straightforward contextual meaning of the words “*lo titgodedu*” as a prohibition against a mourner cutting his own flesh due to his grief. He explains that the reason for this prohibition is so that people will not follow in the ways of the pagan nations who practiced this mourning ritual.

Rashi also explains that since we are “the children of the Hashem,” it is appropriate to be handsome and not cut ourselves when mourning, despite the fact that it is a mitzvah to mourn those who pass from this world. Commentaries elaborate on this ban against excessive mourning to be rooted in our belief of that a person’s eternal soul lives on, and that Hashem will resurrect the dead at the proper time. Therefore, mourning should be tempered with the knowledge that the degree of the enormity of the loss is only as we are able to perceive it with our physical senses, and is also only temporary.

In the course of our *sugya*, this verse is cited as the source for an additional prohibition that is derived from the exact wording of the text, as *Chazal* explain: “Do not make yourselves into separate groups.” The word *titgodedu* in the verse has the same root as the word for “group” – *agudah*.

In practical terms, what does this prohibition mean and what purpose does it serve?

First, it should be emphasized what this does *not* mean. It does not mean that there can be only one way to view and interpret various aspects of the Torah. When engaged in Torah study, it is not only permitted, but it is an admirable quality to ask, argue and “debate” with others in striving to understand the Torah in the truest possible way. Anyone who has ever even visited a yeshiva has likely been amazed by the sight and sounds of passionate Torah study between study partners and between students and their Torah teacher.

Rather, in practical terms, this prohibition bans people from dividing into separate groups which live according to separate codes of Jewish law. Of course, the details and parameters of this prohibition require careful definition, which are the subject of much discussion among our Sages in the *gemara* and through the ages. As we know, there certainly exist a variety of acceptable halachic practices, such as for Sefardic and Ashkenazic communities, and for those who dwell in Israel and those who live in the Diaspora.

What is the reason for the general prohibition against living as different groups and following more than one accepted halachic practice? Rashi’s commentary on our *daf* gives the reason as being so it should not seem like there is more than one Torah. If people follow more than one halachic ruling, a person might mistakenly think there is more than one Torah, G-d forbid. Just as the Giver of the Torah is One, so too is His Torah. Rashi’s explanation is consistent with the context and location of this verse, which is situated in a section of the Torah that addresses the tragic fate of idol worship and heresy.

However, a different reason for this prohibition is offered by the Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah*. He writes that this prohibition is meant to stem unseemly dispute and social unrest. Diverse halachic practices would likely lead to destructive disunity and confrontation. He writes: “There is a prohibition against there being two courts that follow different customs in a single city, since this can cause great strife.” (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 12:14)

It appears that this derived prohibition is not a ban to forbid a practice that is inherently immoral, such as the transgressions to not murder or steal. Rather, according to both Rashi and the Rambam, the problem with dividing into various groups that follow differing halachic practices is to act as a preventative measure – preventing a descent into pagan ways and preventing strife within the Jewish People.

■ *Yevamot* 13b

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

The Torah outlines the purification for a woman after birth: for any birth, there is an initial seven day period of impurity. If the baby is a boy, on the eighth day the child is circumcised. After this eighth day, the mother waits a period 33 days – a purification cycle – until she brings her *korban* in the Beit Hamikdash. If she gives birth to a daughter, the purification period is twice as long – 66 days. The obvious question, is, why the disparity?

Before we can answer this question, we turn to a general understanding of the sources of impurity, which include a dead animal (which has not been halachically slaughtered), creepy crawlers, certain bodily emissions, leprosy, and certain elements of the Temple service (e.g. leading the he-goat to the wilderness on Yom Kippur, and involvement with the ashes of the red heifer).

Man is destined to live in moral freedom. Yet, whenever a living organism succumbs to compelling physical forces, this is liable to give rise to the notion that man lacks freedom. Impurity – *tumah* – results from encounters which threaten our awareness of the moral freedom of man. There is nothing that fosters this notion more than a dead body, and it is for this reason that one who touches a dead body is rendered impure. Indeed, this resultant impurity is of the highest order and has much stringency associated with it. The purification process symbolically reaffirms moral freedom, unfettered by any external constraint.

Why would childbirth induce a state of *tumah*? The mother's effort and labor in producing a child is merely a physical process – from the “planting” phase (*tazria*) to the birth. Man is formed, takes shape and grows like a plant, in a process that has the most minimal human imprint. Although surely a woman experiences discomfort and effort in carrying and birthing a child, the process, once in motion, is markedly independent of any human choice or

input. The entire physical process by which man comes into being – similar to the physical process which ends his life – threatens the awareness of man's moral freedom. Therefore, precisely here, where man is brought into being, we are reminded that man need not succumb to the forces of nature. The mother – under the fresh impression of her passive and painful submission to the physical forces of nature which formed this child and led to the child's birth – must renew her consciousness of her moral stature.

This accounts for a single cycle of purification of 33 days – the process restores awareness of moral freedom and moral imperative. Why is it doubled in the case of a daughter?

On the day of circumcision, the father fulfills the first of the duties incumbent upon a father concerning his son. At this time the father resolves to prepare his son for the life that lies ahead: he is to train him to walk before G-d, in complete adherence to Torah, and through his own conduct serve as a role model for his son to emulate on his future path.

Following the birth of a daughter, the purity cycle is doubled – 66 days. This is meant to impress on the mother the full magnitude of her task – to be an example and role model of the Jewish woman of the future. Indeed, the mother's influence on the moral standards of her daughters is twice as great as her influence on the moral development of her sons. A crucial part of her sons' education comes from the father, as he becomes the male role model for them. With daughters, however, the mother is both a role model and a molder of character. Hence, after the birth of each daughter she must doubly prepare herself – for her own sake and for her daughter's sake – to fully embrace the moral freedom granted her, and ascend the path of purity.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 7:19-21, 12:2, 4-5