BS"D
April 21, 2023

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 10 #26, April 21, 2023; 2, 30 Nisan 5783; Tazria Metzora 5783
Rosh Hodesh Iyar 5783 (30 Nisan)

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 more than 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.

As Jews, we must become accustomed to changing moods in an instant – over and over again. Nisan is the happiest month of the year, the only month during which we do not say Tachanun, do not recite Kel Moley Rachamim, and do not present an eulogy at a funeral. However, Sefira starts the night of the second Seder and continues for the following seven weeks. Historically, Sefira has been a period of many of the worst attacks on our people – Crusades, pogroms, Warsaw slaughter, etc. During Sefira, we observe 33 consecutive days during which we do not listen to live music and do not cut our hair. (Religious men also do not shave during this period.)

The week after Pesach is especially difficult for my family. We have five yahrzeits in a four day period (25 to 28 Nisan), all of relatives I knew well during my lifetime, none of the deaths related to the Holocaust. Even so, since Yom HaShoah is 27 Nisan (unless delayed a day to avoid Shabbat), we go through eleven yahrzeit candles during four days. I always feel as if I should be saying Tachanum during this difficult week.

During a non-leap year, our week of four yahrzeits most often coincides with Tazria-Metzora, the parshas discussing how a person becomes tamai (ritually impure) and then can (usually) regain tahara (ritual purity). Historically, the most discussed symptom of becoming tamai has been white spots or areas on the body – a miraculous skin ailment that is not contagious and requires a Kohen to diagnose. Ritual purity was a very serious issue during the time of the Mishkan and later the Temple in Jerusalem, because a person who became tamai had to leave the camp (area near the Mishkan or Mikdash) and call out "tamai, tamai" whenever another person came near. A tamai person could not interact with or stay near any tahor person and had to stay out of the area of the Mishkan or Mikdash.

The readings below give a flavor of the complexity of the laws of ritual purity (see especially Steinsaltz). Perhaps the best way to understand ritual purity is to follow Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at Aleph Beta. In addition to tzaraat, other causes of becoming tamai include coming in contact with a near death experience (such as a corpse) or other factor that involves dealing with a situation involving losing the force of life (following The Ralba"g). For example, a person with tzaraat has a portion of the body white and flakey similar to the look of a stillborn baby (Bemidbar 12:12). Childbirth makes a woman tamai for one week (for a boy) or two weeks (for a girl), then requires several additional weeks of recovery at home before the mother may go to the mikvah, bring a korban, and participate again in rituals near the Mishkan or Mikdash. Since childbirth was medically dangerous (and still involves some medical risk), this condition fits the pattern of potential contact with death. Another interpretation is that a new mother feels the loss of a life that had been in her body as the baby leaves to become an independent person. One with an unnatural bodily discharge also fits the category – for example, a man with an unnatural seminal discharge releases sperm that could involve the loss of potential life of an additional child.

Our tradition teaches that speaking lashon hora (evil speech about another person) is a classic reason for tzaraat. (Moshe and Miriam both acquire temporary tzaraat after speaking lashon hora.) The tzaraat is a signal that the person

has harmed one or more other individuals and must do teshuvah. If a Kohen finds the skin disease to be tzaraat, the metzora (person with tzaraat) must stay outside the camp for a week, reflect and learn to be more careful when speaking about others, and after being cured, go to the mikvah and bring a korban. Rabbi Marc Angel shares that a person who engages in lashon hora has poor self esteem, and the period of isolation helps him learn to speak respectfully about other people.

Rabbi Fohrman notes that the Gemorah repeatedly compares three types of people: a metzora, a mourner, and a menuda (one who is excommunicated). These individuals have all suffered losses. A metzora and a menuda have both lost contact with all their family and friends. While a mourner has normally lost one person, the deceased person has lost everyone. These categories of people must all deal with losing people important to them.

The purification for a metzora, which Rabbi Yehoshua Singer explains clearly, is very similar to the korban Pesach. Both require a korban with killing an animal, painting wood with the blood of the sacrificed animal, and the same plants (hyssop and cedar wood). The korban for a metzora includes two birds, symbols of voice and sound. The korban Pesach also comes after a near death event, escaping death of the first born during the tenth plague. A metzora has lost connections with other individuals – family and friends – for a minimum of a week and must prepare to re-establish human connections.

Tazria-Metzora, with its miraculous properties that seem strange today, certainly fits with the spirit of the first weeks after the end of Pesach. We go from the joy of Pesach and our freedom almost immediately to Yom HaShoah, and a week later from Yom HaZikaron immediately to Yom HaAtzmaut. Dickens stated that it was the best of times and the worst of times. That is how the first two weeks after Pesach feel to me.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, 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 and obscure medical and legal details. I share this love of Tazria and Metzora. If asked to present a Dvar Torah on any parsha, Tazria and Matzora would be near the top of the list of those I would most enjoy discussing.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

Hannah and Alan

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 Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, 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; Sharon bat Sarah, 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,

Hannah & Alan

Tazria – The Good The Bad and The Ugly

By Rabbi Dovid Green © 5760

In this weeks Parsha we are told many details relating to one who was suffering from a physical/spiritual ill called tzoraas. (If you can say “pizza,” you can pronounce “tzoraas.”) Tzoraas was a lesion that appeared on the skin resulting from the sufferer’s having transgressed the prohibition against speaking negatively of others. The affected area(s) whether on garments, an abode or the body of the person, had to be shown to a kohein who would then prescribe the form or correction needed for the type of lesion(s) that had appeared. The correction for the transgression involved distancing oneself from the community for a given amount of time.

One might think that we are fortunate in our day and age not to have to undergo such uncomfortable scrutiny for engaging in something as seemingly justified as negative speech. After all, we don’t just wake up and decide to go around destroying the personal relationships and businesses of others through maliceous slander! We have what we feel are good reasons to speak against someone else. What an imposition it must have been to have to, measure for measure, put all ones personal and business dealings on hold and leave the community, even temporarily, and then wait for ones ugly “spots” to heal.

Surprisingly, just the opposite is true. How fortunate we will be when the time will come when we will once again have a clear indication of a transgression such as that of lashon horah, slanderous speech. (True as well as false.) How good it will be for us to seek direction as to how to go about undoing the problems caused by the negative remarks we make about others the smallest of which can cause untold and unforseen harm.

Picture a person brought to Heaven after a long life of good deeds only to discover that the scales of judgment are heavily loaded down on the side of transgressions. The person will protest “But I gave charity, I kept a set time for Torah study and I observed the Sabbath and kosher laws faithfully!” What, at closer inspection is weighing down the “scales”? What is found is every word of negative speech spoken about others over an entire lifetime! The person is shown what pain and destruction it turns out were caused by those words, in the 20/20 hindsight only a devine court can supply. “Oh no!” cries the plaintiff. “If only I could have undergone the healing and forgiveness process as was available in the time of the Holy Temple, I’d be so much better off at this point.”

What to do. One of the best ways to avoid speaking badly of others is not to refrain from speaking altogether. It’s not to lie and say you think some bum is a great guy. It’s to look at the “bum” and try to see him in a positive light. Perhaps the circumstances led you to see another as a bum but the reality of the situation may have been completely different than what was originally perceived. It happens. We find situations like that very often in our lives. It sometimes takes a little diplomatic research to discover the positive reality but it’s there. What does one do in the face of someone else’s real intended but not life threatening negative behavior when there is no positive light to see the situation in?

The story is told of Rabbi Aryeh Levin that one of the many unfortunates he and his wife took into their home stole a precious article from the Levin household. The Rabbi saw what occurred and immediately pursued his wayward guest calling “I forgive you!” “I relinquish all ownership!” “It’s yours!” “It’s yours!” He didn’t want the thief to have the transgression on his head for the rest of his life.

What Rabbi Levin did, and the beauty of it was that it was his first reaction, was he saw the thief not as a cunning robber who was out to rip off his family but as a very unfortunate poor person who had sadly fallen so low as to actually steal. He was mature enough not to take the transgressors actions personally. Someone robs you and you don’t take it personally?! The thief didn’t hate the Rabbi. He would have stolen from anyone who hosted him. If Rabbi Levin could have recovered the stolen item, he certainly would have done what was necessary to do so. He wasn’t looking to be robbed or to give away his heirlooms. Judging others favorably in the face of the inevitable undeserving “slaps in the face” one receives from others does not mean to lie to yourself or turn the other cheek to let others slap the other side, in the case of our story, to offer the thief more of ones possessions…gratis. It means to put the negative occurrences aimed at us into perspective. Don’t take it personally. Miserable people try to make others miserable. How sad. We can attempt to halt the ugly spiral of bad speech one on another if we’ll learn to judge others favorably.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5760-tazria/

A Thought on the Parsha (Tazria/Metzora): A Tzara'at Survivor

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

The double parasha Tazria-Metzorah details the laws of tumah, any impurity that would require people to maintain their distance from the Mishkan. The primary focus is on the metzorah, a person afflicted with the skin disease tzara'at, and how he is to become pure. The parasha continues with cases of tzara'at that occur on garments and on a house before turning the focus back to people and their impurities: the zav, literally the "flow," a man with an unusual penile emission; a man who had a seminal emission; the niddah, the woman who has menstruated; and the zavah, the woman who has had an irregular flow of blood.

The common denominator of all of these tumaot is that they develop from within the person; they are not contracted from the outside. Whether the condition is a skin disease or some type of flow, the source is in the person. Although less intense than the tumah of touching a corpse, the tumah of these parshiyot is more severe in one important way: it directly defines personal status. Such a person may not enter into to the Levite camp, or, after the wilderness period, the Temple Mount. A person with corpse-impurity, by contrast, can go up onto the Temple Mount.

Tumah that comes from the outside, even if very intense, does not define the identity of the person to whom it transferred. We do not have a proper noun for a person who has touched a corpse; he is described only in terms of what he has done. In contrast, Tazria-Metzorah is filled with a cast of characters – the Metzorah, the Zav, the Niddah, the Zavah – defined by their status. Hence, they must keep their distance from the Temple, where the primary concern is to keep tamei things, and more specifically tamei people, out.

We often define a person's very self by more readily identifiable traits. This can help us organize our reality, but it can also lead to generalization and discrimination. My children have special needs, but these don't define them. I do not want them to go through life as "he is Asperger's" or even "he is autistic." These are conditions they have not adjectives and certainly not proper nouns. I want no one to forget – especially them – that, first and foremost, they are special, unique, wonderful people who are so much more than any particular condition they may have. When people meet one of my sons, they have to see them for who they are; if all they see is a label, they are not really seeing them at all.

As we might expect, a closer reading of this week's parasha reveals that the Torah does not label people by their conditions. Take, for example, the man with an irregular flow. He is referred to as ha-zav. This could be translated as a proper noun: "the Flow-er," or "the Emitter." However, this approach is almost universally eschewed; most translators have understood that the word zav, as it is used here, is not meant as a name but a descriptor. The proper translation is, "the man who has a flow." This is his condition, not who he is.

This is true for everyone in our parasha. There is the man asher teizei mimenu shikhvat zera, "who has experienced a seminal emission"; the woman who is bi'nidattah, "experiencing her flow"; and the woman who is "in her [irregular] flow" (Vayikra, 15:16, 20, 26-28). These are people in certain states, not people defined by their state. Because the tumah occurs to them directly they own their tumah more, and they are more distanced from the Mikdash, but this does not and should not define their identity.

There is one exception to this rule. Although the person with the skin disease is mostly described just that simply, the Torah does, in one place, give him a proper name. At the beginning of Parashat Metzorah he is called the metzorah, a title used in very much the same sense as "the leper." This may be because, unlike the others, this condition is long-lasting, severe, potentially recurrent, and visible to all. It is thus more likely that a person may wind up being defined by it. This is often what happens with those who have cancer. Consider the following blog post:

I had migraines for 25 years. Bad ones, that left me quaking in agony in a darkened room, moving only to vomit. Those migraines changed my life more than cancer did… Yet, I don't consider them a part of my identity.

Not so with cancer. I have migraines, I am a cancer patient.

I suppose the [intensity of the] treatment can help explain it… We can't keep it a secret, like those with high blood pressure can. We don't get to face our disease in private: we lose our hair and are thus outed as cancer patients. If we leave the house, we tell the world.

It's also true that the fact that the disease can come back and strike at any time is part of the reason it never fully leaves your psyche.
Notice how many of the characteristics of living with cancer parallel those of tzara'at: intensive treatment, the public nature (hair growing wild in one case, baldness in the other), the potential for recurrence. These traits can conspire to turn the disease into identity.

I believe, however, that even here the Torah pushes back against this sort of labeling. It is ironic that the label metzorah does not appear when the person is diagnosed with the condition, when he is ostracized from the camp, or when he practices the public signs announcing his state. It is only assigned when he begins the process of purification: "This shall be the law of the metzorah on the day that he becomes pure…" (Vayikra, 14:2). It seems that the Torah is acknowledging that this state can become an identity and advising that it only be recognized as such in retrospect, once the condition can no longer outwardly identify who they are. In fact, one study has shown that people who self-identify as a "cancer survivor" are more likely to have "better psychological well-being and post-traumatic growth," this in spite of the same study's finding that "neither identifying as a 'patient' nor a 'person with cancer' was related to well-being."

It would seem that after having lived through such a traumatic condition, it is healthier to see one's current state as a significant break from one's past state. If one 'had cancer' and now simply 'does not have cancer,' if there is significant continuity of identity from the period of disease to after, it may be harder to fully own one's new, healthy state. Perhaps the Torah is telling the person with tzara'at, resist letting this terrible disease define you when you have it. But when you are putting it behind you, then you can say that before you were a metzorah, and now you are no longer.

Just as they may be helpful when the condition is a thing of the past, labels for people can serve a useful function in legal texts. Halakhaand the rabbinic literature does in fact assign labels to people with these conditions: a woman with a flow, for example, is a niddah, a menstruant. Legal systems may need a convenient way of categorizing and grouping, but when dealing with real people with current conditions, labeling will always remain dangerous, reductionist, and dehumanizing.

While the Torah focuses on how certain people can become tahor, how they can change their current state, we must acknowledge that there are people with lifelong conditions. These people can only talk about managing their condition, not treating it and certainly not curing it. We cannot further trap them in their condition by labeling them and identifying them with it. It is our responsibility as a society to ensure that, whomever the person and whatever their condition, we will always see him or her as he or she fully is, that we see the inherent purity that is each person's essence.

Shabbat Shalom!

Note from Rabbi Linzer to women: see https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AEDlVH5y5J8hZEGopgBOIE1-PBw

---

Thoughts for Tazria/Metsora

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Torah describes a certain ailment known as tsara'at. While this word has often been translated as leprosy, Maimonides wrote that we do not really know what it means. It seems not to be a medical condition at all, but rather a physical sign of a spiritual blemish.

Rabbinic tradition has connected tsara'at with the sin of lashon hara — slander, evil gossip. Obviously, tsara'at does not manifest itself today in all those who utter negative comments about others; if it did, almost everyone would be afflicted with it. However, the moral intent of the rabbinic tradition is important; it relates to an affliction of the soul rather than the body.

The Torah teaches that one who contracts tsara'at is sent into isolation "outside the camp." Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz comments:

> *"When one is isolated with tsara'at, 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 is isolated with them can he begin to grapple with them until they disappear" (Talks on the Parasha,* p. 224).

Being isolated gives one an opportunity for self-reflection and for honest thinking about moral shortcomings.

But isolation provides something else.

It is natural for people to compare ourselves to others. Yes, I have made sins…but others are much worse than I am. Yes, I've spoken slander and gossip…but hardly as much as many people I know. Consciously or subconsciously, we tend to evaluate ourselves favorably in contrast with others.

When one is isolated, there's no one there to compare oneself against! The isolated individual suddenly realizes that he/she must self-judge without the advantage of having anyone to look down upon.

One of the root causes of slander and gossip is comparing ourselves to others. People often see themselves in a general competition. If others have more or better, the tendency is to want to cut them down to size, to find faults, to speak disparagingly about them. If others have less or worse, the tendency is to gloat and publicize their shortcomings in comparison to ourselves. **Lashon hara stems from lack of self-esteem. In order to bolster one's ego, one seeks to compare others unfavorably to oneself.** [emphasis added]

That is the source of the moral blemish of tsara'at and that's why isolation is a suitable cure. Isolation helps one to realize that making negative comparisons to others is a sign of personal weakness. We shouldn't be comparing ourselves to others; we should be comparing ourselves to our ideal selves, to what we can be. It is a way to develop the inner poise and strength of character so that we don't feel a need to run others down in order to bolster ourselves?

Today, we don't have the physical manifestations of tsara'at and we don't punish anyone by sending them into isolation. However, we can each find occasion to make private time for self-reflection. The goal is to enable us to rise above the pettiness of lashon hara. We aren't better when we demean others; we actually demean ourselves when we do so.

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-tazriametsora

Thoughts on the Teachings of Elie Wiesel (for Yom HaShoah)

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. Actually, it was against all odds that he should have been alive, let alone become a powerful voice for world peace. When he was only fifteen years old, he — along with all the

Jews in his town of Sighet — was rounded up by the Nazis and shipped to concentration camps where most of them were murdered. His mother and younger sister perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. His father died before war's end. His two older sisters survived. The young Elie Wiesel — a religious, pious young man — was spiritually scarred for life by his traumatic experiences in the hell of Nazism's death camps.

After the war, he was sent to France, along with other orphans. He could not then find words to describe the Holocaust. The pain was too raw and too deep. He found work as a journalist. In the early 1950s he interviewed the Nobel Prize-winning French novelist François Mauriac, who encouraged Wiesel to write about the concentration camps and to bear witness for the millions whose lives were snuffed out by the Nazis and their collaborators. This led to Wiesel writing an extensive work in Yiddish, later edited down and published in French in 1958, and in English in 1960: The Night. That book was widely read and acclaimed; and Wiesel went on to write many more books, win many awards, teach many classes, give thousands of lectures.

Upon moving to the United States in 1955, his career as writer and teacher flourished. He held professorial positions at the City University of New York, Yale University, and Boston University. He received numerous awards for his literary and human rights activities, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States Congressional Gold Medal and the Medal of Liberty Award. President Jimmy Carter appointed Wiesel chairman of the United State Holocaust Memorial Council in 1978. Shortly after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he and his wife established The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, was not only to be a voice and a memorial for the murdered millions. His life's mission was to serve as a conscience to the world, to remind humanity of the horrors of war and mass murder, to help humanity understand that there should never again be concentration camps, genocide, ruthless and merciless tyranny.

Throughout his life, Elie Wiesel was a religiously observant Jew; but his faith in God — and humanity – was conflicted, sometimes angry; in spite of his grievances, though, he sought to remain optimistic. "I belong to a generation that has often felt abandoned by God and betrayed by mankind. And yet, I believe that we must not give up on either…..There it is: I still believe in man in spite of man" *(Open Heart,* pp. 72, 73).

Wiesel's approach found expression in his description of biblical Isaac, the son of Abraham who was brought to the mountain to be sacrificed to the Lord. At the last moment, an angel appeared to Abraham and commanded him not to put the knife to Isaac's throat. In Hebrew, the name Isaac (Yitzhak) means: he will laugh. Wiesel asked: "Why was the most tragic of our ancestors named Isaac, a name which evokes and signifies laughter?" And he provided his answer: "As the first survivor, he had to teach us, the future survivors of Jewish history, that it is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter. Isaac, of course, never freed himself from the traumatizing scenes that violated his youth; the holocaust had marked him and continued to haunt him forever. Yet, he remained capable of laughter. And in spite of everything, he did laugh" *(Messengers of God,* p. 97).

Wiesel's religious worldview was strongly influenced by the Hassidic movement. He wrote much about Hassidic masters and drew heavily on their teachings. A central element of Hassidism was the role of the Rebbe, the rabbi and teacher, who was — and was expected to be — a tzaddik, a truly righteous person who was deemed to have great powers.

The Hassidic movement began with Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), born in a small town in the Ukraine. The Besht, as he came to be known, brought a message of hope to the poor and oppressed Jews. A man of humble origins, he taught that the less fortunate were beloved by God, "that every one of them existed in God's memory, that every one of them played a part in his people's destiny, each in his way and according to his means" *(Souls on Fire,* p. 25). The simple, unlearned Jew could serve God through piety, joy, song, love of nature. What God required was a sincere and pious heart. When people criticized the Besht for associating with lowly individuals, he replied: "A small Tzaddik loves small sinners; it takes a great Tzaddik to love great sinners" *(Somewhere a Master,* p. 65). This was a basic principle of Hassidism: love for our fellow human beings must resemble God's love; it reaches everyone, great and small.

The Besht's successor was Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch. He drew hundreds of students and thousands of followers. To the more erudite, he taught the hidden truths of the faith. To the simple, he explained that their mere recital

of the Sh'ma Yisrael prayer with proper devotion would make them worthy of redemption. The Maggid inspired loyalty. He was an excellent strategist and administrator and succeeded in spreading Hassidism throughout Eastern Europe. Although the Besht was the first leader of the Hassidic movement, it was Rabbi Dov Baer who established the role of the Hassidic Rebbe as a Tzaddik. "As he saw it, the Tzaddik had to combine the virtues and gifts, as well as fulfill the roles and obligations, of saint, guide and sage. Spokesman for God in His dealings with man, intercessor for man in his dealings with God" *(Souls on Fire,* p. 66). An essential role of the Tzaddik was to encourage Hassidim never to consider themselves as being useless, abandoned, or neglected by the Almighty.

As Hassidism grew and spread, new Rebbes emerged, each with his own distinctive style. The common denominator, though, was that each had to be a Tzaddik, a righteous person who could connect the people with God, and God with the people. Some Tzaddikim were ascetic and humble; others enjoyed a degree of luxury. Some were compassionate in the extreme, while others were more remote, less personally involved with the individual struggles of their followers. Some were expected to be wonder workers who could perform miracles; others were respected for their insistence on individual responsibility.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1809) was known for his unlimited love of each Jew, even the most sinful and ignorant among them. The notables of Berdichev chided him for associating with people of inferior rank. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak replied: "When the Messiah will come, God will arrange a feast in his honor, and all our patriarchs and kings, our prophets and sages will of course be invited. As for myself, I shall quietly make my way into one of the last rows and hope not to be noticed. If I am discovered anyway and asked what right I have to attend, I shall say: Please be merciful with me, for I have been merciful too" (Ibid., p. 99).

A Tzaddik of a later generation, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859), was known for the rigorous demands he made on himself and others. He sought no compromises with truth, no short cuts, no evasions. Wiesel describes him as "the angry saint, the divine rebel. Among the thousands of Hassidic leaders great and small, from the Baal Shem's time to the Holocaust, he is undeniably the most disconcerting, mysterious figure of all. Also the most tragic" (Ibid., p. 231). The Kotzker always seemed to be yearning, to be reaching for something beyond. He once explained that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was punished and had to forever crawl in and eat the dust. It has been asked: why is eating dust a punishment? In fact, this makes it very easy for the serpent to eat without having to search for its sustenance. The Kotzer replied: "That is the worst punishment of all: never to be hungry, never to seek, never to desire anything" *(Somewhere a Master,* p. 101). The Kotzker spent the last years of his life as a melancholy recluse. Yet, his sharp wisdom and keen erudition made him a sainted figure among his followers, and one of the most quoted Hassidic Rebbes through modern times.

Elie Wiesel was especially drawn to those Tzaddikim who were torn by internal conflict and doubts. Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz (1728-1791) taught that even if some questions are without answers, one must still ask them. Doubts are not necessarily destructive, if they bring one to a Rebbe. One must realize that others have gone through the same sorrow and endured the same anguish. "God is everywhere, even in pain, even in the search for faith" (Ibid., p. 12).

The Tzaddik invariably lives a double life. He must at once be a humble soul, aware of his limitations — and he must be a seemingly perfect person in the eyes of his followers. If he is too humble, he cannot gain their trust. If he thinks he indeed is perfect, then he is a deeply flawed human being. "A saint who knows that he is a saint — isn't. Or more precisely, no longer is. A conscience that is too clear is suspect. To ever be clear, conscience must have overcome doubt. As Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav put it: No heart is as whole as one that has been broken" (Ibid., p. 59).

Elie Wiesel was drawn to Hassidic masters who were epitomes of religious faith and leadership…and who had their own questions, self-doubts, feelings of melancholy. In spite of personal internal struggles, the Tzaddik had to be available to his followers with a full and loving heart. "Just tell him that you need him and he will receive you. Tell him that you are suffering and he will be your companion. Tell him you need a presence and he will share your solitude without invading it. This may seem unusual today, but in those days many Hassidic Masters treated their followers in that way, with similar compassion" (Ibid., p. 142).

Wiesel writes nostalgically, especially about the early Tzadikkim of Hassidism. But as the movement grew and expanded, it also lost some of the initial energy and idealism of its founders. Many different and competing groups emerged, each

with its own Rebbe/Tzaddik.

To the outside observer, Hassidim appear to be cult-like groups blindly devoted to their charismatic Rebbes; they dress in distinctive garb, follow distinctive customs, and speak primarily in Yiddish rather than the language of the land. Yet, Hassidim are living testimony of the power of survival. Vast numbers of Hassidim perished during the Holocaust. Their communities in Europe were decimated. Yet, the survivors did not lose faith. They rebuilt communities in Israel, the United States and elsewhere; a new generation of Rebbes emerged, attracting thousands of adherents. Elie Wiesel's emotional connection to Hassidism and Hassidim are an expression of his faith in humanity's ability to overcome horrors…and survive with renewed vigor and optimism.

* * *

When it was announced in 1986 that Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Prize, many (including me) supposed it was the prize in literature. After all, he was a famous author of numerous highly acclaimed books. But the prize was not for literature, but for peace.

Apparently the Nobel committee thought that his universal messages relating to peace were more important than his literary production. Some have felt that Wiesel's writing is overly emotional, sometimes pretentious; it tries too hard to appear profound. While his books will be read for many years to come, his role as a conscience for humanity was deemed most significant.

> *In presenting the Nobel Peace Prize, Egil Aarvik, chair of the Nobel Committee, said this about Wiesel: "His mission is not to gain the world's sympathy for victims or the survivors. His aim is to awaken our conscience. Our indifference to evil makes us partners in the crime. This is the reason for his attack on indifference and his insistence on measures aimed at preventing a new Holocaust. We know that the unimaginable has happened. What are we doing now to prevent its happening again?"*

References

Conversations with Elie Wiesel, E. Wiesel and Richard D. Heffner, Schocken Books, New York, 2001.

Messengers of God, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1976.

Night, Bantam Books, New York, 1960.

Open Heart, Schocken Books, New York, 2012.

Somewhere a Master, Schocken Books, New York, 1982.

Souls on Fire, Random House, New York, 1972.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. In commemoration of Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, April 18, 2023. This article appears in issue 38 of *Conversations,* the Institute's journal.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-teachings-elie-wiesel

---

Tzaraas: Learning the Skill of "I Don't Know"

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Tzaraas was powerful. It often appeared as a skin condition most closely associated with leprosy, but it was something different. If could appear on garments or homes as well. It was not contagious. It was diagnosed not by a doctor but by a Kohein. If the Kohein declared it "Tomey-Impure" then the afflicted person would have to leave the camp and enter

isolation.

Most commonly, this spiritually activated affliction would come because of negative speech, Lashon Horah. Our Rabbis teach, “Just as this person separated people)through negative speech(so shall he be separated.”

Often, people who have the bad habit of Lashon Horah don’t even realize how much damage they are doing, and how wrong their perspective is. They may excuse themselves and say, “I was only relating the facts.” Or “It was just words.” Sometimes their interpretation of events provides the negative perspective with which their listeners will process the events. And it isn’t pretty.

Jewish tradition maintains that just as in a court of law we are obligated to hear all the evidence and allow arguments and explanations, so in the courtroom of our minds as citizens we are obligated to judge and process events and interpretations with righteousness. “Be slow in judgment,” is a motto not only for a legally appointed judge. “Judge people favorably,” is the Torah attitude, and one that would keep us all out of a lot of trouble.

Interestingly, the Torah provides a particular strategy to become better at this mitzva. When such an affliction comes upon a person’s home, he must invite the Kohein to come see it, using particular words: “Like an affliction has appeared to me in my house.” The commentaries explain that even if the homeowner is a scholar and an expert in these laws, he must humble himself and say only, “Like an affliction.” As the Mishna infers, “A person must teach himself to say, ‘I don’t know.’”

This is not just a random place for the Torah to teach us humility and the skill of saying “I don’t know.” The situation of Tzaraas is one in which this lesson is particularly relevant. If Tzaraas afflicts a person because of his bad habit of maligning people, the skill of saying “I don’t know” will go a long way in providing the cure. “Don’t pass judgment so fast” is the lesson we wish to impart to the person. Even if you are a scholar, you don’t know everything. In fact, even if you think you know everything, you certainly don’t know how things are playing out exactly in other people's lives. “Do not judge a person until you are in their place.”

Let’s say, for example, a person is carrying packages, and someone passes by and ignores him and does not help. A package-carrier might have a surge of anger and pass judgment and decide that the passerby is callous and unkind. In self-righteousness he could easily share his pained feelings with others. This would be especially true if he was asked his assessment of the passerby in a reference check.

Yet, the laws of Lashon Horah, and the lesson of Tzaraas — “like an affliction” — teach us to recognize that we do not know the whole story. Was the passerby distracted by something else on their mind? Did they even see you? If they did see you, did they get the impression that you had things under control?

A beautiful book on the topic, *The Other Side of the Story*, is a classic in illustrating how the truth and reality can be so different than our first impression. In fact, in the laws of Lashon Horah, the Chofetz Chaim points out that before speaking negatively about other people we must address a few criteria to make sure that we aren’t drawing inappropriate conclusions or causing unjustified damage.

Tzaraas is big because Lashon Horah is big. Lashon Horah can separate loved ones with just a few words. It can destroy human beings with just a shrug that is dismissive.

The antidote is humility. The antidote is to realize that we don’t know the whole story, and we aren’t licensed to pass judgement on other people based on our personal perspective and first reaction.

The lesson of Tzaraas is that we are guests in Hashem’s world just like the next person. Be slow in judgment, patient to see another point of view. If we ostracize someone else without justified cause, Hashem reserves the right to put us in time out.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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.**

Tazria-Metzora -- Natural Empathy

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

In his commentary on Parshas Metzorah, Rabbeinu Bachye explains *tzara'as*, commonly translated as leprosy, to be a punishment for slander. He notes that the term used for one who has *tzara'as* – a *metzora* - is actually a contraction of the term ***M****o****TZ****i sheim* ***RA***, which means "one who gives a bad name." He notes that the purification process for the *metzora* includes two birds, cedar wood and hyssop. Birds are symbols of voice and sound, and one who has misused his voice must therefore use birds as part of the process of correcting his flaw.

Rabbeinu Bachye explains that the cedar wood and hyssop also give an important message to the gossiper. However, here he suddenly raises an additional flaw. He notes that cedar is of the tallest trees, while hyssop is of the smallest plants and says, "What is the correction for this one who was haughty? Let him humble himself like hyssop and he will be atoned." While it can certainly be understood that one who is haughty would speak slanderously, there would seem to be many other reasons besides haughtiness for one person to speak ill of another. He may have previously harmed me in some way, or I may feel slighted by him. He may have done something which I find shocking or troubling, or it may just be juicy gossip. Why should we assume that anyone who speaks slander is guilty of haughtiness?

If we study the trait of haughtiness, there does appear to be a connection with slander. The Mesillas Yesharim (Path of the Just) explains in chapters 11 and 22 that the essence of haughtiness is the attitude that I am inherently special and deserving of praise. Humility is the exact opposite – an attitude that I am not more significant than anyone else and am undeserving of praise. Both a haughty person and a humble person may be aware of their strengths and of their flaws. The difference is in their perspective. The haughty person sees himself as being better than others overall and finds his flaws to be insignificant in the big picture. The humble person recognizes his flaws as being significant, and therefore does not consider himself to be better than others.

When we speak slanderously, we are focusing on another person's flaws, saying that the other person is somehow less worthy because of those flaws. If I am aware of my own flaws, I will be much less likely to note someone else's flaws. I wouldn't want them to turn around and shine a spotlight on my own flaws.

This doesn't fully answer the question, though. Being aware of my own flaws will not necessarily prevent me from ever speaking gossip. Perhaps someone may do something so outlandish that it is just juicy gossip. Or perhaps, someone will harm me in some way and I will simply want to get back at him by publicizing his flaws. We can still ask why Rabbeinu Bachye says that all slander requires arrogance.

I believe Rabbeinu Bachye is highlighting for us the beautiful yet delicate nature of the human soul. When I look at another human being and see his flaws, my natural instinct is to hide those flaws. I naturally empathize with him and understand how it feels to be flawed and to have those flaws noticed, because I recognize that I also have flaws. Though my flaws may be different, the emotion and the human experience is the same. I cannot help but sense how he would feel. Recognizing how he would feel, I would naturally refrain from slander.

The only reason why I wouldn't empathize this way is if I somehow view myself as different than him. He has flaws, but I am not like him because I am perfect or at least my flaws are insignificant. Only if I believe that I could never relate to his experience, would I be able to be callous and speak against him. If I take a moment to stop and open my eyes to my own flaws, I instinctively recognize and empathize with his situation. I would empathize so strongly that I would be incapable of ignoring his pain and speaking against him.

G-d has gifted us with a noble spirit. Whenever I recognize another person's situation, I feel his pain and care to protect him. I only need to open my eyes and see his reality. Empathy is imbedded in the human psyche.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Parashat Shmini: Arguing with God

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[note: Because I did not have time to prepare Devrei Torah during Pesach for Shabbat Shemini, I held Rabbi Hefter's fascinating Devar Torah and am sharing it this week.]

The New Moon of Nissan is associated with anticipation of the joy of redemption. Yet, the first Rosh Chodesh Nissan after the great exodus from Egypt was one in which joy was mingled with grief, and Aharon the High Priest left God hanging. According to our sages, the inauguration of the *Mishkan* was on the New Moon of Nissan. In the ecstasy of the moment, two of Aharon's sons violated the boundary between the human and the divine and were consumed by God's fire. The moment of joy was marred by tragedy.

The deaths of Nadav and Avihu is followed by an uncharacteristic legalistic exchange between Moshe and Aharon:

> *"And Moshe diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold it was burnt: and he was angry with Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon that were left alive, saying, Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God has given it to you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? […] And Aharon said to Moshe, Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord; and such things have befallen me that if I had eaten the sin offering today, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord? And when Moshe heard that, he was pleased."* Vayikra 10:16-20.

Our sages are divided as to the identity of the sin offering *(Zevachim 101 a-b)*. I wish to explicate the opinion that it was the sin offering of the New Moon, Rosh Chodesh, which was not consumed. Investigating this possibility will not only uncover the hidden meaning of the minor festival of the New Moon but also teach us something fundamental about our relationship with God.

But first some necessary background; on the New Moon an additional sacrifice (*musaf*) is brought in the temple. It consists of a goat as a sin offering (*Hatat*) in addition to the burnt offerings. Portions of the sin offering are eaten by the *kohanim*. Concerning this aspect of the ritual, the Talmud states that the *kohanim* eat and the owners of the sacrifice are atoned *(Pesahim 59b).* By accepting and eating the food provided by the sinner, the Kohen shows that something redeeming has emerged from the sin and thus participates in its expiation)*kaparah*(.

Moshe is concerned that the atonement of the sin offering will be incomplete since the offering was burnt rather than eaten.

For which sin does the sin offering of the New Moon atone? The Talmud Chullim 60b provides the staggering answer:

> *Simeon b. Pazzi pointed out a contradiction]between verses[. One verse says: And God made the two great lights, and immediately the verse continues: The greater light . . . and the lesser light. The moon said unto the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Is it possible for two kings to wear one crown'? He answered: 'Go then and make thyself smaller'. 'Sovereign of the Universe'! cried the moon, 'Because I have suggested that which is proper must I then*

make myself smaller'?]…[On seeing that it would not be consoled the Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Bring an atonement for Me for making the moon smaller.'

It is God Himself who is in need of atonement consequent to His diminishing the moon. Surely, R. Shimon b. Pazzi would have been banished from numerous rabbinic associations had he lived today.

What does the diminishing of the moon symbolize that it should be considered a sin in need of atonement? The light of the sun is powerful and steady. It has come to symbolize eternity and God's enduring and perpetual beneficence. The moon palely reflects the light of the sun; it waxes and wanes. Just prior to the new moon, total darkness prevails. The emergence of the new moon symbolizes hope and regeneration)hence the proclamation upon the blessing of the new moon, *David melekh Yisrael hai ve kayam*. David King of Israel lives!(. The waning moon symbolizes deterioration and death. The moon has come to symbolize all creation. Thus the diminishing of the moon by God is symbolic of the imperfection inherent in creation. Our world is full of beauty, wonder and astonishing harmony. Yet it is also fatally flawed and astoundingly cruel. Natural disasters and human atrocities conspire to bring unspeakable suffering into the world.

Death is the embodiment of all that is imperfect in God's creation. Death is not abstractions for Aharon; his two eldest sons were just consumed by God's fire. By refusing to partake in the sin offering of God, he is refusing to absolve God of criminal liability for death and suffering in the world.

This point is more acute when we realize that this sin offering for this *rosh chodesh* is the ***first*** *rosh chodesh.* ** While later generations brought and consumed the sin offering of Rosh Chodesh, accepting God and the imperfect world He created, Aharon has registered his protest. God will have to bear His sin alone; Aharon will not atone for Him. Nissan is a time of joy and celebration of redemption. Why was it marred by the tragedy of Aharon?

The way Aharon handled his grief is a lesson to all on how to build and maintain a living relationship with God. In an honest relationship we dare not repress our feelings lest resentment and alienation grow. Aharon, by refusing to eat the sin offering, is insisting on an authentic relationship with God. Not one based upon servile submission and sycophantic platitudes. The intensity and – yes – the recrimination of God implicit in Aharon's behavior is actually the foundation upon which he builds his authentic relationship with God.

The preacher who obsessively apologizes for God and believes he is protecting Him is in fact erecting barriers to Him. God needs no protection and suffers no apologies. An authentic relationship with Him must be based first and foremost upon honesty.

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

**]ed. Note: I presume that Rabbi Hefter means that Rosh Hodesh Nisan of the second year is the first time when B'Nai Yisrael could bring a korban)because there was no Mishkan before then(– and that day was the first time that Aaron, the first Kohen, could offer a korban.[

Tazria Metzora: Curing Narrow Mindedness

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]note: "leper" and "Leprosy" in this Dvar Torah are generic terms for physical manifestations for a spiritual disease and are not related to the medical condition later called leprosy.[

When the leper heals, he brings two live birds, cedar, crimson wool, and hyssop. The priest will slaughter one bird onto a clay vessel filled with fresh water. He will then dip the live bird, with the

cedar, crimson wool, and hyssop, in the mixture of blood and water. He will sprinkle it on the healing leper seven times, and will then let the live bird fly into the fields.)Free translation of Lev. 14:2-7(

This strange ritual is usually understood as a symbolic act of atonement for the sin of gossip and calumny, which in turn is understood as the spiritual sin of the leper. The blood stains the water, just as the leper contaminated his environment, and setting the bird free symbolizes the far-reaching damage of the rumors spread by the leper. This explanation presents the healing process of the leper as incomplete, as its symbolism still carries an accusatory tone.

In addition, though the traditional view of leprosy as a punishment for calumny is supported by several verses, and seems to be the reason for the leprosy contracted by Moshe and Miriam, other cases mentioned in the bible do not fall under this category.

I would like to offer a broader definition to the spiritual sin punished by leprosy, based on the concept of the bi-radical root. This is the theory that in biblical Hebrew we can identify two-letter roots which later branch out to three-letter ones. All the new roots created are nuances of the original one. i The word צרעת – leprosy, is derived from the root צרע, which has in its basis the bi-radical root צר – narrow. That root is also in the basis of the biblical roots צרב, צרה, צרח, צרפ, צרר, which all share the concept of being limited or restricted. צרב means burning the skin, limiting its growth; to be in צרה is to be in a narrow place, in distress; צרח means a sharp, piercing scream, as well as a high and narrow tower; צרפ is the action of separating slags from metal, most commonly used in the bible as a metaphor for suffering; צרר is a bundle, which contains objects in an enclosure, and it also means adversaries, in the sense of those who besiege.

We can conclude, then, that the sin of the leper is a narrow and limited world view, which prevents him from unlocking potential talents and which leads him to misjudge others.This definition explains the six known cases of leprosy in the bible, and includes the sins of gossip, arrogance and greed:

Moshe)Exodus 4:1-7(: Moshe refuses to believe that the Israelites will be open to his offer of redemption. Despite God's promise, he chooses to limit his vision. He is punished with momentary leprosy.

Miriam)Numbers 12:1-16(: Miriam speaks against Moshe. She complains that she is as great a prophet as he is. Seeking the glory and greatness of others is a sign that one chooses to mimic them instead of searching for his own talents. Because of Miriam's own greatness, her leprosy lasts only seven days, as if to show that her words were said at a moment of weakness.

Uzziyahu)II Chronicles 26(: Uzziyahu was one of the most successful kings of the southern kingdom of Yehudah, a conqueror, a builder, and a unifier, but at a certain point he wanted to serve as the High Priest. The priests tried to prevent him, but he forced his way to the inner sanctuary with frankincense, only to emerge with leprosy in his forehead, where the High Priests carries the band with God's name on it. Uzziyahu's sin was similar to that of Miriam in that he felt that he needs to mimic other and perform the duties of the High Priest in order to display his greatness. In reality, he did not need that because he had so many other qualities. Probably because the king's transgression involved a physical conflict and a breach of the Temple's boundaries, he remained a leper for life.

Naaman)II Kings 5:1-19(: We are not told what was the cause for Naaman's leprosy, but we do know that Naaman, who was an Aramean general, came to see Elisha after a long correspondence and an elaborate journey, in hope of being cured of his disease. Elisha ordered the general to bathe seven times in the Jordan river, to which he responded with anger: "I thought that he will raise his hand and cure me; did I travel all that distance to be told to bathe in this small river? My rivers back home in Damascus, Amana and Parpar, are better than all the waters of Israel! I can bathe in them and heal!" Naaman, who made the journey from Aram to Israel with the belief that the prophet could cure him, was willing to turn around and return home without heeding the prophet's advice, because it did not make sense to him. That is the epitome of narrow-mindedness. Luckily for him, his servants proved to be more open-minded, and they convinced him to bathe in the Jordan, arguing that he has nothing to lose, and he was indeed cured.

Gehazi)II Kings 5:20-27(: The grateful Naaman returns to Elisha and offers a generous reward, but the prophet declines to accept it and is satisfied with Naaman's recognition of God's power. Elisha's servant Gehazi, who refuses to accept his master's decision, chases the general's chariot and tells him that his master changed his mind because he has just received poor visitors. When Gehazi returns home with his loot, Elisha tells him that Naaman's leprosy will now afflict him. Gehazi's actions stemmed from the narrow vision of one who thinks that material wealth is the solution to all his problems. He has become similar to the leper Naaman, in refusing to accept his master's decision and thinking that he can deceive him.

Four anonymous lepers)II Kings 7:3-9(: The lepers were sitting outside the gates of the besieged city of Shomron. When they found out that the enemy's army was driven away miraculously, they moved from tent to tent, carrying loot and burying it in hiding places, eating and drinking. It was only after they have been doing it for a while that they remembered the plight of their brethren, who were suffering extreme hunger inside the city. Their initial actions show their narrow focus on themselves and on material needs.

In conclusion, we could say that the bible warns us of the dangers of not opening our mind and our heart to the possibilities surrounding us, and of trying to mimic others. This understanding sheds light on the strange ritual of the leper's purification. Slaughtering the first bird over the water symbolizes the killing of innovation and creativity. The cedar and hyssop, the mightiest and lowliest plants, represent the wide range of possibilities, and the crimson stuff stands for human craftsmanship, which uses simple raw materials to create new and magnificent objects. The second bird is set free to send the message that instead of limiting ourselves, we should spread our wings and explore new fields.

ENDNOTE:

i. The first to present this theory in modern times was Dr. Aaron Marcus in his book *Barzilay*. One of the best examples is the root פר which represents strength, possession, and spreading out, and its many derivatives in the bible: פרא, פרד, פרה, פרז, פרח, פרי, פרמ, פרס, פרע, פרצ, פרק, פרש

* Torah VeAhava. 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 Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Hope in Heldenplatz

By Rabbi Eitan Cooper *

About ten years ago, on a trip to Vienna, Austria, shortly after getting married, I had the opportunity to visit Heldenplatz)"Heroes Square"(. Anyone who visits Vienna probably encounters this massive space at the center of the city — it's hard to miss.

While today it is a popular site in the city for tourists to visit, in March of 1938 it was the location of Hitler's formal announcement of the Anschluss — the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany. The speech took place in front of thousands of people and was one of Hitler's more famous addresses. Here I found myself standing, 75 years later, on a trip with my wife.

Standing in that spot, we looked around, and realized that the sun was setting — we needed to daven mincha. And while I have davened mincha in many inspiring locations before, this mincha was perhaps one of the most memorable of my life. It was memorable because it produced a very strong and unique sense of kavana, which emerged from being in a place where so many of our ancestors' fate was sealed, where so many cheered on and lended their support to the horrors that the Nazis were perpetrating.

And there we stood, alive and well, newly married, overwhelmed with sadness for what was lost during the Shoah. But

also full of pride and gratitude for the Jewish people's survival. Despite the horrors of the Shoah, we were still standing, and Hitler, who must have seemed so invincible speaking from this very square we were privileged to be davening in, was not.

This transition — from darkness to light, mafeila l'orah — is noted in a subtle way at the start of this week's parsha. Tazria-Metzora begins with a description of what a woman must do after giving birth to a male child. It describes the offerings she must bring and the days that she remains טמאה)tmeiah(. Upon closer inspection, one finds a short pasuk that seems a bit out of place:

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

What is this pasuk doing here? Why are we being informed again of the mitzvah of brit milah, the commandment to circumcise baby boys on the 8th day of life? Haven't we already learned about this earlier in the Torah?

I'd like to suggest that this verse is in conversation with the start of last week's parsha)Shmini(, which also began with a description of an 8th day — the celebration of the dedication and consecration of the Mishkan. As we read last week, this celebration was tainted by the tragic death of Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu, who offered a fire to Hashem that they were not supposed to. The incredible joy and promise of the 8th day was reversed into unspeakable sorrow and pain for Aharon and for all the Jewish people.

Read within this context, our pasuk, which describes the birth of a male baby and his bris on the 8th day, serves as a powerful reminder: Despite the trauma the Jewish people had experienced and no doubt internalized after the death of Aharon's sons, there will still be a future where Jewish babies are born. Not only will they be born, but we will be joyous again — celebrating their bris on the 8th day.

The 8th day — which in last week's parsha was a point of pain — is transformed this week into a point of pride. This is precisely the feeling we felt while davening in Heldenplatz. The source of our people's pain became a source of comfort and pride.

As we mark the transition from Yom Hashoah this week into the days next week when we will commemorate Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, we have an opportunity to reflect on this important message. We can and must continue to remember our people's pain. And we can also draw inspiration from where the Jewish people stand today, Thank G-d, alive and well.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Assistant Rabbi, of Beth Sholom Congregation, Potomac, MD. Alumnus of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and my very close personal friend. Hebrew omitted because of problems going across various software programs.

https://library.yctorah.org/2023/04/hope-in-heldenplatz/

Shavuon Tazria Metzora

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

In a famous Simpsons episode, Homer is home alone and decides it's the perfect chance to make his patented, space age, out of this world, moon waffles)i.e. a waffle made out of store-bought waffle mix, caramel, and liquid smoke that he fries to a crisp and wraps around an entire stick of butter(.

So when I visited the Coromandel over Pesach, I thought it was the perfect chance to make my patented, space age, out of this world moon matzah which consisted of matzah held up to the light of the moon. I don't think it tasted any different than regular matzah. But matzah definitely does make better food for a hike. It never goes bad and takes up way less space than risen bread. How lucky our forefathers were to have matzah on their journey and not bread that would have

developed mould within a few days.

Such is the tradeoff that we must make. If you want homemade bread with of its subtleties of flavour, you have to accept that you must eat it within a few days. It takes a while to make and must be eaten quickly. Matzah is the opposite. It takes less than 20 minutes to make but can be eaten forever after that.

It's the tradeoff that happens in other areas of life. For instance, if you want a relationship where the other person will be at your side at a moment's notice when you need help or a listening ear, you must slowly build that with them over a period of years. But if you've only shown passing interest in developing a friendship with them, then don't expect that they will be so quick to be by your side. And that's fine. We all have limited time and can't possibly be close with everyone.

And our parsha gives us an example of another tradeoff. A person who gossips and spreads insulting info about another person which ruins their reputation. Yes you get a good quick laugh. But you also get a skin disease and placed in isolation for seven days. That quick laugh leads to a long-winded downward spiral for you and for whom you spoke about.

But that goes the other way too. A quick praise of someone uplifts all of us. Something small leads to something big.

Yes, life is full of tradeoffs even beyond relationships, breads and our words. And we have the privilege of being aware of them and of having the power to choose.
Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand.

Rav Kook Torah
Tazria: Man versus Mosquito

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:

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

> *"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(.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/TAZRIA_65.htm

Tazria Metzora: Holiness and Childbirth)5767, 5772, 5773(

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

The sidrot of Tazria and Metzora contain laws which are among the most difficult to understand. They are about conditions of "impurity" arising from the fact that we are physical beings, embodied souls, and hence exposed to)in Hamlet's words(

> *"the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to."*

Though we have immortal longings, mortality is the condition of human existence, as it is of all embodied life. As Rambam explains)Guide for the Perplexed, III:12(:

> *We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently . . . He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, namely, to be at the same time subject and not*

subject to change.

Throughout history there have been two distinct and opposing ways of relating to this fact: hedonism)living for physical pleasure(and asceticism)relinquishing physical pleasure(. The former worships the physical while denying the spiritual, the latter enthrones the spiritual at the cost of the physical.

The Jewish way has always been different: to sanctify the physical – eating, drinking, sex and rest – making the life of the body a vehicle for the Divine Presence. The reason is simple. We believe with perfect faith that the God of redemption is also the God of creation. The physical world we inhabit is the one God made and pronounced "very good." To be a hedonist is to deny God. To be an ascetic is to deny the goodness of God's world. To be a Jew is to celebrate both creation and Creator. That is the principle that explains many otherwise incomprehensible features of Jewish life.

The laws with which the sedra begins are striking examples of this:

> *When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be teme'ah for seven days, just as she is during the time of separation when she has her period . . . Then, for thirty-three additional days she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean. Until this purification period is complete, she shall not touch anything holy and shall not enter the sanctuary.*
>
> *If she gives birth to a girl, she shall have for two weeks the same teme'ah status as during her menstrual period. Then, for sixty-six days after that, she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean.*

She then brings a burnt-offering and a sin-offering, after which she is restored to "ritual purity." What is the meaning of these laws? Why does childbirth render the mother teme'ah)usually translated as "ritually impure," better understood as "a condition which impedes or exempts from a direct encounter with holiness"(? And why is the period after giving birth to a girl twice that for a boy? There is a temptation to see these laws as inherently beyond the reach of human understanding. Several rabbinic statements seem to say just this. In fact, it is not so, as Maimonides explains at length in the Guide. To be sure, we can never know – specifically with respect to laws that have to do with kedushah)holiness(and teharah)purity(– whether our understanding is correct. But we are not thereby forced to abandon our search for understanding, even though any explanation will be at best speculative and tentative.

The first principle essential to understanding the laws of ritual purity and impurity is that God is life. Judaism is a profound rejection of cults, ancient and modern, that glorify death. The great pyramids of Egypt were grandiose tombs. Arthur Koestler noted that without death "the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent." The English metaphysical poets turned to it constantly as a theme. As T. S. Eliot wrote:

> *Webster was much possessed by death*
> *And saw the skull beneath the skin . . .*
> *Donne, I suppose, was such another . . .*
> *He knew the anguish of the marrow*
> *The ague of the skeleton . . .*
> *Freud coined the word thanatos to describe the death-directed character of human life.*
>
> – *Whispers of Immortality* by T. S. Eliot

Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. "It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor those who go down into silence")Psalm 114("What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?")Psalm 30(. As we open a sefer Torah we say: "All of you who hold fast to the Lord your God are alive today")Deut 4:4(. The Torah is a tree of life. God is the God of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: "Choose life")Deut. 30:19(.

It follows that kedushah)holiness(– a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of God – involves a supreme consciousness of life. That is why the paradigm case of tumah is contact with a corpse. Other cases of tumah include diseases or bodily emissions that remind us of our mortality. God's domain is life. Therefore it may not

be associated in any way with intimations of death.

This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws in his work The Kuzari:

> *A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing.*
> *Kuzari,* II:60

The laws of purity apply exclusively to Israel, argues Halevi, precisely because Judaism is the supreme religion of life, and its adherents are therefore hyper-sensitive to even the most subtle distinctions between life and death.

A second principle, equally striking, is the acute sensitivity Judaism shows to the birth of a child. Nothing is more "natural" than procreation. Every living thing engages in it. Sociobiologists go so far as to argue that a human being is a gene's way of creating another gene. By contrast, the Torah goes to great lengths to describe how many of the heroines of the Bible – among them Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and the Shunamite woman – were infertile and had children only through a miracle.

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of God. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to God himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to God than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as God brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chavah "for she is the mother of all life."

We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, not only does she undergo great risk)until recently, childbirth was a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike(. She is also separated from what until now had been part of her own body)a foetus, said the rabbis, "is like a limb of the mother"(and which has now become an independent person. If that is so in the case of a boy, it is doubly so in the case of a girl – who, with God's help, will not merely live but may herself in later years become a source of new life. At one level, therefore, the laws signal the detachment of life from life.

At another level, they surely suggest something more profound. There is a halachic principle: "One who is engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from other mitzvoth." It is as if God were saying to the mother: for forty days in the case of a boy, and doubly so in the case of a girl)the mother-daughter bond is ontologically stronger than that between mother and son(, I exempt you from coming before Me in the place of holiness because you are fully engaged in one of the holiest acts of all, nurturing and caring for your child. Unlike others you do not need to visit the Temple to be attached to life in all its sacred splendour. You are experiencing it yourself, directly and with every fibre of your being. Days, weeks, from now you will come and give thanks before Me)together with offerings for having come through a moment of danger(. But for now, look upon your child with wonder. For you have been given a glimpse of the great secret, otherwise known only to God.

Childbirth exempts the new mother from attendance at the Temple because her bedside replicates the experience of the Temple. She now knows what it is for love to beget life, and, in the midst of mortality, to be touched by an intimation of immortality.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/covenant-conversation-tazria-metsorah-holiness-and-childbirth/

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. The archives did not preserve any footnotes for this Dvar Torah.

The Inner Rhythm of Tumah: An Essay on Parshat Metzora

By Adin Even-Israel)Steinsaltz(

"Knowledge" refers to the Order of Taharot

This parshah deals primarily with laws of tumah and taharah: tzaraat on people and on houses and the tumah of a zav and a zava1 and of a menstruant woman. Whoever studies these subjects in detail discovers – as Maimonides writes in his introduction to the Order of Taharot – that even if he were to learn the laws of tahara a thousand times, he still would not know them, since they are so complex, complicated, and inter-connected. The principles of the laws are not so complicated, but the details are so intricate that they are almost impossible to absorb.

Commenting on the verse, "There shall be faith in your times, strength, salvation, wisdom, and knowledge,"2 the Talmud states,

> *"'Faith' refers to the Order of Zera'im; 'your times' refers to the Order of Moed; 'strength' refers to the Order of Nashim; 'salvation' refers to the Order of Nezikin; 'wisdom' refers to the Order of Kodashim; 'knowledge' refers to the Order of Taharot."3*

According to this interpretation of the verse, there appears to be a progression in the level of difficulty of the respective orders. The first orders, including the Order of Nezikin, are considered relatively easy to learn and understand, while the last two orders are notoriously difficult. This can be seen in the Talmud, where R. Acha asks a question relating to damages, and he is told, "When we get to]Tractate Zevachim[– ask your question there."4 In other words, the difficult questions are reserved for Zevachim, the first tractate in the Order of Kodashim, while the easy questions are asked in Nezikin. Now, in comparison to Taharot, even Kodashim seems simple and uncomplicated. It is virtually impossible to explain all the detailed laws of tumah and taharah, and it is even difficult to map out even a general framework for them.

Why are the orders of Kodashim and Teharot so difficult? The reason is that in the other orders, it is possible to follow the logic that guides the discussion, even without a strong knowledge base. Since the main line of thought is usually straightforward, it is possible to predict what will happen next and what the subject of the next discussion will be. When studying Kodashim, it is impossible to find the path within the maze. Even if one knows what the law is in the case of a guilt offering, for example, one cannot infer from this what the law will be in the case of the sin offering. It is very difficult to point to an inner logic within the various topics. In Taharot, the situation is similar. There exist review books that contain tables and charts explaining the laws of tumah and taharah, and it is plain to see that there is not even one guiding principle within these books, not only for the general categories of tumah, but even for the various details within each unique type of tumah. Thus, for example, there are aspects in which the tumah of a zav is stricter than the tumah of a corpse, whereas in other aspects the tumah of a corpse is stricter than even the tuma of a metzora.

One thing is clear: Tumah has nothing to do with uncleanness, a common misconception. It is not without reason that the concept of tumah does not exist in other languages, and that includes even related languages such as Aramaic. In the Aramaic Targumim, the usual translation for tamei is mesaav, a word that serves as the translation of meluchlach)unclean(as well. Apparently, in Aramaic there is no word that corresponds precisely to the term tamei, and the same is true in English and other languages. In other languages it is always necessary to explain the term tumah with several other words, as it has its own distinctive character that does not exist in those languages.

Throughout history, and especially in recent generations, people have tried to explain that the laws of tumah and taharah are related to hygiene and physical health. These explanations are wrong, both in their general thrust and in their details. Even a superficial analysis of the laws of tumah is enough to demonstrate clearly that these explanations are off the mark.

For example, one might have thought that the metzora is sent outside the camp so that he should not infect others. But a study of the detailed laws reveals that, as Maimonides stated *)Commentary on the Mishnah,* Nega'im 12:5(, there exists no disease that fits the description of tzaraat in the Talmud and in halachah. Indeed, such a disease would be a scientific impossibility, and thus it is certainly not contagious.

Maimonides' conclusion is that tzaraat is actually a miraculous event. We probably have no idea at all what tzaraat on houses is or what tzaraat on garments is, and even the tzaraat that appears on people cannot be classified as a disease. In fact, our sages explain that, in principle, the nations of the world should never be afflicted with tzaraat, because essentially the whole matter of tzaraat pertains to Jews alone. However, in practice, they, too, get tzaraat, so that they should not say to the Jews: "You are a nation of metzora'im."5

There are also various esoteric explanations regarding tzaraat, and their common denominator is that tzaraat has nothing at all to do with hygiene.

Tuma and tahara – life and death

It is possible perhaps to nevertheless attempt to give a very general explanation for the entire framework of tumah and taharah.

Throughout the Torah, from Genesis onward, the world is divided into two poles: life and death, and correspondingly, good and evil: "life and good," "death and evil."6 These matters are presented to us as the two extremes of existence, and every other element of existence falls on the spectrum between these two poles.

Death is presented in our literature not as a normal, natural phenomenon, but as a result of sin. Jewish thinkers throughout history have written that sin and death therefore are forever intertwined. The connection between them appears, for example, in the following interpretation: On the words "engraved)charut(on the Tablets,"7 our sages expound, "Do not read 'charut')engraved(but 'cherut')freedom(, for no man is truly free unless the Angel of Death has no power over him…and as a result of their idolatry]at the sin of the Golden Calf[the Angel of Death came upon them."8 Likewise, the relation between tumah and taharah can be explained on the basis of this division. By way of analogy, it can be said that the creation of tumah resembles the production of a magnetic field. A magnetic field is produced when a drastic change occurs in an electric field. One of the ways this can happen is when an electric current that is moving through metal suddenly stops, in which case magnetization occurs. The new phenomenon is produced at the point of change, whether it is change from one extreme to the other or a more limited change. Similarly, tumah is produced when the complete current of life within an entity is stopped, whether in its entirety or in only one respect. Take, for example, the tumah of a corpse. This tumah occurs not because the corpse is not alive, nor because it used to be alive, but because it used to be alive and then this condition suddenly stopped.

What also emerges from the notion of the connection to life and death is a principle that applies throughout the laws of tumah. The stronger the current of life, the more intense the tumah will be if and when that life is stopped and cut off. The more life force that exists in an entity, the more intense the tumah generated by the negation of that life force will be. Conversely, the less life force that is in an entity, or the lower the level of its life, the less the tumah generated by the negation of its life force will be. We may not be able to explain all the minor questions of the laws of tumah and taharah, but this theory at least helps explain the overarching structure of these laws, in a general sense.

According to Taharot, the most severe form of tumah is that of a corpse. This is because when a person dies, the cessation of the current of life is the most drastic cessation of taharah possible. And when the deceased is a Jew, the tumah reaches its maximum height. When the deceased is not a Jew, the essence of his life was not quite so high, so the tumah generated by the cessation of that life is similarly less. This explains the seemingly paradoxical fact that a deceased Jew conveys tumah more than a deceased non-Jew does, and that a deceased human being conveys tumah more than a dead animal does. A deceased Jew conveys tumah more than a non-Jew because the life current that was stopped was on a higher level, and for the same reason, a deceased non-Jew conveys tumah much more than a cow does.

On a related note, not everything that dies conveys tumah. Creatures that we consider to lack a life force even when alive do not become tamei upon their death. According to the Talmud,9 a dead snake does not convey tumah. This is strange, as we usually think of a snake as the lowest animal in the world. Yet a snake does not convey tumah, neither when alive nor when dead. In truth, this should not be so surprising; a dead snake does not convey tumah because its life force is not sufficient enough to generate tumah. Tumah is produced by a fracture, by the tension of the sudden contrast between complete vitality and death. But when a creature is inherently insignificant, its death, too, is insignificant and does not

generate tumah.

The basic concept is that tumah accompanies death or crisis, whether it is big or small; but while the entity is complete and healthy, it does not become tamei.

A simple example of this is the tumah of the menstruant woman. This tumah is connected to the natural destruction of life that is part of the woman's menstrual cycle. This is destruction not of actual life but of the lost potential for fertilization. As a result, the actual unfertilized egg cells that could have developed into new life are destroyed and flushed out of the body, and tumah results. It is still a normal occurrence and not considered an illness, yet it is connected with this same element of destruction – a partial form of death – and this, too, results in tumah.

A similar example is the tumah that results from a seminal emission. Even in the context of marital relations, and even if the relations result in procreation, an inevitable result of seminal emission is loss, a type of death. Each drop of semen contains a huge number of living cells, each cell carrying the potential for life, and the great majority of the cells – even in the best-case scenario of fertilization – are lost.

According to our literature, the white spot of a tzaraat mark indicates that something has died in that part of the body. If one looks at the symptoms of tzaraat that are described in the Torah, it seems that they serve to distinguish between tzaraat and ordinary illness. There are cases where the Torah says, "it is scar tissue from the infection,"10 or, "it is merely scar tissue from the burn,"11 and therefore the mark is tahor. When the symptom is a result of an infection or other medical ailment, it may not be pleasant, but it is not tzaraat. When, however, the condition deprives the person of his life force, it is no longer defined as an illness, but is considered an impure affliction.

A zava experiences an impairment of her body's vitality as well. It is a result of a severe hormonal imbalance that prevents the woman from conceiving a new life, which explains the basis for its tumah.

Receptacles

The intrinsic connection between the concepts of tumah and taharah and the life force of the entity apparently also applies to the distinction between things that are susceptible to tumah and those that are not. In the thirty chapters of Tractate Kelim, there are countless details that can drive a person crazy, but there are also several major principles, one of which is that the more perfect the vessel and the higher its quality, the more susceptible it is to tumah. This progression extends from high-quality metal vessels to low-quality earthenware vessels. If we were to understand tumah per se as a type of defect, this progression would be surprising. It would seem counterintuitive that a perfect and beautiful vessel would be susceptible to tumah, while an inferior or defective vessel would not be. In reality, however, the logic is just the opposite: Sensitivity to tumah requires some level of perfection.

A similar concept can be observed in the tumah of vessels. A metal vessel becomes tamei even if it has no receptacle. A wooden vessel requires a receptacle in order to be considered a utensil; but once it is labeled a utensil, it can become tamei through its outer surface as well; whereas an earthenware vessel cannot become tamei through its outer surface.12

At first glance, this is quite puzzling. Why should an earthenware vessel not become tamei through its outer surface? According to an explanation attributed to the Kotzker Rebbe, an earthenware vessel is a utensil not by virtue of the material from which it is made but only in that it is a receptacle. Therefore, when something tamei touches the vessel's outer surface, the vessel does not itself become tamei, because its material is insignificant. Only when something enters the earthenware vessel's inner space, the part of the vessel that determines its status as a utensil, can the vessel become tamei, because only then does the vessel reach a level where it is even relevant to speak of tumah.

The key of childbirth

The section of the parshah that deals with the metzora is preceded by the section on the tumah of a woman who has just given birth, and this in itself is truly striking. Why should the laws of tumah begin precisely with this form of tumah? After all, other forms of tumah are much more common and no less severe. Why, then, did the Torah choose to begin with the tumah that follows childbirth? Furthermore, in light of our explanation of tumah as a decline in life force, this tumah seems

doubly anomalous.

Regarding tumah following childbirth, the Kotzker Rebbe said as follows: According to the Talmud, three keys remain in G d's hand alone and were not entrusted to any emissaries: the key of rain, the key of childbirth, and the key of the revival of the dead.13 Since the key of childbirth is in G d's hand, then apparently His spirit is present during the birth, after which it immediately departs – and this is the source of the tension that generates tumah. The tumah is generated not because the birth is something inherently tamei – on the contrary, it is a time when new life comes into the world – but because the birth involves a gulf between a high and a subsequent low, evoking the gulf between life and death.

The highly charged experience of childbirth and the fall from this high shortly thereafter derive from various aspects of the experience. First of all, the birth itself is an incredible miracle: One life is growing and developing inside another. We often take this for granted; we know how it happens and assume that it is natural. But in truth, the whole phenomenon of pregnancy, in which a woman bears two lives that suddenly separate from each other, is nothing short of miraculous. We hear a sense of wonder in Eve's exclamation of amazement and excitement upon giving birth to the world's first child: "I have acquired a man together with G d!"14 Eve reflects on the birth and exclaims, "Look what happened! I did something together with G d; I made a human being!"

From the physical, physiological standpoint, too, the process of childbirth is very similar to every other circumstance that creates tumah. Pregnancy demands tremendous changes in the way the body functions. Throughout the pregnancy, there is a continuous miracle transpiring in the mother's body, a miracle of creation, to which every other bodily function must adjust. When the process of childbirth begins, all of the body's systems speed up dramatically; massive releases of adrenaline and other hormones advance the labor vigorously, eventually enabling the birth of a child. Then, immediately after the birth, this unique and exceptional process, the miracle of creation, everything stops, not gradually but all at once. The chasm is huge. One moment the world is full of wonder, and the next moment it is already gone. The great disparity is what creates the tumah.

The intensity of this abrupt change is reflected, in a sense, in the phenomenon of post-partum depression. Most women experience a slight, fleeting feeling of sadness after giving birth, but sometimes this feeling turns into severe depression, which can be traumatic for both the mother and her family.

Even after all of this, we must remember and acknowledge that although we may have illuminated one general aspect of the laws of tumah and taharah, we will never truly be able to understand all of the complexities of these laws; questions will always remain. As King Solomon said regarding the laws of the red cow, "I left no wisdom in the world that I did not understand, but when I got to the section on the red cow 'I said, "I will get wisdom," but it was far from me.'15"16

FOOTNOTES:

1. . A zav or a zava is a person who experienced an abnormal discharge or flow, and is thus rendered tamei; see Leviticus 15.

2. Is. 33:6.

3. Shabbat 31a.

4. Bava Metzia 109b.

5. Genesis Rabba 88:1.

6. Deut. 30:15.

7. Ex. 32:16.

8. Eiruvin 54a.

9. Eiruvin 13b.

10. Lev. 13:23.

11. 13:28.

12. Chullin 24b.

13. Taanit 2a.

14. Gen. 4:1.

15. Eccl. 7:23.

16. Midrash Zuta, Eccl. 7.

* 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.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5105885/jewish/The-Inner-Rhythm-of-Tumah.htm

---

Tazria Metzora: When The Examiner Sees Only Good

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Inner Priest

Tazri'a discusses a now-extinct disease known as tzara'at, which appeared on a Jewish man or woman's skin, garment, or home as a reflection of some subtle spiritual imperfection in the person.

> *In the case of a dermal lesion, the person was brought to a kohen)priest(for an examination. If the priest declared that the person was indeed suffering from tzara'at, the sufferer needed to go through a period of separation from the community followed by a process of ritual purification.*
>)Lev. 13:6(

It would seem more logical that someone with a lesion be brought to an expert in Jewish law to determine if he is indeed afflicted with tzara'at. Why a priest?

The reason why the Torah specifies that a priest make this determination is because the priests are devoted totally to the service of G-d. Their holiness-centered lifestyle keeps them immune from the worldly perspective that sees every effect as the deserved result of some cause. Thus, they are uniquely positioned to see the good in others and enable them to see the good in themselves. This is what eventually heals the person from tzara'at.

Similarly, whenever we confront a potential spiritual defect in ourselves, we must access our inner "priest," our pristine connection to G-d, in order to view that defect in a way that will lead to its healing. If we find it difficult to summon our own inner priest, we should seek out someone who can substitute for it, in order to cure ourselves in a wholesome and positive manner.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3 *

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* *Your Dailly Wisdom,* a three volume set in a special lucite case, is now available from Kehot Publication Society. Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky has adapted and translated these inspiring lessons from the Lubivatcher Rebbe, and Chabad House Publications of California has now made them available in a special set:

https://store.kehotonline.com/prodinfo.asp?number=ERE-DAIL.LSLUCITE

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 29, Issue 26 **Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Metzora** **5783 B"H**

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "When you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34)

The disease known as leprosy has engendered dread in the hearts of people, especially in times gone by when it was apparently more widespread and exceedingly contagious. In biblical times, the priests (kohanim) would determine whether a skin discoloration or scab was indeed leprous – and, if so, the hapless leper would be rendered ritually impure and exiled from society. From the biblical religious perspective, this tzara'at emanated from a serious moral deficiency, generally identified as slander.

An especially problematic aspect of these laws of tzara'at is the fact that not only individuals but even walls of houses could become infected by this ritually impure discoloration. Do walls have minds, souls, consciences or moral choices which allow for punishment? And stranger still, the Bible describes the phenomenon of "leprosy of houses" in almost positive, gift-of-God terms:

"The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "when you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34)

How are we to understand this biblical reference to the "divine gift" of the leprous walls? And third, for individuals, the tzara'at malady is expressed as a white discoloration, whereas for walls, white spots are not at all problematic, the only thing they attest to is mold! Green and red are the dangerous colors for walls (Lev. 14:36,37). Why the difference?

Nahmanides, the twelfth-century commentary who is an especial champion of the unique importance of the Land of Israel for the people of Israel, sees the phenomenon of the leprous walls as an expression of the intensely concentrated moral sensitivity of our holy land: the sanctity of Israel, home of the Divine Presence (Shekhina), cannot abide within its boundaries a home in which slander is spoken. Hence the walls of such a house in Israel will naturally show the effects of words of gossip which can destroy lives.

Maimonides sees another benefit to the "leprosy of the homes"– an explicit warning to cease and desist from speaking slander: "This is a sign and a wonder to warn people against indulging in malicious speech (lashon hara). If they do recount slanderous tales, the walls of their homes will change; and if the inhabitants maintain their wickedness, the garments upon them will change" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Impurity of Tzara'at 16:10).

Rashi suggests a practical application for the "gift of the leprous walls": "It was a happy tiding for them when the plague (of leprosy) came upon (their homes). This is because the Amorite Canaanites had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years when Israel was in the desert, and because of the leprous plagues the walls were taken apart and [the treasures] were found" (Rashi, Lev. 14:34).

I would suggest that Rashi's commentary may be given a figurative rather than a literal spin. The walls of a house represent a family, the family which inhabits that house; and every family has its own individual culture and climate, scents and sensitivities, tales and traditions. A house may also represent many generations of families who lived there; the values, faith commitments and lifestyles which animated those families and constituted their continuity. The sounds, smells and songs, the character, culture and commitments which are absorbed – and expressed – by the walls of a house, are indeed a treasure which is worthy of discovery and exploration. The walls of a home impart powerful lessons; hidden in those walls is a significant treasure-trove of memories and messages for the present and future generations. Perhaps it is for this reason that the nation of Israel is called the house of Israel throughout the Bible.

From this perspective we can now understand the biblical introduction to "house-leprosy." This hidden power of the walls is a present as well as a plague, a gift as well as a curse. Do the walls emit the fragrance of Shabbat ĥalla baking in the oven or the smells of cheap liquor? Are the sounds which seep through the crevices sounds of Torah study, prayer and words of affection or are they experiences of tale-bearing, porn and anger? The good news inherent in the leprosy of the walls is the potency of family: the very same home environment which can be so injurious can also be exceedingly beneficial. It all depends upon the "culture of the table" which the family creates and which the walls absorb – and sometimes emit.

With this understanding, it is instructive to note the specific colorations – or discolorations – which render the walls ritually unclean: "And he (the kohen – priest) shall examine the leprous plague penetratingly embedded in the walls of the house, whether they are bright green or bright red…" (Lev. 14:37). Can it be that green is identified with money and materialism (yerukim in modern Hebrew, an apt description of American dollars) and red identified with blood and violence? A home which imparts materialistic goals as the ideal and/or insensitivity to the shedding of blood – remember that our sages compared slander or character assassination to the shedding of blood – is certainly deserving of the badge of impurity!… *[Excerpted]*

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

A Time for Silence, a Time for Speech

He did most of his writing and public speaking almost exactly one hundred years ago. He had no secular education, and it is doubtful that he even read the newspapers of his day. Nevertheless, he had insights into the problems of his era that were astounding, even prophetic.

His diagnosis of the ills of the early 20th century holds true even now, a century later. He understood the power of words. He knew how written and spoken language could be used as weapons to destroy humanity. How incredibly relevant his words are in our age, when words can be communicated electronically!

He based his teachings and preaching upon the verse in Psalms which reads:
"Who is the man who is eager for life,
Who desires years of good fortune?
Guard your tongue from evil,
Your lips from deceitful speech." (Psalms 34:13-14)

He took this biblical advice seriously and urged all who would listen to guard their tongues and speak no malice and no falsehood.

His name was Israel Meir HaCohen, and he named his first major work "Chafetz Chaim", "Eager for Life", after the above verse in Psalms. He is now part of Jewish history and forever known as the Chafetz Chaim.

His teachings have a special connection to this week's Torah portion, Metzora (Leviticus 14 and 15), and to its Haftarah (II Kings 7:3-20). Note that there is no explicit reference in the text of our parsha to the theme of the negative powers of language, nor is there any such reference in the Haftarah.

Our text this week deals, rather, with the detailed laws of the metzora, usually translated as "leper", and the selection from II Kings tells the story of the four lepers who dwelled

outside the gates of Jerusalem, who were the first to discover the abandoned camp of the Aramean army that had laid siege to the city.

Rabbinic tradition, however, looks to understand why the metzora has been afflicted with his disease. The Talmud in the tractate Arachin understands the word metzora as a contraction of the phrase "motzi shem ra, one who spreads a 'bad name'" about his fellow. And so, the metzora has come to symbolize the person who is guilty of malicious gossip (lashon hora), or other abuse of words – deception, profanity, verbal assassination.

Interestingly, another early 20th century rabbinic sage, Rabbi Baruch Epstein, author of Torah Temima, points out that the Talmudic rabbis had the license to thus interpret the word metzora. This is because the usual term for the leper is "tzarua", not "metzora." The use of the unusual term suggests another, in this case, homiletic, meaning—he who speaks evil.

When the Chafetz Chaim urged us all to "guard our tongues" and "speak no evil", was he suggesting that we adopt silence as a guide to our behavior, avoiding speech and self-expression entirely?

The answer to this is a resounding "no", and this is illustrated in a fascinating story about Rabbi Israel Meir and his son-in-law, Rabbi Hershel Levinson. I found this story in a Yiddish language biography of the Chafetz Chaim, written by Moshe Mayer Yashar. An excerpted edition of this book is available in English, but without some of the more interesting and personal anecdotes.

Rabbi Hershel, the son-in-law, was a very pious man who spent his days in the study hall who seldom spoke at all. Many believed that he was even more saintly than his revered father-in-law. After all, his father-in-law spoke all over the place and taught and preached, and even joked, at every opportunity.

However, the Chafetz Chaim did not entirely approve of his son-in-law's avoidance of speech and devotion to almost complete silence about worldly matters. Rather, he insisted that one must use his gifts of speech, and use them widely and frequently, yet wisely and carefully.

Silence, for the Chafetz Chaim, was not the preferred way of life. Speech that carefully avoided gossip, insults, and profanity was the preferred behavior.

Today, there are groups of very well-intentioned individuals who emphasize the evils of lashon hora. Sometimes, I am afraid, they do so by avoiding to speak negatively when such speech is necessary. They sometimes refrain from protesting criminal behavior out of fear that, in doing so, they are maliciously gossiping about a criminal.

This was not the Chafetz Chaim's way. In the book mentioned above, by the title of which he is known to the ages, he emphasizes that there are opportunities when one must use speech to warn against sinful or dangerous individuals, or to protest breaches of Torah or of universal moral law. When negative talk has a beneficial objective, it is no longer to be considered negative, but actually becomes a mitzvah.

The four lepers who are described in the narrative contained in this week's Haftarah were stationed outside the gates of Jerusalem because such was what the Torah required of lepers. They were to have no contact with the residents of the city, perhaps because of the fear that their condition was contagious.

They were thus doomed, in a sense, to silence. They could not communicate with their friends and family within the city's gates. And so it is no wonder, then, that when they found that the Aramean besieging Jerusalem had been abandoned overnight, their first inclination was to keep that secret to themselves. But then, in II Kings 7:9, they came to their senses, and their sound consciences prevailed:
"Then they said to one another,
'We are not doing right.
This is a day of good news,
And we are keeping silent!
If we wait until the light of morning,
We shall incur guilt.
Come, let us go and inform the king's palace.'
They went and called out to the gate keepers of the city
And told them..."

Words can harm, but they can also heal. This was the teaching of Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen. It is perhaps best encapsulated in the words of Kohelet:
"There is a time for all things...
A time for silence
And a time for speaking" (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Difference Between a Nazir and a Metzorah

In the beginning of Parshas Metzorah the pasuk says: “This is the law of the Metzorah on the day of his purification and he shall be brought to the Kohen…” [Vayikra 14:2]. This pasuk introduces the procedure on the day a Metzorah becomes Tahor. The Torah does not say “he comes to the Kohen” or “he walks to the Kohen”. It uses the passive tense: V’hoovah el haKohen – he is brought to the Kohen.

This does not mean the person is put onto a stretcher and wheeled to the Kohen. Nevertheless, it is a peculiar grammatical construct. It seems ironic that by the parsha of Nazir in Parshas Nasso the Torah uses an almost identical introduction to the parsha: Zos Toras haNazir: “This is the law of the Nazir: On the day his abstinence is completed, he shall bring himself (Yavi oso) to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” [Bamidbar 6:13]. These are parallel pesukim!

Rashi over there on the words Yavi Oso interprets “he shall bring himself”. Rashi comments that this is one of three occurrences of the word ‘Es‘ that Rabbi Yishmael expounds upon. Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirer Mashgiach, zt”l, raises the question – why the difference? Why by Metzorah does it say “He is brought to the Kohen” and yet by the Nazir it says he brings himself?

Rav Yeruchem answers that this highlights a fundamental difference between the Nazir and the Metzorah. A Nazir is in charge of himself and a Metzorah is subject to other forces that are in charge of him.

Why does a person become a Metzorah? It is for a variety of reasons. First of all, he cannot keep his mouth shut! Why can’t he keep his mouth shut? It is because he can’t control himself. Who is in charge? His Yetzer HaRa is in charge. It is his lust, for whatever reason, to gossip and speak Lashon haRa. Another cause of Tzaraas, according to the Gemara is Tzarus Ayin (stinginess). He is very cheap. Why is he cheap? It is because he likes money. So, who is in charge? Do I control my money or does my money control me?

The whole parsha of Metzorah deals with a person who is subject to external forces – be it his mouth, be it his evil inclination to speak Lashon haRa, be it his evil inclination to accumulate wealth, or be it a result of personal pride. All these conditions that the Gemara mentions in connection with Tzaraas are symptomatic of someone who is not a Baale-bos over himself. Concerning a person who is not in charge of himself, the Torah emphasizes: And he shall be brought (v’hoovah) to the Kohen.

The Nazir, on the other hand, is the one person who is singled out in the Torah for his unique ability to take control of himself. The Nazir senses that he may be headed down a slippery path and says, “I am not going to let this happen to me. I am going to abstain from wine. I am going to abstain from beautifying my appearance. I am going to be in charge of myself!” Regarding a person who is in charge of himself, the Torah states “Yavi oso” which according to Rashi implies he will bring himself!

We have often quoted the Rabbinic teaching: There is no freer person than one who occupies himself with Torah. Why is he a free man? Does he not have 613 commandments? Is he not bound by a myriad of Rabbinic restrictions? The answer is, because such a person can be in charge of himself. He can say “No” to his evil inclination.

There is a famous vort from Rav Chaim Volozhin on the pasuk “u’mosar ha’Adam min haBeheima – ayin.” [Koheles 3:19] (there is no

difference between man and animal). Rav Chaim Volozhin homiletically interprets the pasuk as follows: Do you know what distinguishes a man from an animal? Ayin – The ability to say 'No!' When an animal is hungry, he eats. When a human being is hungry, he does not need to eat. He can control himself. That is the difference between a Nazir and a Metzorah.

Tzaraas Teaches a Major Life Lesson About Negiyus - The process of Negaim involves the Kohen viewing the blemish on the skin of the person and then ruling whether or not that blemish is Tzaraas. The Mishna says [Negaim 2:5] "A person can view (and rule on) all blemishes except his own." The simple and correct interpretation of this Mishna is that even though a Kohen can pasken on anyone else's blemish, but if the Kohen has a blemish of his own, he may not view it and pasken on its status.

Beyond the simple and correct interpretation of this Mishna, there is also a life's lesson to be learned from the Mishna's formulation of this halacha. The life's lesson is that "All blemishes a person can see" – meaning I can look at other people and notice their faults. "This person has a temper, this person is haughty, this person is envious" and so forth. I see every fault under the sun in other people! But "except for his own blemishes" – We do not see our own faults. They can be staring us in the face, but we do not see them.

This is one of the great challenges of life. We all have personal biases that do not allow us to see our own shortcomings. We are not even aware of these biases. I always comment that if ever you hear a person say "I may be no'geah (personally affected), but…" do not pay attention to the rest of the sentence. There is no such thing as "I may be no'geah but…" If you are affected by the matter then your opinion is for sure tainted. This is the life-lesson of the Mishna's formulation "All blemishes a person may see except his own blemishes."

I want to relate two incidents that vividly illustrate this phenomenon.

There was a person named Rav Dovid Mirer from the city of Mir and a second person named Rav Dovid Novardok from the city of that name. (In Europe people were often identified not by their last names, but by their city of origin.) The cities were not far from each other, and the two Dovids knew one another. In the course of their business dealings with one another, they had some kind of dispute which they brought to a Din Torah. They came before the great Rav Chaim Volozhiner to adjudicate their case.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner ruled in favor of Rav Dovid Mirer. Rav Dovid Novardok felt that Rav Chaim Volozhiner made a mistake and that he was wronged in this Din Torah. However, Rav Chaim Volozhiner was the Gadol HaDor and Rav Dovid Novardok was not about to challenge him. However, he always felt that he lost the case unjustly.

Several months later, Rav Chaim Volozhiner met Rav Dovid Novardok and asked a favor of him: "There are two Jews that I know who asked me to hear their Din Torah. I am too busy to adjudicate their dispute. Would you mind taking the case for me? I will even pay you for your wasted time (Schar Batalah) ten gold pieces. But I want you to hear the case and you adjudicate it."

Rav Dovid Novardoker accepted the assignment. He went to adjudicate the case. The two people sat down in front of him and they each presented their claims. Rav Dovid Novardoker ruled in favor of one of the parties. Rav Chaim Volozhiner later asked him "Nu, who did you rule like?" He responded "I ruled like this one person."

It hit him suddenly like a bolt of lightning. It was the exact same case that he had with Rav Dovid Mirer. But he had not been able to see then how his logic was wrong because it was dealing with his own pocket. And yet, when he saw these same facts being replayed with other individuals, he was easily able to see the truth.

After Rav Chaim Volozhin died, these two people came to Rav Dovid Novardoker and explained to him that they never had a Din Torah between themselves. It was all a charade that Rav Chaim Volozhin set up with them. He wanted to teach Rav Dovid Novardoker this lesson – when it is a case involving your own money, you do not view things correctly.

The following is an even more startling incident: The Shach (Rav Shabsi Kohen, famous Shulchan Aruch commentary (1621-1662)) once had a Din Torah with another Jew. However, nobody in the Shach's city wanted to adjudicate the case because they did not want to take a case where they might have to rule against the Gadol Hador. The Shach and his disputant decided they would travel to another city where nobody knew the Shach and they would have the case heard there. In the seventeenth century, people did not know what the Shach looked like. There were no Jewish newspapers and there were no photographs. People did not see the Shach burning his chometz or lighting his Chanukah candles or making Birkas Ilanos – so people did not know what he looked like!

They went to a Rav in another city. The Shach gave his side of the story and his disputant gave his side of the story and the Rav ruled against the Shach. The Shach said "Ok. You are the Rav. You have paskened, I need to accept it. But tell me, why did you pasken like that?" To which the Rav said, "I paskened that way based on the opinion of the Shach in Choshen Mishpat (the section of Shulchan Aruch dealing with monetary matters) and he quoted the exact chapter and paragraph where the Shach's ruling was recorded.

At this point the Shach was startled. "It is an explicit Shach! It is me!" But even though the Shach ruled clearly in an abstract case, he was still not able to apply it to himself. He was blinded by his personal involvement in the matter! It was because "all blemishes a person may rule on, except on his own blemishes." We see everyone else's faults except our own. This is the scary part about negiyus.

Elisha Told Na'aman to Immerse in the Yarden Based on the Letter Nun - The Haftorah of Parshas Tazria is the story of Na'aman, the Gentile general of the King of Aram. He had Tzaraas and could not find a cure for his condition. He came to the Prophet Elisha seeking help. Elisha told him, "Go immerse in the Jordan River." Na'aman dipped himself in the Yarden. Lo and behold, his Tzaraas was cured. This is the story of Chapter 5 in Melachim II.

The Rokeach, an early Biblical commentary asks: Where did Elisha get the idea that the way for Na'aman to cure himself from Tzaraas would be to immerse in the Yarden?

I would never ask such a question because a Navi is a Navi, and if a Navi says to go dip in the Yarden, you do that. If the Navi says to stand on your head, you do that. You assume the Navi is telling you the word of G-d. But the Rokeach is a Rishon, and he asks this question and gives an incredible answer that only a Rishon could give.

The Rokeach says that there are three—and only three—pesukim in the entire Torah that both begin with the letter Nun and end with the letter Nun. The first pasuk is "Nega Tzaraas, when it will be found in man, he shall be brought to the Kohen." [Vayikra 13:9]. The second pasuk is "Navi from your midst amongst your brethren like myself shall the L-rd your G-d raise up, to him you shall listen (tishma'un)" [Devorim 18:15]. The third pasuk is "Nachnu (we) shall cross over armed, before Hashem, to the land of Canaan, and ours shall be the heritage of our inheritance across the Jordan." [Bamidbar 32:32]. Those are the only three pesukim in all of Chumash that both begin and end with the letter Nun. One is about Tzaraas; one is about a prophet; and one is about the Yarden.

The Rokeach says this was Elisha's insight: The three pesukim reference a Metzorah (Na'aman), a prophet (Elisha), and the Yarden. The clear message is that the prophet should tell the Metzorah to immerse in the Yarden.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

When is it important to call a spade a spade? In Parshat Noach (Bereishit 7:2) the Torah gives us details of the animals brought onto Noah's Ark: "Min habehema hatehorah," – Noah brought onto the ark clean animals,

"umin habehema asher einena tehorah," – and also animals which are not clean.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in the Gemara, Masechet Pesachim 3a, notes that in theory the Torah should have referred to a 'behemiah hatemeiah' – an impure or defiled animal. Instead eight additional letters are used in the term 'asher einena tehorah' – animals which are not clean.

Clean Speech - From here Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches that the Torah wants us to know that we should always strive to use clean, gentle forms of speech.

If that's the case, what would Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say about the parshiot of Tazria and Metzora? Here time and again the Torah uses the term 'temeiah' – impure or defiled.

The reason is clear. In the book of Bereishit the Torah engages in historical narrative and that is a context in which we should strive to avoid unclean terminology. But in the book of Vayikra, where we are presented with 'din' Jewish law, when we are made aware of halacha – the do's and the don'ts of life – the Torah doesn't beat about the bush. It calls a spade a spade. If something is temeiah, if it is impure, it is called by that term.

So too for example, when it comes to the laws of kashrut, what we can or can't eat, it's not good enough to say that something is not kosher. We call it treif, spelling out exactly what the nature of this food is. That also applies to our conduct. If there is behaviour which is treif, let's make it known that that is what it is.

Character Assassination - Now what is it in the parshiot of Tazria and Metzora that the Torah refers to as being temeiah? The term here is linked to Metzora, which comes from 'motzi shem ra'. It is the purposeful attempt to assassinate the character of another person. I find this to be of particular pertinence and relevance in our times; times in which 'cancel culture' is gaining ground; times in which people increasingly prefer to attack the opponent rather than the opponent's views; times when people are engaging in demonisation instead of being brave enough to debate the issues at hand.

From Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi we learn how important it is that in our speech we should always use clean, gentle terminology. But we also learn how important it is to call a spade a spade. If something is wrong let's call it by that name and that includes ad hominem responses to the views of others. When people try to assassinate a character of an opponent, we must make it known in no uncertain terms that that is totally unacceptable.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Meaning of Brit Milah

f someone were to read only our Torah Portion of Tazriia-Metzora, he or she would never know by reading the text that the Mitzvah of Brit Milah-circumcision was more important than any of the 613 Mitzvot-Commandments. The Torah merely says, in five short words (Leviticus 12:5), that Jewish males should be circumcised on the eighth day of life, and then goes on to enumerate other Jewish laws. Only if we go back to the narrative of the first circumcision by Abraham (Genesis 17:7-13), do we see that this is a crucial and eternal Jewish covenant, and its non-fulfillment incurs the death penalty. This is only one of two positive commandments for which non-compliance has such a severe punishment (Sanhedrin 99a, Maimonides, Hilchot Milah 1:6). Of all the commandments in the Torah, the Brit Milah (circumcision) seems to be the most barbaric. It also seems to be devoid of any meaning for the Jew of the twenty-first century. This ancient ceremony causes unnecessary pain to the infant boy and psychological pain to many parents who watch the procedure. Why did God create a commandment that is so painful? What is the true meaning of a Brit Milah? Can it still have significance for the Jew of today?

When non-Jewish oppressors wanted to destroy Judaism, they selected the Brit Milah (along with Shabbat and Torah learning) to be prohibited through decree (Taanit 18a). They realized that this Mitzvah is so basic and significant to Judaism that successfully eliminating its practice would threaten the very survival of Judaism. Brit Milah is also the Mitzvah (along with Shabbat and Torah learning) for which Jews were willing to die rather than abstain (Midrash, Mechilta, Ki Tissa). Therefore, all these demonstrate how special and vital to Judaism this commandment is. The Torah implies that God promises Abraham and the Jews that as long the Jews believe in God, the Almighty will never destroy the Jewish people (Genesis 17:7-14).

But why is this commandment so special? What is it about this ritual that makes it so meaningful to the Jew? What does the act of removing the foreskin symbolize that makes the Brit Milah so essential to Judaism? The name of the commandments itself -- Brit -- means a covenant. This covenant or agreement with God is symbolized through circumcision. This ritual act is the first that God asked of Abraham and continues to ask of all Jewish males. What is the nature of this covenant?

Radak (Radak commentary on Genesis 17:11) explains that the mark of the Brit Milah must specifically be made upon the organ of procreation to symbolize that each Jew must overcome his animalistic, physical desires. Rabbi Isaac Arama (Commentary of Akedat Yitzchak on Genesis 17) explains the symbolism of circumcision a bit differently and stresses the national symbol. He says that this commandment binds all Jews together. By putting a physical demarcation upon each Jew, separating the Jew from the non-Jew, all Jewish males feel a special kinship, causing more harmony among Jews. Of all the possible rituals, it is the Brit Milah that a non-Jewish convert must perform (along with ritual immersion) to enter Judaism and become part of the Jewish people (Maimonides, Hilchot Isurei Biah 13:6). Maimonides (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed III, 49) explains that because the rite is so painful, that an adult would only perform it if he truly believed in God. Thus, the pain associated with this Mitzvah is intentional, to show how much a Jew is willing to sacrifice for God, even at the earliest age. The parents, who also suffer pain watching their infant being "wounded" during the Brit ceremony, also demonstrate, in their willingness to nevertheless go through with the ritual, how strong their commitment is to God and Judaism. This same act has been repeated tens of millions of times over the ages, showing that it is precisely the same symbol and same covenant between God and each Jew in all generations. Others (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed III, 49) have explained the use of the organ of procreation to symbolize the future of the Jewish people. Thus, the physical sign upon this organ of creation binds together all Jews of all generations and associates the future of Judaism with God.

Why not Create Man Already Circumcised? - If it is, indeed, so crucial for the Jew to be circumcised, why did God instruct man to perform this ritual? God could have created man already circumcised, already "perfect," rather than creating an "imperfect" man who circumcises himself. Why make man do what God could have done through Creation? The wicked Turnus Rufus already asked this question of Rabbi Akiva (Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 5). Rabbi Akiva responded to this question by asking Turnus Rufus, in effect, why God did not create any bread trees in the world. Every society eats and needs some sort of bread product as its staple in the nation's diet. Yet the process to get this staple as an edible food is unusually long and painstaking: plowing, seeding, watering, cutting, winnowing, threshing, sifting, kneading, and, finally, baking. Since all cultures have bread, would not it have been simpler for God to create a bread tree, with the bread all prepared, ready to be picked off the tree the same as a fruit?

Rabbi Akiva answers that all the effort needed is indeed part of the Divine plan. God purposely did not create bread trees, because He wanted man to go through all the painful steps to eat bread. God purposely created the world incomplete so that man could now make the world more complete. God only creates the wheat (with man's help) so that man can then take that wheat and process it and make it into bread. There is no other being on earth who takes God's creation and processes it and

develops it as man does. No animal cooks its food or improves on raw material to make it better. This is man's goal in the world in partnership with God. God created an incomplete world so that man could continue with the creative process and complete it. Similarly, God purposely created man incomplete without a Brit Milah so that man could "complete the job" by performing circumcision.

This idea is expressed in the Aleinu prayer (the concluding prayer of each prayer service) in the phrase "Litakain Olam Bemalchut Shadai -- to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty." It is man's role to perfect the Creation begun by the Almighty. Man, thus, creates, imitating God the Creator (see the chapter about "Shabbat" for an amplification of this idea). This concept is also alluded to in the final word of the creation story (Genesis 2:3). On the seventh day God rested. The verse says that God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because He rested from all creative activity that He had created. Then, inexplicably, the verse adds the verb "Laasot-to do" at the end of the verse. This word is extraneous from the verse and makes no apparent sense. To make sense of the verse, it can be understood that the word "to do" does not apply to God, but to man. God created the world so that after God completes His creation, man can then do for himself in the world to continue the process. Man has a responsibility to continue and improve God's creation. This is symbolized, according to Rabbi Akiva, by the Brit Milah.

The Midrash (Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 11:6) supports this idea with a discussion between a philosopher and a Rabbi. When a philosopher specifically asked Rabbi Hoshaya why man wasn't born circumcised, he answered, like Rabbi Akiva, that everything created requires development. Plants must be sweetened; grain must be milled, and man also needs to be perfected. This concept also explains a Talmudic statement (Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 11:6) that Abraham was not complete until he circumcised himself. The act of circumcision completes the creation of God. Thus, rather than mutilation, which is often how circumcision is perceived in the secular world, Judaism views circumcision as an act of completion.

Why, Then, is there no Circumcision for Women? - If circumcision is such an important symbol to the Jewish people and such an important commandment, then why is it reserved for males only? Why didn't God create females with a physiological need to "complete creation," as God did for males? The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 27a) asks this very question and explains that women are already born complete, as if already circumcised. What does this mean? This is not merely an apologetic statement by the Talmud, given today's feminist movement (as there was no feminist movement at the time of the Talmud). It is believed that each creature in process of the six days of Creation was created on a higher spiritual level than any creation formed before itself. Thus, the birds (created on Day five) are on a higher spiritual level than the grass and plants (created on Day three), while the animals (created on Day six) are on a higher spiritual level than birds. Man, the being with the highest spirituality, was created last. However, there is one being created after man on that sixth day of Creation -- woman. Thus, the woman, created after man, is the most spiritual being in the world. One of the ways this more advanced spirituality is manifest is that woman does not need a Brit Milah. This, then, may help explain that enigmatic Talmudic statement. Because woman is already more spiritual at birth, she needs no Brit Milah to perfect herself as man does.

Another aspect of woman's higher spirituality is demonstrated in the differences between man and woman regarding the observance of positive commandments that are time-bound. A man is obligated in these commandments while a woman is not obligated (Mishnah, Kiddushin 1:7). It has been suggested that because a woman is created with more spirituality, she does not need these "extra" Mitzvot to perfect herself, while man who has less spirituality needs these commandments and also needs to further develop his sensitivity to time to reach a higher spiritual plane (see chapter about "The Jewish Attitude to Time").

The Symbolism of the Number Eight - Just as each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is a number as well as a letter, numbers in Judaism also symbolize many of the ideas and concepts (on many levels) to which each number is attached. According to Maharal (Mishnah, Kiddushin 1:7), the number seven symbolizes in Judaism everything natural, everything part of the original creation. Thus, there are seven days of the week. The seven days of the creation of nature itself, a seven-year cycle of land where man works with nature, a forty-nine-year cycle (seven times seven) of the land in Jewish law, etc. There are seven notes in the natural music scale and seven colors in the natural spectrum. The number eight, however, symbolizes all things beyond creation, or the supernatural. This explains why the Brit Milah is supposed to take place specifically on the eighth day of a newborn's life. The circumcision, which is beyond creation, takes place on day eight and not day seven to show that man is supposed to go beyond nature in the world. It also symbolizes the unnatural existence of the Jewish people who have survived as a nation, as symbolized by the Brit Milah, not by natural means, but by God's Providence. Similarly, there are eight days of Chanukah, not seven, due to the supernatural nature of the miracle with the oil, and, in addition, to prevent the belief that the miracle of the battle was a natural occurrence.

This interplay between seven and eight is demonstrated in many other aspects of Jewish ritual. The holidays of Passover and Sukkot both symbolize, among other ideas, holidays of nature with the bringing of the Omer offering (Leviticus 23:9-14) on Passover and the celebration of the harvest and blessing of the four species on Sukkot (Leviticus 23:39-40). Yet, each of these "natural" holidays is followed by an eighth day of a holiday that symbolizes the uniqueness of the Jewish people. Immediately following Sukkot is Shemini Atzeret, a day devoid of any ties to nature (a Jew is forbidden from taking the Four Species or sit in the Sukkah on this day) that is a special day of "saying goodbye" between God and the Jewish people. This same concept is celebrated on Shavuot, the "eighth" day of Passover, albeit seven weeks after that holiday. This day is a special experience between the Jewish people and God, celebrating the supernatural event of Revelation on Mount Sinai.

The number eight is also symbolic of perfection. As noted above, Abraham was called complete or perfect only when he circumcised himself (Genesis 17:1). As explained above, the role of man in the world is to perfect it (8), and to improve upon nature (7). The Jewish symbol of that perfection on earth is the Tabernacle, or Holy Temple, and anything associated with it. It was for this reason, therefore, that Priests serving in the Temple could not have any physical imperfections or deformities (Leviticus 21:17), and neither could the sacrifices offered (Leviticus 20:22). It is also why many of the symbols of the Temple are associated with the number eight. The High Priest wore eight special vestments of clothing while performing the service in the Temple, eight poles were used for carrying the vessels in the Tabernacle, eight varieties of spices were used in making the anointment oil, and eight musical instruments accompanied the Levites singing the Psalms in the Temple (Rabbeinu Bechaya commentary on Leviticus 9:1, discusses all the confluence of "eights" in the Temple.). An animal had to be at least eight days old before it could be sacrificed (Leviticus 22:27). It was no accident that the Priests dedicated the Tabernacle on the eighth day of inauguration (Leviticus 22:27). The number eight is also associated with the concept of future perfection, Messianic times, as the harp of the Messiah will have eight strings (Arachin 13b).

A Jewish Brit is a New Creation - The Hebrew word for covenant, Brit, is derived from the Hebrew word Briah, creation (Kuzari 1:97). What does this mean and what is its significance? A new creation today is formed when two separate entities combine to form something else. This is the essence of every covenant, Brit. The very first mention of Brit in the Torah is the rainbow following the flood that destroyed the world and saved Noah (Genesis 9:9). The symbol of this Brit is incomplete, a rainbow of half of a circle. Why

only half? Because each part of a Brit by itself is incomplete, such as the half circle of the rainbow symbolizing God's half of the covenant. It is only in combination with a new object, when a new creation is forged, along with man's part/half, that both parties contribute, and then the Brit become complete.

It is also interesting to note that in a Jewish covenant, Brit, the verb Lichrot, to cut off is used to describe the forging of a Brit (Nehemiah 9:8 is but one of many examples of this.). To forge a special covenant with Abraham (in addition to the Brit Milah), God commanded Abraham to cut the pieces of three animals in half (Genesis 15:9-10). What is the significance of cutting off in forming a Brit? Only when each party "cuts off" something of himself and gives up a part of his own identity, can this new unit, a new creation, emerge. Thus, as part of this new creation of Brit, Abraham takes on a new name (Genesis 17:1-7), as he becomes a new person, a new creation.

All of these symbols converge in a Brit Milah. A new creation, a new (complete) human being emerges after a Brit Milah. The covenant, Brit, is between the child and God, as the child is not complete without the spiritual component added by the Brit Milah, just as God is "incomplete" without this covenant with His people. And the Brit is forged by cutting off, removing a part of oneself to become unity with the other party (God). It is at that moment, therefore, that a Jewish boy receives his name, as he becomes a new entity, a new creation.

Thus, Brit Milah has significance for the Jew both on the individual level as well as the symbolic level. It demonstrates the Jew's commitment to God and his willingness to sacrifice to keep the relationship with God. Finally, it symbolizes the continuity of Judaism from the first Jew, Abraham, to today's Jew, uniting them through this commandment.

*** 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

Eviction Affliction

Rav Jonathan Bailey

To understand the affliction of tzara'at, the ideal would have been for God to have explained it to us. Well, He didn't. So, the next best method would have been to look at all the times it occurs – as a reprimand – in Chumash, and compare the circumstances, people involved, etc.; well, it only happens once, with Miriam's criticism of Moshe at the end of Parshat Be'ha'alotkha. So what method is left to us? In this week's two parshiyot, the types of tzara'at are enumerated, along with the negative consequences, and purification processes. We know that God's punishments are always perfectly reflective of the crime, so if we understand the ramifications to the punishment and the method of purification, they will serve as an ample source for our understanding of the reason behind this enigmatic affliction.

To begin, there are only three 'places' where tzara'at can occur: on people (skin), their clothing or their houses. Also, when someone is officially determined a metzorah, he must: let his hair grow, allow his clothing to become ragged and tattered, pull his 'hood' down over his face, publicly proclaim, 'I am impure, I am impure' and reside, alone, outside the public camp for at least seven days. Then, when he is officially rid of his affliction, he must shave off all his hair, immerse himself and his clothing, bring a collection of korbanot and have the oil and blood of these korbanot sprinkled upon him. Then he is permitted to return to the camp but not to his house, for he must reside another seven days outside of his personal abode and only a week after his official return may he finally enter his house. These are all the facts we have from the text.

If we look at the list of possible affected areas, we can immediately discern a common theme: all these locales are used as societal definers. How you look, how you dress, what kind of house you live in; and the 'better' these characteristics, the 'higher' you are in society. So, our picture is now a bit sharper: this punishment's affliction is societal specific. Then, when a person is declared a true metzorah, he must let his hair grow wild, let his clothing become tattered, he must cover his face, publicly proclaim to his neighbors that he is impure and, most blatant of all, he must leave society and live alone! So, the punishment's repercussions, too, are directly connected to society, for the process totally removes the afflicted from his societal status. When he finally wants to reenter society, he must first shave off his hair, immerse himself and his clothing ('immersion' is the Torah's metaphorical symbol of rebirth), but nonetheless only returns to the general society, for he must still remain outside his own, personal house. After seven days – seven days of being 'right there' but just not all the way in – he may totally reenter society.

To review: the social status symbols are directly afflicted; the punishment demands a total disregarding of every aspect of societal standing; a return requires removal and subsequent recreation of social standing and seven days of enforced introspection before returning fully to society. What we can now posit, therefore, is that the punishment of tzara'at was for one who corrupted socially, so that God reciprocates perfectly with an enforced corruption of the transgressor's society. It is not coincidental, therefore, that the Midrash attributes the transgression of Lashon Harah as the cause of this affliction – Lashon Harah concerns the corrupting of the preexisting social system by introducing facts and information that directly lead to the damaging of another's social standing. And, to return to our last proof-source, Miriam: if you read the episode carefully, you will see that even when Moshe's prayer to restore her health is accepted, God still requires her to remain outside of the camp for seven days! For if one receives tzara'at for a social crime (she criticized the leader of the nation, seeking to lower his status (which is why God immediately responds with 'Moshe is the greatest of all, we speak face to face' i.e. he's the 'highest')), although the actual affliction may heal, the lesson still must be learned – so she had to remain alone, to introspect, even though the prayer for the physical affliction was received.

This, I believe, is the meaning behind tzara'at and this, I believe, is the Torah's emphasis of the utmost severity in belittling, disparaging or undermining your fellow human. The misconceived, erroneous notion that is so easily believed that as long as we're good 'God-Jews' then we don't have to be good 'People-Jews' is one that the Torah recognized even at the inception of the nation and one that God looked to prevent with the most dramatic of methods.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Triple Covering

Tzaraas can manifest itself either on the body, on the clothing, or on the walls of the home. The Medrash, cited by the Daas Zekeinem M'Baalei Tosfos as well as the Rambam (Hilchos Tumaas Tzaraas), explains that these three possible kinds of tzaraas are interrelated. They represent a progression of severity that correspond to three different points on the timeline of spiritual decay. At first, Hashem inflicts our homes with tzaraas, in order to encourage us to improve. However, that is just a cautionary shot across the bow. If we heed Hashem's message and see the error of our ways, the tzaraas on the walls of our home will dissipate and not spread any further. However, if we continue down the same sinful trajectory then Hashem will send tzaraas again, this time not to our home but to our clothing, which is more direct and difficult to ignore. If we somehow manage to overlook this warning as well, then the tzaraas will appear on our skin itself, presenting an unmistakable and immediate calamity that demands our undivided attention.

The Kli Yakar observes that the three areas wherein tzaraas can materialize are all coverings. Our skin covers our bodies which is in turn covered by our clothing all of which are housed inside of our home. The Megaleh Amukos claims that the tzaraas found on these three coverings corresponds to the corruption of the three mitzvos which we use to cover ourselves on a daily basis. The Gemara

(Menachos 43b) states that Hashem surrounded us with mitzvos in order to deter us from sinning. The tefillin which covers our heads and arms, the tzitzis which adorn our garments, and the mezuzah which is placed on the outside of our home, are all meant to serve as a protective covering and barrier to sin. The tefilin protect our bodies, the tzitzis cover our clothing, and the mezuzah secures our home. Therefore, when one develops tzaraas as a result of habitual sinning, it is appropriate and instructive that the tzaraas manifest itself specifically on one of these three coverings, each of which is safeguarded by a different mitzvah, which was willfully disregarded somewhere along the way.

In addition, the Gemara (Arachin 15b) states that one of the specific sins that most often precipitates an episode of tzaraas is lashon hara, evil and harmful speech. The Gemara continues and explains that in order to protect us from speaking lashon hara, Hashem surrounded our tongue with three covering or obstacles to sin. The tongue is positioned horizontally in a resting position, as opposed to the other limbs of the body which are vertical and poised to act. In addition, the tongue is further shielded by a wall of teeth, which is then enclosed within our lips that can be completely sealed. Therefore, it should not be surprising that there are also three possible forms of tzaraas that can contaminate the individual who presumably spoke lashon hara by breaching the three defensive measures protecting the tongue, and that part of his rehabilitation should include being exiled from all of the three encampments and settlements which encircle and protect the Mishkan (see Vayikra 13, 46).

The fact that our tongue and mouth are so heavily fortified emphasizes the importance of our speech and indicates the potential our mouths have to be a vehicle for kedushah and holiness. In a certain sense, our tongue, which is thrice secured, is comparable only to the holy Ark which was also blanketed beneath three protective layers while traveling, consisting of the paroches, the skin of a tachash, and a cloth dyed with techeiles (see Bamidbar 4, 5-6). Rav Yisrael Salanter explains that Parshas Shemini, which speaks about forbidden foods, is followed by Parshas Tazria and Metzorah which deals with the consequences of speaking lashon hara, in order to teach us that we must be just as careful about what goes in our mouth as what comes out of our mouth. Unfortunately, often, even those people who would never dream of eating something which is prohibited have no qualms about speaking lashon hara. Perhaps for this reason, while often a double seal is sufficient to ensure that food is kosher, our tongue and our speech require a triple covering.

chiefrabbi.org

Yom Ha'atzmaut 75: A call for Jewish unity

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

19 April 2023

As we celebrate 75 glorious years of the state of Israel, let us draw some inspiration from Psalm 75. The Psalm commences, "Lamenatseach, al tashcheit." It's dedicated to the musician, and the opening message is,

"Al tashcheit," – "Do not destroy."

This, according to our commentators, is a plea by the Jewish people to our enemies: Do not seek to annihilate us. We respect the divine soul which exists in every human being. We want to get on well with everybody. We want to live in harmony and peace with our neighbours. Why do you seek to destroy us?

The State of Israel was created only three years after an attempt to annihilate the entire Jewish people, when six million innocent Jewish women, men and children were brutally murdered and throughout the 75 years of Medinat Yisrael, we have continued to cry out,

"Al tashcheit," – "Do not destroy," – because we recognise that there are those with malevolent intent who seek the destruction of the state.

Now, fascinatingly, there is another psalm, Psalm 57, which starts with exactly the same words: Lemenatseach, al tashcheit – for the musician, do not destroy. The Alshich explains the context over there to be very different.

David, he explains, was on the run from King Saul, who sought to kill him. David and his warriors were able to corner Saul, and the warriors asked for the green light to go in for the kill. But David called out to them and he said, "Al tashcheit." – "Don't destroy."

Yes, there are deep and bitter divisions between us, but we have a responsibility to guarantee Jewish unity.

During the past 75 miraculous years, thanks to the daily intervention of Hashem, He has preserved Medinat Yisrael against all odds. And it's also thanks to Jewish unity – both within Israel and between Israel and the diaspora – which has empowered Israel to succeed as it has.

As we now celebrate this very special day, we pray to Hashem that he will bless and protect us from our enemies without, and, through our efforts to preserve Jewish unity, may we thereby ensure that we will be blessed to have many many happy returns of this glorious and festive day.

I wish you all chag sameach.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Metzorah :: Strange Altar-Fellows

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Metzora deals with the purification process of the person afflicted with tzora'as. After the disease healed, the formerly afflicted person is instructed to bring a sacrifice that includes two very diametrical items. "And he shall take two birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop (Leviticus 14:4)." The Torah details the offering and all of its intricacies, leaving the commentaries to ponder the symbolism of the wood of the tallest of trees bound together with the lowly moss of the hyssop.

Rashi explains that, "the hyssop symbolizes the humility that the metzora should have," and the cedar," he explains, "is a symbolic reminder that he who holds himself as high as the cedar tree should learn to lower himself like the hyssop."

However, wouldn't hyssop alone teach us this characteristic or at least symbolize humility? What point is there in bringing cedar? And, in fact, if bringing moss represents the need for humility couldn't the offering of cedar represent the need for pride? Perhaps there is another explanation for the two attributes to be joined.

A few years after Rabbi Shneur Kotler succeeded his late father Reb Ahron as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Lakewood Yeshiva, the Yeshiva's enrollment began to expand. No longer was Reb Shneur able to sit and study in the large Yeshiva all day. He was suddenly forced to raise funds day in and day out often leaving early in the morning and returning home way past midnight.

A brief respite was the annual convention of Agudath Israel at which nearly 1000 laymen and rabbinical leaders would gather for a long weekend to discuss the state of Torah affairs.

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, the oldest member of the Council of Torah Sages would often highlight the keynote session on Saturday night. As the eldest of the world's Torah sages, Reb Yaakov would find a way to sneak up to the dais, usually through a back door, to avoid having the entire crowd arise upon seeing his presence as is required by Jewish Law. Yet this year things were different. Reb Yaakov engaged the much younger, Reb Shneur in conversation outside the large ballroom and waited until everyone took his or her seats. Then he took Reb Shneur by the hand and said, "I think it is time we took our seats." He proudly held Reb Shneur by the arm and escorted him to the dais as the throng of people rose in awe.

Reb Shneur, stunned by Reb Yaakov's departure from his trademark humility asked him why he did not go through the back as was his usual custom.

"Reb Shneur," he explained, "your Rebbitzen (rabbi's wife) is sitting in the auditorium . The entire year she sees you in a much-dishonored light. You run from donor to donor in order to keep the Yeshiva open, you have hardly any time to prepare your lectures, and all she sees are people knocking on your door with their problems. Yet she stands beside you faithful and unwavering. It is time that she sees that you get a little kavod (honor).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Gur (1799-1866) explains that sometimes people become so humbled to the point of forgetting that they can actually achieve wonderful accomplishments. Often, humility breeds self-effacement that may lead to despair. Of course Rashi is correct in explaining that those who are haughty as the cedar must humble themselves as mass, but one must also bear in mind an equally important fact – that at times after one has been humiliated as low as the hyssop he must rise in his own eyes to the height of a cedar and proudly exclaim that he can and will accomplish the lofty and far reaching goal to which he or she aspires. And those are goals that only the cedar's limbs can touch.

So, perhaps the lowly hyssop must be bound with a seemingly mismatched and more supercilious counterpart, the cedar. Because when they are offered hand-in-hand, they may have a lot to learn from each other.

Soon to be available: Parsha Parables — A collection of the best of Drasha! This will be available at a special pre-publication price for subscribers of Project Genesis – see details in this week's Lifeline mailing!

In memory of Joseph Fertig by Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Fertig

Good Shabbos!

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tazria

A Joyful Time Should Be Had by All

At the beginning of Parshas Tazria, the Torah says that after a woman gives birth to a male son, she is ritually impure for seven days. Then, following immersion in a mikva (a ritual bath), she returns to a state of ritual purity. On the eighth day, male sons are circumcised. The Talmud in Niddah (31b) provides a very interesting reason for performing the bris milah on the eighth day.

During the seven days of ritual impurity following the birth of a son, the mother is a niddah. In early generations, prior to subsequent rabbinic prohibitions which exist today, the husband and wife were finally allowed to fully be together by the eighth day.

The Gemara explains that the reason why we wait until the eighth day for the bris milah and the accompanying celebration is that prior to this time, the happiness of the husband and wife are limited by the prohibition against intimately sharing their joy together. The lack of ability by husband and wife to celebrate fully might even dampen the spirits and restrict the enjoyment of the other guests. Therefore, the Torah established that milah be 'delayed' until the eighth day, so that everyone will be able to fully participate in the joyous occasion.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein zt"l (the Slobodka Rosh Yeshiva) points out that the Torah is expressing tremendous sensitivity for people's feelings. This passage essentially says that milah should really be performed sooner. The Torah has us wait until the eighth day to make sure that everyone who is present at the bris will be able to fully enjoy themselves.

The concept of sharing happy occasions and maximizing everyone's simcha is so basic to Torah ethics that it justifies 'postponing' milah until the eighth day.

Rav Moshe Mordechai pointed out a parallel to a minhag during the Yizkor prayer in memory of the dead, which we say four times a year—on Yom Kippur, and at the end of the three major holidays (Pesach, Shavuos, and Shemini Atzeres following Sukkos). There is a virtually universal custom that when Yizkor is said, people whose parents are both still living leave the sanctuary during the recital. What is the reason for this custom?

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein wrote that the reason for this custom is the very concept mentioned earlier. Yizkor is usually recited on Yom Tov. If reciting Yizkor is not exactly a joyous experience for the people whose parents are deceased, it can at least be a comforting experience to remember their loved ones on Yom Tov. But if the other people witness this and watch friends and relatives perhaps shedding tears for departed parents, that would affect and contradict their enjoyment of the Yom Tov. We are trying to avoid this. We try to provide the appropriate form of Simchas Yom Tov (happiness on the holiday) for everyone.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Loneliness versus Societal Life – Tazri'a-Metzora

Parashat Tazri'a Metzora - 5783

The portions of Tazri'a-Metzora, which we will read this week, deal with a variety of impurities, the halachic implications stemming from a state of impurity – such as distancing oneself from the Temple – and the ways to purify oneself from these states. At the center of these is the "metzorah" – a person who suffered from a skin disease that is unlike other diseases that are treated in conventional medical ways. "Tzara'at" – which is not Hansen's Disease – is viewed by the Torah as punishment for misconduct. The result of this is that the treatment is not done by a doctor but by a kohen (priest), and the methods of treatment do not include conventional remedies as in any other disease but include special sacrifices that the "metzorah" brings to the Temple.

The Sages interpreted "tzara'at" as punishment for the sin of "lashon hara" (slander). A person who takes advantage of his social connections to say negative things about others is punished with this disease. The removal of the "metzora" from human society until the disease disappears

is interpreted as part of the punishment intended to restore the correct relationship between the individual and society, and to understand the negativity of slander.

Each person faces two inherent contradictory tendencies: individualism versus collective affiliation, singularity versus sociality. On the one hand, man is a social being, he wants to be part of a community, and loneliness is a harsh punishment for him. On the other hand, a person feels a deep need to preserve his uniqueness, his personality, and the feelings and insights that exist only in him. No one has an exact replica of himself, nor is there anyone who can know and understand man accurately — except himself.

Sometimes, the collective blurs the individual. A person is surrounded by society from the day he is born. This may lead him to lose his personal identity, not listen to himself, not recognize his hidden personal desires, and in fact, miss the deepest and richest experience of his life. Sometimes the opposite occurs when a person feels that society threatens his personal identity, so he seeks to quit society and isolate himself to discover a rich personal world even at the steep price of loneliness.

Is there a way to balance the uniqueness of each person with life in society? There is, and it is with what is he called 'ayin tova' – a positive outlook. A person who looks at others and society with appreciation, recognizes the value of human beings and seeks to learn from them and improve – does not dismiss the conventions of society, but acquires from it the advantages it provides. When one does so while maintaining one's own voice, one gains the benefits of individuality as well as the advantages of collective affiliation.

A person who speaks slanderously about others adopts a negative view of them, and therefore of society; perhaps out of fear that a positive view of society will suppress his own independent and unique personality. This perspective and the resulting behavior poison societal life. This person not only loses the ability to enjoy a proper societal life, but also harms his environment.

How is "tzara'at" related to this? In some places in the Torah, we find "tzara'at" to be an expression of death, of decay. A person who rejects societal life and strives for extreme individualism loses an important dimension of life. In describing the creation of the world in the book of Genesis, we find G-d's judgment of creation. Again and again the sentence is repeated, "And G-d saw that it was good." All of creation is good, except for one thing: "It is not good for man to be alone." Loneliness is not the way for the individual to develop. On the contrary, it is precisely through social interaction that the person is called upon to develop his independent personality.

A person who speaks slanderously creates social decay. There is no choice but to temporarily banish this person from society in order to enable him to appreciate life in society. The loneliness that the "metzora" is commanded to experience is the cure for his illness that harms society as a whole.

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

Rav Kook Torah

Rav Kook on Tazria: Shiloh and the Birth-Offerings

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Torah portion of Tazria begins with the offerings of women who recently gave birth. Astonishingly, it was due to these birth-offerings that a distinguished lineage of priests was permanently disqualified from serving in the Temple. Even more tragically, this incident led to the destruction of the Shiloh Tabernacle, the forerunner to the Temple in Jerusalem, after serving nearly for four centuries as the spiritual hub of the Jewish people (Yoma 9a).

The Sin of Eli's Sons

The book of Samuel paints a disturbing picture of the Temple service in Shiloh. The sons of Eli were insensitive priests who would take their portions by force, treating the Temple offerings with contempt (I Sam. II:17). Their most egregious offense, according to the reports reaching the ears of their father, was that "they slept with the women who streamed to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (I Sam. II:22).

The Talmud cautions against taking this verse literally: "Anyone who says the sons of Eli sinned is mistaken" (Shabbat 55b). If so, what does it mean that "they slept with the women"?

According to the Sages, they failed to promptly offer the birth-offerings, thus preventing the women from returning home. Not trusting the priests to bring the offerings, the women remained in Shiloh until they saw with their own eyes that their offering was completed. Eli's sons' inattentive service caused the women to be unnecessarily separated from their husbands; the verse refers to their irresponsible behavior as if they had slept with them.

Is this some form of Talmudic obfuscation, with the rabbis downplaying the abuse perpetrated by Eli's sons? Why should this offense be the cause for the destruction of the Tabernacle?

The Purpose of the Temple Service

If we wish to understand what brought about the fall of the Tabernacle in Shiloh, we should not assign too much weight to passing incidents, grave though they may be. Rather we should look for signs of moral decay that undermined the foundations of the Temple service and its purpose.

The Divine service is integrally connected with the goal of sanctifying life. We cannot fully elevate life in all of its aspects, in its pinnacles and its crises, unless we are able to connect life to its Source, to the Creator of all life.

Life also includes times of trouble and distress. What will restore its natural happiness and joy? What will rejuvenate it and grant it nobility and grace? This can only be

accomplished by uncovering the holiness found in all aspects of life.

The Birth-Offering

The birth of a child is a wonderful occasion, bringing new life and joy to the family. But the birthing experience itself is a challenging one, involving great pain and suffering. The complex experiences of the woman giving birth can generate stress and tension, and are only overcome with the passage of time, as life returns to its usual joy and happiness.

What can cleanse the difficult impressions and feelings that result from this suffering, rooted in the failings of Adam and Eve in the beginnings of humanity? Their remedy requires an act of drawing near to God. The new mother elevates her birthing experience with her chatat and olah offerings, rectifying the shortcomings caused by the rebellious tendencies of the human heart. This act of devotion opens her heart will love for her Creator, filling her with a profound appreciation for the greatness of the One who gives life to all creatures.

In short: the Temple offerings must reflect a harmony between the Divine service and the goal of elevating life. This is especially true for the offerings brought after giving birth. True morality cannot sanction the idea of a mechanical Temple service, disconnected from the people and their lives.

The Service in Shiloh

The unfeeling, even tyrannical, atmosphere that existed in the Shiloh Tabernacle - the absence of ethical sensitivity, the lack of integrity and compassion, the disconnect from the needs of the people, by an order of priests who paraded their elevated station over the people - this climate created an artificial divide between the principles of morality and the Temple service. In the end, it destroyed the reign of the priestly family of Eli. These callous priests saw no connection between their service and the sanctification of life. Ultimately, their actions brought about the downfall of the Tabernacle in Shiloh.

The priests should have seen the birth-offering as a vehicle to elevate life. How could they delay these offerings, thus impairing their primary purpose: shalom bayit - harmony and peace in family life?

Eli's sons mistakenly viewed their priesthood as an entitlement. Instead of a service based on purity and holiness, their service reeked of high-handed arrogance. They were functionaries, focusing solely on the technical aspects of the Temple service.

It was this corruption that caused the Tabernacle's destruction - something that no specific sinful act could bring about. Had Eli's sons truly sinned as written, such a state would not have continued for long without correction. The service in Shiloh did not suffer from any particular evil incident, but from a moral decay at its core, necessitating its destruction in order to be corrected.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 49-50)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Tazria-Metzora
פרשת תזריע-מצורע תשפ"ג

Parashas Tazria

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

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

The custom among Jews is to wish the father of the newly-circumcised infant, *K'sheim she'nichnas l'bris, kein yikanes l'Torah, u'lechuppah, u'lmaasim tovim*, "As the infant enters into the covenant of *Bris Milah*, so, too, should he enter into Torah, *chuppah*/marriage and the performance of good deeds." Many commentators have offered interpretations of this statement by *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 137b) – each one intimating an important lesson. I will share but a few. *Tochachas Chaim* explains the concept behind *k'sheim she'nichnas*, "As the (infant) enters into the *Bris*": When a father brings his newborn son into the covenant of Avraham *Avinu*, it is a momentous occasion – one for which he spares no expense. He seeks the finest, most experienced *mohel*, ritual circumcisor, and prepares a decent to lavish *seudah*, festive meal, following the *bris*. Even one who is not swimming in money does what he can to celebrate this auspicious event. When the child begins to grow up and it is time to arrange for his education, however, the father's deep pockets are suddenly empty. He is prepared to get by with a mediocre *rebbe*/tutor whose going rate is less than the sought after, experienced *rebbe*. When it is time to marry off his son, he is suddenly on an austerity program, in which every penny counts. The father must remember that, while *Bris Milah* is important and life-altering, so, too, is Torah study and marriage. They go hand-in-hand.

Alternatively, when an infant enters the covenant, he has no vested interests, no ego, no anxiety concerning what he personally benefits from this experience. Likewise, his approach to studying Torah and the performance of good deeds should not be oriented towards personal gain, recognition, an opportunity to aggrandize himself and his activities. He should study Torah *lishmah*, for its sake, and carry out acts of lovingkindness simply because it is Hashem's command.

The *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah* transforms the infant forever. It is an indelible sign on his body that remains with him from cradle to grave. Likewise, one should never divest himself of his marriage obligations and his commitment to Torah study. Sadly, we find excuses to rationalize our lack of interest/commitment. We somehow find time for everything but… As *Bris Milah* is a game-changer in one's commitment, marriage and regular Torah study should likewise be an intrinsic part of our lives.

Why do we wish this blessing exclusively for the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*? Why do we not extend this blessing

to every *mitzvah*? When one puts on *Tefillin*, eats *matzah*, sits in the *Succah*, makes *kiddush*, we do not say, "As you performed this *mitzvah*, so, too, shall you merit to perform other *mitzvos*." What is unique about *Bris Milah*? The *milah* experience transforms the child into a Jew. It transforms his entire body. As such, he (via the *mitzvah*) becomes a *cheftza d'mitzvah*, article of the *mitzvah*, much like *Tefillin, matzah, Succah*. Concerning other *mitzvos*, however, there is a *gavra*, man/person, who performs the *mitzvah* and a *cheftza*, the article/subject upon which the *mitzvah* is performed. We bless the child that, just as you became a *cheftza d'mitzvah* through *milah*, so, too, shall your relationship with Torah, marriage and good deeds not be an extraneous, externalized experience. It must become a part of him. This can only happen when he becomes a part of it.

I have always wondered why the word *chuppah*, which refers to the marriage canopy, is used to connote marriage. Why not simply say "marriage"? Perhaps the word *chuppah* is designed to give us a window into understanding the proper approach to Torah and *maasim tovim. Chazal* (*Gittin* 57a) relate that there used to be a tradition in Yerushalayim that, at the birth of a girl, the parents planted a cypress tree. At the birth of a boy, they planted a cedar tree. When the children grew up and were ready to marry, they cut the branches down and used them as the four poles of their *chuppah*. [Probably each parent held one pole.] Why was the wood used to fashion poles? Would it not have made more sense to use the wood to build a house for the young couple? I think the lesson to be derived herein is that parents raise their children and escort them to the *chuppah*. They prepare them for life. The actual building of their home is up to the young couple – who (if they had a good upbringing) incorporate the lessons (which their parents) infused in them into setting the standard for the moral, ethical and spiritual compass of their jointly-built home.

Having said this, the lesson of *chuppah* is: Children live their own lives based upon their education, both formal education and the modeling that they received from their parents. We pray for the *rach ha'nimol,* young circumcised child, that, just as his parents brought him to his *Bris Milah*, he should be worthy of having parents whose life lessons concerning marriage, Torah study and performance of good deeds will be worth incorporating and building upon.

Last, *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, was writing a *mazel tov* note to one of his *talmidim*, students, whose wife had recently given birth to a boy. The *Rosh Yeshivah* wrote, "I would like to share an entire litany of blessings with you. However, what can I add to *Chazal* who coined the perfect blessing that you should merit to raise him *l'Torah, u'lchuppah, u'l'maasim tovim*? Clearly, every blessing that I could give is included in these three blessings."

Parashas Metzora

ואם דל הוא ואין ידו משגת

If he is poor and his means are not sufficient. (14:21)

The Torah goes out of its way to be sensitive to the needs of one who is impoverished. I refer to one who simply has no means of providing for his family. Poverty is, for the most part, something either we hear about – but do not actually experience – or towards which we conveniently close our eyes because it makes us feel uncomfortable and guilty. This does not mean that it does not exist. Serious pockets of poverty exist all over, especially in families who have made Torah their life's endeavor. Since, *baruch Hashem,* most of us remain spectators, the feelings of hunger and hopelessness that some people experience are beyond our ability to understand.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Shlita*, relates the story of one of *Klal Yisrael's* greatest Torah giants who, at the beginning of his rise to distinction, was living in abject poverty. Once he was invited to attend the *Pesach Seder* of a prominent family. The family had *davened Tefillas Maariv* earlier in order to usher in the *Yom Tov*. As a result, the family returned home while it was still daylight. This *gadol* asked to make *kiddush* immediately. The host family was surprised. "On the *Seder* night, it is appropriate to make *kiddush* after *tzeis ha'kochavim* (nightfall; the time when three stars are visible in the sky). His rejoinder is a comment we should all take to heart: "*Chazal* teach that one who is need of the support of others, who looks to them for his sustenance, his world is dark and bleak. My world is also dark – so dark that, even if the sun is still shining outside, for me, it is dark enough to recite *kiddush*." Having said this, *Rav* Zilberstein observes that such words coming from the mouth of a *gadol b'Yisrael* should engender within us feelings of empathy for those who have less than we do. I think that empathy is not sufficient. We must do something about it.

להורות ביום הטמא וביום הטהור זאת תורת הצרעת

To rule on which day it is contaminated and on which day it is purified; this is the law of *tzaraas*. (14:57)

The one who speaks *lashon hora*, who slanders with impunity, has a jaundiced view of people. In order to speak negatively about someone, it is natural (and probably necessary) to knock down his personal opinion of the subject of his *lashon hora* a few notches. He, therefore, has no qualms about humiliating him, because, after all, what is he? While this attitude may not course through the mind of every *baal lashon hora*, the mere fact that he is callous and unfeeling concerning the feelings of his fellow Jew is an indication that he has a low opinion of him. In order to achieve atonement properly, he himself must feel the pain of being the subject of condescendence, feeling belittled, treated like a dishrag – used and thrown away.

In his *Haamek Davar* commentary to the *parshah*, the *Netziv, zl,* cites the *Raavad* in his commentary to *Toras*

Kohanim, who explains the word *l'horos* as to teach others to recognize the signs of an impure plague. Indeed, he is encouraged to call other *Kohanim* to explain and teach them, so that they will know what to do when they are asked to rule regarding the impurity of a plague. The *Netziv* explains that this is what is meant by *Zos Toras hatzaraas*, for it is only concerning *tzaraas* that we have an enjoinment to teach. Veritably, why should the *metzora* be subject to the scrutiny of an entire class of *Kohanim*? Why should he suffer the indignation of having a group of novice *Kohanim* studying his skin, looking at his body as if it were a piece of meat? Anyone who has been a patient in a teaching hospital has been subject to such scrutiny when his attending physician enters his room with a class of interns, poking and prodding. The *Netziv* explains that the *metzora* is treated to his own medicine. He had no problem shaming his fellow and putting him in an awkward position. So, too, in the course of expiating his sin, he will be treated in a similar manner.

It all boils down to how we view others. If our opinion is low, our treatment of them will reflect it. We have to find redeeming merit in every person, to elevate him in our eyes. After all, Hashem considers him worthy enough to be here, alive and well. Why should we not act likewise? The *Koznitzer Maggid, zl*, had a *chassid* who was a well-respected *Rav* in Cracow. He was a *halachic* decisor of note, loved and admired by all of Cracow. Everything seemed to be going well, except for one dark cloud in his life which plagued him. He and his wife had yet to be blessed with a child.

The *Rav* made numerous trips to petition the *Maggid's* blessing for a child. Sadly, the *Maggid* averted his request. Finally, the *Rav* broke down and asked, "Why can the *Rav* not bless me? Am I different from all the others who have been blessed, and who are today embracing their child?"

When the *Rebbe* heard this, he looked deeply into his *chassid's* eyes and said, "My dear friend, I would do anything in my power to help you. Alas, all of the gates in Heaven are sealed to your blessing. I have tried and tried, but I have been unsuccessful in opening them."

When the *Rav* heard this, he was visibly shaken. "Does this mean that there is no hope for me to have a child?" he asked dejectedly. "No, there is one person whose access to Heavenly favor is great. His name is Yosef Drudick. Go to him and petition his blessing."

When the *Rav* heard the name Yossele Drukick, he was bowled over. Who did not know the elusive Yossele? Rather, nobody knew him because he refused to interact with people. He was the most feared person in the community. He was introverted and wanted nothing to do with anyone. Children ran from him in terror. How could such a person be his only option for a blessing? But when the *Koznitzer* spoke, it was not to be questioned. He would make it to Yossele's broken-down shack on the outskirts of town and petition his blessing. No one had ever seen the inside of the shack that Yossele shared with his wife and children. It was where Yossele remained enclosed in his own world, isolated from everyone. During the week, however, he would go out and travel from village to village repairing pots and pans.

The *Rav* figured that he would just show up at Yossele's door *Erev Shabbos* and say that he had nowhere to spend *Shabbos*. Could he be their guest? The following Friday he implemented his plan, arriving at Yossele's house just before *Shabbos*. He knocked on the door and was met by a woman who asked what he wanted. He related his tale of woe and pleaded with her to allow him to stay for *Shabbos*. Her response was an emphatic, "No." "My husband does not allow people into the house." After tearful begging, she said, "You can stay in the back with the horses, but the house is strictly off limits." He went to the back and made himself comfortable with the two old horses that would pull Yossele's wagon. This was not his idea of *Shabbos*, but he must listen to his *Rebbe*.

Just before sunset, as he was about to usher in *Shabbos Kodesh*, he heard a loud knock at the door. He opened it to come face to face with the dread Yossele. "What are you doing here?" he asked. The *Rav* began to stammer out his story. "You can remain here, but under no circumstances may you come to the house," Yossele warned.

That *Shabbos* was one to remember. The *Rav* had some *challah* that he brought with him. It was to be his meals, which he ate in solitude together with the horses. On Friday night, he was fitful, as sleep was hard to come by between the odor of the horses and the cold that seeped through the old broken walls. *Shabbos* morning was no better. Indeed, he was counting the minutes until he could escape from this misery.

All day, he was disconcerted by the thoughts coursing through his mind. Why was he here? To get a *brachah* from a man whom he had (like so many others) shunned and reviled. He had erected a wall between himself and the Yosseles of this world – and now he needed him. It was the Yossele whom he had avoided that held the keys to his becoming a father. He introspected on this: "I have erected a wall between me and 'them'. They have neither been accepted nor welcomed, because they were different." The *Rav* said to himself, "I am really not deserving or worthy of Yossele's blessing. I have shunned him, and now I ask for his favor? This is hypocrisy!" When he realized his shortcomings vis-à-vis those who did not fit in his "circle," he broke down in bitter weeping.

It was at that moment that he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to behold a man with a silver-white beard that seemed to glow. His eyes shone brightly and (he felt) bore through him to the core of his soul. The image was metaphysical. "Come into my home," the man smiled. "Let us wash for *shalosh seudos*."

He walked into the house as if in a trance. There was a table covered with a clean, white tablecloth. There was challah, wine and gefilte fish, but above all, it was a welcoming, although other-worldly, scene. The *Rav* just sat there and listened to the beautiful melodies emanating from Yossele's mouth. Suddenly, Yossele stopped singing and moaned, "Oy*, Srultche Koznitzer ken mir shoin oichet, "Oy*, the *Koznitzer Maggid* also knows about me." (Apparently, Yossele was one of the *lamed vav*, thirty-six, holy *tzaddikim*, that grace each generation. They seek neither recognition nor acclaim. They devote their lives to unblemished devotion to Hashem.)

Yossele asked the *Rav*, "How can I help you?" "I request a *brachah* for a child." "You will be blessed with a child" was Yossele's immediate response. "There is one condition. You must name him Yossele."

The lesson is quite clear: If we bond with others, we will not speak negatively. Hashem will then listen to our prayers.

Sponsored in loving memory of our mother
דבורה רחל בת ר' אברהם מרדכי ע"ה - נפ' ג' אייר - תנצב"ה
Dr. Morris and Marcie Kinast

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha
For the week ending 22 April 2023 / 1 Iyar 5783
Facts and Formulae For the Forgetful
Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Here we are, post Pesach, and an interesting issue of repetition has come up again (no pun intended). Over the course of the last Yom Tov filled month, and right up to, and including this Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar, a simple question might elicit a very different rabbinic response. The subject? What does one do if the halachically mandated 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' in Birkas Hamazon[1] was forgotten? Does Bentching need to be repeated or not? And why would there be different answers to a seemingly straightforward sheilah?

Repeating Rationales

This quite common clique of queries is not new; it is actually addressed several hundred years ago in the very first printed halachic responsum of the renowned Rav Akiva Eiger zt"l.[2] Someone wrote to Rav Eiger explaining that some members of his household forgot to say 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' in Bentching, and his local Rabbi told them to repeat Birkas Hamazon. Yet, the questioner seemed to recall a different time when faced with the same dilemma his rabbi ruled not to repeat Bentching. So, this perplexed person, as opposed to doing what most would do in his situation – request an explanation and halachic rationale from said rabbi, instead decided to write to the Gadol Hador seeking an elucidation.

Rav Eiger responded that Birkas Hamazon must be repeated when someone forgets 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on Yom Tov. However, if it was forgotten on Rosh Chodesh then one does not repeat Bentching. The distinction is fascinating! It lies in the different halachic requirements for a festive bread meal ('Seudah'). Yom Tov, just like Shabbos, has an actual requirement of 'Seudah,' therefore if one does not mention the Yom Tov day in Birkas Hamazon as part of 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' or likewise, Retzei on Shabbos, he must repeat the whole Bentching.[3]

On the other hand, Rosh Chodesh is different. Although there is a Mitzvah to have a 'Seudah' on it, it is not actually halachically required,[4] and therefore Bentching is not repeated if 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' was forgotten.[5] [6] Accordingly, on this (or any) Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, if one would forget 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' in Bentching, he would not repeat his Bentching;[7] whereas if it was Retzei that was forgotten, he would.

Women's Rights

Yet, Rav Akiva Eiger added a caveat. He states that if the letter writer was referring to a woman forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' then even on Yom Tov she should not repeat Birkas Hamazon. He explains that a women's requirement to have a bread 'Seudah' on Yom Tov is due to the Mitzvah of Oneg / Simchas Yom Tov and falls under the category of a 'Mitzvas Asei Shehazman Gerama,' a time-bound positive commandment, from which women are technically generally exempt.[8] Therefore, he rules, if a woman forgot 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' she should not repeat Bentching, as she was not halachically mandated to have bread at the 'Seudah.'

The sole exceptions to this rule are on Shabbos, due to the joint obligations of positive and negative commandments (Zachor V'Shamor)[9] that men and women are equally obligated in following, and on the first night of Pesach regarding eating Matzah, which likewise has a joint obligation of positive and negative commandments (not eating chometz and eating Matzah).[10] Exclusively on these specific times, Rav Eiger maintains, would a women indeed need to repeat Bentching.

Requiring Repeating

However, opposition to Rav Akiva Eiger's novel ruling regarding women was not long in coming, most notably by Rav Shlomo Cohen zt"l, eminent Dayan in Vilna and author of several authoritative sefarim, including the Cheshek Shlomo, and Shu"t Binyan Shlomo.[11]

These decisors noted that the Shulchan Aruch, when he codified this halacha, did not seem to make any distinction between which Yom Tov it was, nor between men's and women's obligations, when he ruled that one must repeat Bentching if 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' was mistakenly forgotten. Additionally, according to the understanding of many great authorities, including the Pri Megadim, Sha'agas Aryeh, Shoel' U'Meishiv, and Shulchan Aruch Harav, women are obligated in the same level of Mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov that men are, including the Mitzvah to have a bread 'Seudah.'[12] According to this understanding, women

would also need to repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' on any Yom Tov.

The Defense Rests (and Does Not Repeat)

However, Rav Eiger did not take this lying down. In the hashmatos (appendix) to his original teshuva, Rav Akiva Eiger later defended his ruling, addressing these valid points raised. He maintained that although women obviously are included in the Mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov, he makes a distinction that their requirement is referring to wearing new clothing and celebrating Yom Tov with Bassar V'Yayin (meat and wine); yet, without an actual obligation to partake in a bread 'Seudah.'

Rav Eiger cites proof to this assessment, that we find regarding the halacha of repeating Bentching, the Shulchan Aruch rules that Chol Hamoed has similar status to Rosh Chodesh, and one does not repeat Birkas Hamazon if he forgot 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.'[13] Yet, Chol HaMoed being part and parcel of Yom Tov, still retains the obligation for Simchas Yom Tov. Therefore, concludes Rav Eiger, it stands to reason that the Mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov alone does not sufficiently mandate an actual bread 'Seudah.'

Bottom Line

So, how do contemporary authorities rule, having to choose a path between such luminaries of generations past? While several poskim rule stringently that a woman should repeat Birkas Hamazon if she forgot 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on Yom Tov, reportedly including Rav Moshe Feinsteinzt"l,[14] and others seem undecided;[15] it seems that most contemporary authorities, including the Sdei Chemed, and the Maharsham, and more recently, the Debreciner Rav and the Shevet Halevi,[16] rule that a woman should not repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on Yom Tov, except on the first night of Pesach. This is also the conclusion of several contemporary sefarim that exclusively deal with halachos pertaining to women.[17]

As an aside, these authorities add that this psak surely holds true and repetition unnecessary in the eventuality of a case where she is merely uncertain if she said 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' (and even on the first night of Pesach).[18] They assert that aside from following Rav Akiva Eiger's trailblazing ruling, there is additional justification to allow leniency for women regarding repetition of Bentching due to lapse of 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' based on several minority opinions.[19] Indeed, mv"r Rav Yaakov Blau zt"l (Chaver Badatz Eida Chareidis in Yerushalayim and author of Pischei Choshen et al.), shortly before he was niftar,[20] as well as Rav Asher Weiss, the renowned Minchas Asher,[21] recently told this author that the ikar l'halacha follows Rav Akiva Eiger, and women should not repeat Bentching on Yom Tov for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' aside from the first night of Pesach (and of course, on Shabbos if she forgot 'Retzei').

In conclusion, if you just finished Bentching and realized (too late) that 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' was not recited, before panicking, just remember the sine qua non: Were you truly obligated to eat the 'Seudah' that you just finished? If so, then your Bentching was incomplete, and needs repetition. If not, repetition is not required as you already were yotzei 'V'achalta v'savata u'vayrachta,'[22] and are now worthy of receiving Hashem's personal favor![23] B'tayavon!

Postscript: Sefardic Supplement

It is important to note that most of this article follows the Ashkenazic rule. For Sefardim the psak may actually be somewhat different. The Kaf Hachaim, based on Tosafos' shittah that one is obligated to have bread exclusively on the first night of Sukkos and Pesach, rules that these are the only times that even a man must repeat Bentching on Yom Tov; otherwise, the well known rule of 'safek brachos lehakel' is followed.[24] Actually, and even though the Shulchan Aruch does not rule this way, many contemporary Sefardic Poskim, including the Ben Ish Chai, maintain a similar position to the Kaf Hachaim, that exclusively on the first nights of Pesach and Sukkos would a man have to repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.'Otherwise, even on Yom Tov, he would not repeat Birkas Hamazon.[25]

The Kaf Hachaim continues that if a man has to repeat Bentching only on these two exclusive times, then certainly, a woman, whose chiyuv to Bentch in the first place is maximum a safek Mitzvah Deoraysa or Derabbanan should not have to repeat Bentching for missing 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' at any time. Following this would mean that a woman should never have to repeat Bentching for forgetting'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.'Rav Ezriel Hildescheimer zt"l, famed founder and Rosh Yeshiva of the Rabbinical Seminary of Berlin, ruled similarly to the Kaf Hachaim, that women never need to repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.'[26]

Although many dispute the Kaf Hachaim's reasoning regarding women, including Rav Ovadiah Yosef zt"l, Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul zt"l,Rav Yaakov Hillel, and the Birur Halacha,and in the words of Rav Ovadiah, "ain b'sfaiko shel Rebbi Ezriel l'dchos haVaday shel HaGaon R' Akiva Eiger," meaning that they follow Rav Akiva Eiger's ruling of mandated repeating for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' at least regarding Shabbos and the first night of Pesach,[27] nevertheless, several authorities do indeed use the Kaf Hachaim's rationales as snifei lehakel for the rest of the Yomim Tovim, allowing women not to repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.'[28]As with any case in halacha, if this happens, one should ascertain a proper ruling for themselves from their own competent halachic authority.

The author wishes to thank mv"r Rav Yosef Yitzchak Lerner, as much of this article is based on his excellent comprehensive sefer Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 25).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: vspitz@ohr.edu.

[1]See Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 188: 5).

[2]Shu"t Rabbi Akiva Eiger (vol. 1: 1); also cited b'kitzur in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 188: 6).

[3]This entire discussion is referring to when one forgot to say 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' at all during Bentching. If one remembered during the actual Birkas Hamazon, depending at which point he remembered, there is a specific bracha to say (dependant on the holiday) and may not need to repeat his Bentching. See Shulchan Aruch and main commentaries (Orach Chaim 188: 5 – 7).

[4]See Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 419), Pri Chodosh (ad loc. 1), Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav ad loc. 1) and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 2). The Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 2) concludes that a 'Yarei Shamayim' would make sure to wash and have a 'Seudah' on Rosh Chodesh in order to honor the day properly, as one who honors the Mitzvos is rewarded many times over.

[5]Gemara Brachos (49a-b), Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 188: 6 -7), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ad loc. 10), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44: 12 - 14), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 188: 15), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 26; Biur Halacha s.v. l'rosh).

[6]This rule of not repeating Bentching includes Chol Hamoed as well (Shulchan Aruch ad loc.). However, regarding Rosh Hashana, it is not so simple. Several poskim maintain that there is no actual obligation to eat davka bread on Rosh Hashana [and although not the normative halacha, there are shittos in the Gaonim that one may actually fast on Rosh Hashana - see Mordechai (Rosh Hashana Ch. 1: 708 at length, and Yoma Ch.1: 723), Rosh (at the very end of Maseches Rosh Hashana), Terumas HaDeshen (Shu"t 278), and Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 597) and Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 1)], and therefore rule that if one forgot 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on Rosh Hashana, Bentching is not repeated. These include the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 188: 7), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eishel Avraham 7), Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 188: 10), Derech Hachaim (Hilchos Birkas Hamazon 7), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44: end 14), Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 188: 25), Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin zt"l (Shu"t Gevuros Eliyahu, vol. 1 – Orach Chaim 155: end 9), the Ba'er Moshe (Shu"t vol. 3: 38, 13; however he does admit that this ruling is not so clear, therefore it is preferable to ask someone else to be motzi him m'safek), and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Moadim U'Zmanim vol. 1: 4 haghah and vol. 8, Lekutei Ha'aros on vol. 1: 4; Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 2: 269). However, others, including the Elyah Rabba (Orach Chaim 188: 8), Matteh Efraim (583: 4), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 21; who maintains that this the pashut pshat in the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l (Halichos Shlomo, Moadim vol. 1, Rosh Hashana Ch. 1, footnote 87) and the Shemiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa (vol. 2, Ch. 57: 7 and footnote 23) rule that one must indeed repeat Bentching. The Shulchan Aruch Harav (Siddur, Piskei Birkas Hamazon) maintains that at the Seudah on Leil Rosh Hashana, Bentching is repeated for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' but not at the daytime Seudah. See also Yeshuos Yaakov (Orach Chaim 188: 3) and Elef Hamagen on the Matteh Efraim (ibid. 29). Interestingly, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 19) brings down both sides of this machlokes but does not rule conclusively. See also Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 25: 21 - pg. 343).

[7]See Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 188:7), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44:15), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 18), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 28). See also Shu"t Yad Dodi (vol. 1, Hilchos Birkas Hamazon 21).

[8]See, for example, Gemara Brachos (20b).

[9]We know that 'Shamor V'Zachor B'Dibbur Echad', as mentioned in Rav Shlomo Alkabetz's timeless 'Lecha Dodi', and hence, it is precisely this nuance that teaches us the joint obligations of positive and negative commandments (Zachor V'Shamor) on Shabbos, which obligates women the same as men. Rav Eiger explains that as making Kiddush is for 'Zachor,' and the halacha is that Kiddush needs to be 'b'makon seudah' (Pesachim 101a; and duly codified by the Rif (Pesachim 20a), Rosh (ad loc. Ch. 10: 5), Tosafos (ad loc. 100b s.v. yedei Kiddush), Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos, Ch. 29: 8 and 10), and Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 273: 1). [This obligation was discussed at length in a previous article titled 'More Common Kiddush Questions: Kiddush B'Makom Seudah.'] Therefore, he concludes, a woman is required to have a bread 'Seudah' on Shabbos.

[10]Gemara Pesachim (43b). See Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 472: 25).

[11]Shu"t Binyan Shlomo (vol. 2, Orach Chaim 47); also cited in the Sdei Chemed (vol. 9, Asifas Dinim, Ma'areches Yom Tov, 2: 6). He asserts that even according to Rav Akiva Eiger, on Shavuos (d'ba'inan nami lachem - see Gemara Pesachim 68b) women should repeat Bentching if 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' wasn't said.

[12]Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 328, Eishel Avraham 10; regarding women's obligation to have a bread 'Seudah'), Shu"t Sha'agas Aryeh (66, regarding women's obligations for Simchas Yom Tov), Shu"t Shoel U'Meishiv (Tinyana vol. 2: 55; regarding women's obligations for Kiddush and Seudah on Yom Tov), and Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 271: 5, regarding women's obligations for Kiddush on Yom Tov). The Maharsham (Shu"t vol. 3: 226) and Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe Orach Chaim vol. 4: 100) also wrote responsae explaining that women are obligated in Kiddush on Yom Tov as well. [However, although the Sefer Hachinuch (end Mitzva 31) rules explicitly this way relating to Women's obligation of Kiddush on Shabbos, the Minchas Chinuch (ad loc. 18) is mesupak with this regarding Yom Tov, as the Sefer Hachinuch does not mention it.] The Rambam (Hilchos Avoda Zara Ch. 12: 3) also seemingly rules this way, calling Simchas Yom Tov a 'Mitzvas Asei Shehazman Gerama' that women are obligated in. The Beis Hillel (Yoreh Deah 273) implies this way as well, opining that women even have a chiyuv to be metaher themselves for Yom Tov as men do. The Mishnah Berurah (Biur Halacha 188, s.v. seudah) also cites that there is no Simchas Yom Tov without bread. Many of these shittos are based on the Tosafos HaRosh (Brachos 49b s.v. Shabasos u'Yamim Tovim) who concludes that "l'olam" there is a chiyuv to eat lechem due to Simchas Yom Tov. [Interestingly, Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. eey baui) asks the same question but concludes differently.]See also Sdei Chemed (ibid.) at length.

[13]Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 188:7).

[14]Including the Pischei Teshuva of the Mahari"a M'Vilna (Orach Chaim 188: 6 and 529: 2), Shu"t Sheilas Shmuel (11), Orchos Chaim (188: 3 and 529: 7), Shu"t Yad Eliyahu (17: 2), Shu"t Sheilas Yaakov (97 and 125), Shu"t Mishkan Betzalel (vol. 1: 137), Shu"t Even Yaakov (30), and Shu"t Lechem She'arim (9), all cited in Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 2,5 footnote 92). This author has been informed b'sheim Rav Chaim Ganzweig, mashgiach at Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim (MTJ) that Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, as well as his son Rav Dovid Feinstein zt"l, both ruled that since today women have accepted the Mitzva of Simchas Yom Tov as an absolute obligation, they therefore have to repeat Birkas Hamazon for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on Yom Tov. See Rabbi Yitzchok Dovid Frankel's Shu"t Yad Dodi (vol. 1, Hilchos Birkas Hamazon 20, and footnote 18; pg. 69).

[15]Many sefarim cite both sides of the debate with no clear-cut ruling, including the Sha'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha (44: 6), Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa (vol. 2: Ch. 57, footnote 18), and Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 25: 34).

[16]Including the Sdei Chemed (vol. 5, Ma'areches Brachos 4, 2), Maharsham (Daas Torah, Orach Chaim vol. 2: 188, 6), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (vol. 3: 38, 9), Shu"t Shevet HaLevi (vol. 4: 18, 1 and vol. 6: 61), Birur Halacha (Orach Chaim vol. 2: 188; pg. 135 - 136), Shu"t Zeicher Simcha (27; who maintains that since there is no clear-cut ruling, 'shev v'al ta'aseh adif' and she should not repeat Bentching) and Yalkut Yosef (vol. 3, Brachos pg. 355). See also Shu"t Yabea Omer (vol. 6, Orach Chaim 28: 4 and 5) and Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion (vol. 2: 46, 27) who rule like Rav Akiva Eiger, that on Shabbos and first night of Pesach she must repeat Bentching if she forgot 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' implying that on other Yomim Tovim she should not.

[17]Halichos Baysah (Ch. 12: 13 and footnote 26 at length), Koh Somar L'Bais Yaakov (pg. 81; footnotes 33 and 34), Halichos Bas Yisrael (Ch. 3: 13 and footnote 32; Ch. 17, 14), Yalkut Yosef (Otzar Dinim L'Isha U'l'Vas Ch. 11: 16), and the ArtScroll Ohel Leah Women's Siddur (pg. 163).

[18]Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (vol. 3: 38, 13 s.v. nashim), Shu"t Yigal Yaakov (Orach Chaim 22), and Halichos Baysah (Ch. 12: 14), not like the Yad Yitzchak (Shu"t vol. 2: 54) who opines that she should repeat Bentching even if she is unsure if she said 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo.' Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1: Ch. 25 footnote 94) adds an additional compelling reason why she should not repeat Bentching if she is merely uncertain if she recited 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo': The Mishnah Berurah (186: 3 and Biur Halacha s.v. ella) cites a machlokes haposkim regarding a women who is mesupak if she Bentched at all, whether she needs to repeat Bentching; therefore, it stands to reason that if she is certain that she Bentched and is merely unsure if she recited 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo,' that it can't be any more obligating.

[19]Including the fact that the Gemara (Brachos 20b) does not rule if Birkas Hamazon for women is a chiyuv Deoraysa or Derabbanan [and this safek is codified in halacha - see Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 5: 1), Rosh (Brachos Ch. 3: 13), and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 186: 1)]; that is why a women should not be motzi a man in his Bentching obligation).

[20]See Yated Ne'eman(21 Shevat 5773 | February 1, 2013 pg. 68).

[21]See also the recent Minchas Asher on Zemiros L'Shabbos (Seudos Shabbos 5, pg. 168 - 169), that although there are many questions on his shittah, nevertheless, the ikar halacha still follows Rav Akiva Eiger on this.

[22]Devarim, Parshas Eikev (Ch. 8: verse 10).

[23]See Gemara Brachos (20b) and Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar (Parashas Nasso 11: 7).

[24]Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 188: 24) based on Tosafos' shittah (Sukka 27b s.v. ee baui achil; see also Tosafos on Brachos 49b s.v. ee baui).

[25]See, for example, Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Chukas 21), Shu"t Yechaveh Daas (vol. 5: 36), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu's Darchei Halacha glosses to the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44: 17), Yalkut Yosef (Brachos pg. 349) and Rav Yaakov Hillel's Luach Ahavat Shalom (5778; Nissan, First Day of Pesach, Seudah, note 743). On the other hand, Rav Shalom Messas (Mashash) zt"l (Shu"t Shemesh U'Magein vol. 1: 13) argues that Sefardim must follow the psak of the Shulchan Aruch and men must repeat Bentching for forgetting 'Ya'aleh V'Yavo' on any Yom Tov.

[26]Shu"t Rebbi Ezriel (Orach Chaim 185: 6).

[27]See Shu"t Yabea Omer (vol. 6, Orach Chaim 28: 4 and 5), Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion (vol. 2: 46, 27), Luach Ahavat Shalom (5778; Nissan, First Day of Pesach, Seudah, note 744), and Birur Halacha (Orach Chaim vol. 2: 188, pg. 135 – 136),

[28]See Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 1, Ch. 25 footnotes 44 and 91), Shemiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa (ibid.), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (ibid.), Halichos Baysah (ibid.), Koh Somar L'Bais Yaakov (ibid. footnote 34), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 8, 78), and Halichos Bas Yisrael (ibid.).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Halacha, serves as the Sho'el U'Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

Weekly Parsha TAZRIA – METZORAH
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The laws regarding ritual purity and the metaphysical disease of tzsorat, which by the way is not the medically recognized disease of leprosy, affect three categories of human life and society – the human body, clothing and houses. These three areas of human societal existence are the basic building blocks of civilization and society generally. They are the most vital and at the same time the most vulnerable areas of our existence. And it is apparent that the Torah wishes us to be aware of this fact.

Health of body is a necessary precedent to most cases of human accomplishment. Not many of us are able to rise over illness, pain and/or chronic discomfort on a regular and permanent basis. Medical science recognizes that our mood and our mind affect our physical state of wellbeing. The Torah injects into this insight that our soul also has such an effect as well.

The rabbis specifically found that the distress caused to one's soul by evil speech, slander and defamation reflects itself physically in the disease of tzsorat. In biblical times, hurting other human beings by the intemperate use if one's tongue, had clear physical consequences that served as a warning of the displeasure of one's soul at such behavior.

The human body is our mainstay. It is also the most fragile and vulnerable to decay and discomfort. It is only logical that it is in this area of our existence that the possibility of tzsorat lurks and lingers.

Clothing represents our outer representation of ourselves to the society around us. Originally, as described in the Torah itself, clothing was meant to shelter us from the elements and to provide us with a sense of privacy and modesty in covering our nakedness. As humanity evolved and developed, clothing became a statement of personality and even of the mental and spiritual nature of the person.

Clothing also became an instrument of hubris, competitiveness and even of lewdness. It also became vulnerable to the distress of the soul over its use for essentially negative purposes. And in biblical times, the angst of the soul translated itself into tzsorat that affected clothing directly.

And finally, tzsorat was able to invade the physical structure of one's dwelling place. One is entitled to live in a comfortable and attractive home. All of the amenities of modern life are permitted to us. But the Psalmist warned us that we should be careful not to make our homes our "graves." Homes, by their very nature, are temporary and transient places.

Our father Avraham described himself as a wandering itinerant on this earth. Again, as in all areas of human life, the Torah demands of us perspective and common sense when dealing with our homes. We gawk with wonder when visiting palaces and mansions of the rich and famous yet our inner self tells us that this really is not the way that we wish to live. The vulnerability of homes and houses to tzsorat is obvious to all.

In Jewish life, less is more.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

TAZRIA, METZORA The Plague of Evil Speech
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Rabbis moralised the condition of tzara'at – often translated as leprosy – the subject that dominates both

Tazria and Metzora. It was, they said, a punishment rather than a medical condition. Their interpretation was based on the internal evidence of the Mosaic books themselves. Moses' hand became leprous when he expressed doubt about the willingness of the people to believe in his mission (Ex. 4:6-7). Miriam was struck by leprosy when she spoke against Moses (Num. 12:1-15). The metzora (leper) was a motzi shem ra: a person who spoke slightingly about others.

Evil speech, lashon hara, was considered by the Sages to be one of the worst sins of all. Here is how Maimonides summarises it:

The Sages said: there are three transgressions for which a person is punished in this world and has no share in the world come – idolatry, illicit sex, and bloodshed – and evil speech is as bad as all three combined. They also said: whoever speaks with an evil tongue is as if he denied God . . . Evil speech kills three people – the one who says it, the one who accepts it, and the one about whom it is said.

Hilchot Deot 7:3

Is it so? Consider just two of many examples. In the early 13th century, a bitter dispute broke out between devotees and critics of Maimonides. For the former, he was one of the greatest Jewish minds of all time. For the latter, he was a dangerous thinker whose works contained heresy and whose influence led people to abandon the commandments. There were ferocious exchanges. Each side issued condemnations and excommunications against the other. There were pamphlets and counter-pamphlets, sermons and counter-sermons, and for while French and Spanish Jewry were convulsed by the controversy. Then, in 1232, Maimonides' books were burned by the Dominicans. The shock brought a brief respite; then extremists desecrated Maimonides' tomb in Tiberius. In the early 1240s, following the Disputation of Paris, Christians burned all the copies of the Talmud they could find. It was one of the great tragedies of the Middle Ages.

What was the connection between the internal Jewish struggle and the Christian burning of Jewish books? Did the Dominicans take advantage of Jewish accusations of heresy against Maimonides, to level their own charges? Was it simply that they were able to take advantage of the internal split within Jewry, to proceed with their own persecutions without fear of concerted Jewish reprisals? One way or another, throughout the Middle Ages, many of the worst Christian persecutions of Jews were either incited by converted Jews, or exploited internal weaknesses of the Jewish community.

Moving to the modern age, one of the most brilliant exponents of Orthodoxy was R. Meir Loeb ben Yechiel Michal Malbim (1809-1879), Chief Rabbi of Rumania. An outstanding scholar, whose commentary to Tanach is one of the glories of the nineteenth century, he was at first welcomed by all groups in the Jewish community as a man of learning and religious integrity. Soon, however, the more 'enlightened' Jews discovered to their dismay that he was a vigorous traditionalist, and they began to incite the civil authorities against him. In posters and pamphlets they portrayed him as a benighted relic of the Middle Ages, a man opposed to progress and the spirit of the age.

One Purim, they sent him a gift of a parcel of food which included pork and crabs, with an accompanying message: 'We, the local progressives, are honoured to present these delicacies and tasty dishes from our table as a gift to our luminary.' Eventually, in response to the campaign, the government withdrew its official recognition of the Jewish community, and of Malbim as its Chief Rabbi, and banned him from delivering sermons in the Great Synagogue. On Friday, 18 March 1864, policemen surrounded his house early in the morning, arrested and imprisoned him. After the Sabbath, he was placed on a ship and taken to the Bulgarian border, where he was released on condition that he never return to Rumania. This is how the Encyclopaedia Judaica describes the campaign:

M. Rosen has published various documents which disclose the false accusations and calumnies Malbim's Jewish-assimilationist enemies wrote against him to the Rumanian government. They accused him of disloyalty and of impeding social assimilation between Jews and non-Jews by insisting on adherence to the dietary laws, and said, 'This Rabbi by his conduct and prohibitions wishes to impede our progress.' As a result of this, the Prime Minister of Rumania issued a proclamation against the 'ignorant and insolent' Rabbi… In consequence the minister refused to grant rights to the Jews of Bucharest, on the grounds that the Rabbi of the community was 'the sworn enemy of progress'.

Similar stories could be told about several other outstanding scholars – among them, R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes, R. Azriel Hildesheimer, R. Yitzhak Reines, and even the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik of blessed memory, who was brought to court in Boston in 1941 to face trumped-up charges by the local Jewish community. Even these shameful episodes were only a continuation of the vicious war waged against the Hassidic movement by their opponents, the mitnagdim, which saw many Hassidic leaders (among them the first Rebbe of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi) imprisoned on false testimony given to the local authorities by other Jews.

For a people of history, we can be bewilderingly obtuse to the lessons of history. Time and again, unable to resolve their own conflicts civilly and graciously, Jews slandered their opponents to the civil authorities, with results that were disastrous to the Jewish community as a whole. Despite the fact that the whole of rabbinic Judaism is a culture of argument; despite the fact that the Talmud explicitly says that the school of Hillel had its views accepted because they were 'gentle, modest, taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, and taught their opponents' views before their own' (Eruvin 13b) –

despite this, Jews have continued to excoriate, denounce, even excommunicate those whose views they did not understand, even when the objects of their scorn (Maimonides, Malbim, and the rest) were among the greatest-ever defenders of Orthodoxy against the intellectual challenges of their age.

Of what were the accusers guilty? Only evil speech. And what, after all, is evil speech? Mere words. Yet words have consequences. Diminishing their opponents, the self-proclaimed defenders of the faith diminished themselves and their faith. They managed to convey the impression that Judaism is simple-minded, narrow, incapable of handling complexity, helpless in the face of challenge, a religion of anathemas instead of arguments, excommunication instead of reasoned debate. Maimonides and Malbim took their fate philosophically. Yet one weeps to see a great tradition brought so low.

What an astonishing insight it was to see leprosy – that disfiguring disease – as a symbol and symptom of evil speech. For we truly are disfigured when we use words to condemn, not communicate; to close rather than open minds; when we use language as a weapon and wield it brutally. The message of Metzora remains. Linguistic violence is no less savage than physical violence, and those who afflict others are themselves afflicted. Words wound. Insults injure. Evil speech destroys communities. Language is God's greatest gift to humankind and it must be guarded if it is to heal, not harm.

Don't Only Look at the Disease; See the Person
The Origin of Holistic Medicine
Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Redundancy

The Torah portion of Tazria, Leviticus chapter 13, discusses the laws of tzaraas, an unusual illness, identified by a white patch appearing on the skin of a person with the hair inside of it turning white. This was symptomatic of an internal moral and spiritual blemish, and it deemed the person as temporarily "impure." He or she was required to separate from the community and undergo an intense program of introspection and healing.[1]

The Torah describes the procedures for determining the tzaraas/leprosy condition:

סַפַּחַת אוֹ בַהֶרֶת, וְהָיָה -בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אוֹ-יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר-תזריע יג, ב: אָדָם, כִּי אֶחָד מִבָּנָיו -אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן, אוֹ אֶל-וְהוּבָא אֶל--בְּשָׂרוֹ, לְנֶגַע צָרָעַת-בְּעוֹר נֶגַע הָפַךְ לָבָן, הַבָּשָׂר וְשֵׂעָר בַּ-הַנֶּגַע בְּעוֹר-הַכֹּהֲנִים. ג וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת נֶגַע צָרַעַת, הוּא; וְרָאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן, וְטִמֵּא אֹתוֹ--וּמַרְאֵה הַנֶּגַע עָמֹק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ.

The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh; If hair in the affliction has turned white, and the affliction's appearance is deeper than the skin of his flesh – - it is a tzaraas affliction; the Kohen shall look at him and make him impure.

The Torah is stating that only a Kohen (a priest), a descendent of Aaron the High Priest, was authorized to diagnose a tzaraas-leprosy and pronounce the malady as such. Even in a case where all the symptoms of the illness are clearly present and a multitude of scholars recognize it as tzaraas, the person cannot be diagnosed as possessing this malady unless a Kohen states so explicitly.[2]

But there is a blatant strange redundancy in the above verse. Can you see it?

The verse states: "The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh… the Kohen shall look at it and make him impure." Why is the same phrase repeated? The Torah should have said: "The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh… and make him impure." Why does it say again, "the Kohen shall look at it?"[3]

One of the great rabbis of the last generation offered a magnificent explanation. As it turns out, the origins of what we call today "holistic medicine" and the "integrated approach" are in the Torah.

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk (1843–1926), author of the Torah commentary Meshech Chochma, was one of the prominent sages and leaders in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century. He himself was a Kohen, and hence this insight is even more personal.[4]

The Two Steps

The Meshech Chochmah suggests that the Torah is teaching us a profound law and lesson.[5]

There are two distinct evaluations that need to be made. Note that the first time around the Torah states: "The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh…" The second time around the Torah states: "The Kohen shall look at him and make him impure."

These, suggests Reb Meir Simcha, are two separate evaluations. One is on the disease; the other is on the person. First, the Kohen must look at the affliction ("V'raah haKohen es haNega") and see if it is one that technically meets the definition of a tzaraas-leprosy description. He must examine the symptoms and determine the proper diagnosis based on the nature of this disease. What he is looking at is the affliction.

But that is not enough. He must now look at something else. He must look at the person ("v'raahhu haKohen"), "and the Kohen shall look at HIM," and see if it is appropriate to declare this person impure. The symptoms may be present, but the person may not be in a state where you can declare him or her impure.

The Torah instructs the Kohen to evaluate two independent factors: (a) whether the blemish is indeed a tzaraas; and (b) whether at this time it is appropriate to turn the person into a metzorah. Unless both factors are present, the Kohen should not declare the person impure.

The Practical Difference

As an example of this, Reb Meir Simcha quotes the following Talmudic law:[6]

"If the leper is a newlywed groom, he is given the Seven Days of Feasting (before declaring him impure), and the same applies on a Festival." [7] Meaning, if a fresh groom or bride develops the symptoms of leprosy, the Kohen will

not examine them and declare them impure, even if all the symptoms are blatantly present, until after a full week passes since the wedding. The same is true for the seven days of the holidays, Passover and Sukkos. In order to avoid spoiling one's wedding celebration or the joy of the festival (Yom Tov), the Kohen has the license to delay proclaiming the person a metzorah (a leper) even though he knows full well that the skin condition qualifies as leprosy.[8]

How can the Rabbis come up with such a novel law? If the Torah says that someone is a leper and needs a certain treatment, delaying it is wrong. It is like delaying medical treatment for a patient in the middle of the holidays, so as not to aggravate him! You are not doing him a favor. How then could the Rabbis come up with this novel law that we may delay the entire process of examination and diagnosis?

The Sages derived this law from the following verse: "And on the day that it will be seen." Why is the day mentioned here? The verse could have said, "and when it will be seen." The words "and on the day" come to teach us that there are days when the Kohen will not look at the leprosy. The Kohen must look if it is the right time to declare him impure, or we must wait for another time. From this, the Talmud deduced that certain times are off-limits for examining the symptoms of the leprosy. And they reasoned which days would be considered off-limits.

This is as far as times are concerned. The Meshech Chochmah brilliantly argues that the meaning behind the redundancy in the above verse teaches us something even more powerful: Sometimes the person is not ready for this verdict. The Torah instructs the Kohen not only to look at the symptoms, not only to look at the time but also to look at the person. Not only to examine the malady but also to peer into the human being. The person may have the disease, but if the person is not ready to become impure, he should not deem him impure.

This is a novel idea of the Meshech Chochmah. The Kohen has the right to ignore the symptoms for any reason that makes the Kohen feel that it is wrong to declare him impure. For example, if this person with the symptoms must be in the company of people; to quarantine him outside of the Jewish camp would be dangerous and counter-productive, then this person is not in a state where he or she can be seen and diagnosed as being impure.

A New Medicine

Fascinatingly, this approach, articulated millennia ago in the Torah, is reflected in contemporary medicine.

There are two approaches to medicine. The decision as to which model to use for diagnosis and treatment of the patient revolves around the following question: does the physician treat with the goal of ameliorating his patient's symptoms, or does he treat with the goal of putting the entire patient in balance, treating the person, not only the disease? With the goal of stopping pain or discomfort, and eliminate symptoms, the physician needs to consider the fastest, least complicated, least expensive, and most efficacious therapy, and the approach with the fewest side effects. Should his goal be to promote overall balance and wellbeing, the physician needs to choose a treatment protocol that best addresses the patient's patterns and differential diagnosis, constitution, and history, including imbalances in the patient's biochemistry, biomechanics, and bioelectricity, as well as non-physical considerations: his emotional, mental, psychological, and spiritual state.

The Torah is intimating to us that a healer's approach should be not only to focus and get rid of the symptoms but rather to look at and treat the "whole person," for if not, the whole person will not get well. Either there will be some other new condition, or the condition originally treated will return. The Torah advocates a "holistic approach," appreciating all facets of a person's life, and seeing how all aspects of our lives are integrated, rather than just suppress local symptoms.

How to Diagnose People

The message to all of us is how we judge ourselves and others.

Before I can pronounce a person as impure, I need to see the person, not only the problem. Do I know how to recognize the difference between evil and trauma? Between selfishness and fear? Between being bad and being wounded?

A teacher of mine once told me: do not answer the question; answer the person. A person may come and ask you: why did my mother die young? You may be a wise guy and say because she had a weak heart. Maybe you answered the question, but you did not answer the person. He was not asking a medical question; he was asking an emotional question. He is in pain. He misses his mother.

The Mishna in Ethics of the Fathers tells us[9] to "give every person the benefit of the doubt." But a more precise translation is that "one should judge the whole person as meritorious." ("Heve dan es kol haAdam l'kaf zechus.") Before you judge someone, you need to look at all the factors making up the person. You need to look at "kal haAdam," at the entire human being, before you give a diagnosis. Never judge somebody without knowing the whole story and the whole person. You may think you understand, but you don't.

A Tale of Two Therapists

There are also two types of therapists. Those who fit each patient into a pre-existing mode; and those who will tune in to the unique persona and struggles of the patient.

They do not fit him into their boxes, but rather employ their models, and will borrow from diverse models, to help accommodate the person they are treating.

When Your Child Rejects You

Your child, or your student, may be behaving disrespectfully. He may be saying hurtful things. At such a moment you are tempted to look at him and say: You are tameh! You are impure. Get out of my home.

Technically, you may be correct. He has all the symptoms. His behaviors are ill-conceived and obnoxious. But the Torah says: Wait! "Varahu HaKohen," you must not only look at the actual behavior, at the actual words coming out of his or her mouth but also at the entire human being. Evaluate his entire story.

In life, don't try to suppress the symptoms; but rather try to understand the person.

Will calling this child "impure," "contaminated," "tarnished," really help him or her? Is this what he or she needs? Will this really serve his or her interests? Will it help him rehabilitate himself? Is it possible that there is a deep pain in this child's heart which he is incapable of addressing and is causing him deep anguish and anger? Maybe this is a time he needs more of his father, not less of his father? He needs more empathy, not less. It is precisely at this moment that he needs you much more than he can even articulate!

I See Your Heart

Rabbi Aryeh Levin, known as the Tzaddik of Jerusalem, was once walking on the street, when he saw a former student of his, who had abandoned the Jewish way of life, walking toward him. When the student noticed that he was walking directly toward his former master, he crossed the street to avoid him.

Reb Aryeh went after him and said with a smile: "I'm so happy to see you! Why did you avoid me?"

The student replied: "I will be perfectly honest. I am embarrassed to see you because I don't have a kipa on my head…"

Reb Aryeh looked at him and said: "My dear student, don't you realize that I am a short man! I can only see up to your heart."

There are two types of educators and teachers. Some just see the rules and the deviations of the rules, but others can just peer into the heart and see a soul.

Do Not Win Arguments

In 1963, Professor Velvl Greene was a rising star at the University of Minnesota. Greene was a pioneer in the field of bacteriology, having been invited by NASA to study the effects of space travel on human life. The young scientist was visiting and lecturing at dozens of universities across America each year.

1963 was also the year that Professor Greene first met Rabbi Moshe Feller, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's emissary in Minneapolis. Up to that point, the Greenes, like many American Jews of their generation, gave little credence to their Jewish heritage; observances like Shabbat, kashrut, and tefillin struck them as old-fashioned, if not primitive. But in the young Chassidic couple, Professor Green saw a vibrant and fulfilling outlook and lifestyle, one which could fill the deep void in his successful yet rootless life.

At Rabbi Feller's suggestion, Professor Greene wrote to the Rebbe about this "void" and his interest in Judaism; the Rebbe's warm and engaging reply was not long in coming. The two developed a steady correspondence, and the young scientist was soon taken by the Rebbe's phenomenal mind and passionate devotion. With each letter, Greene found himself further encouraged along his spiritual journey and his commitment to Torah. Soon the Greenes had made their kitchen kosher and begun to observe Shabbat.

One day Professor Greene came across a letter the Rebbe wrote to a scientist concerning the Torah's account of the creation of the universe and the rejection of the theory of evolution. Dr. Greene penned a no-holds-barred critique. "Because I greatly respected the Rebbe," Professor Greene recalls, "I dropped the forgiving tone that scientists often use with laymen, addressing the Rebbe as if he were a colleague whose ideas I rejected. I bluntly stated that he was wrong, specifying what I saw as faulty and unscientific. I concluded my letter by saying that the Rebbe had best stick to his field of expertise, Torah, and leave science to scientists."

But the Rebbe's next letter resumed their correspondence where it had originally begun - in Greene's spiritual quest and his Jewish identity. Of the evolution issue - not a word. The Professor assumed that the Rebbe was conceding that in matters of empirical fact, Torah must defer to scientific reason. With this, he considered the matter closed.

Professor Greene's progress towards a Torah-true life continued, and over the next year and a half, he reported to the Rebbe each Jewish milestone along his journey: full Shabbat observance, observance of family purity, etc. The Rebbe responded with words of encouragement and blessing, and, on one occasion, a gift of a pair of tefillin which Green began to wrap regularly.

Then came the letter in which the Greenes told the Rebbe that they had decided to place their children in a Yeshivah to receive the fullest possible Jewish education. The Rebbe's reply was especially warm and encouraging, as befitting the turning point in their lives that such a move indicated. Then, at the end of his letter, the Rebbe added, "By the way, concerning what you wrote me regarding the Torah's account of creation..." and proceeded to refute, point by point, Professor Greene's objections to the Rebbe's "unscientific" treatment of the subject.

"You are probably wondering," concluded the Rebbe, "why I waited this long to respond to your remarks on the matter. But my job in life is not to win arguments. My job is to bring Jews closer to the Torah and its mitzvot."

Don't try to win arguments; try to help people.

[1] See Talmud Erkin 15b. Midrash Rabah Tazria. Klei Yakar to Tazria and many of the commentators on the portion.

[2] The ramifications of this biblical law are far-reaching. For example, even if the only Kohen present is a child so that he is unable to examine the person in question, a trustworthy scholar needs to report his findings to the Kohen, and it is only the Kohen who may pronounce the white-patched person as impure. Even if the only Kohen

around is an imbecile, lacking the knowledge and understanding required to give a diagnosis, it is only he who is entitled to make the verbal pronouncement under the instruction and guidance of an adult scholar. (Toras Kohanim. Mishnah Negaim chapter 3. Maimonidies laws of Tumas Tzaraas 9:2. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 27 Tazria).

[3] The question is raised in Toras Kohanim, where a halachic answer is given.

[4] Reb Meir Simcha served as the Rabbi of the Latvian city of Dvinsk (now known as Daugavpils). He served in that position for 39 years until his death and authored a famous work on the Rambam's Mishnah Torah, Ohr Somayach. He also wrote a classic work on the Torah, Meshech Chochmah. (In Dvinsk, he was the Rabbi of the Ashkenazim, while his counterpart was the Chasidic Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon or by his work Tzofnath Paneach. The two had great respect for each other).

In Dvinsk, he received visitors from the whole region and was frequently consulted on issues affecting the community at large, including Poland and Lithuania. He died in 1926 in a hotel in Riga while seeking medical treatment. He had one daughter, who predeceased him. (She got married, but both she and her husband died young without children.)

His name is carried and lives on by his two works: Ohr Somayach, which is a derivative of his name Meir Simcha, meaning joyous light. And his work Meshech Chochmah: Meshech is an acronym of his name, Meir Simcha Kohen.

[5] עירזת 'פ המכח דשמ :והכה והארו 'וכ עגנה תא והכה הארו. הכפילות מבואר. ועיין תו"כ. ויתכן ע"ד רז"ל שהכוונה שיראה את הנגע אם היא ראויה לטמאנה, הוא שיש בה סימן טומאה שער לבן, וראהו הכהן הוא שיראה הכהן על האיש אם ראוי לטמאותו, הוא אם חתן נותנין משתה, וכן ברגל נותנין לו כל ימות הרגל, שלא לערבב לו כל ז' ימי ה שמחתו, ודרכיה דרכי נועם, ולכן וראהו איך הוא באיכותו אם הוא ראוי לפי הזמן לטמאותו, וזה שאמר וביום הראות יש יום שאי אתה רואה הוא ענין מצד הזמן, לא שאם לפי תכונתו צריך התחברות עם אנשים וכיו"ב שהוא ענין מצד הזמן. בינה זה.אינך רואה בו, רק כ

[6] סוי שי ,(די ,גי עירזת) וב תוארה סויבו אינתהו :ב ,ז וטק דעומ שאתה רואה בו ויש יום שאי אתה רואה בו. מכאן אמרו חתן שנולד בו נגע נותנין לו ז' ימי המשתה לו ולביתו ולכסותו, וכן ברגל נותנין לו שבעת ימי הרגל.

[7] Moed Katan 7b

[8] For a detailed explanation, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 37 Tazria.

[9] Avos 1:6

לע"נ

שרה משא 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 haBeged (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 haZikkaron (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 haZikkaron 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 built 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 interst 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 Ribbono 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 agendae 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 a 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.

****

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

****

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 uncleanliness], 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 & Avinu'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 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 simi

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 uncleanliness).

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 though 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 "tumat 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 our 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 "tamey" (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'btarim" (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 Noach 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 Noach 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 - "l'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.