BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 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.

*** Note on upcoming schedule: Next Shabbat is Metzora (Hagadol) with Pesach starting April 22. I decided to cover Tazria and Metzora this Shabbat and focus on Pesach next Shabbat. I'll then skip Hol HaMoed Pesach and resume with Acharei Mot May 3-4.**

Hamas has just announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead), including Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Tazria and Metzora come right after the death of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. Contact with a dead body creates tumah, spiritual impurity, and disqualifies a person from coming close to Hashem's presence or participating in rituals for a period of time. The process of recovering from tumah and becoming tahor (spiritually pure) again is the subject of Metzora. Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org explain that all forms of tumah arise from behavior or situations that involve contact with death or a near death experience.

Rabbi Marc Angel observes that despite the dangerous and deadly attacks by Hamas and increases in anti-Semitism throughout the world, the latest World Happiness survey, very recently released, ranks Israel as the fifth happiest country in the world – far better than the United States (number 23). Rabbi Mordechai Rhine observes Moshe's remark that tzaraat (the physical manifestation of tazria) is a loving message from Hashem and exists so B'Nai Yisrael will eat, drink, and be happy.

Tzaraat, a white area on a person's skin, garment, or walls of his home, is a communication from God that something is off. Rabbi Rhine quotes psalm 73, which states that Hashem does only good for the Jewish people, for those who are of pure heart. A person with tzaraat must consult with a Kohen, who will identify whether the white spot is tzaraat. After a positive identification, a metzora (one with tzaraat), must leave the camp, call out that he is tamai (impure), and perform teshuvah for a week. The kohen then re-examines the spot and determines when the metzora may go through the purification process and re-enter the community.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on coping with lashon hara, evil speech, the classic evil that chazal recognize as the leading cause of tzaraat. Rabbi Sacks discusses the 2019 film, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,* which focuses on the life of Fred Rogers, the long time television personality on public broadcasting. A magazine decided to do a series on heros and asked Rogers to be the subject of one episode – but assigned a journalist known for his angry, negative

writings. The journalist tries to engage Rogers in negative speech. Rogers, however, turns every negative comment into positive messages to build up the journalist's self image. While the writer attempts to obtain his typical negative interview, Rogers uses his speech only to help him heal from a negative self image from his past. Rabbi Sacks observes that speech has the power to heal or to harm. While the journalist's history is using writing to harm, Rogers uses speech to heal. Rogers perfectly embodies the message of Tazria and Metzora. The cure for tzaraat is to get rid of negativism. Rogers listens carefully, talks gently, and affirms the positive in others. Chazal say that lashon hara is worse than the three cardinal sins of Judaism (idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed). Fred Rogers understands that lashon tov is the cure for lashon hara and the foundation of a moral, happy society.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the discussion of Tazria starts with the laws of tumah and tahara following childbirth (a situation that historically involved a close encounter with death for both the mother and baby). In the six plus months since Hamas entered Israel to murder and kidnap as many of our people as possible, approximately 90,000 babies have been born in Israel. Rabbi Brander informs us that Tazria expresses our hope that the embryos in the bodies of our mothers, and the newly born babies, will help transform our world for a better tomorrow. We who are adults must focus on building a better society and world in which our children and grandchildren can blossom. With the new generations, hopefully our people and the world can find ways to heal.

My beloved Rabbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved to teach lessons from legal parts of the Torah, even more than from the more familiar narrative sections. I recall my anger when I heard a rabbi describe Tazria-Metzora as "boring." Anyone who believes that this double parsha discusses physical illness or is boring has not understood the Torah. For me, Tazria and Metzora are among the most interesting and exciting sections of the Torah. May we teach our children and grandchildren to uncover the jewels in the Torah, especially those in deep levels that come alive as we delve into the many levels of meaning behind the words.

Shabbat Shalom,

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Tazria: Looking Ahead

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander (5784 / 202)(**
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone *

**** Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen: the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers. AM YISRAEL CHAI!**

The opening of Parshat Tazria, which details the laws governing purity and impurity following childbirth, focuses primarily on halakhic technicalities. Yet the Torah's mention of childbirth gives our Sages a unique opportunity to marvel at the wonder of bringing children into the world.

In Vayikra Rabbah, the Sages voice their amazement at the miraculousness with which mothers can carry a pregnancy and create new life.

Rabbi Levi said:

> *The way of the world is that if a person deposits a purse of silver in private and]the other individual[returns a litra of gold in public, does he not feel a debt of gratitude toward him? So it is with the Holy One blessed be He, people deposit a putrid drop in private and the Holy One blessed be He returns completed, high quality human beings in public. Is this not worthy of praise? That is, "I will project my opinion afar, and I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker."*)Job 36:3( )Vayikra Rabbah 14:2(

Rabbi Levi takes as his point of departure the words of Job, who *'looks off into the distance,'* reflecting on what the future holds. Here, it is the birth of a child that calls for forward thinking, holding onto hope that what begins as an embryo will successfully grow into a healthy baby to be born at the proper time, and the fulfillment of that hope gives us reason to praise the Almighty. It is only by Divine grace that this long, at times agonizing, process of human fertility can bring about a child, and it is in this Divine wonder that we place our hope.

And it is no different once a child is born. At a Brit Milah, a mitzva similarly discussed in Tazria, the traditional liturgy declares our hope that zeh hakatan gadol yihyeh, *'this small child shall yet be great.'* For all our children, we hope from the moment they are born that, at times against all odds, they will persevere through the challenges that will come their way, transform the world around them, as we look off hopefully into the distance to a better tomorrow than the world of today.

If ever these were the feelings held in parents' hearts, they are all the more amplified in the hearts and minds of every new Israeli parent and grandparent. Think of all the babies born in Israel since October 7th – approximately 90,000, based on the most recent official data. What a world they've been born into: a period marked by crisis and tragedy, of lives lost, innocents held hostage, communities in ruin, and a nation simultaneously grieving and fearful yet fiercely showing courage and resolve. With what hope can these children, many of whom bear names such as Nova, Be'eri, and Oz in commemoration of the massacres of Simchat Torah, be raised under these challenging circumstances? What will Simchat Torah look like when they enter the portals of the synagogue and then the portals of the IDF?

Yet the Torah teaches us not to get locked into any particular moment, but rather to look onwards to what lies ahead. We are charged not to lose hope in our mission, to believe that we can still build a society and a world in which our children will thrive, and one that they, too, will take part in building. R, Levi, the famous Amoraic aggadist, uses this verse from Job to remind Jewish parents throughout the ages to look off into the future and prepare our children for the bringing of the

Messianic era. It is the same R. Levi who reminds us of our responsibility to dream for a bright future, confident that, with God's help, there will be better days down the road, and that our dreams will eventually be fulfilled)Berakhot 55b(.

All these little ones will grow, and with them our people and our world will find ways to heal.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Tazria: To Fix the World

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5782)2022(

> *When a man from]among[you brings a)Korbon(sacrifice to HASHEM; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your sacrifice.*)Vayikra 1:2(
>
> *And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*)Vayikra 12:3(

There are only two positive or action Mitzvos that if one fails to perform them the result is KORES – being cut off, disconnected.)What exactly that means is a long discussion but suffice it to say that it is not a pleasant place to be.(Those two Mitzvos are Bris Mila and Korbon Pesach! Why are those two so loaded with such heavy consequences? What makes them so much more important? There may be many approaches to the question but here is one I'd like to try on for size.

What is the reason for bringing a Korbon? Yes, it is a Commandment, but what is the *Taam,* the reason, literally the taste, or benefit of this Mitzvah? The Ohr Gedaliahu introduces a raging debate on the subject between two giants of Jewish thought. The Rambam, Maimonodies, states that the reason for Korbonos is to nullify idolatry. Those animals that the nations of the world held in high esteem and even worshipped are meant to be rendered false, and worthless. Only HASHEM is worthy of our service. The Ramban, Nachmanodies, disagrees with his earlier contemporary, the Rambam. He says that the reason for a Korbon is to be found in the word itself, Korbon, which means to draw close, that is to draw close to HASHEM.

He also contends that the Rambam contradicts himself. Although he writes in *Moreh Nevuchim* that a Korbon is meant to nullify idolatry, in his giant compendium the *Yad HaChazaka,* in his introduction to the laws of *Avoda Zara*, idolatry, the Rambam reviews the history of how Adam's initial belief in one G-d devolved into idolatry over time. He identifies the historical period when that despicable practice started, based on a verse in Chumash, *"And to Shes also to him a son was born, and he named him Enosh; then it became common)huchal(to call by the name of HASHEM."*

Rashi explains the verse based on the Midrash:

> *Then, it became common: Heb. הוּחַל, is an expression of חוּלִין profaneness: to name people and idols with the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to make them idols and to call them deities. It seems that idolatry, according to the Rambam, came in to being generations later and yet everyone agrees that Adam the first man brought a Korbon. Why would he need to bring a Korbon at a time that predated idolatry?*

The Ohr Gedaliahu cleverly reconciles and essentially makes perfect peace between the two competing approaches to the reason of Korbonos. After the sin with the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, HASHEM approached Adam:

> *"And HASHEM called to man, and He said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because)ANOCHI(I am naked; so I hid."" This declaration that Adam made is very revealing. He declares, as if with a capital "I", "I am naked." The Midrash says that he intimated in that statement, "I did it and I will do it again!" He was infused with a brazenness, a sense of independence and separateness from HASHEM. The Midrash may really be telling us about his desperation. "I did it, and I don't think I can stop myself from doing it again!" In either case he found himself distant from HASHEM.*

The Baal Shem Tov sees meaning in the verse in Devarim, *"I stand between HASHEM and you…"*)Devarim 5:5(that the "I," the inflated ego, the ANOCHI, stands between each of us and HASHEM. To the extent that that ANOCHI, that fat I, the first granule of Avoda Zara, is whittled down so too we grow closer to HASHEM. It's the removal of idolatry which has its roots in self-absorption which allows us to draw closer to HASHEM.

Bris Mila is the sublimating of the individual's animalistic appetite to holiness. That is the process of abolishing the personal egoistic form of idolatry. Korbon Pesach is the nullification of the collective ego, the sacred godhead of Egypt. In order to bring the Korbon Pesach one needs a Bris Mila, because one must first cure himself and only then can he hope to fix the world!

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5782-tazria/

Tazria – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Using a Mohel Who is Not Shomer Shabbat

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

"'On the eighth day you shall circumcise his flesh' – and even on Shabbat" (Shabbat 132a).

QUESTION — New York, USA

In a small town without a traditional mohel nearby, would we be lenient on who the mohel is to avoid postponing a Shabbat brit milah? Would we allow a mohel who is not shomer Shabbat (i.e. a Jewish doctor who does circumcision in coordination with local shuls)? What if the mohel lives close enough to walk (~1.5 hour) but will likely drive?

ANSWER

First, we should note that if necessary for halakhic reasons, the bris can be postponed. For example, a number of Israeli poskim rule that you need to do so if relatives will drive to the brit milah on Shabbat. Certainly if the person is not a valid mohel, you would absolutely have to postpone until Sunday.

So, may a Shabbat violator be a mohel? The answer to this starts with looking at the ruling of Rema in *Shulchan Arukh* YD 264:1 that someone who rejects the entire Torah (a mumar) is invalid to serve as a mohel. However, this ruling rests on shaky ground. The Gemara only disqualifies someone who is not obligated in milah and even Or Zarua, who is the source of Rema's ruling, only raises the possibility that such a person might be invalid. Many poskim thus argue on Rema's ruling and state that a mumar is valid to serve as a mohel. (See, for example *Birkei Yosef,* 264:2, quoting *Pri Chadash,* Rabbi Akiva Eiger, on YD 264).

Even if one were to accept that a mumar is invalid, it is highly questionable that a Shabbat violator would fall in that category in this case. Although we normally equate the two, the invalidity here is based on rejecting milah, which is not relevant in our case. In addition, the general principle of *tinok she'nishba,* that we do not apply the disqualifications that come with non-Shabbat observance, should apply in this case.

It should be noted, however, that Rav Moshe Feinstein, who elsewhere is ready to apply the principle of *tinok she'nishba,* rules that one may not use a mohel who is not shomer Shabbat *(Iggrot Moshe* YD 2:118) even if this means delaying the milah.

Nevertheless, given the arguments above, I would say that if the mohel is secular, or is basically anything other than a principled rejecter of Shabbat, that he is kosher be'dieved, and in this case you can use him, since there is a pressing need.

What about the fact that the mohel will drive due to your invitation. This raises issues of *lifnei iver,* enabling someone to sin, and, according to Rav Moshe, such an invitation might even be considered a direct enticement to sin, since if he drives, he is doing it directly as a response to your invitation *(Iggrot Moshe* OC 1:99). Nevertheless, the practice in youth groups and kiruv organizations, and among the general community, is to invite guests and offer to put them up in your house. Here, however, it is different. The fact that he is getting in the car and driving to you because you are paying him, would tie you tightly to his chilul Shabbat. I would say, *"I can't ask you to do the milah if it would mean your driving here. I can either put you up in my home, a local B&B, etc., or you can take the bus. Would you agree to that?"* If he says yes, you can't be responsible if he drives in the end. If he says that he will likely drive, the you would need to push it off until Sunday.

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YCT invites readers to a Pre-Pesach Learning on Zoom, Free & Open to the Public, Sunday, April 7th, 8-10 p.m., Eastern Time. For information, yctorah.org.

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/04/ryrshemini/

Sending the Sick Outside the Camp

by Rabbi Dov Linzer *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

Who are our modern-day metzoraim, the people who are pushed outside of normal society and keep distant and hidden from everyone else?

The metzora is not a leper, but he is much like one. He has a serious skin disease and is sent outside of the Israelite camp, in an area that would eventually become outside the city walls of the Land of Israel. We are told that he himself must announce his impure status — *"'Impure! Impure!' he shall call out."* He must warn everyone to keep their distance, and he is then sent outside of the camp—"בָּדָד יֵשֵׁב—He must live alone. Outside of the camp is his dwelling place" (Leviticus 13:46).

The case of the metzora challenges us to reckon who in our society we have cast outside, people with whom we would rather not engage or ideally even see because they make us uncomfortable, because we are afraid of catching what they have?

Initially, I had seen this as a metaphor for those with disabilities, a topic that is close to my heart. As a parent of two boys on the Autism spectrum, I have felt more than once the harsh sting of *"impure,"* the active and passive ways that my children were excluded from community, friends, and Jewish institutions. And historically speaking, those with disabilities, particularly those with developmental and social-emotional ones, were put in insane asylums and other institutions, kept out of sight and mind of "civilized" society. If we don't see them, we can pretend that they don't exist.

This reality is true, as are its parallels to the metzora. And yet from the Torah's perspective, people with disabilities, at least physical ones, are recognized as very much among us. Not only are we to see them as equal members of society, we are also given explicit mitzvot to avoid the tendency that some might have to abuse and mock them. *"You shall not curse the deaf"* and *"Do not put a stumbling block before the blind"* are core mitzvot in the Torah. We have much work to do on the individual and societal level to live up to these mitzvot, to create a society free of bias, barriers, and exclusion. Yet because of those mitzvot, it would not make sense to map the metzora onto these cases. So then, who is a metzora?

As I see it, the metzora serves as a metaphor for the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Hospitals and nursing homes are absolutely essential institutions for society, and they provide the sick and elderly with life-saving care.

And yet, as institutions, they also keep the sick and elderly outside of society, away from our homes and our parks, our synagogues and shopping centers. Many people prefer it this way. Being around the sick or the elderly makes them feel uncomfortable. It is so much easier to have them where they need not be seen. Isn't it amazing how there are almost no really infirm or sick people in our homes and on our streets!

We cannot allow ourselves to accept this attitude of banishing the sick. Someone has to step up and create a different reality.

Who is the one who tends to the metzora? It is the Kohen. He figures so prominently in our parsha that the word "וְ הַכֹּהֵן — The Kohen" appears over 80 times. It is the Kohen who constantly engages with the metzora: checking up on him during the various stages of the development of the tzaraat, and being the one to go out to him when he is healed in order to purify him and bring him back into the camp.

Who serves as our Kohen? The answer is obvious: It is the rabbi. Rabbis are the ones who do the pastoral care, the ones who make bikkur cholim calls. They are the ones who are present for the sick, and who make regular visits to the hospitals and the nursing homes. They represent us when we cannot be bothered to be there ourselves. But we have to be bothered.

We have offloaded onto the rabbi a responsibility that belongs to all of us equally. There are communities that recognize this, particularly in the form of bikkur cholim groups. And yet, even in those communities, we are talking about a small number of individuals. For all the rest of us, it becomes another form of vicarious fulfillment.

The person who steps us has to be each one of us. While the Torah speaks of the Kohen in the case of the metzora, Chazal teach us, again and again, the central mitzvah of bikkur cholim. This mitzvah is rooted in *"Love thy neighbor as thyself,"* a mitzvah which tells us that we must act in the same way we would want to be treated. Beyond that, it is a mitzvah rooted in the core principle that everyone — sick, infirm or elderly — is our neighbor. Everyone is in society among us.

Since COVID, this mitzvah has been made easier for us. We Zoom in, we don't have to travel, we don't have to encounter directly, we don't have to over-extend ourselves. This has allowed many more people to visit the sick, undoubtedly. But such Zoom visits, as important as they are, are only a small part of what bikkur cholim is about. Being physically present demands more from us, but it is so much more helpful. Chazal tell us that one who is present with the sick takes away 1/60th of their illness. This is true in a very practical way. When one is present, it lifts spirits. The visitor can advocate for the patient, and this makes a real difference. Doctors and nurses pay more attention to those who have guests, to those who have others who care for them. Perhaps most importantly, our physical presence helps connect the one we are visiting to the larger human reality and the life that exists outside the hospital. We make them part of our society.

It is our responsibility to do this mitzvah, to not let just the rabbi be the Kohen. Like the Kohen, we must visit and be engaged with the sick, during their illness, and when it is time to bring them back into society. We must, in fact, ensure that they never leave.

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https://library.yctorah.org/2023/10/noach-the-rosh-yeshiva-responds-reciting-a-blessing-on-seeing-a-solar-eclipse/

The Disease of Hatred: Thoughts for Parashat Tazria

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Each morning, we pray that the Almighty will protect us from various evils including *"slander and false accusation, hatred and calumnious charges."* Although we and our ancestors have prayed these words for many centuries, the evils have not disappeared. We continue to face slanders, hatred and vicious calumnies. We continue to pray that the Almighty will indeed protect us from all the evils we face.

This week's Parasha includes laws relating to *tsara'at,* a disease which our sages associated with the sin of lashon hara, evil speech. The tsara'at is a physical manifestation of a spiritual illness. Even though the physical signs of tsara'at are no longer identifiable these days, the spiritual malady remains. Evil speech is a symptom of a deep and contagious social disease.

The recent World Happiness Report (spring 2024) notes that the United States ranks only 23rd among the countries of the world in terms of the happiness of its population. Israel, by contrast, is ranked 5th. In spite of all the problems facing Israel — terrorism, war, economic sanctions etc. — Israelis remain among the happiest people in the world. Israelis feel that their lives mean something, that they are working for a better future.

So why is the United States doing so poorly? And why are American young people, in particular, suffering from a lack of happiness and meaningfulness in life?

Much of the problem stems from increased patterns of hatred, divisiveness, and lashon hara. American society has a tsara'at that is not being dealt with in an adequate manner. Extreme groups utilize mass media to spread lies and hatred. Hateful cult-like leaders promote anti-Semitism, racism, political violence. Universities — that should be bastions of humanism — have become hubs for violence and extremism. In too many circles, it has become fashionable to emphasize all the faults of America and to downplay the amazing historic achievements of this country.

An increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric and intimidation is a sign of the spiritual tsara'at of America (and much of the world!). The slander, false accusations, hatred and calumnious charges are unsettling — not only to Jews, but to all who foster a civil society in which all people are treated fairly and respectfully. Unfortunately, blatant lies against Jews gain credence among hateful and/or ignorant people. But once hatred goes unchecked against one group, the venom spreads.
In the United States, an assortment of hate groups emerge, each spewing its own brand of lashon hara: white supremacists, black supremacists, radical liberals, radical conservatives, anti-Asians, anti-immigrants etc. When a society is plagued with so many manifestations of hatred and divisiveness, it promotes societal malaise. It is difficult these days to be able to honestly describe America as *"one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."* So many people are unhappy. The current political, intellectual and spiritual leaders of the country have not addressed the problems seriously enough and have not been successful in creating a more positive and unifying message.

The Torah states that one plagued with tsara'at needed to undergo a purification process. Similarly, a society suffering from spiritual tsara'at needs to examine the roots of its disease and to purify itself. Leaders in all strata of society need to mobilize against the hatred that is cutting at the soul of our nation. We not only need to speak and act against hatred and bigotry; we must articulate a positive message about civil society, about the values that make America a bastion of freedom, about working together to build an idealistic national consensus.

The antidote to *lashon hara* — evil speech — is *lashon hatov,* beneficial and constructive speech. As we say in our daily prayers each day: *"My Lord, guard my tongue from speaking evil and my lips from uttering deceit."*

* 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 during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3218

Metsora: Faith with Reason, not Blind Faith

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This week's Torah portion, Metsora, begins with a verse that is repeated many times in the Torah: *"And God spoke to Moses, saying."* The verse simply could have said: And God spoke to Moses. Why does it add the word "saying" (leimor)?

Rabbi Hayyim Hirschensohn, an important rabbinic figure of the early 20th century, offered a fascinating interpretation. The Torah added the word "saying" to indicate that God did not want the words of Torah to be given in an absolute fixed form, but rather to be subject to discussion and explanation. The word "leimor" is, in a sense, an invitation to us to participate in the analysis of the text. Indeed, the Talmud notes that Moses had asked God for a clearcut halakha, but God responded by telling him that halakha is to be determined by the majority opinion of the sages in the Great Court, and that there are 49 ways to declare something pure and 49 ways to declare that same thing to be impure (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:2, 22A). Instead of demanding blind obedience, God demanded that the sages – and all students of Torah – use their rational faculties to try to determine truth. (For more on Rabbi Hirschensohn, see Dr. David Zohar's article in the Responsa section of our website.)

A great proponent of reason-based faith was Moses Maimonides. In his *Guide for the Perplexed,* he offered explanations of the Torah's commandments based on the premise that God had a reason for giving us these commandments. The mitzvoth are not arbitrary orders to force us into compliance, but are expressions of Divine wisdom. Our task is to use our intellectual faculties to try to understand the mitzvoth as best as we can. Maimonides wrote*: "There is a group of human beings who consider it a grievous thing that causes should be given for any law; what would please them most is that the intellect would not find a meaning for the commandments and prohibitions."* (Guide 3:31) He was displeased with those who thought that the Torah's teachings should be accepted blindly and unthinkingly. This tendency of mind leads inexorably to a superficial view of religion, even to superstition. A mind that is trained to accept information without analyzing and questioning it, is a mind that can be controlled by demagogues and shamans.
The rise of authoritarianism and absolutism in religion is a very negative development.

Some years ago, my daughter Ronda was studying in a yeshiva for girls in Israel. One of her teachers made a statement, and Ronda asked for an explanation. The teacher replied: this is what our sages taught. Ronda asked: but what was their reasoning? The teacher replied: if our sages said something, it must be accepted as true. We don't need to worry about explanations. This reply distressed Ronda, and helped her to decide to leave that school. A teacher who demands blind obedience is not the kind of teacher she wanted – nor that anyone should want. Students have a right and responsibility to ask for reasons; and teachers have an obligation to help their students develop their intellects, not stifle questions and free inquiry.

A member of my congregation recently called me after attending his father's funeral in Israel. He was told by the burial society there that he should pay a fee so that they would recite kaddish each day in memory of his father. The representative of the burial society told my congregant that having the kaddish said each day would get his father into heaven. Without the daily kaddish, the father's soul was in danger.

Certainly it is praiseworthy for a child to recite kaddish in memory of a deceased parent. And certainly it is praiseworthy to give charity in memory of a parent. Yet, the burial society representative was saying more than this: he was saying that the recitation of kaddish was a sine qua non of getting into heaven! If he were asked how he knows this to be true, he would be unable to give any rational explanation. He would say: that's what our holy teachers have taught, and that is what we accept as true.

The kaddish became a *"mourner's prayer"* only in the Middle Ages. Before that, all the pious men and women who died did not have kaddish recited over them on a daily basis. Does that mean they did not "get into heaven"? Even after the kaddish became a "mourner's prayer," does entry into heaven really depend absolutely on kaddish being recited each day

for one's soul? How can this be known with any certainty? What kind of God would not let a righteous person into heaven just because someone did not say kaddish for his/her soul?

The problem here isn't with the importance and value of saying kaddish: the problem is with the theological position that is offered without explanation and without reasonable argumentation or proof. While the burial society surely thinks it is espousing a proper belief and practice, it is doing so in a manner akin to magic and superstition i.e. if a certain formula is recited, then the soul will enter heaven.

Judaism is a repository of great spiritual and intellectual treasures. We must use our intelligence and our intellectual curiosity in order to find greater meaning in Jewish ideas and traditions. The Torah invites us to think and to understand to the best of our ability; it does not demand unthinking, blind obedience. And God spoke to Moses "saying" – "saying" is an invitation to each of us to join the conversation, to share our views, to seek truth.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/faith-reason-not-blind-faith

Tazria: Tzaraas – Mentorship and Rebuke

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

One of the features of Torah Judaism is the concept that Hashem alerts us if we are off track. Sometimes an alert can come in the form of a prophet or mentor sharing rebuke or giving direction. Other times more innocent looking methods could remind us to reassess. As a friend of mine explained, “If I am about to send a critical email and my computer crashes, I don’t particularly see it as a divine punishment. I prefer to see it as divine intervention, guiding me to reread and reword the email.”

When Moshe taught the details of the various afflictions related to Tzaraas, the people were overwhelmed (Vayikra Rabboh 15:4). These afflictions ostracize the sinner; they bring about many painful situations. Tzaraas can be seen as a very intense punishment.
Moshe calmed the people by saying, *"The afflictions are there so that you will eat, drink, and be happy."* Tzaraas is a communication. It is an alert that something is not on track. For example, among the reasons that Tzaraas comes is if a person is stingy or speaks Lashon Horah. The self-centered person would stay that way indefinitely if he is not alerted. Moshe invited the Jews to see these afflictions, not as punishments, but as guides. Their purpose is so that we get back on track, to *"eat, drink, and be happy."*

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

Negative feedback can be painful, but if it serves a purpose. We appreciate it because it helps us get where we want to go. Similarly, Moshe was telling the people that the afflictions should not be seen as punishments. They are meant to alert people that they are not on track. By providing an alert, Hashem enables us to redirect ourselves towards goodness. Like a coach who provides critical feedback because he really believes in his charge, Hashem is confident that with the right feedback a person can strive to reach his or her infinite potential.

A great example of this is the rumble strips which are often placed on the side of a highway to awaken a drowsy driver who is veering out of his lane. The sound of the tires on the rumble strips is loud, ominous, and scary. But society views it

as a gift because it alerts the driver that he is going off course. Those rumble strips save lives and enable us to safely arrive at our destination.

However…I could well imagine a simplistic driver who is resentful of the rumble strips. He might emphatically criticize the bureaucrats who instituted such noisemakers, and who restrict people to drive only where they think people should drive. I estimate that if such a person drove into a guardrail at the edge of a cliff, he would probably rant about the bureaucracy, pathetically unaware that the guardrail just saved his life.

Moshe's guidance to the Jewish people about Tzaraas is equally applicable to all negative feedback. As the verse in Tehillim (73:1) states, *"Hashem does only good for the Jewish people, for those who are of pure heart."* If one's heart is in the right place – focused on growth and excellence – then all communication is good.

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

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

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

The reality is that these safeguards keep us safe. Like rumble strips, they alert us if we are too close to danger. If we find ourselves running up against safeguards too often, we might just be too close to the edge. Indeed, if one walks right up against the fence, he will regularly bump against the fence, sometimes quite painfully. Instead, it is best to heed the warning: Move closer to a place of safe travel. The fence is not a punishment to be resentful of. It is a guide. Move away from the fence; enjoy the garden. Come into the home which the fence protects, to eat, to drink, and to be happy.

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.**

Parshas Hachodesh – Our First Mitzvah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Tazria

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *****

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Tazria. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* 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.

Tazria: Are Men Better?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

In the opening chapters of Genesis we read about the woman's sin and her subsequent punishment. In the narrative which follows a woman's submissive status, though at times better than the current one, is inferred from the relationship systems between biblical men and their wives and daughters and the legal discussion uses, as does Modern Hebrew, the masculine form as default. That being said, this week's Parasha still has the distinct honor of being the first in which the Torah explicitly sets different standards for males and females:

> *"When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days....she shall remain in a state of blood purification thirty three days. If she bears a female, she shall be unclean two weeks...she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty six days*" Lev. 12:2-5.

The Midrashic and exegetical material dealing with this section revolves around three main concepts: women are inferior to men, the ways to guarantee male fetuses and the science of conception and gestation, but the salient feature of most commentaries is that they focus on the shorter period of impurity after the birth of a boy as a proof for male superiority, instead of considering the longer purity period after the birth of a girl as an opposite, or at least equalizing, argument.

The Talmud recommends that one should pray from the third day following conception through the fortieth that the fetus will be a male. A question was raised: we have learned that if a woman conceives first a male will be produced, but if the man conceives first it will be a female, and once the fetus' gender is determined it cannot be changed. The Talmud answers that it sometimes happens that both sides conceive simultaneously, in which case the gender is still pending until the fortieth day. B. Berakhot 60:1.

Nachmanides explains that the fetus is solely produced by the man's seed, and the woman's contribution is an injection of blood from the uterus into it. He mentions that according to Greek science the body is produced by the woman while the soul and the power of life are provided by the man. Both views consider the man superior and both will resurface in later Jewish literature.

The Midrash recommends the following actions as means to guarantee that one's children will be males and not)G-d forbid(females: abstain from relationships before the period; recite the Havdalah on wine; sanctify yourself during marital relationships. It makes me wonder whether all my very observant good friends who are fathers to girls only)Abou'l Bannat in Arabic(have failed on one, two, or all three. VaYikra Rabbah, Tazria, 14.

An interesting explanation to the longer impurity period mandated at the birth of a girl can be found in the writings of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Sabba)1440-1508(. He writes that women are aware that men control them, treat them as maid-servants, and are the only cause of their strife. Despite all that women, still love their husbands -- a love which according to R. Sabba is counterintuitive and can be understood only as stemming from the woman's curse in Genesis. A woman is willing to tolerate her suffering in order to become a mother, but as she experiences the terrible pain of birth pangs, she vows become celibate. Later on, however, when she sees her little bundle of joy, she regrets her vow of celibacy and wishes to return to her husband. Now if she had a boy, the joy is so great that she regrets within one week and thus declared pure on the eighth day, but if she had a girl it takes twice as long to regret. That is because the mother always prays for a boy and does not want a girl, as the maxim states: *"Three things are wanted by no one but necessary for all: a daughter among sons; tall stalks in the field; vinegar among the wine barrels."* Each one of these is considered a bad omen. Vinegar is spoiled wine,

tall stalks attract attention and can cause the evil eye to attack, and women brought curse to the world. This is the reason, says R. Sabba, that the waiting period is longer for girl. *Tzeror haMor,* Tazria and VaYetze

R. Yitzhak Karo)1458-1535(agrees with his colleague that the female is inferior. Her nature is cold and humid so she needs twice as much as a male to be formed and become a human being in the womb. This shows that according to the divine wisdom a female is worth only half a male, and for that reason he is the one obligated to study Torah. *Toledot Yitzhak,* VaYikra 12

Some of the men reading these lines might be gleefully smiling the *"I told you so"* smile, but others, and probably many women, will feel exasperated and frustrated to hear that this is what Judaism thinks of them. The Torah, though, has many facets, and there are commentators, such as Rabbi Moshe Shamah, who view the matter in a different light. *)Recalling the Covenant,* pp. 576-579(. According to R. Shamah, the varying levels of cleanliness following the birth of a boy or a girl were meant to ease the concern of the multitudes that the newborn might be harmed by demons. The belief that a newborn and its mother are susceptible to demonic attacks can still be found among observant Jews today, although it does not date back to biblical times but rather to pagan Germanic superstitions, as Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten proves in her seminal work on Jewish family life in medieval Germany. *)Mothers and Children, Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe,* pp. 142-182(.

The Torah, in our Parasha, placed restrictions on the mother, but not on the baby, to convey a message of protection and reassurance for the mother on one hand, but also a clear statement that the Torah does not believe in demons who can hurt the baby.

The reason for the different periods after a delivery of a boy or a girl is explained by R. Shamah as representing two aspects of the covenant, which is related to the number eight. A boy's circumcision on the eighth day marks his acceptance of the covenant, while for the girl the same effect is achieved by observing a purity period totaling eighty days.

This discussion is but the tip of the iceberg. There are many more sources in our Talmudic and rabbinic literature which do not treat women with a great deal of compassion and understanding, even when they rely on biblical sources which could be interpreted otherwise, probably because of culture and societal norms of the author's place and era. What then should be the response of rabbis, educators and lay leaders? Can one claim that it has always been like that or should we acknowledge national and global changes? Should we try, or is it even possible, to reconcile the traditional approach with the growing demand for equality inside and outside Judaism?

Rabbi David Bigman, Rosh Yeshiva of Maaleh HaGilboa, believes that instead of confronting disparaging or harmful statements head-on, educators should find subtler alternatives for those women who want to delve into Torah study. *)To Be a Jewish Woman,* Vol. 2, pp. 114-120.(I fear that this method at best postpones the crisis, but might even exacerbate it, since by channeling women's energies away from the problems we ignore them and cannot work towards a solution.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, the prolific author who in his short journey through this world has enriched us with immeasurable wisdom, wished to differ. In a small book published posthumously, he refers to the Genesis narrative and to the sin described in the second chapter. He explains that the first chapter of Genesis deals with God's world, which existed only in God's mind and which will reappear at the End of Days. We live in an imperfect world, the world of the second chapter, and our role is to perfect it. One of the main differences between the two chapters is that in the first one man and woman are created simultaneously and have an equal status, while in the second chapter the woman is created as an afterthought, to serve Adam and be his companion. Rabbi Kaplan therefore concludes, albeit very subtly, that the religious obligation to correct the discrimination against women is part and parcel of our duty to hasten the coming of Messiah. In his words:

> *"The new awareness among women is merely a glimpse of the future Messianic Age")Immortality, resurrection and the Age of the Universe,* p. 62

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

Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Kosher Speech

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Sometimes we say things that we should not have said. We get caught up in the revels or pain of the moment and blurt out all kinds of things that we regret. We ask forgiveness if we hurt anybody and chalk it up to temporary insanity.

Our portion is all about these words that escape from our mouth. For instance, if we speak gossip that damages another person, God gives us a reminder in the form of a skin discoloration called tzoraas that we need to watch what we say. Not everything that we think should be said, and not everything that we say should be said again.

Such damaging gossip is called lashon hara)evil speech(in Hebrew, and it's one thing that our Sages teach us has caused destruction for the Jews time and time again. It's one thing to disagree but it's quite another to speak in ways that destroy another person. Lashon Hara leads to baseless hatred among us, and that doesn't help anyone.

So maybe we need a little baseless love in our life. Instead of kvetching, let's make an effort this week to say something positive and loving about the people we know and don't know. If evil speech can make our skin look sick, then maybe loving speech can make our skin look like we just put on some fancy Dead Sea salt skin cream.

Shabbat Shalom,

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah
Tazria: Shiloh and the Birth-Offerings

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.(

https://ravkooktorah.org/TAZRIA_67.htm

Tazria/Metzora: Words That Heal (5780)

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

At the risk of disclosing a spoiler, I would like to begin this week's Covenant & Conversation by discussing the 2019 film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood.* Tom Hanks plays the beloved American children's television producer/presenter Mister Rogers, a legendary figure to several generations of young Americans, famous for his musical invitation, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

What makes the film unusual is that it is an unabashed celebration of the power of human goodness to heal broken hearts. Today such straightforward moral messages tend to be confined to children's films)some of them, as it happens, works of genius(. Such is the power and subtlety of the film, however, that one is not tempted to dismiss it as simplistic or naïve.

The plot is based on a true story. A magazine had decided to run a series of short profiles around the theme of heroes. It assigned one of its most gifted journalists to write the vignette about Fred Rogers. The journalist was, however, a troubled soul. He had a badly broken relationship with his father. The two had physically fought at his sister's wedding. The father sought reconciliation, but the journalist refused even to see him.

The jagged edges of his character showed in his journalism. Everything he wrote had a critical undercurrent as if he relished destroying the images of the people he had come to portray. Given his reputation, he wondered why the children's television star had agreed to be interviewed by him. Had Rogers not read any of his writings? Did he not know the obvious risk that the profile would be negative, perhaps devastatingly so? It turned out that not only had Rogers read every article of his that he could get hold of; he was also the only figure who had agreed to be interviewed by him. All the other "heroes" had turned him down.

The journalist goes to meet Rogers, first sitting through the production of an episode of his show, complete with puppets, toy trains and a miniature townscape. It is a moment ripe for big-city cynicism. Yet Rogers, when they meet and talk, defies any conventional stereotype. He turns the questions away from himself and toward the journalist. Almost immediately sensing the core of unhappiness within him, he then turns every negative question into a positive affirmation, and exudes the calmness and quiet, the listening silence, that allows and encourages the journalist to talk about himself.

It is a remarkable experience to watch as Hanks' gentleness, immovable even under pressure, slowly allows the journalist – who had, after all, merely come to write a 400 word profile – to acknowledge his own failings vis-à-vis his father and to give him the emotional strength to forgive him and be reconciled to him in the limited time before he died. Here is a fragment of their conversation that will give you a feel for the tone of the relationship:

> Journalist: You love people like me.
>
> Fred Rogers: What are people like you? I've never met anyone like you in my entire life.
>
> Journalist: Broken people.

> Fred Rogers: I don't think you are broken. I know you are a man of conviction. A person who knows the difference between what is wrong and what is right. Try to remember that your relationship with your father also helped to shape those parts. He helped you become what you are.

Note how in a few brief sentences, Rogers helps reframe the journalist's self-image, as well as his relationship with his father. The very argumentativeness that led him to fight with his father was something he owed to his father. The film reflects the true story of when the real Fred Rogers met the journalist Tom Junod. Junod, like his character 'Lloyd Vogel' in the film, came to mock but stayed to be inspired. He said about the experience, "What is grace? I'm not certain; all I know is that my heart felt like a spike, and then, in that room, it opened and felt like an umbrella." The film is, as one reviewer put it, "a perfectly pitched and played ode to goodness."]1[

The point of this long introduction is that the film is a rare and compelling illustration of the power of speech to heal or harm. This, according to the Sages, is what Tazria and Metzora are about. Tsara'at, the skin condition whose diagnosis and purification form the heart of the parshiyot, was a punishment for lashon hara, evil speech, and the word metzora, for one suffering from the condition, was, they said, an abridgment of the phrase motzi shem ra, one who speaks slander. The key prooftext they brought was the case of Miriam who spoke badly about Moses, and was struck with tsara'at as a result)Num. 12(. Moses alludes to this incident many years later, urging the Israelites to take it to heart:

> "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt." Deut. 24:9

Judaism is, I have argued, a religion of words and silences, speaking and listening, communicating and attending. God created the universe by words – *"And He said … and there was"* – and we create the social universe by words, by the promises with which we bind ourselves to meet our obligations to others. God's revelation at Sinai was of words – *"You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a Voice"*)Deut. 4:12(. Every other ancient religion had its monuments of brick and stone; Jews, exiled, had only words, the Torah they carried with them wherever they went. The supreme mitzvah in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, *"Listen, Israel."* For God is invisible and we make no icons. We can't see God; we can't smell God; we can't touch God; we can't taste God. All we can do is listen in the hope of hearing God. In Judaism, listening is high religious art.

Or it should be. What Tom Hanks shows us in his portrayal of Fred Rogers is a man who is capable of attending to other people, listening to them, talking gently to them in a way that is powerfully affirming without for a moment being bland or assuming that all is well with the world or with them. The reason this is both interesting and important is that it is hard to know how to listen to God if we do not know how to listen to other people. And how can we expect God to listen to us if we are incapable of listening to others?

This entire issue of speech and its impact on people has become massively amplified by the spread of smartphones and social media and their impact, especially on young people and on the entire tone of the public conversation. Online abuse is the plague of our age. It has happened because of the ease and impersonality of communication. It gives rise to what has been called the disinhibition effect: people feel freer to be cruel and crude than they would be in a face-to-face situation. When you are in the physical presence of someone, it is hard to forget that the other is a living, breathing human being just as you are, with feelings like yours and vulnerabilities like yours. But when you are not, all the poison within you can leak out, with sometimes devastating effects. The number of teenage suicides and attempted suicides has doubled in the past ten years, and most attribute the rise to effects of social media. Rarely have the laws of lashon hara been more timely or necessary.

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood offers a fascinating commentary on an ancient debate in Judaism, one discussed by Maimonides in the sixth of his Eight Chapters, as to which is greater, the chassid, the saint, the person who is naturally good, or ha-moshel be-nafsho, one who is not naturally saintly at all but who practices self-restraint and suppresses the negative elements in their character. It is precisely this question, whose answer is not obvious, that gives the film its edge.

The Rabbis said some severe things about lashon hara. It is worse than the three cardinal sins – idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed – combined. It kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one of whom it is spoken, and the one who receives it.]2[. Joseph received the hatred of his brothers because he spoke negatively about some of them. The generation that left Egypt was denied the chance of entering the land because they spoke badly about it. One who speaks it is said to be like an atheist.]3[

I believe we need the laws of lashon hara now more than almost ever before. Social media is awash with hate.

The language of politics has become ad hominem and vile. We seem to have forgotten the messages that Tazria and Metzora teach: that **evil speech is a plague. It destroys relationships, rides roughshod over people's feelings, debases the public square, turns politics into a jousting match between competing egos and defiles all that is sacred about our common life. It need not be like this.**

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood shows how good speech can heal where evil speech harms.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Ian Freer*, Empire,* 27 January 2020.

]2[Arachin 16b.

]3[Arachin 15b.

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[What can we learn from Fred Rogers and the way he utilised the power of speech?

]2[Do you think the technology and social media of our age is a positive addition to our lives or only destructive?

]3[Do you agree with Rabbi Sacks when he says that we need the laws of lashon hara more now than ever before?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/words-that-heal/ Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Tazria -- From Pale to Passion

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2024

I'll never forget that morning.

My father never had a particularly quiet voice, but this time, he was positively booming. So much so, all my friends were giving me strange stares.

It was a Sunday morning in my yeshivah, and he had come to join the annual "father and son weekend." Part of the program was for the fathers to study with their sons on Sunday morning. As sleepy teenagers, we were used to slogging our way through the early morning study session.

But here I was, sitting across from my relatively even-keeled father, and not a soul in that room was able to sleep as we learned the text together and his naturally loud voice reached ear-splitting levels. My bemused friends later told me about my father disrupting their morning naps, and I must say, I was quite proud of my enthusiastic dad.

He taught me a valuable lesson that day: get excited about your Judaism!

White = Bad?

The portions of Tazria and Metzorah are largely devoted to the laws of tzaraat, a mysterious rash of white lesions that appeared on the skin in Temple times.1 According to Torah law, this rash renders a person ritually impure.

The Torah prescribes an elaborate system, but generally speaking, if a person spots a white lesion on their skin, they go to a priest in the Temple for inspection. If the priest declares the lesion impure, the person quarantines for seven days, before returning for reinspection. If the spot has diminished, they are OK. But if it has spread, they are expelled from the camp and must sit outside the city with no human contact. Thereafter, they bring an offering and undergo a purification procedure.

Let's read some of that:

> *And the kohen shall see him on the seventh day a second time. And the lesion has become dimmer, and the lesion has not spread on the skin, the kohen shall pronounce him clean . . . However, if the lesion spreads on the skin after it has been shown to the kohen . . . the kohen shall pronounce him unclean. It is tzara'at*.2

In other words, the more the white lesion spreads, the more impure they are.

Why? What is the significance behind the fact that white symbolizes impurity? And why must it be brought to the kohen specifically? Why can't a person self-diagnose, or go to a friend to take a look? Why must it be a priest in the Temple?

Red Is for Life, White Is for…

Generally speaking, a white or pale complexion is not a good sign. It's usually when a person is feeling faint or weak that they turn white, indicating an acute lack of energy, and to some degree, a loss of life.

In contrast, one who is full of energy is usually flush with color, even ruddy. After all, red is the color of blood, and blood is life. So, when a person is feeling animated and full of life, blood rushes around the body, lending the flesh a vibrant hue.

As with everything in this world, these physical characteristics represent a spiritual reality.

According to Jewish thought, life flows from the soul that animates the body. The Kabbalists taught of a soul that is a literal piece of G d that was injected into each human being, and it is this soul that animates the body every second. When the soul departs from the body it leaves behind a lifeless corpse. That's why death is associated with impurity, for the G dly energy has left, leaving a coarse, physical entity behind.

Spiritually speaking, when is a person full of energy and life? It is when they follow G d's word and plug into the G dly energy that is their soul. But when they cut themselves off from the source of life, i.e., they sin against G d, they actively damage their own soul, their own life.

The Tzara'at Barometer

Now, we don't usually get to see an actual physical manifestation of this spiritual reality. When we lose our temper, don't pray the right way, or say something nasty, we don't actively feel or see that loss of spiritual life.

Tzara'at is a spiritual ailment that reflects this inner reality. As the Talmud famously tells us, this unusual ailment comes from the grave sin of lashon hara, speaking ill of others. And so, the rash is white — indicating the loss of life that occurs when one sins.

That's why tzaraat causes impurity, because it's more than just a punishment for doing something bad. The lesion indicates a loss of spiritual life due to sin, and it is that loss of life that causes impurity.

But the thing is that tzara'at can be very small, a tiny white blotch — so much so, that not always does the person even discern that something is amiss. And when they do, it's not always readily diagnosable. "Perhaps it's not really so big, maybe it's not really so bad, who knows?" The challenge of admitting and recognizing that you've done something wrong is a familiar thing, and so it is with this person sporting a small tzaraat: they can't be sure it's really that bad.

So what must they do?

They must go to the kohen — a servant of G d ensconced in a holy environment and tasked with a holy job. Holy as he is, the priest is able to discern the true loss of life that is the small blotch of white, and inform the person that there's something that must be fixed. Thus, he declares the person impure and prescribes a purification process, namely a path for teshuvah.

If the white lesion spreads, that spells trouble, indicating further loss of life. If it recedes, that means that death is disappearing and in its place, a holy source of life is reemerging.

Get Excited About the Right Things

This complex tale of white spiritual ailments tells us that holiness and G dliness are synonymous with red, raging, passionate life. So, if you're not getting excited, something is amiss.

Everyone gets animated and excited about something. Some people are into sports, avidly following their team and screaming with excitement when they win the superbowl. Others get excited about money, while still others are passionate about art, boring everyone around them with long discourses about the beauty of this painting and the finesse of that sculpture. Everyone has something they're excited about.

So, if your sports passion is red hot, but your Judaism is pale white, that's a tzaraat problem. If you get excited discussing politics with your friends, but you're dragging your feet to shul, or dreading a Shabbat meal with your family, then your Judaism is "pale" and it runs the risk of sputtering and dying out.

The message of the tzaraat is that real life is the spiritual life of your soul and her connection to G d. That's something worth getting excited about. So don't let the Yankees get all your red-hot passion; leave some of that for your Judaism as well.3

FOOTNOTES:

l. There are no recorded cases of this rash in modern times. See Is *Tzara'at Leprosy?*

2. Leviticus 13:6-8.

3. This essay is based on *Ma'or Vashemesh,* Vayikra 13:2.

* Writer, editor, and rabbi; also editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program**.**

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5465992/jewish/From-Pale-to-Passion.htm

Tazri'a: Are Your Garments in Good Shape?

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Garments

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.

> *This is the law governing a lesion of tzara'at on a woolen or linen garment, warp or woof, or any leather article, to be rid of defilement or to be defiled.*)Lev. 13:59(

Spiritually, our "garments" are our faculties of thought, speech, and action, which "clothe" – i.e., enable us to express – our intellect and emotions.

We are born with intrinsic intellectual and emotional capacities; it is very difficult to change these. In contrast, it is easy to control our manner of thinking, talking, and acting – as simple as changing our clothing.

By sanctifying our "garments," i.e., thinking and talking about holy things and using our limbs for holy actions, we can gradually remake our intellect and emotions, as well. Having holy ideas – seeing the world through G-d's eyes and ears, so to speak – becomes second nature. Similarly, having holy emotions – liking or avoiding things based on their conduciveness to holy, wholesome, and positive living – also becomes second nature.

By choosing how we "dress" ourselves, then, we can ultimately ninfluence what kind of person we become.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Sacrifices of Childbirth

At the start of this parsha is a cluster of laws that challenged and puzzled the commentators. They concern a woman who has just given birth. If she gives birth to a son, she is "unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period." She must then wait for a further thirty-three days before coming into contact with holy objects or appearing at the Temple. If she gives birth to a girl, both time periods are doubled: she is unclean for two weeks and must wait a further sixty-six days. She then has to bring two offerings:

When her purification period for a son or a daughter is complete, she shall bring to the Priest, to the Communion Tent entrance, a yearling sheep for a burnt offering, and a young common dove, or a turtle dove for a sin offering. [The priest] shall offer [the sacrifice] before God and atone for [the woman], thus cleansing her of the blood coming from her womb. This law applies whether a woman gives birth to a boy or to a girl. (Lev. 12:6–7)

The problems are obvious. Why does she need to bring a sacrifice? We could understand if she had to bring a thanksgiving offering, giving thanks for her recovery and for her child. But that is not what she is commanded. Instead she must bring a burnt offering – normally brought for a serious offence – together with a sin offering. What, though, is her offence? What is her sin? She has just fulfilled the first command in the Torah, to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). She has done nothing wrong. Why does she need atonement? Here are some of the suggestions of the commentators:

Rabbenu Baḥya and Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (Kli Yakar, 1550–1619) both suggest that the offerings recall the sin of Eve in Eden and her punishment from God that "I will make your pain in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children" (Gen. 3:16).[1]

Ibn Ezra, following a suggestion in the Talmud, says that the woman during the anguish of labour may have thought or expressed ideas that were sinful or that she now regrets (such as vowing not to have future relations with her husband).[2]

Nahmanides says that the sacrifices are a kind of "ransom" or relief offering for having survived the dangers of childbirth, as well as a form of prayer for a full recovery.[3]

Sforno says that the woman has been intensely focused on the physical processes accompanying childbirth. She needs both time and the bringing of an offering to rededicate her thoughts to God and matters of the spirit.[4]

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk says that the burnt offering is like an olat re'iya, an offering brought when appearing at the Temple on festivals, following the injunction, "Do not appear before Me empty-handed" (Ex. 23:15). The woman celebrates her ability to appear before God at the Temple.[5]

Without displacing any of these ideas, we might however suggest another set of perspectives. The first is about the fundamental concepts that dominate this section of Leviticus, the words tamei and tahor, normally translated as (ritually) "unclean/clean," or "defiled/pure." It is important to note that these words do not have the kind of resonance they bear in English. Tamei does not mean impure or defiled. It is a technical term meaning that one is in a condition that prevents him from entering the Tabernacle or Temple. Tahor means the opposite, that he may enter.

How are we to understand this? The Tabernacle, and at a later date, the Temple, were symbols of the presence of God within the human domain – at the heart of the camp during the wilderness years and at the centre of the nation during the years of the monarchy.

But they were only symbols, because in monotheism God is everywhere equally. The very concepts of place and time in relation to God are metaphorical. It is not that God is here rather than elsewhere but that we, as humans, feel His presence here rather than elsewhere. It was essential therefore that, from a human perspective, the experience of being in the domain of the holy was an experience of pure transcendence.

God is eternal. God is spiritual. We and the universe are physical and whatever is physical is subject to birth, growth, decline, decay, and death. It is these things that must be excluded from the Sanctuary if we are to have the experience of standing in the presence of eternity.

What therefore bars us from entering the holy is anything that reminds us or others of our mortality: the fact that we are born and will one day die. Contact with death or even birth has this effect. Both therefore debar the person who has had such contact from the domain of the holy. Special, though different, processes of purification had to be undergone both by those who had come into contact with the dead (Num. 19:1–22) and by a mother who had given birth.

The same is true of anything that draws attention to our physicality. That is why, for example, people who suffered from the skin disease called tzar'aat ("leprosy"), or the flow of menstrual blood or a seminal discharge, also had to undergo a rite of purification. Likewise, a priest with a physical blemish was disqualified from serving in the priesthood (Lev. 21:16–23) and was precluded from approaching the altar to offer the fire-offerings.[6]

The woman who had just given birth was therefore teme'a, not because of the sin of Eve

but because birth, like death, is a signal of mortality, which has no place in the Temple, the space set aside for consciousness of eternity and spirituality.

As for the burnt offering, this is a reminder of the binding of Isaac, and of the animal sacrificed as a burnt offering in his place (Gen. 22:13).

I have argued elsewhere[7] that the binding of Isaac was intended as a protest against the absolute power parents had over children in the ancient world – patria potestas, as it was called in Roman law. Essentially, the child was regarded as the property of his parents. A father had total legal power over a child, even to the extent of life and death. That was one reason why child sacrifice was so widely practised in the ancient world.[8]

The Torah makes an implicit comment on this in its account of the name given to the first human child. Eve called him Cain – from the Hebrew meaning "ownership" – saying, "I have acquired a child through God" (Gen. 4:1). Treat your child as a possession and you may turn him into a murderer: that is what the text implies.

The narrative of the binding of Isaac is a statement for all time that parents do not own their children. The whole story of the birth of Isaac points in that direction. He was born when Sarah was already postmenopausal (Gen. 18:11), incapable of having a child naturally. Isaac was clearly the special gift of God. As the first Jewish child, he became the precedent for all subsequent generations. The binding was intended to establish that children belong to God. Parents are merely their guardians.

That, in relation to the firstborn, was also the message of the tenth plague in Egypt. All firstborn were to have been priests in the service of God. Only after the sin of the Golden Calf did this role devolve on the tribe of Levi. The same idea lies behind the ritual of the redemption of the firstborn. Hannah dedicated her child, Samuel, to God, as did the wife of Manoah, mother of Samson. A mother brought a burnt offering, as did Abraham, in lieu of the child. By so doing she acknowledged that she was not the owner of the child, merely its guardian. In bringing the offering it was as if she had said: "God, I know I should dedicate this child entirely to Your service. Please accept this offering in his place."

As for the sin offering, there is a fascinating rabbinic passage that sheds light on it. It describes a conversation between God and the angels prior to the creation of man: When the Holy One, Blessed Be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, "Do you agree that we should make man in Our image?" They replied, "Sovereign of the universe, what will be his deeds?" God showed them the history of mankind. The angels replied, "What is man that You are mindful of him?" [Let man not be created]. God destroyed the angels.

He created a second group, and asked them the same question, and they gave the same answer. God destroyed them.

He created a third group of angels, and they replied, "Sovereign of the Universe, the first and second group of angels told You not to create man, and it did not avail them. You did not listen. What then can we say but this: The universe is Yours. Do with it as You wish." And God created man.

But when it came to the generation of the Flood, and then to the generation of those who built the Tower of Babel, the angels said to God, "Were not the first angels right? See how great is the corruption of mankind."

And God replied [Is. 46:4], "Even to old age I will not change, and even to grey hair, I will still be patient."[9]

The angels were opposed to the creation of man because they knew in advance that of all life forms, humans alone were capable of sinning and thus threatening the work of the Creator. The passage implies that God knew that humans would sin and yet persisted in creating humanity. This may explain the sin offering brought on the birth of a child.

The child will one day sin: "There is none on earth so righteous as to do only good and never sin," says Ecclesiastes (7:20). So a mother brings a sin offering in advance to atone, as it were, for any sin the child may commit while still a child, as if to say: "God, you knew humans would sin, yet still You created them and commanded us to bring new lives into the world. Therefore, please accept this sin offering in advance for any wrong my child may do."

Parents are responsible in Jewish law for sins their children commit. That is why, when a child becomes bar or bat mitzvah, a parent makes the blessing thanking God "for making me exempt from the punishment that might have accrued to me through this one."[10]

Thus the sacrifices a woman brings on the birth of a child, and the period during which she is unable to enter the Temple, have nothing to do with any sin she may have committed or any "defilement" she may have undergone. They are, rather, to do with the basic fact of human mortality, together with the responsibility a parent undertakes for the conduct of a child, and an acknowledgement that every new life is the gift of God.

[1] Rabbenu Bachya and Kli Yakar, Commentary to Leviticus 12:6.
[2] Niddah 31b; Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Leviticus 12:6.
[3] Nahmanides, Commentary to Leviticus 12:7.
[4] Sforno, Commentary to Leviticus 12:8.
[5] Meshech Chochmah, Commentary to Leviticus 12:6.
[6] Maimonides makes the interesting observation that the prohibition against a priest with a physical blemish serving in the Temple had nothing to do with holiness per se, but was due to popular perception: "For the multitude does not estimate man by his true form but by the perfection of his bodily limbs and the beauty of his garments, and the Temple was to be held in great reverence by all." The Guide for the Perplexed, III:45.
[7] Jonathan Sacks, The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning (London: Hodder, 2011), 177–181.
[8] On child sacrifice, see Jon D. Levenson, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).
[9] Sanhedrin 38b.
[10] Genesis Rabbah 63:10.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

God, What Have You Done for Me Lately?

"If a woman has conceived seed and born a male child: then she shall be unclean for seven days; as in the days of her menstrual sickness shall she be unclean." (Leviticus 12:2)

One of the greatest miracles of life is that of childbirth – and this Torah portion opens with the short state of impurity (bound up with the women's and child's close brush with death) and the much longer state of purity (because of the marvelous phenomenon of the continuity of life) which the mother must experience. And the Bible also commands the mother to bring two sacrifices (obviously during Temple times): a whole burnt offering, symbolizing the fact that all of life ultimately belongs to God, and a sin offering, usually explained as being necessary in case the woman took an oath never to become pregnant again while experiencing the pain of childbirth. What is strange about all this is that the mother is not commanded to give a thanksgiving offering, the most likely sacrifice one would expect to find in such a situation!

There is yet a second question – specific to the thanksgiving offering. The general law regarding a thanksgiving offering is that it must be completely consumed on the day on which it is brought – one day and one night. The priests eat of it their allotted portion, those who bring it eat of it, and others in Jerusalem may be invited to eat of it – as long as it is consumed by the end of the first night. Since many wealthy people would bring especially generous thanksgiving offerings in accordance with their station in life, and since the meat had to be consumed in one day, Josephus

records that there was always plenty of "barbecued" meat offered to residents of and pilgrims to Jerusalem in open "Kiddushes" free to everyone. This certainly added an extra incentive to travel to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals – good food, free of charge, was always in abundance! But the thanksgiving offering is merely one type of sacrifice subsumed under the more general category of peace offerings (shlamim) – and all of the other peace offerings, like those brought in payment of an oath, may be consumed for two days! Why only give the thanksgiving offering one day to be eaten?

I would like to suggest an answer to both questions, but we must first review the fascinating biblical account of Elijah the Prophet on Mount Carmel. You will remember that Elijah, sorely vexed by the multitude of Israelites following the pagan god Baal, arranged for a daring contest in front of six hundred thousand Israelites, involving four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal versus the lone Elijah – on top of Mount Carmel. The prophets of each arranged their respective altars, the Baalists prayed, danced, sang and slashed their skin to their idol – but received neither answer nor response. Elijah turned heavenward: "Answer me O God, answer me…, and a fire from the Lord descended and consumed the whole burnt offering…The entire nation saw, fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God'… and they slaughtered the false prophets of Baal'". (I Kings 18:37–40)

The story, however, is not yet over. Ironically and tragically accurate is the response of Jezebel, wicked and idolatrous Queen of Israel, to Elijah: "At this time tomorrow I shall make your life like each of those [slaughtered prophets]" (ibid. 19:2). Why the next day, and not that very day? After all, the powerful and diabolical Queen Jezebel could just as easily have ordered an immediate execution for Elijah! But she understood that had she done so on the day of the miraculous occurrence, when Elijah was a national hero, she may well have faced a popular uprising. Tomorrow, however, one day later – by then, the miracle would have been forgotten, business would return to usual, and the wicked queen could do whatever she wanted to Elijah with impunity. Her words ring so true that Elijah flees to the desert and begs the Almighty to take his soul!

The Bible, as well as our own contemporary experiences, abound with supportive incidents to buttress Jezebel's insight. Only three days after the miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea, the freed slaves again complain about the bitter waters at Mara. Only forty days after the phenomenal revelation at Sinai, the Israelites worship the golden calf – and the day after the miraculous Six Day War and the liberation of Jerusalem, the Jews in the Diaspora as well as in Israel largely returned "to business as usual." Indeed, Moshe Dayan, when he first visited the Western Wall, kissed its stones with such visible emotion that a reporter asked if he had become a "born-again Jew." Dayan honestly responded, "I was not religious yesterday and I will not be religious tomorrow. But at this moment, no one in Israel is more religious than I."

This is how Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed nineteenth century dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, answered our questions. It is sadly not within the nature of most people to sustain our feelings of thanksgiving; we are generally only concerned with what God has done for us lately, now, today. We all too easily forget God's many bounties of yesterday – and certainly of last year and of five years ago. The offering for thanksgiving must therefore be consumed on the very day it was brought; by the next day, the feelings of gratitude will have dissipated. And since the woman may not offer a Temple sacrifice after childbirth until the periods of her impurity and purity have passed – forty days for a male child and eighty days for a female child – she cannot be expected to bring a thanksgiving offering such a long time after the birth. By then she may be so concerned with staying up at night and the vexations of a colicky offspring that the initial joy of birth may well have been forgotten.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l

Sanctity and Impurity

"She [the mother of a newborn] shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary, until her purification period is completed" (12:4). What does the "sacred" have to do with purity and impurity? From a strict halakhic perspective, this verse teaches that throughout the one or two-week period of impurity following childbirth, the mother assumes the status of a "nida" (menstruating woman), while during the subsequent days - the "days of purity" - her status is that of a "tevul yom" (a ritually impure individual on the final day of impurity, after immersion in the mikveh but before sunset). Like a "tevul yom," she may not eat teruma or sacrificial meat and may not enter the Mikdash, until the completion of the period of purification. This is the halakha that emerges from this verse. But conceptually, how are we to understand this apparent incompatibility of "sanctity" with "impurity"? Are these not two different orders?

This connection appears once again towards the end of Parashat Metzora: "You shall put Benei Yisrael on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them" (15:31). Here impurity clashes with the Mishkan - the source of kedusha, sanctity. In fact, throughout Sefer Vayikra the Torah intermeshes both these worlds, that of sanctity (sacrifices and the like) and that of purity/impurity (the childbearing mother, those who experience bodily emissions, the leper, etc.).

The Jewish approach in this regard differs from the two other prevalent attitudes to this issue. The magical approach claims that there are in fact forces of sanctity and impurity inherent in the world, but they are primordial, embedded within the natural order. There are demons, evil spirits and the like, but man does not and cannot bring them into existence; they emerged together with the rest of creation. The scientific approach, by contrast, maintains that no forces of sanctity or impurity exist in the world whatsoever. No object can be seen as more sacred then the next, no given place can be considered holier than the next, and no quality of impurity can be attributed to corpses or anything else. Simply put, science outright rejects all these concepts.

Judaism disputes both positions. On the one hand, it rejects the scientific approach and insists upon the existence of sacred and profane, purity and impurity. Even further, it believes in a hierarchy of levels of sanctity and purity. On the other hand, it disputes the magical approach and sees all sanctity and impurity as emanating from man, not from nature. Man creates sanctity - he writes Torah scrolls and tefillin (and only with the proper intention in mind), he designates an animal as sacred for the purposes of sacrifices, and he even infuses specific periods of time with sanctity.

Rav Soloveitchik writes that Mount Sinai, the site of the most sacred and exalted event of all time, stands today bereft of any sanctity whatsoever; we do not even know where it is. By contrast, the most sacred site in the world for Jews is perhaps the Temple Mount, which received its sanctity from specifically human endeavors: it is the place where man reaches out to the Almighty. Mount Sinai lost its sanctity, as its kedusha emanated from God alone, not man.

The same principle holds true with regard to the Jewish concept of "tum'a," impurity. Natural objects which have not been touched by humans - such as live animals, plants, and raw materials - are not susceptible to halakhic impurity. Only people and objects designated for human use - utensils, foods, and liquids - can become impure. What more, gentiles cannot receive tum'a. Someone outside the realm of kedusha cannot experience tum'a, defilement. Additionally, the process of purification requires specifically a return to the natural order. An impure individual immerses in a natural water-source, either a fountain or

another reservoir whose water has not been drawn by human beings, and an impure earthenware utensil must be broken into raw materials.

The Rambam writes (Hilkhot Tum'at Okhlin 16:9) that there is no prohibition to intentionally make oneself or food items ritually impure. Even kohanim and nezirim may intentionally bring upon themselves all types of ritual impurity except contact with a dead body. "All that is written in the Torah and Scriptures regarding the laws of ritual impurity and purity are relevant only to the Mikdash and its sacred items, terumot, and tithes" (ibid., 8). Ritual impurity poses a problem only within the context of kedusha. "An individual must purify himself for the festivals" (Rosh Ha-shana 16b). The Rambam (ibid., 10) bases this law strictly on the fact that on the festivals people enter the Mikdash and partake of sacrificial meat, which require a state of ritual purity. Others, however, relate this halakha to the very identity of a Yom Tov as a period of kedusha. One may not go through a time of sanctity in a state of ritual impurity.

The verse with which we opened - "She shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary" - implies, at first glance, that introducing impurity into the Mikdash or onto sacred items adversely affects the Mikdash or those sacred items. The verse we cited from the end of Parashat Metzora, however, raises a different problem: "You shall put Benei Yisrael on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them." Here, Benei Yisrael are warned to avoid bringing tum'a into the Mikdash "lest they die." The intrusion of impurity into the world of sanctity harms us, directly. This concept emerges again in Parashat Korach: "Benei Yisrael said to Moshe, Lo, we perish! We are lost, all of us lost! Everyone who so much ventures near God's Mishkan must die. Alas, we are doomed to perish!" (Bemidbar 17:27-28). Although there the issue involves not impurity but the prohibition of non-kohanim to enter the Sanctuary, the idea is one and the same: the sanctity of the Mikdash demands a heavy burden of responsibility, from which Benei Yisrael fear.

Gentiles can live their lives in the "gray area." They do not have a world of kedusha, they have far fewer mitzvot to observe, and no ritual impurity affects them. The Jews were granted the possibility of reaching high levels of sanctity, they have many mitzvot and must adhere to a higher standard of values. But this is not given to us gratis. The elevated status of Am Yisrael carries with it tremendous responsibility, and one must ensure that he not diminish in any way the sanctity afforded to him. Anything in which we infuse kedusha must be guarded against tum'a. Herein lies the relationship between impurity and sanctity, a relationship that emerges throughout Sefer Vayikra. *(Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Tazria-Metzora 5754 [1994]. Summarized by Matan Glidai Translated by David Silverberg)*

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Lessons of Leprosy

Avi Ganz

תניא ארבעה חשובים כמת: עני ומצורע, וסומא ומי שאין לו בנים וכו' (ב"י, ב"במדבר י)מצורע דכתיב: אל נא תהי כמת'. (ב:ד"נדרים ס)

The Gemara (in Arachin and other places) tells us that Tzoraat was a sort of spiritual consequence of speaking Lashon Hora. Once someone violates a civil contract (even an implied one), the punishment very often reflects that. But how often does the Torah describe, in great detail, the physical expression of a spiritual ailment which is then to be diagnosed and treated by a Kohen and after which comes yet another set of unique rules, or a course of follow up treatment, as it were?

The Metzora, the gemara tells us, will first notice the walls of his house afflicted. This, if nothing else, gives him some time to remove his belongings. A warning of things to come. The next step is the clothing of the Metzora. Last, of course, is when the individual develops this skin condition and is sent outside of society.

Without paying too much attention to the details, it's hard not to notice this unique ritual and how it differs from most: a person gets a physical punishment; an illness as a result of his or her spiritual misconduct which, ultimately, was due to a transgression of the "Bein Adam L'Chaveiro" sort. The first instance, of course, was Miriam, who was taken to task for haven misspoken about her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Great Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz (1902-1979) wonders what it is about the Metzora that gives him the status of "chashuv k'meis," or considered dead. He suggests that our fundamental role on this earth is to engage with and provide for others.

An 'ani 'cannot provide for others simply because he is lacking the resources to do so. A blind person who cannot detect others in his

surroundings is also chashuv kmeis because a primary function of the human condition is to be sensitive to others and their needs, and this particular handicap directly affects this very significant function. As parents, our raison d'etre is to provide for our children; ergo, one who does not have children is lacking in the ability to give.

There is no doubt that all three have opportunities to engage and to provide. The Torah is not suggesting that these individuals are less than, but rather that they start with a significant handicap. Rav Chaim suggests, therefore, that the Metzora is included among these others as a chashuv kmeis because he has been removed from society: he can no longer engage with friends, children, students, and teachers. His connection to the world from which he benefits has become one-sided and that, at least for now, makes his existence more similar to that of a meis.

And if so, Rav Chaim continues, we can understand the ritual, the illness, and its direct relationship with the individual and the Lashon Hora that caused it.

In the instance of Miriam HaNevia, we know that Miriam was not speaking ill of her brother for fun. We also know that she was not necessarily criticizing Moshe Rabbeinu. Yet, the Torah tells us that she was sent out of the camp and, it would seem, there was even a chance that the entire nation was to travel leaving Miriam behind. She was, in a very real way, an outcast.

When someone speaks ill of another person, the intention, too often, is to highlight otherness. The goal (while not stated explicitly) is to make sure the listener appreciates just how different and unworthy the subject is. In other words, the speaker of Lashon Hora intends to make sure that the subject of his tale is "michutz laMachane"; an outsider.

The Torah's response, then, makes perfect sense. Now you will be chutz laMachane. Now you will know what it feels like to be different. It's not enough to "just" have the skin condition and it's also not enough to "just" be exiled out of the camp. Both have to take place to drive the lesson home.

Rav Shmulevitz highlights the Rambam who stresses that Miriam was Moshe's older sister who had doted on him and taken care of him… and Moshe Rabbeinu, the great anav, certainly didn't take it personally and yet… the story of Miriam and her Tzoraas is one of the six zechiros: to be read and remembered consistently.

The message of this unique set of laws is the sensitivity with which we must relate to others. If we are careful about not speaking negatively of others, we will come to see and share more positivity. As difficult and sensitive as these ideas are, they aid in what is one of the most significant of our roles: giving to others in all ways, supporting our friends, and making sure that every individual has a place to contribute to society.

When the Metzora eventually does return to society, he is back in a place where he can give. If excommunication is the greatest punishment, then having a place within society is the greatest reward.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

To Fix the World

When a man from [among] you brings a (Korbon) sacrifice to HASHEM; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your sacrifice. (Vayikra 1:2)

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

There are only two positive or action Mitzvos that if one fails to perform them the result is KORES – being cut off, disconnected. (What exactly that means is a long discussion but suffice it to say that it is not a pleasant place to be.) Those two Mitzvos are Bris Mila and Korbon Pesach! Why are those two so loaded with such heavy consequences? What makes them so much more important? There may be many approaches to the question but here is one I'd like to try on for size.

What is the reason for bringing a Korbon? Yes, it is a Commandment, but what is the Taam, the reason, literally the taste, or benefit of this Mitzvah? The Ohr Gedaliahu introduces a raging debate on the subject between two giants of Jewish thought. The Rambam, Maimonodies states that the reason for Korbonos is to nullify idolatry. Those animals that the nations of the world held in high esteem and even worshipped are meant to be rendered false, and worthless. Only HASHEM is worthy of our service. The Ramban, Nachmanodies, disagrees with his earlier contemporary the Rambam. He says that the reason for a Korbon is to be found in the word itself, Korbon, which means to draw close, that is to draw close to HASHEM.

He also contends that the Rambam contradicts himself. Although he writes in Moreh Nevuchim that a Korbon is meant to nullify idolatry, in his giant compendium the Yad HaChazaka, in his introduction to the laws of Avoda Zara- idolatry, the Rambam reviews the history of how Adam's initial belief in one G-d devolved into idolatry over time. He identifies the historical period when that despicable practice started, based on a verse in Chumash, "And to Shes also to him a son was born, and he named him Enosh; then it became common (huchal) to call by the name of HASHEM".

Rashi explains the verse based on the Midrash, Then, it became common: Heb. הוּחַל, is an expression of חוֹלִין profaneness: to name people and idols with the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to make them idols and to call them deities" It seems that idolatry, according to the Rambam, came in to being generations later and yet everyone agrees that Adam the first man brought a Korbon. Why would he need to bring a Korbon at a time that predated idolatry?

The Ohr Gedaliahu cleverly reconciles and essentially makes perfect peace between the two competing approaches to the reason of Korbonos. After the sin with the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, HASHEM approached Adam. "And HASHEM called to man, and He said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because (ANOCHI) I am naked; so I hid."" This declaration that Adam made is very revealing. He declares, as if with a capital "I", "I am naked". The Midrash says that he intimated in that statement, "I did it and I will do it again!" He was infused with a brazenness, a sense of independence and separateness from HASHEM. The Midrash may really be telling us about his desperation. "I did it, and I don't think I can stop myself from doing it again!" In either case he found himself distant from HASHEM.

The Baal Shem Tov sees meaning in the verse in Devarim, "I stand between HASHEM and you…" (Devarim 5:5) that the "I", the inflated ego, the ANOCHI stands between each of us and HASHEM. To the extent that that ANOCHI, that fat I, the first granule of Avoda Zara is whittled down so too we grow closer to HASHEM. It's the removal of idolatry which has its roots in self-absorption which allows us to draw closer to HASHEM.

Bris Mila is the sublimating of the individual's animalistic appetite to holiness. That is the process of abolishing the personal egoistic form of idolatry. Korbon Pesach is the nullification of the collective ego, the sacred godhead of Egypt. In order to bring the Korbon Pesach one needs a Bris Mila, because one must first cure himself and only then can he hope to fix the world!

Dense with Gemilas Chassadim

And the HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying, "This shall be the law of the person afflicted with Tzoraas, on the day of his cleansing: He

shall be brought to the Kohen…" (Vayikra 14:1-2)

Rabbi Samlai taught: With regard to the Torah, its beginning is an act of kindness (Gemilas Chassadim) and its end is an act of kindness. Its beginning is an act of kindness, as it is written: "And HASHEM Elochim made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them" (Breishis 3:21). And its end is an act of kindness, as it is written: "And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab" (Devarim 34:6). – Tractate Sota 14A

What is the value of learning that the Torah has Gemilas Chassadim at both the beginning and the end? Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl gave an analogy to explain. A traveling book salesman sets up a table of books for people to browse and buy. How does the potential customer know whether this is a book worth purchasing? He cannot read the entire book, so he glances at the first few pages and then at the last few pages. If he likes what he sees, then can assume that the middle section is very similar in quality and he is willing to invest his money and time on the book. If we examine the Torah and discover that from the beginning, there is found Gemilas Chassadim and then in the very end there is Gemilas Chassadim then we can safely assume that the entire Torah is filled, even dense with Gemilas Chassadim.

That is a very nice idea and it's good to know but it invites a few major challenges. Tazria and Metzora read like a medical textbook and the person who is stricken must go through many processes and procedures to purify himself and be rid of this skin ailment so he can return to normal life. Where is the Gemilas Chessed of this affliction called Tzoraas?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that Tzoraas was a great benefit, and it is tragic that we don't have it today. How so? I went through many used broken-down jalopy cars until I realized the meaning of and importance of two simple words, "Oil Change". Then one day I bought an expensive car that required monthly payments.

I took out the user's manual and started reading and highlighting important information for the survival and maintenance of the car. I did not want to be stuck making payments on a car that is not functional, so, I became a student and practitioner of the oil change.

New cars nowadays have a feature my Yeshivisha cars never had. There is the ubiquitous amber light on the dashboard that indicates it's time for new oil or to check the engine. If one ignores those blatant signs, he will have ruined his car through negligence. If the car has no such early detection system, and if he is not learned in its needs, it's only a matter of when and not if the car's engine will burn out and it will be a candidate for the junkyard.

Tzoraas came about because of Loshon Hora, speaking badly about others. The Chofetz Chaim explains that even if someone has boatloads of Torah and Mitzvos, if he is not careful about guarding his speech his spiritual bank account can become emptied out just like a businessman who makes tons of money but is not careful about how he spends and keeps his wealth He can end up a pauper. So, woe to us who lack this early detection system to keep us from destroying our spiritual fortune. Tzoraas was that amber light on the dashboard or the check engine sign that tells us to get to a Cohen, a spiritual mechanic before it's too late.

My wife and I were driving on the highway last week and she was marveling that every car seemed to have a phone mounted onto the windshield with the same app on display, WAZE. "Everybody is coming from and going to a different place and WAZE is showing the best way to get there. How is that possible?" I told her that from here we can learn Hashgacha Pratis, that HASHEM can guide every person in an individualized way to reach their destination. Dovid HaMelech said, "Tov V'Yosher HASHEM, Al Ken Yorah Chataim B'Derech" – "HASHEM is good and straight, therefore he guides those who are liable to err on the way." It's no mistake that the Gematria (numerical value) of Gemilas Chassadim is 611 the same as the word Torah, because the Torah is rich and dense with Gemilas Chassadim.

Collected by Allen Klein & Chaim Shulman

Home Weekly Parsha TAZRIA
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the primary commandments in Judaism is to marry and have children. In the Garden of Eden, we find Adam and Chava blessed by God and told to procreate and fill the world with people. For the Jewish people, having children has become a demographic necessity. Even though it is years since World II and the resultant Holocaust, the Jewish people has not as of yet made good on those immense losses in terms of population.

This is due to a lower-than-average birth rate amongst nonobservant Jews, a high rate of divorce, later-in-life marriages and an increasing population of singles. The ravages of assimilation and intermarriage also play a great part in the fact that Jews can hardly replace themselves, let alone make up for the deficit caused by the Holocaust.

The Torah places a high priority on children. It sees in children not only the physical continuity of the Jewish people but also a spiritual and heavenly connection that transcends one's life span. The rabbis commented regarding our father Jacob that as long as his descendants were alive and functioning then Jacob himself, so to speak, was also still alive. Seeing oneself 'past the grave,' is one of the hallmarks of Judaism and of the Jewish people. The concept of the immortal soul is reinforced by being able to project forward in time, living vicariously in the lives of one's descendants.

But, my friends, we all know that having and raising children is no easy task. And we also know that a parent remains a parent for one's entire life. I feel that this is one of the subtle messages conveyed at the beginning of this week's Torah reading. The Torah speaks of impurity, sacrifice, and isolation of the mother after the birth of a child. This is the Torah's indication that these are factors that are unavoidable in the raising and nurturing of a child. In all human society it is natural, indeed expected, for parents to do everything possible to give their children a good and healthy life. Those parents who do not somehow have that instinct within them are shunned in society and even liable to criminal punishment for neglect or abuse of their children. They are, even in our most open and liberal society, treated as being aberrant and cruel. The Torah, which is the book of practical human life, minces no words in describing the difficulties – impurity, sacrifice, and separation from others – that having and raising children automatically brings to parents.

It is perhaps for this very reason that the Torah gave women such a strong maternal instinct and the desire to have children. For without that instinct, based only on the practicalities of life and the difficulties of raising children, Jewish demographics would, in a practical sense, offer us no hope whatsoever for the future. The rabbis in Avot correctly stated that "the reward is directly commensurate with the effort and sacrifice." That is certainly true as far as children and generations and the Jewish future is concerned.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

The Law of Idolatry B'Shituf for Non-Jews
Revivim -- Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

One who worships idolatry b'shituf (in combination) is one who believes in a Supreme God, but at the same time, also believes in various forces with independent power * Some poskim rule stringently and consider them idolaters, while others are lenient, since the prohibition of idolatry b'shituf was stated for Israel, and not for the descendants of Noah * In practice, most contemporary poskim ruled leniently, and therefore, adherents of Eastern religions and Christians, as long as they believe in a Supreme God, are not considered idolaters.

Q: I have heard that there are halachic authorities who hold that according to Jewish law, adherents of Eastern religions and Christians, as long as they believe in a Supreme God, are not considered in violation of the prohibition of idolatry that applies to the descendants of Noah. This is because even though their worship involves idolatry, since they believe in a Supreme God who is above all other gods, and they are upright people who observe the other six of the Seven Noahide Laws, they are considered righteous gentiles. However, on the other hand, I have heard it said that one cannot rely on this opinion, as it is the view of the minority of poskim.

A: Although our attitude towards adherents of these religions depends on several issues that I cannot address here, indeed, the main issue relates to the law of avodah zarah b'shituf (the combination of belief in G-d with other idolatrous and alien beliefs), which, according to most halachic authorities, is not considered idolatry for non-Jews. In other words, included in the Seven Noahide Laws is a prohibition against worshipping idolatry, but when the non-Jew believes in the Lord God of gods, even if he incorporates belief in idols, he is still not considered a sinner of idolatry. I will try to summarize the issue from its foundations in Jewish law.

Idolatry B'shituf

First, let us define: One who worships idolatry b'shituf is one who believes that above all is a Supreme God, the God of gods and the source of all powers, with the ability to influence them. At the same time, he believes that God created various forces that govern the world, and they have independent power to influence what happens in the world to do good or bad – they benefit those who worship them, and harm those who do not. In order to receive the benefit, one bows down to their idols and performs rituals before them, thereby incorporating belief in the Supreme God, with belief in idols.

For Jews, idolatry b'shituf is prohibited like absolute idolatry, as it is stated: "One who sacrifices to the gods, except to the Lord alone, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 22:19).

The View of the Stringent Poskim

According to the stringent opinions, idolatry b'shituf is prohibited for non-Jews, just as it is for Jews, for if non-Jews are permitted to worship idolatry b'shituf, the prohibition of idolatry would be nullified for them, since all idolaters believe in some way in an ancient Creator who is above all. As it is stated: "For from the rising of the sun until its setting, My name is great among the nations, and everywhere incense and pure oblation are offered to My name, for My name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 1:11). Our Sages explained that the intention is that in all places, even the idolaters call God the "God of gods" (Menachot 110a), and nevertheless, they are still called idolaters (Ma'il Tzedakah 22).

The stringent opinions also derived this from the words of our Sages, who prohibited conducting business with Christians on Sunday and the three preceding days, like the law of idolaters (Avodah Zarah 6a), and this, despite the fact that it is known that Christians incorporate the Name of Heaven. And although the Rishonim (Medieval Halachic authorities) permitted conducting business with Christians in practice, the stringent opinions maintain that they were lenient because the Christians of their time were not devout, and due to enmity and financial need, and not because they do not have the status of idolaters. Therefore, the stringent opinions ruled that idolatry b'shituf is prohibited for non-Jews, Christians, and all the more so, adherents of Eastern religions, are considered idolaters.

This is the opinion of Rabbi Shmuel Landa, son of the Nodah Biyehudah (Nodah Biyehudah Tinyana Y.D. 148); Rabbi Ephraim Cohen (Sha'ar Ephraim 24); Rabbi Yonah of Lednsdorf (Ma'il Tzedakah 22); Rabbi Raphael HaKohen (VaShav HaKohen 38); Rabbi Yosef Ta'omim (Pri Megadim Sh.P.T. Y.D. 65:11); Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Shu"t Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger 4, Y.D. 43); Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (Emunah Yesharah 2:7); Rabbi Yosef Babad (Minchath Chinuch 86:2); and others.

The Rationale of the Lenient Opinions

However, according to most halachic authorities and commentators, although it is preferable for non-Jews to believe in monotheism, only the nation of Israel is obligated to do so, but non-Jews are not prohibited from worshipping idolatry b'shituf. And one cannot argue that every

idolater incorporates the Name of Heaven in his worship, because as long as he believes that the ancient Creator does not influence the world, and therefore, does not turn to Him in worship, he is considered an absolute idolater. Only when he believes that the God of gods also influences the world, and also turns to Him in prayer, is he considered one who worships idolatry b'shituf.

The Sources Supporting the Lenient View

The Torah warned Israel to destroy all idolatrous images and not to derive benefit from them, but the descendants of Noah were not warned about this (Avodah Zarah 64a). It is possible to learn from this in accordance with the lenient view, that as long as they believe in a Supreme God, their statues are not considered idolatry, and consequently, there is no reason to destroy them.

Similarly, in the Temple, a sacrifice was not accepted from an Israelite who worshipped idolatry, but a sacrifice was accepted from a non-Jew who worshipped idolatry (Chullin 5a), since by coming to offer a sacrifice to God, he incorporates belief in God, and consequently, does not have the status of an idolater.

We also learned that Jews must sacrifice their lives for the belief in monotheism and not bow down to an idol, but the descendants of Noah are not obligated to do so (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 3:5). The explanation for this is simple: as long as they also believe in the Supreme God, they are not considered idolaters, and consequently, they are not required to sacrifice their lives.

The Reason for the Difference between Jews and Non-Jews

The difference arises from the fact that God revealed Himself to Israel, and commanded them specifically about the belief in His Oneness, as it is stated: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Likewise, in the Ten Commandments, it is stated: "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image…You shall not bow down to them nor worship them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God…" (Exodus 20:2-5). Ramban (Nachmanides) explained that this jealousy is specifically directed against Israel, for Israel is His treasured nation whom He separated for Himself from all the nations, as stated: "And I will separate you from the peoples to be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26), and "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Therefore, when Jews worship idolatry, God will be jealous against them "like a man who is jealous over his wife when she goes after others, and as one serving a master other than him."

It can be added that similarly, the Kohanim (priests) have special warnings, where when a Jew violates them, they do not bear a sin.

The Torah further states to Israel: "See, I taught you decrees and laws…Only beware for yourself and greatly guard your soul, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart, all the days of your life…the day you stood before the Lord your God at Chorev…And you shall well guard yourselves, for you did not see any image on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Chorev from the midst of the fire…lest you become corrupt and make yourselves a graven image…and lest you raise your eyes to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, the entire host of heaven, and be drawn to prostrate before them and worship that which the Lord your God has assigned to all the peoples under the entire heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:5-20). The early commentators explained that since God did not reveal Himself to the nations of the world as He did to Israel at the Revelation at Mount Sinai, His conduct in the world is reflected to them through various forces and manifestations, as stated: "That which the Lord your God has assigned to all the peoples under the entire heaven." And since God bestows abundance upon every nation and land through stars, constellations and angels, they are prone to ascribe independent powers to them, and worship them (Rashbam, Nachmanides, Rashba and others).

The Halachic Authorities

This is also the view of Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema in Darchei Moshe and Shulchan Aruch OC 156:2), Rabbi Shabbetai Cohen (Shach YD 151:7), Rabbi Moshe Rivkash (Be'er HaGolah CM 425:1), Rabbi Yair Bachrach (Chavot Yair 185), Rabbi Alexander Ziskind (Tivuat Shur 4:1). These poskim expounded on this at great length: Rabbi Binyamin Zev Boskowitz (Seder Mishnah on Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 1:7:1-3, Avodah Zarah 3:3), Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson (Sho'el U'Meishiv 2:1:51, 3:1:55 and many other places in his responsa and Torah commentaries), Rabbi Elazar Fleckles (Teshuva Me'Ahava 1:69), Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Lifshitz (Chamedet Shlomo OC 36:14), Rabbi Yaakov Ornstein (Yeshu'ot Yaakov OC 156:1), Rabbi Avraham HaKohen of Salonika (Shiyurei Tohorah 100:6), Rabbi Chaim Palagi (Chayim Melech, Melachim 9:2), Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger (Binyan Tzion 1:63), Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum (Avnei Tzedek YD 105), Rabbi Rachemin Franco (Shaarei Rachamim 5), Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman (Melamed Leho'il YD 55), Rabbi Mordechai Horowitz (Mateh Levi 2:YD:28), Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog (Techukas LeYisrael 1:2:6), Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Kisvei HaGri"a Henkin 2:226), Rabbi Avraham Aharon Preis (Mishnah Avraham 2:1:1-2), Rabbi Shalom Messas (Shemesh U'Magen 3:OC:30-31), and many other poskim.

Many wrote about this principle in a spiritual context, including: Rabbi Moshe Zacuto quoted in Mikdash Melech (Ha'azinu pg. 106) of Rabbi Shalom Buzaglo; Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz the Ba'al HaFla'ah (Penei Yefes, Bereishis 11:1, 31:53 and elsewhere); Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (Kedushas Levi, Devarim Va'eschanan 5:7); Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Chayos (Toras HaNevi'im 11); Malbim (Melachim II 17:34 and elsewhere). Likewise, Maran Rabbi Kook wrote: "Shituf is for them (the nations), for now, the ultimate ascent" (Orot, Yisrael VeTchiyato 5); "And the descendants of Noah are not warned against shituf, which is beyond their conceptual and spiritual capacity" (Shemonah Kevatzim 8:44); Rav Hirsch Kalischer (Mai Marom 10:35, 12:32:2). This was also the view of the Rebbes of Chabad: Rabbi Menachem Mendel the Tzemach Tzedek (Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut 5) who wrote that this was the view of the Rambam (Hil. Avodah Zarah 1:1-2); and the last Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (Likkutei Sichot 25:16 note 44).

In summary

For Jews, idolatry b'shituf is prohibited like absolute idolatry, and all the laws of distancing from idolatry also apply to idolatry b'shituf. However, for the nations of the world, according to the majority of poskim, there is no prohibition to worship idolatry b'shituf, and this is the main reason for the leniencies regarding Christianity.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Othello, WikiLeaks, and Mildewed Walls

TAZRIA Rabbi Jonathan Sachs

It was the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, that translated tsara'at, the condition whose identification and cleansing occupies much of Tazria and Metzora as "lepra", giving rise to a long tradition identifying it with leprosy.

That tradition is now widely acknowledged to be incorrect. First, the condition described in the Torah simply does not fit the symptoms of leprosy. Second, the Torah applies it not only to various skin conditions but also to mildew on clothes and the walls of houses, which certainly rules out any known disease. The Rambam puts it best:

"Tsara'at is a comprehensive term covering a number of dissimilar conditions. Thus whiteness in a person's skin is called tsara'at. The falling off of some of his hair on the head or the chin is called tsara'at. A change of colour in garments or in houses is called tsara'at."

Hilchot Tumat Tsara'at 16:10

Seeking to identify the nature of the phenomenon, the Sages sought for clues elsewhere in the Torah and found them readily available. Miriam was smitten by tsara'at for speaking badly about her brother Moses (Num. 12:10). The Torah later gives special emphasis to this event, seeing in it a warning for all generations:

"Be careful with regard to the plague of tsara'at . . . Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt."

Deut. 24:8-9

It was, in other words, no normal phenomenon but a specific Divine

punishment for lashon hara, evil speech. The Rabbis drew attention to the verbal similarity between metzora, a person afflicted by the condition, and motzi shem ra, someone guilty of slander.

Rambam, on the basis of rabbinic traditions, gives a brilliant account of why tsara'at afflicted both inanimate objects like walls and clothes, and human beings:

It [tsara'at] was a sign and wonder among the Israelites to warn them against slanderous speaking. For if a man uttered slander, the walls of his house would suffer a change. If he repented, the house would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until the house was torn down, leather objects in his house on which he sat or lay would suffer a change. If he repented they would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, the garments which he wore would suffer a change. If he repented they would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, his skin would suffer a change and he would become infected by tsara'at and be set apart and alone until he no more engaged in the conversation of the wicked which is scoffing and slander.

Hilchot Tumat Tsara'at 16:10

The most compelling illustration of what the tradition is speaking about when it talks of the gravity of motsi shem ra, slander, and lashon hara, evil speech, is Shakespeare's tragedy Othello. Iago, a high-ranking soldier, is bitterly resentful of Othello, a Moorish general in the army of Venice. Othello has promoted a younger man, Cassio, over the more experienced Iago, who is determined to take revenge. He does so in a prolonged and vicious campaign, which involves among other things tricking Othello into the suspicion that his wife, Desdemona, is having an adulterous affair with Cassio. Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio, and he himself kills Desdemona, smothering her in her bed. Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant, discovers her mistress dead and as Othello explains why he has killed her, realises the nature of her husband's plot and exposes it. Othello, in guilt and grief, commits suicide, while Iago is arrested and taken to be tortured and possibly executed.

It is a play entirely about the evil of slander and suspicion, and portrays literally what the Sages said figuratively:

"Evil speech kills three people: the one who says it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is said."

Arachin 15b

Shakespeare's tragedy makes it painfully clear how much evil speech lives in the dark corners of suspicion. Had the others known what Iago was saying to stir up fear and distrust, the facts might have become known and the tragedy averted. As it was, he was able to mislead the various characters, playing on their emotional weaknesses, distrust and envy, getting each to believe the worst about one another. It ends in serial bloodshed and disaster.

Hence the poetic justice Jewish tradition attributes to one of the least poetic of biblical passages, the laws relating to skin diseases and mildew. The slanderer spreads his lies in private, but his evil is exposed in public. First the walls of his house proclaim his sin, then the leather objects on which he sits, then his clothes, and eventually his skin itself. He is condemned to the humiliation of isolation:

'Unclean! Unclean!' he must call out . . . Since he is unclean, he must remain alone, and his place shall be outside the camp.

Lev. 13:45-46

Said the Rabbis: Because his words separated husband from wife and brother from brother, his punishment is that he is separated from human contact and made an outcast from society (Arachin 16b).

At its highest, WikiLeaks aims at being today's functional equivalent of the law of the metzora: an attempt to make public the discreditable things people do and say in private. The Sages said about evil speech that it was as bad as idolatry, incest, and murder combined, and it was Shakespeare's genius to show us one dramatic way in which it can contaminate human relationships, turning people against one another with tragic consequences.

Never say or do in private what you would be ashamed to read about on the front page of tomorrow's newspapers. That is the basic theme of the law of tsara'at, updated to today.

Parshat Tazria: God, What Have You Done for Me Lately?

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"If a woman has conceived seed and born a male child: then she shall be unclean for seven days; as in the days of her menstrual sickness shall she be unclean." (Leviticus 12:2)

One of the greatest miracles of life is that of childbirth – and this Torah portion opens with the short state of impurity (bound up with the women's and child's close brush with death) and the much longer state of purity (because of the marvelous phenomenon of the continuity of life) which the mother must experience. And the Bible also commands the mother to bring two sacrifices (obviously during Temple times): a whole burnt offering, symbolizing the fact that all of life ultimately belongs to God, and a sin offering, usually explained as being necessary in case the woman took an oath never to become pregnant again while experiencing the pain of childbirth. What is strange about all this is that the mother is not commanded to give a thanksgiving offering, the most likely sacrifice one would expect to find in such a situation!

There is yet a second question – specific to the thanksgiving offering. The general law regarding a thanksgiving offering is that it must be completely consumed on the day on which it is brought – one day and one night. The priests eat of it their allotted portion, those who bring it eat of it, and others in Jerusalem may be invited to eat of it – as long as it is consumed by the end of the first night. Since many wealthy people would bring especially generous thanksgiving offerings in accordance with their station in life, and since the meat had to be consumed in one day, Josephus records that there was always plenty of "barbecued" meat offered to residents of and pilgrims to Jerusalem in open "Kiddushes" free to everyone. This certainly added an extra incentive to travel to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festivals – good food, free of charge, was always in abundance! But the thanksgiving offering is merely one type of sacrifice subsumed under the more general category of peace offerings (shlamim) – and all of the other peace offerings, like those brought in payment of an oath, may be consumed for two days! Why only give the thanksgiving offering one day to be eaten?

I would like to suggest an answer to both questions, but we must first review the fascinating biblical account of Elijah the Prophet on Mount Carmel. You will remember that Elijah, sorely vexed by the multitude of Israelites following the pagan god Baal, arranged for a daring contest in front of six hundred thousand Israelites, involving four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal versus the lone Elijah – on top of Mount Carmel. The prophets of each arranged their respective altars, the Baalists prayed, danced, sang and slashed their skin to their idol – but received neither answer nor response. Elijah turned heavenward:

"Answer me O God, answer me…, and a fire from the Lord descended and consumed the whole burnt offering…The entire nation saw, fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God'… and they slaughtered the false prophets of Baal'". (I Kings 18:37–40)

The story, however, is not yet over. Ironically and tragically accurate is the response of Jezebel, wicked and idolatrous Queen of Israel, to Elijah: "At this time tomorrow I shall make your life like each of those [slaughtered prophets]" (ibid. 19:2). Why the next day, and not that very day? After all, the powerful and diabolical Queen Jezebel could just as easily have ordered an immediate execution for Elijah! But she understood that had she done so on the day of the miraculous occurrence, when Elijah was a national hero, she may well have faced a popular uprising. Tomorrow, however, one day later – by then, the miracle would have been forgotten, business would return to usual, and the wicked queen could do whatever she wanted to Elijah with impunity. Her words ring so true that Elijah flees to the desert and begs the Almighty to take his soul!

The Bible, as well as our own contemporary experiences, abound with supportive incidents to buttress Jezebel's insight. Only three days after the miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea, the freed slaves again complain about the bitter waters at Mara. Only forty days after the phenomenal revelation at Sinai, the Israelites worship the golden calf –

and the day after the miraculous Six Day War and the liberation of Jerusalem, the Jews in the Diaspora as well as in Israel largely returned "to business as usual." Indeed, Moshe Dayan, when he first visited the Western Wall, kissed its stones with such visible emotion that a reporter asked if he had become a "born-again Jew." Dayan honestly responded, "I was not religious yesterday and I will not be religious tomorrow. But at this moment, no one in Israel is more religious than I."

This is how Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed nineteenth century dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, answered our questions. It is sadly not within the nature of most people to sustain our feelings of thanksgiving; we are generally only concerned with what God has done for us lately, now, today. We all too easily forget God's many bounties of yesterday – and certainly of last year and of five years ago. The offering for thanksgiving must therefore be consumed on the very day it was brought; by the next day, the feelings of gratitude will have dissipated. And since the woman may not offer a Temple sacrifice after childbirth until the periods of her impurity and purity have passed – forty days for a male child and eighty days for a female child – she cannot be expected to bring a thanksgiving offering such a long time after the birth. By then she may be so concerned with staying up at night and the vexations of a colicky offspring that the initial joy of birth may well have been forgotten.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi YY Jacobson from: Rabbi YY Jacobson rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net
Apr 11, 2024, 5:14 PM
subject: **How to Bring Out the Best in Your Loved Ones - Essay by abbi YY Jacobson**

How to Bring Out the Best in Your Loved Ones

If You Don't Love Me, Don't Expel Me

Where Is G-d?

A couple had two little mischievous boys, ages 8 and 10. They were always getting into trouble, and their parents knew that if any mischief occurred in their town, their sons would get the blame.

The boys' mother heard that a rabbi in town had been successful in disciplining children, so she asked if he would speak with her boys. The rabbi agreed and asked to see them individually.

So, the mother sent her 8-year-old first, in the morning, with the older boy to see the rabbi in the afternoon.

The rabbi, a huge man with a booming voice, sat the younger boy down and asked him sternly, "Where is G-d?"

The boy's mouth dropped open, but he made no response, sitting there with his mouth hanging open.

The rabbi repeated the question. "Where is G-d?"

Again, the boy made no attempt to answer.

So, the rabbi raised his voice some more and shook his finger in the boy's face and bellowed, "Where is G-d!?"

The boy screamed and bolted from the room. He ran directly home and dove into his closet, slamming the door behind him.

When his older brother found him in the closet, he asked, "What happened?"

The younger brother, gasping for breath, replied: "We are in real big trouble this time! G-d is missing, and they think we did it!"

The Ignorant Kohen

The Torah portion of Tazria, in the book of Leviticus, discusses the laws of tzaraat, an unusual illness, identified by a white patch appearing on the skin of a person, that was symptomatic of a profound emotional and spiritual blemish within this individual. This, plus several secondary symptoms, determined the person as being temporarily "impure," and required him or her to separate from the community and undergo an intense program of introspection and healing [1].

The Torah states[2] that only a Kohen (a priest), a descendent of Aaron, the High Priest of the tribe of Levi, was authorized to diagnose a tzaraat-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 tzaraat, the person cannot be diagnosed as possessing this malady unless a Kohen states so explicitly.

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 (shoteh), 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.3

Why was the Kohen so indispensable to this process? Shouldn't the scholar, who is intricately familiar with the symptoms of this malady, be trusted more than a child-Kohen who can do nothing more than utter a diagnosis determined by someone else? What is needed here is an expert in these illnesses and symptoms, not a priest! (3*)

Conduits of Blessing

More than three millennia ago the Kohanim were charged with the mission of blessing the Jewish people[4]. To this day in the Holy Land, there is an interval during every morning service, at which the Kohanim spread out their hands and extend Divine blessings on their Jewish brethren. Among Diaspora Jewry, this tradition is practiced only on holidays.

The Kabbalah explains[5] that the reason the Kohanim were designated to be the conduits for Divine blessings is because their souls evolve from the celestial chamber of love, granting them a unique ability to cultivate compassion and kindness toward others and hence making them uniquely suitable conduits for G-d's love and grace.

This is reason for the Jewish law which states[6] that a Kohen who is disliked by the congregation or dislikes the congregation is forbidden to bless the people, because the negative energy that surround this man may severely obstruct the flow of the blessings. Indeed, the blessing recited by the Kohanim prior to the priestly blessings states: "He (G-d) commanded us to bless his people Israel with love." The Zohar, the basic text of the Kabbalah, explains[7] that this is also the reason for the tradition that an unmarried Kohen could not serve as an agent of the Jewish people performing the services in the Holy Temple (Beit Hamikdash) in Jerusalem.

In order for the Kohen to be worthy of this extraordinary position, he needed to fully develop his innate capacity for love and selflessness, and it is only through marriage, in which one learns to share one's life with another human being, that a person is challenged to bring out his full potential for caring and affection. When you are unmarried, you may be extremely kind and sensitive, but at the end of the day you have the luxury of retreating to your own hub and doing things your own way.

Ultimately, you need not answer but to yourself, which is why so many people today opt for the single life. It is only in the institution of marriage that you are consistently called upon to take another person and their needs and feelings seriously. For a marriage to work and blossom, you can't be selfish. That is why it was only the Married Kohen who was charged with the responsibility of serving G-d in the Jerusalem Holy Temple.

Prerequisite for Criticism

Now we will understand why the Torah allows no one but the Kohen to diagnose another human being as suffering from an illness that renders him or her severely impure and requires them to separate from the community. The Torah is imparting to us a critical lesson: Before you diagnose another person as being spiritually ill and deserving temporary isolation, you must make sure that your heart if filled with love toward this person. For it is only then that we are certain that your diagnosis is not coming from your own bios or lack of refinement, but it is objectively true and thus productive and beneficial; and it is only then that you will no doubt search for every possible way to rehabilitate this wounded soul.

As parents, educators, spouses, employers, and colleagues, we often need to rebuke, denounce, criticize, and sometimes penalize. Yet all too often these are done more as an outlet for our own anger and frustration rather than as a tool to help these people become the best they can be. We may call it discipline and justice, but if it is not based on kindness

and the desire to help the other person, they may end up being more destructive than constructive.

Principals and teachers at times feel the need to expel a student from the institution, just as—during biblical times—the leper was dismissed from the community. Comes the Torah and declares: If you are not a Kohen, you are forbidden from issuing forth such a verdict! If you do not genuinely care for this youngster, you have no right to expel them! If you will not lose sleep over the fact that you had no choice but to dismiss a student, then it might be you who should be dismissed from your position.

It is easy to define somebody as "impure" if you do not understand their pain, but it is unethical. Before you punish, you must first learn how to be a Kohen, how to really care about others. When criticism, punishment and even dismissal are motivated by concern for the person rather than your own rage or incompetence, it will have a totally different effect on the person you are punishing. Your criticism will build, rather than destroy, this person's character. What is equally important, you will not cease to labor that the situation be reversed and the individual returns to his or her potential glory.

So next time before you criticize your spouse, stop and ask yourself if you are doing it as a "Kohen," out of concern and care for them, or because of your stress or anger. If that is the case, you ought to remain silent until you can transcend your self-absorption and enter into the world of another human being.[8]

[1] See Midrashim and commentaries to the Torah portions of Tazria-Metzorah. Talmud Erchin 15b. Rambam Laws of Tumas Tzaraas at the end. [2] Leviticus 13:2 and Toras Kohanim and Rashi on verse. Mishnah Negaim chapter 3. Maimonidies laws of Tumas Tzaraas 9:2. [3] Toras Kohanim, Mishnah and Maimonidies cited in previous footnote. 3*) See the answer presented in Meshech Chachmah (By Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen, the author of Or Samach and the Rabbi of the Ashkenazim in Dvinsk, Poland) Parshas Tazria [4] Numbers 6: 22-27. [5] Zohar vol. 1 p. 256b; Vol. 3 pp. 145-147. This idea is based on Moses' expression in Deuteronomy 33:8. Cf. Sefer Halikkutim-Tzemach Tzedek under the entry of Kohanim. [6] Shlchan Aruch HaRav Orach Chaim 128:19, based on Zohar ibid. [7] Zohar vol. 3 p. 145b. [8] This essay is based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe from December 1984. Likkutei Sichos vol. 27 pp. 88-91. Cf. references noted there.

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from:TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> date:Apr 11, 2024, subject: Rabbi Yakov Haber: On Earthquakes, Eclipses, and Tzara'as

Rabbi Yakov Haber

On Earthquakes, Eclipses, and Tzara'as

Much "buzz" has abounded recently concerning two natural phenomena occurring within the last few days, a non-lethal earthquake hitting the tri-state area and a solar eclipse, total in many areas of the United States, but seen, to some extent, practically across all of that country. Much has been written and said about various Torah perspectives on these two events, for, as believing Jews, we do not attribute anything to mere happenstance. Here, I humbly submit some viewpoints culled from Torah sources with a modest attempt to connect these two natural events to broader current events and to the weekly Torah reading.

A famous passage in Maseches Brachos (59a) states:

AND OVER ZEVA'OT [a blessing is recited]. What are ZEVA'OT? R. Kattina said: A rumbling of the earth. R. Kattina was once going along the road, and when he came to the door of the house of a certain necromancer, there was a rumbling of the earth. He said: Does the necromancer know what this rumbling is? He called after him, Kattina, Kattina, why should I not know? When the Holy One, blessed be He, calls to mind His children, who are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, He lets fall two tears into the ocean, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and that is the rumbling. Said R. Kattina: The necromancer is a liar and his words are false. If it was as he says, there should be one rumbling after another! He did not really mean this, however. There really was one rumbling after another, and the reason why he did not admit it was so that people should not go astray after him. R. Kattina, for his own part, said: [G-d] clasps His hands, as it says: "I will also smite my hands together, and I will satisfy my fury." R. Nathan said: [G-d] emits a sigh, as it is said: "I will satisfy my fury upon them and I will be eased." And the Rabbis said: He treads upon the firmament, as it says: "He giveth a noise as they that tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth." R. Aha b. Jacob says: He presses his feet together beneath the throne of glory, as it says: "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth is my foot-stool."[1]

Although earthquakes are unpredictable events,[2] in the above passage, Chazal present various approaches as to the cause of their happening. At first glance, all of these statements - attributing earthquakes to various Divine actions - seem directly at odds with the contemporary scientific theory of tectonic plates which attributes earthquakes to the shifting of tectonic plates beneath the earth's surface. These plates, resting on liquid magma, are the foundation of all of the land above.[3] A fundamental statement of Maharal (Be'er Hagola 6:1) illuminates our understanding of this and similar statements of Chazal. Our Sages in their aggadic statements are rarely concerned about the siba or direct, natural cause of natural or historical phenomena. They do not deny that this is present, but since natural phenomena are created and controlled by Hashem, they are more focused on the "sibas hasiba - the cause of the cause." In other words, they seek the fundamental, spiritual, heavenly reason why either erratic natural phenomena (e.g. earthquakes and rainbows) happen at a specific time or why cyclical ones (e.g. eclipses and comets) were programmed into the fabric of the natural order of creation by their Creator.[4]

In light of this, our Torah luminaries have presented various central lessons inherent in the above-mentioned teaching of Chazal. Here, we present one of them. Maharal (Be'er Hagola 4:7) explains that Klal Yisrael being in exile represents a fundamental change of the proper state of the world.[5] Such a change causes, by means of Divine providence, another massive change in the world order, an earthquake. In the language of Maharal, "shinui goreres shinui." Perhaps we can elaborate based on another teaching of Maharal (Nesiv Ha'avodah 5) that the word for place, "makom," is related to the word "mekayeim" or causing existence. Without a place to rest on, nothing could exist; the bricks of a building are not its true source of existence, but rather the piece of land it rests on is. Hashem is called "Hamakom" since He is the true Source of existence for everything. Hence, when the world order is massively conceptually "shaken to its core" by the exile of the Jewish people, its very source of existence, the makom, is quite literally shaken by its core. According to Maharal, the various anthropomorphic expressions used by the various Amoraim[6] refer to different parts of the body representing various aspects of G-d's closeness to mankind - eyes, hands, heart (the source of sighs), the lower leg (the source of kicks) and the foot, each one focusing on a different level of Divine providence evidenced by the earthquake.[7]

Commenting on eclipses, Chazal (Sukka 29a) state (among other comments there) that when a "solar defect" occurs, this is a bad omen for the nations of the world. By contrast, when a "lunar defect" happens, this is an inauspicious sign for the Jewish people. Here too, Maharal (Be'er Hagolah 6:2), in answering the problem that these "defects" are predictable natural events, explains, as mentioned briefly above, that the world was created in an imperfect manner in light of the imperfections that different segments of mankind would later manifest. Perhaps we can also explain that just as there are times in the day which are more conducive to prayers being answered and seasons in the year where certain spiritual resources are more readily accessible, eclipse phenomena may represent such times.[8] In addition, many have noted that a solar eclipse caused by the moon, smaller than the sun by orders of magnitude, indicates the important teaching of "רבים ביד מעטים", that when one is allied with the Creator of the World and the Master of its History, the ability to overcome mighty nations can be granted even to the few and the weak.[9] Rav Aryeh Lebowitz quotes the Rishpei Eish that indeed a solar eclipse represents the victory of Klal Yisrael, represented by the moon, over the persecuting nations of the world, represented by the sun. The subsequent light of the sun represents the light of redemption over the entire world to follow that.

The bulk of our parasha deals with the physical phenomenon of tzara'as. As is quite evident, this is not to be equated with the medical condition

known as leprosy. Neither its initial appearance not the halachos mandating its declaration as tamei or tahor corresponds to medical science. Nonetheless, tzara'as is a physical phenomenon on the body, clothing or home. This serves as an example of the Maharal's principle of sibas hasiba on an individual basis. True, there is a physical phenomenon governed perhaps by the rules of nature, but it clearly represents a Divinely machinated physical manifestation of some spiritual malaise as highlighted by Chazal in Midrashim listing the various sins which can cause tzara'as. Not just concerning tzara'as but concerning all travails in life, Chazal (Berachos 5a) adjure us: הרואה שייסורין באין עליו, יפשפש במעשיו - one who sees that suffering befalls him, should examine his deeds and return to G-d. In other words, one should constantly strive to see "the cause of the cause" and not suffice with a surface level focus on just the physical reason for the stress.

Klal Yisrael the world over, and, more manifestly, the yishuv in the Holy Land remain threatened by formidable enemy nations. The IDF remains locked in a multi-front war against Arab terrorists in Gaza, Yehuda and Shomron, Lebanon and Syria in a precarious struggle for survival. Iran, the modern-day kingdom of Persia, has threatened and, in light of recent events, presently threatens severe reprisal attacks against Israel and its interests abroad. Any other nation would go insane from fear under the current situation. But, the Jewish people, strengthened by the words of the haggada: "In every generation they rise up to destroy us, and the Holy One blessed be He saves us from their hand!" have confidence that they will survive against all odds.[10] The natural phenomena just occurring should both inspire us to be worthy of Hashem's protection by strengthening our avodas Hashem and by improving our interpersonal relationships and serve as an impetus to constantly realize that the Sibas Hasibos and Ilas Ha'ilos Above is the One truly running the show. May the aforementioned words of the Rishpei Aish be fulfilled in our days with a speedy victory over our enemies and may the illumination of the final redemption speedily shine in this month of the ge'ulah! אור חדש על ציון תאיר ונזכה כלנו מהרה לאורו!

[1] Translation courtesy of the online version of the Soncino Talmud. [2] A quote from the United States Geological Survey: "Can you predict earthquakes? No. Neither the USGS nor any other scientists have ever predicted a major earthquake. We do not know how, and we do not expect to know how any time in the foreseeable future. USGS scientists can only calculate the probability that a significant earthquake will occur...in a specific area within a certain number of years." Available at https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/can-you-predict-earthquakes. [3] A fascinating passage in Chazal perhaps references this by comparing the earth to a ship floating on the ocean (Midrash Tehillim 93) as explained by Rav Dovid Brown, Mysteries of Creation. [4] A similar approach explains the difference between human history and Divinely recorded history as written in Tanach. The former concerns itself only with natural, historical cause and effect; the latter presents the inner Divine dimension. See the Daas Mikr introduction to the book of Shmuel. [5] See also Netzach Yisrael 1. [6] And the necromancer who, in the Gemara's conclusion, actually spoke truth. R. Katina dismissed his words in order to avoid people following his other falsehoods and forbidden behaviors. [7] The existence of earthquakes before the Jewish people were exiled represented the imperfect state of the world which would allow for such an exile. These words of Maharal perhaps imply that in the perfect Messianic era, earthquakes will cease to exist. He writes this explicitly concerning eclipses (see below) ceasing in the Messianic era (Be'er Hagolah 6:2). [8] I was delighted that Rav Aryeh Lebowitz expressed a similar thought in his recently published remarks on the eclipse. [9] A fascinating insight by Professor Nathan Aviezer in his book, "In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science" suggests that, on a pshat level, the seeming contradiction between the passages describing the creation of the sun and the moon as, on he one hand ," שני מאורות הגדולים" but, on the other hand, also as "המאור הגדול" and " המאור הקטון" can be resolved by noting that although in actual size, the sun dwarfs the moon being approximately 400 times larger than it, but in relative size - due to the sun's extreme distance from the earth and the moon's relative nearness being 400 times closer - they are practically equal. This is of course is what allows for a total solar eclipse of the gigantic sun by the small moon. [10] Even CNN, notoriously anti-Israel in its news coverage, put out a series of videos entitled Against All Odds documenting the miraculous survival of the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael.

The beginning of Parshas Tazria includes references to parent-child relationships…

Medical Procedures on a Parent

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: My Daughter, the Surgeon

"I specifically want my daughter to perform my upcoming operation. Is this permitted?"

Question #2: My Son, the Medic

"May my son, a trained medic, give me my daily shot?"

Foreword

One of the many mitzvos mentioned in parshas Mishpatim is capital punishment for someone, male or female, who strikes his or her parent. As we all know, the aseres hadibros include a mitzvah of kibud av ve'eim, honoring parents, and the Torah also has another mitzvah of yiras av ve'eim, treating parents with awe (Vayikra 19:3). Obviously, the opposite extreme is someone who curses or strikes his parent. Yet, there are situations in which the parent wants the child to "wound" him because of the resultant benefit. For example, if the parent needs open heart surgery, and the child is the most qualified thoracic surgeon available, he would probably want him or her to perform the operation. (We are assuming, of course, that the "child surgeon" in this instance feels that he can make objective medical decisions.) Another situation is that the parent requires an injection and it is more convenient or less expensive to have the child, who is a nurse, physician or medic, administer the injection. Yet a third, common situation is when the child is a dentist and will provide free dental care to the parent, but this involves either a painkilling shot or causing the gums to bleed.

Introduction

Although the Torah states that someone who strikes his parent shall be put to death, we know that capital punishment is meted out only when:

(a) a beis din of 23, specially-ordained dayanim rule this way,

(b) the crime is witnessed by two halachically valid witnesses,

(c) the defendant receives a clear warning prior to performing his criminal act,

(d) he acknowledges to have understood the warning, including the ramifications of its punishment, and

(e) he commits the crime immediately (Rambam, Hilchos Mamrim 5:5).

The potential capital punishment meted out by the Torah for striking a parent establishes this as a major sin, a significant factor relating to our opening questions (see Sanhedrin 84b).

Our first discussion will be about the passages in the Mishnah and in the Gemara, located in Sanhedrin 84-85, that discuss the halachic details of this prohibition. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 85b) states that someone who strikes his father or mother is deemed punishable by the death penalty only when he draws blood. The poskim provide three instances to explain what this means:

(1) We see blood from the injury (Bava Kama 86a). Bear in mind that bleeding can be tiny, painless and insignificant; yet, that would be included in the Torah's prohibition. Examples of causing bleeding would include injecting something directly into a vein or pressing against sensitive gums.

(2) An injury in which it is noticeable that there is bleeding under the skin, called colloquially a "black and blue mark."

(3) An ear injury that causes deafness, which is an indication that the blow caused internal bleeding (Bava Kama 86a, 98a).

The Gemara (84b) states that the punishment for striking a parent does not exist if the wound was for a medical purpose, such as using a needle to remove a thorn, lancing a boil, or bloodletting.

Having ruled that it is permitted to cause therapeutic bleeding on a parent, the Gemara tells us that Rav did not allow his son to remove a thorn from him, nor did Mar berei de Ravina allow his son to drain a

boil. The Gemara questions: why should a son performing this procedure on his father be any different from anyone else performing this procedure on his fellowman? There is a lo sa'aseh min haTorah to injure another Jew, but this action is permitted when it is beneficial. Upon this basis, we have blood tests, perform surgery and donate blood. What difference does it make whether the practitioner performs this service for his parent or for anyone else?

The Gemara answers that the concern is that if the person performing the procedure cuts more than is necessary, this is a negligent (shogeig) violation of the prohibition. We are more concerned about a child performing this act on his parent, since this involves a more serious violation than injuring a fellow Jew. Thus, we view with greater concern something for which the Torah prescribes a high level of punishment – and there is a difference in practical halacha that results from the greater degree of culpability.

Prohibited or suggested?

The rishonim note that Rav and Mar brei deRavina seem to disagree with the previous passage of the Gemara, which permits a child to perform a medical treatment on a parent, even when it causes bleeding. Are these amora'im, Rav and Mar berei deRavina, disputing the previous conclusion of the Gemara, or, perhaps, is there another way to explain the differences between the rulings? In fact, there are numerous approaches to answer this question, two of which figure prominently among the (see Beis Yosef and Bach, Yoreh Deah 241):

(A) Rav and Mar berei deRavina conclude that, although a child may carry out these medical acts when no alternative exists, he may not do so when someone else is available to perform them (Rambam, Hilchos Mamrim 5:7). However, when no one who can perform the treatment is available, the child may do so, and we are not concerned about a potential mishap. This approach is followed as definitive halacha by the Rema and others (Bach, Gra).

(B) Others conclude that, indeed, Rav and Mar brei deRavina disagree with the position of the Gemara, cited earlier, and rule that a child may not perform therapeutic activity that will cause bleeding on a parent. Since this is the last opinion mentioned in the passage of Gemara, it is accepted by these rishonim (Beis Yosef, in his understanding of the position of the Rif and Rosh). The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 241:3) rules that this is the halachic conclusion.

So, at this point, we see that the Shulchan Aruch, usually followed by Sefardim, rules that a therapeutic treatment that causes bleeding cannot be performed by a child, even when no one else is available. The Rema and other early Ashkenazic authorities permit a child to perform these treatments when no one else is available.

When is it considered that someone else is available? What is the halacha if the procedure can be performed by someone else, but the parent prefers that the child does it. For example, the child is a well-known heart surgeon, but the surgery is considered routine and any competent thoracic surgeon should be able to perform it successfully.

Similarly, if the child will charge his parent less than someone else will, is this permitted? Notwithstanding that cost is not usually a factor when we deal with violating Torah prohibitions, here, it may be a factor, because the parent, who wants the child to perform the activity, is not violating any prohibition of the Torah. Thus, if the parent wants the child to perform the procedure because it will now be gratis, many authorities consider this as if there is no one available other than the child (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 241:6; Gesher Hachayim 2:1; Minchas Shelomoh 1:32)

My daughter, the surgeon

At this point, we can answer the first of our opening questions: "I specifically want my daughter to perform my upcoming operation. Is this permitted?"

The answer is that if your daughter is Ashkenazi, it is permitted, but if she is a Sefardiyah, it probably is not.

Mechilah

Does it make any halachic difference if the parent is mocheil the child in advance for any unintended injury? The Minchas Chinuch contends that had Rav and Mar berei deRavina stated that they were completely mocheil their sons, even if the result was an unintended injury, there would be no problem for the sons to perform the procedure. In the opinion of the Minchas Chinuch, the case of the Gemara is when Rav and Mar berei deRavina never declared that they were completely mocheil their sons, regardless of the result. Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach rules that this approach of the Minchas Chinuch should be given credence, at least as a tziruf, which means that we may use this as a heter, combined with other reasons to be lenient.

The Minchas Chinuch proposes a further novel suggestion germane to this prohibition. He contends that if a father asks a son to injure him, there is no prohibition on the son to do so. He understands this to be included in the rule that a parent is permitted to be mocheil on his honor. However, as is noted in Minchas Shelomoh (page 184 note 2), this last opinion of the Minchas Chinuch runs contrary to a ruling of the She'iltos of Rav Achai Gaon (She'ilta #60) wherein it states that, whereas a parent may be mocheil on kavod, as is done whenever a mother prepares meals for adult children, this does not permit striking, cursing or treating a parent with disdain, which is prohibited even if the parents grant permission.

Injection

At this point, let us discuss the second of our opening questions: "May my son, a trained medic, give me my daily shot?"

Most people would not be that concerned whom they entrust with giving them a shot, provided the individual is a medical professional with proper training. According to what we have explained until this point, it would seem that, according to all poskim, this should not be performed by a child for a parent.

However, there are some differences between this case and the situations discussed by the Gemara. Inoculations and most other shots are injected into a muscle, and should not cause any bleeding. Does this permit this action, even when another professional is available, or is it no different from therapeutic bloodletting or boil lancing that is permitted, even according to the Rema, only when no one else is available? Furthermoroe, if a medical professional will charge to give the shot, but the child will do it gratis, does this permit the child to perform it?

These two questions were discussed by Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, a highly respected posek of old yishuv Yerushalayim, in his magnum opus, Gesher Hachayim (Volume II, Chapter 1). There, he mentions that he was asked a shaylah by an emergency medical technician whose mother required regular injections whether he could do them for her, something which would save both of them an appreciable amount of money. Since the Rema paskins that a physician should not perform bloodletting on his parent whenever there is another physician available who can, does that preclude a son from injecting his mother?

The Gesher Hachayim presents three reasons why he believes that it might be permitted:

(1) All the situations we have so far described involve causing bleeding for a therapeutic reason. The concern is the child might cause more bleeding than necessary. However, intramuscular shots do not usually cause any bleeding at all. Although they could cause bleeding, since, in most instances no bleeding occurs, we do not need to be concerned.

(2) To understand his second approach, I note the following: In the case of surgery, a surgeon decides where and how to make the incision. If the child surgeon uses a technique that causes more bleeding than is necessary, this might be considered a negligent violation of the Torah law.

Similarly, in the instances of bloodletting, the practitioner decides how much blood he needs to remove and, in the case of boil lancing, how he will lance the boil. There is ample room for a judgment error that will cause a greater amount of bleeding than the situation requires. On the other hand, the medic in our case of an injection is not deciding how much bleeding or cutting is necessary. Therefore, there are grounds to allow the son to provide this injection for his mother.

(3) The son's willingness to work without charge is considered as if no one else is available. The logic is that Mom is not required to hire someone to give her the injection, when her son is willing to do so for free. After all, it is not her prohibition. Once she decides that she does

not want to hire someone, no one is providing her with the necessary service, and the son is not required to hire someone to take his place.

Rav Tukachinsky then reports that after he thought of these three reasons to permit the son to inject his mom, he sent the shaylah to many rabbonim of Yerushalayim to see if they agreed with his conclusion. The three rabbonim who, indeed, answered him and agreed with him all dated their responsa, from which we see that this shaylah came up in the spring of 1944. The three rabbonim were:

(1) Rav Yitzchak Halevi Herzog, a close, personal friend of Rav Tukachinsky, who was the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisroel at the time.

(2) Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, who was the rav of Yerushalayim.

(3) Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, at the time a very young, up-and-coming superstar in psak halacha. In addition to his reply published in Gesher Hachayim, a longer form of his reply is supplied in Minchas Shelomoh (#32).

Applying leaches

Rav Tukachinsky then discusses a similar, related question whether a child may apply leaches to a parent's wound. Is this considered that the child is injuring the parent in a way that causes bleeding? Rav Tukachinsky was not convinced that this is permitted, but

Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach permitted it for two reasons: When applying leaches, the leaches do not begin to draw blood immediately, and therefore this is not equivalent to striking and drawing blood from a parent. Instead, it is an indirect action that would be exonerated from capital punishment. Once this action is no longer included under the Torah's punishment, the prohibition to perform it on one's parent is the same as on anyone else, and is permitted when done for therapeutic reasons.

Secondly, since the parent has the ability to pull off the leaches before they begin to suck blood, the child has not inflicted any injury (Minchas Shelomoh #32:4).

Conclusion

In conclusion to this article on the concepts of kibud horim, I would like to share a comment that I once responded to in an advice column: "My mother-in-law and I have an excellent, warm relationship. However, one area of conflict causes her anxiety and me irritation. The issue is attending the weddings of extended family members, which is very large (sic.) and there are many weddings. She claims that not attending the weddings of these family members, whom I hardly know, rebels against the family norm. I attend about two or three of these weddings every year, when it works out for my schedule, and I forgo the others so that I have more time for professional work, housework, family time and much-needed sleep. On the rare occasions that I attend, I don't know most of the people there, and I don't feel my presence appreciated enough for me to have killed a night. My mother-in-law agreed that I present this issue to the rav. Please advise.

I answered her: You seem to be asking whether you are obligated to acquiesce to your mother-in-law's request. In response, I'd like to start by briefly reviewing the halachos of kibud av va'em. You do have an obligation of kibud av va'em towards your husband's parents, although not on the same level as your obligation towards your own parents or your husband. However, the mitzvah includes only two components – kibud and morah. Kibud encompasses ensuring that your in-laws have their physical needs met. This involves providing them with food if needed, bringing them a drink if requested, taking care of their medical needs if relevant, and so on. Morah requires you to show them respect by not contradicting them, not sitting in their set places etc.

In the situation you describe, I do not see how either kibud or morah come into play. One can claim that, since your mother-in-law is insisting so strongly on this, there is an element of morah. However, that is only a result of her insisting so strongly that your refusal is rude.

If you are like most frum women today, between caring for a large household, supplementing the family income, and taking care of all your other responsibilities, you are juggling the equivalent of at least two full-time jobs. It seems unfair for your mother-in-law to pile even more on your already overburdened shoulders. Women today are already far too stressed and need to spend more, not less, time with their nuclear families. Encroaching on that time for the sake of fairly distant relatives is not a wise move.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Tazria

Holistic Healing

Tzora'as, the main discussion of the portions of Tazria and Metzorah is an affliction that discolors human skin, clothing, hair, beards and even homes. The laws of tzora'as are detailed, complex and intricate. There are Talmudic tractates that deal with the proper procedure for purification and a litany of laws that must be followed flawlessly. The ramifications of tzora'as have more than physiological implications, they have a great theological impact as well.

The discoloration of skin does not necessarily reflect a chemical impropriety or a nutritional deficiency. It is a heavenly sign of a spiritual flaw, primarily related to a deficient speech pattern. It is a disease that afflicts a gossip. The one in question must go to the kohen (priest) who instructs him in the proper procedure to rid himself of both the blemish and the improper behavior that caused its appearance. The Torah tells us that the fate of the stricken man is totally dependent upon the will of the kohen. The kohen is shown the negah (blemish) and has the power to declare it tamei (impure) or tahor (pure). In fact, even if all signs point to the declaration of impurity, if the kohen, for any reason deems the person tahor or refuses to declare him tamei, the man remains tahor. He is not tamei until openly and clearly labeled as such by the kohen.

Yet the verse seems a bit redundant. "And the kohen shall look at the negah affliction on the skin and behold it has changed to white and appears deeper than the skin of the flesh – it is a tzora'as and the kohen shall look at him and declare him tamei" (Leviticus 13:3). Why must the kohen look twice? The Torah should tell us that the kohen shall look at the negah, and if the affliction is white and appears deeper than the flesh of the skin, then the kohen shall declare him impure. What purpose is served by looking again?

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a young man who came to the chief Rabbi of Vilna, *Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky* with a request. As this young man's father was applying for a Rabbinical position in a town that the sage was familiar with, he asked the rabbi for a letter of approbation on his father's behalf.

Rabbi Grodzinsky felt that the candidate was not worthy of the position, but instead of flatly refusing, he just said that he would rather not mix into the Rabbinical affairs of another city and was sure that the council of that city would make a fair and wise decision.

Rabbi Grodzinsky did not realize the tirade that would be forthcoming. The young man began to spew insults and aspersions at him. The sage, however, accepted them in silence. After a few minutes of hearing the abusive language, Rabbi Grodzinsky excused himself and left the room.

Students who witnessed the barrage were shocked at the young man's brazen audacity. They were even more surprised that the Rav did not silence the young man at the start of the barrage.

Rabbi Grodzinsky turned to them. "You cannot view that onslaught on its own. You must look at the bigger picture. This young man was defending the honor of his father, and in that vein I had to overlook his lapse."

The kohen who is instructed to deal with the stricken individual should not only look at the negah. He must look again. He must look at the man. Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of D'vinsk explains that even if the negah has all the attributes that should lead to a declaration of tumah, there are other factors that must be weighed. If the man is a groom, about to wed, impurity must not be declared. It will ruin the upcoming festivities. If there are other mitigating circumstances, then a declaration of contagion must be postponed.

Perhaps the Torah is telling us more. It is easy to look at a flaw and declare it as such. But one must look at the whole person. He must ask himself "how is my declaration going to affect the future of this person."

He must consider the circumstances that caused the negah. He must look again – once at the negah – and once at the man.
There are those who interpret the adage in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers), "judge all (of the) people in a good way," as do not look at a partial person: rather, judge all of the person — even a flaw may have a motivation or rationale behind it. The kohen may look at the negah, but before he pronounces tamei he must look again. He must look beyond the blemish. He must look at the man.
Good Shabbos!
Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rochel bas Yosef.

A Day of Rectification

If a woman conceives, and bears a male child; then she shall be impure for seven days; as in the days of her menstruation, shall she be impure. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised (12:2-3).
Rashi (ad loc) introduces this week's parsha with a curious statement: "R' Simlai stated, 'just as the creation of man came after all the different animals so too is his law explained after that of the animals.'" Presumably, Rashi is referring to the Torah's detailed description of which animals are to be used for sacrifices under what circumstances, and which animals may or may not be consumed.
It is a little difficult to understand how the verses above are a definitive description of the laws of man. What is unique about the concepts that are introduced here that Chazal refer to them as the law of man? Perhaps even more perplexing is the law itself. Childbirth is, perhaps, the single most important event in a person's lifetime. Why should this event create impurity and a separation between husband and wife?
Ohr Hachaim (ad loc) is bothered by the Torah's repetition that circumcision takes place on the eighth day. The mitzvah of circumcision was originally given to Avraham Avinu and is described in Parshas Lech Lecha. Why, asks the Ohr Hachaim, is there a need for it to be repeated here?
Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (ad loc), in translating the verse "on the eighth day the flesh of his skin shall be circumcised," makes a stunning addition to the possuk that actually changes the whole meaning of the verse. The Targum adds the words "she should become permitted." Therefore the possuk reads, "On the eighth day she should become permitted and the child will have the flesh of his foreskin circumcised."
In other words, the eighth day isn't referring to the age of the newborn, and it isn't a repetition of the laws given in Lech Lecha. The "eighth day" is referring to his mother, it is her eighth day. This addition to the possuk is referring to the teaching of Chazal as to why circumcision is on the eighth day: On the eighth day a woman can become purified and be with her husband once again. Since everyone is rejoicing in the childbirth we want the parents to be joyous as well and therefore they need to be permitted to each other.
This begins to explain the reason as to why these laws are referred to the laws of man: On the sixth day of creation man and woman were created. But on that very same day man and woman both sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. This sin had terrible consequences including the definitive separation between man and wife. The menstrual cycle, the pain of childbirth, and the competition for control of the relationship are all a direct result of the original sin.
This parsha begins to introduce the rectification of the original sin. The impurity that was brought into the world via the sin, which is tangibly expressed in the menstrual cycle, process of childbirth, and male foreskin (Adam was created circumcised) are all discussed here. Thus, the Torah is defining the "law of man" as the efforts we make to address and rectify the original sin. This is the path for man to achieve his ultimate reason for being created but it must begin with a reunification with his soulmate and ultimately a relationship with his creator.

Seeing is Not Believing

All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain impure. He is impure and he shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside of the camp (13:46).
In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces the laws of tzora'as – commonly mistranslated as leprosy due to the fact that tzora'as shares a similar symptom where white splotches appear on the skin of the afflicted.
In fact, tzora'as isn't merely a disease caused by a bacterial infection (which is what leprosy is); it is a very specific punishment sent from heaven for the sin of loshon hora (see Rashi in his comments on this possuk). The Torah first introduced this concept in Parshas Shemos when Moshe's hand turned white "like snow" from tzora'as (Shemos 3:6) and Rashi (ad loc) explains that it was because he spoke loshon hora on the Jewish people. Similarly, Miriam is afflicted with tzora'as when she spoke negatively about Moshe at the end of Parshas Beha'aloscha (Bamidbar 12:10).
Loshon hora is considered one of the worst sins a person can commit, as heinous as murder, adultery, and idol worship (Talmud Arachin 15b). Yet the punishment, tzora'as, seems to be a minor one. After all, the size of the tzora'as discoloration can be relatively small, around the size of a nickel. While the consequence of having tzora'as is related to the sin of loshon hora (see Rashi 13:46), it is difficult to understand how a relatively small mark on one's body is a fitting punishment. We know that Hashem punishes in a very strict system of quid pro quo, nothing more and nothing less than a transgression deserves. How is this small discoloration a proper punishment for the terrible sin of loshon hora?
One of the most famous photos of the 20th century was taken by famous war photographer Eddie Adams. The photo, named "Saigon Execution," depicted a general in the S. Vietnamese army (America's ally) killing, in appalling cold blooded fashion, a Vietcong prisoner. Beyond the Pulitzer Prize that Eddie Adams won, this photo deeply contributed to the American public's conflict as to whether or not to support the Vietnam war.
The New York Times (when they still had a conscience) was extremely hesitant to publish his photo for it depicted the brutality of America's ally, and only consented to run it side by side with a photo of a child slain by the Vietcong. Nonetheless, Eddie Adams' photo was the one burned into the American psyche.
Yet, Adams himself lamented, "Two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. The general killed the Vietcong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths."
The actual circumstances from the incident (obviously not captured on film) were that the prisoner had just ambushed this general's regiment and murdered three of his soldiers. It was a hot and miserable day and tempers were running very high. The general, who actually had a reputation for compassion, made the decision to execute the prisoner for he feared he would lose control of his regiment who were furious that this Vietcong had just murdered three of their fellow soldiers. Because of the terrible backlash from that photo, the general was stripped of his command and discharged from the army. Eddie Adams felt so guilty that he supported him and his family until the end of his life.
Loshon hora, while technically true, is actually the most horrible kind of lie. Loshon hora is exactly like a photograph – a fleeting glimpse of a terrible act that a person committed. But what are the circumstances? Who is that person in reality? Is it fair to paint that person's entire being by that fleeting act; is that who they really are? No one is proud of every moment of his life (there is a well-known saying that no one growing up in the digital era will ever be elected to public office because there are photographs of just about everyone in compromising circumstances).
This is why the punishment for loshon hora is tzora'as. A little discoloration, even the size of a nickel, comes to define the whole person as a metzora. This is the perfect quid pro quo; for it is exactly what the person speaking loshon hora did – took a relatively small (when compared with a person's entire life) and embarrassing vignette and portrayed that to be the entirety of an individual's identity. So too tzora'as, a small discoloration, comes to define the entirety of the sinner.

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from: **Alan Fisher** afisherads@yahoo.com Apr 11, 2024 Subject: Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Tazria 5784

Hamas has just announced that it cannot find even 40 of the remaining approximately 130 hostages (alive and presumed dead), including Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours. We continue our prayers for all our people stuck in Gaza. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Tazria and Metzora come right after the death of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. Contact with a dead body creates tumah, spiritual impurity, and disqualifies a person from coming close to Hashem's presence or participating in rituals for a period of time. The process of recovering from tumah and becoming tahor (spiritually pure) again is the subject of Metzora. Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org explain that all forms of tumah arise from behavior or situations that involve contact with death or a near death experience.

Rabbi Marc Angel observes that despite the dangerous and deadly attacks by Hamas and increases in anti-Semitism throughout the world, the latest World Happiness survey, very recently released, ranks Israel as the fifth happiest country in the world – far better than the United States (number 23). Rabbi Mordechai Rhine observes Moshe's remark that tzaraat (the physical manifestation of tazria) is a loving message from Hashem and exists so B'Nai Yisrael will eat, drink, and be happy.

Tzaraat, a white area on a person's skin, garment, or walls of his home, is a communication from God that something is off. Rabbi Rhine quotes psalm 73, which states that Hashem does only good for the Jewish people, for those who are of pure heart. A person with tzaraat must consult with a Kohen, who will identify whether the white spot is tzaraat. After a positive identification, a metzora (one with tzaraat), must leave the camp, call out that he is tamai (impure), and perform teshuvah for a week. The kohen then re-examines the spot and determines when the metzora may go through the purification process and re-enter the community.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on coping with lashon hara, evil speech, the classic evil that chazal recognize as the leading cause of tzaraat. Rabbi Sacks discusses the 2019 film, A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood, which focuses on the life of Fred Rogers, the long time television personality on public broadcasting. A magazine decided to do a series on heros and asked Rogers to be the subject of one episode – but assigned a journalist known for his angry, negative writings. The journalist tries to engage Rogers in negative speech. Rogers, however, turns every negative comment into positive messages to build up the journalist's self image. While the writer attempts to obtain his typical negative interview, Rogers uses his speech only to help him heal from a negative self image from his past. Rabbi Sacks observes that speech has the power to heal or to harm. While the journalist's history is using writing to harm, Rogers uses speech to heal. Rogers perfectly embodies the message of Tazria and Metzora. The cure for tzaraat is to get rid of negativism. Rogers listens carefully, talks gently, and affirms the positive in others. Chazal say that lashon hara is worse than the three cardinal sins of Judaism (idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed). Fred Rogers understands that lashon tov is the cure for lashon hara and the foundation of a moral, happy society.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the discussion of Tazria starts with the laws of tumah and tahara following childbirth (a situation that historically involved a close encounter with death for both the mother and baby). In the six plus months since Hamas entered Israel to murder and kidnap as many of our people as possible, approximately 90,000 babies have been born in Israel. Rabbi Brander informs us that Tazria expresses our hope that the embryos in the bodies of our mothers, and the newly born babies, will help transform our world for a better tomorrow. We who are adults must focus on building a better society and world in which our children and grandchildren can blossom. With the new generations, hopefully our people and the world can find ways to heal.

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>
Thu, Apr 11, 7:53 PM to ravfrand Parshas Tazria

Give the Critic a Taste of His Own Medicine

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 235, Cesarean Section Births. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk says, "And if the Kohen examines the tzoraas and sees that it has spread, he need not (further) examine the yellow hair, the person is tameh (impure)" (Vayikra 13:36).

The Baal HaTurim points out that there are only two times in the entire Torah where we find this expression "lo yevaker" (he need not examine). The first time is in our parsha. The second time is in Parshas Bechukosai, regarding the laws of temurah (switched sacrifices) "lo yevaker (he shall not distinguish) between good and bad" (Vayikra 27:33).

The Baal HaTurim explains that there is a connection between these two pesukim: Since the person was guilty of distinguishing between good and bad (by speaking lashon horah), therefore the Kohen has no need to examine his tzoraas symptoms further and can declare him tameh (impure) immediately. The Baal HaTurim concludes "…for there are seven reasons that cause negaim (ritual skin-blemishes) to come".

This is a classic comment of the Baal HaTurim because it is a riddle. Anyone is welcome to speculate over the meaning of this Baal HaTurim during his or her Shabbos seudah. My feeling is that the meaning of the Baal HaTurim is the following:

What is the aveira of lashon horah all about? When we distill lashon horah to its basic form, what does it consist of? Basically, lashon horah is about criticizing. It is the uncanny ability to look at a person or situation and find what is wrong — to latch on to the shortcomings and the downside. There is good and bad in all of us. We are not all good and we are not all bad. It is possible to look at a person and say "He's stingy, he's this, he's that, etc." But that same person also has positive traits. The chronic lashon horah speaker never sees these positive traits. He chooses to look at the bad and to criticize. He chooses to examine every person under a microscope, and always come to the conclusion that there are faults and shortcomings.

This is the meaning of the Baal HaTurim. When a person transgresses "You shall not examine between good and bad" (he always examines, always looks for fault and always criticizes), he will be punished midah k'neged mida (measure for measure). He will come to the Kohen and the Torah will instruct the Kohen "Do not examine any further." Rule that he is tameh on the spot. Let receive some of his own medicine. Teach the importance of "You shall not scrutinize (further)…" to he who always scrutinizes.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, Maryland

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#235). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Cesarean Section Births. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Tazria are provided below: A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org.

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from **Ira Zlotowitz** Iraz@klalgovoah.org in memory of Rabby Meir Zlotowitz ZTL date: Apr 11, 2024, 7:01 PM subject: Tidbits for Parashas Tazria • April 12th • 4 Nissan 5784

Reminders

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana was Thursday night, April 11th. The final opportunity is Monday night, April 22nd.

Chodesh Nissan began this past Monday night, April 8th. For the duration of the month, Tachanun, as well as the Yehi Ratzons recited after Kerias Hatorah, are omitted from the weekday davening. On Shabbos, Av Harachamim (before Mussaf) and Tzidkoscha (after Minchah) are omitted as well. The Kel Malei recited by one who has a

yahrzeit is also not said. Fasting and hespeidim are generally prohibited as well.
The berachah of Bircas Ilanos (a blessing on a newly blossomed fruit tree) should ideally be said during the month of Nissan. Many have the minhag not to eat matzah from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (some do not eat matzah beginning from Shushan Purim).
One must donate money for Maos Chittin, money which will be used to provide the needy with food during Pesach. The donation may be given from maaser funds.
As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim and performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael 'in travail and captivity' as well as for the soldiers in battle.
Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Metzia 44 • Yerushalmi: Terumos 101 • Mishnah Yomis: Nazir 2:7-8. • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 84a-86a.
Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!
Shabbos Hagadol is next Shabbos, Parashas Metzora, April 20th.
Leil Bedikas Chametz is on Sunday evening, April 21st.
Pesach begins on Monday evening, April 22nd.
For the Shabbos Table
"וְהִנֵּה לֹא־הָפַךְ הַנֶּגַע אֶת־עֵינוֹ" "the affliction has not changed appearance" (Vayikra 13:55) The simple meaning of this pasuk is that the appearance of the tzara'as on the garment has not changed. The Chidushei HaRim offers another, homiletic interpretation.
The Gemara says that aside from lashon hara, another sin that causes tzara'as is tzarus ha'ayin - a narrowness in spirit resulting in a negative outlook and stinginess mainly towards others. As this sin causes tzara'as, in order to heal one must remedy his "eye" and repair his attitude in this regard. The pasuk can be read,"if the nega does not lead to him remedying his eye", then the tzara'as will inflict him further.
The Chidushei HaRim adds that the word ענג - pleasure, and the word נגע (tzara'as) are very similar with interchangeable letters. The difference just being where the "ayin" is placed. When the ayin - the eye - is proper then it is blissful. When the "ayin" falls and fails, it may become a נגע.
Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

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From: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> Thu, Apr 11, 11:15 AM - Ohr Somayach -Explore JudaismStudy In IsraelAudio Insights into Halacha
5784 - **The Year of the Rare Haftarah - 2**
by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz
As discussed in the OhrNet to Parashas Vayigash, our current year, 5784, is quite a rare one indeed. Over the course of this special year, not just one, but three out of the six rarest haftaros are leined. The next time this will occur is in another seventeen years, in 5801/2040. But first, a bit of background is in order.
According to the Abudraham and Tosafos Yom Tov, the haftaros were established when the wicked Antiochus IV (infamous from the Chanukah miracle) outlawed public reading of the Torah. The Chachamim of the time therefore established the custom of reading a topic from the Nevi'im similar to what was supposed to be read from the Torah. Even after the decree was nullified, and even prior to the Gemara's printing, this became minhag Yisrael.
Most haftaros share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the Torah reading. The Gemara Megillah (29b-31a) discusses the proper haftarah readings for the various holidays throughout the year, which are rather related to the holiday and generally trump a weekly haftarah. But it is not just Yomim Tovim that may "knock off" a regular haftarah, but special Shabbosos, and usually, even if Rosh Chodesh falls out on Sunday. Hence, practically speaking, there are several haftaros that almost never get a chance to be leined publicly.
But, as mentioned previously, this year, three out of the six rarest haftaros are leined. They are the haftaros of Parashas Mikeitz (at the end of sefer Bereishis), Parashas Tazria, and Parashas Kedoshim (both in sefer Vayikra).
As discussed in Part 1 of this series, this year, the haftarah of Parashas Mikeitz was actually leined. In fact the next time "Vayikatz Shlomo" (Melachim I Ch. 3:15), discussing the wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech – ordering to cut the disputed baby in half in order to determine his real mother, is the second rarest haftarah Ashkenazim read, averaging being read only once in ten years. The next time this haftarah is slated to be read is in another 17 years in 5801/2040.
This week, Parashas Tazria, the second rare haftarah "V'ish ba," (Melachim II Ch. 4:42) will be read. Although statistically speaking, it is on average read every 6 years (16.32% of the time), nevertheless, it practically has not been leined in 21 years – since 5763/2003! There are several reasons for this. The common minhag is that when the Parshiyos of Tazria and Metzora are read together - which they are in a standard year; they are only leined separately in a leap year - only the haftarah of the latter Parashah is read.
Although there is some debate about this among the Rishonim, this position is codified as the proper ruling by both the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 284:7) and Rema (Orach Chaim 428:8), and as far as this author knows, this was accepted by all of Klal Yisrael. The main reason this is so is to enable reading a haftarah similar to what was just concluded in the Torah leining, which translates to the second parashah that was just finished, and not the first parashah. So we see that generally speaking, whenever there is a double parashah, the haftarah of the second parashah is read, as that is the Torah reading that we just concluded. However, this means it is only possible for Tazria's haftarah to be read in a leap year, which occurs only 7 out of 19 years.
Moreover, Tazria can also be Parashas HaChodesh, which as a special haftarah reading, would also trump its leining. That, plus the preponderance of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh or Rosh Chodesh falling on Sunday, both of which would preclude it from being leined, make this year's Tazria's stand-alone haftarah quite a rare read, indeed.
However, the calendarical-minded among us who appreciate rarities and statistics need not fret, as we will thankfully not have to wait another 21 years to hear Tazria's haftarah. In fact, in the upcoming leap years, Tazria's haftarah will be read somewhat often – in 5787, 5790, 5793, and then, after an 8 year break, again in 5801.
The remaining rare haftarah, and the reasons detailing why it will be specifically read this year, will be IY"H be discussed closer to the time it will be read.
Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that "the Jew's catechism is his calendar." It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare haftaros, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our calendarical customs.
This author wishes to thank R' Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of 'Understanding the Jewish Calendar,' for originally 'tipping me off' as to the rare haftaros being leined this year, as well as for being a fount of calendarical knowledge.

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

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.

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

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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.