

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the deaths of Nadav and Avihu and after the restrained reaction by Aharon and his remaining sons, the Kohanim were commanded "to separate between the holy and the secular, and between the impure and the pure. And to instruct Bnei Yisrael about all the laws which G-d gave, through Moshe." [Vayikra 10:10-11]. And this is indeed immediately followed by the laws differentiating between the ritually pure and the impure. First come the laws pertaining to eating pure and impure animals, and then the laws of impurity related to a carcass, ending with the words, "This is the law of the animals and the birds, and of all living creatures that swarm in water, and all creatures that crawl on the earth-in order to separate between the impure and the pure, and between the animal which may be eaten and the animal which may not be eaten" [11:46-47]. In the rest of the portions of Tazriya and Metzora, the laws are brought pertaining to ritual impurities related to flows that come from the human body, and impurities stemming from a person's clothing and his home. At the end of these laws, we are told, "This is the law with respect to leprosy and to a blemish; and with respect to tzara'at of clothing or a house... in order to instruct on the day of purity and of impurity." [14:54-57]. Thus, the laws of impurity of animals are discussed in terms of "separation" between the pure and the impure, while the laws of impurity of human beings, their clothing, and their homes are included as part of the "instructions" given by the Kohanim.

The difference between separating-"lehavdil"-and instructing-"lehorot" -- is clearly seen in the different roles played by the Kohanim with respect to the two different kinds of impurity. In the discussion of impure animals in Chapter 11 the Kohanim are not mentioned at all. Evidently, the role of the Kohanim in this matter is a minor one, and at the very most they are responsible for teaching the laws. However, the situation is very different with respect to the ritual impurity of a person himself and of his home. The word "Kohen" appears dozens of times in this week's Torah portion, which is reasonable in that the Kohen is deeply involved in the entire procedure that a "metzora"-a leper-goes through, starting with viewing the malady, through the various stages of being locked up before each decision, and up

to the process of purification. This can lead us to ask a related question:

Why should it be that the Kohen is so intimately involved in the process related to the impurity of a human being or his property?

It may be that the answer to this question will bring us back to the affair of Nadav and Avihu. After they died, their family was commanded to continue the holy rituals and not to observe the customs of mourning. "Do not leave your heads unkempt and do not rend your garments... and your brothers, all of Bnei Yisrael, will weep about the burning that G-d did. And you shall not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, for the Divine oil of anointment is upon you." [10:6-7]. The great strength of the Kohanim was that they were able to overcome their own personal grief and continue performing the rituals of the Tabernacle on that day. Because of this, they were privileged to have the responsibility for the areas of ritual purity and impurity among Bnei Yisrael.

Note that the laws of a metzora are similar to those of a mourner. "And with respect to the afflicted one who has a malady, his clothing shall be torn, and his head shall be unkempt, and he shall be dressed up to his lips, and he will cry out, 'impure, impure'" [13:45]. However, as opposed to a mourner, who in this way expresses his sorrow at the loss of a loved one, a metzora is in effect mourning about himself and about his own difficult problems. It is therefore reasonable to expect that a metzora will be given spiritual support on his long and difficult path. Nobody could be more appropriate for this task of accompanying the metzora than the Kohanim, who acutely felt the pain of mourning but struggled against their emotions with great strength. Thus, it is no coincidence that the metzora is sent "to Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons, the Kohanim" [13:2].

Impurity of a New Mother and Circumcision

by Shlomit Tur-Paz, Director of Ilim Institute, Consultants on the subject of the Jewish life cycle

"A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be impure for seven days... and on the eighth day his foreskin will be removed, and for thirty-three days she will sit with the blood of purity... And if she gives birth to a female, she will be impure for two weeks, the time of her bleeding, and she will then sit with the blood of purity for sixty-six days." [Vayikra 12:2-

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5]. Why are the laws of purity different after the birth of a boy and after the birth of a girl?

Various explanations have been given in the classical sources for this difference. For example, one approach emphasizes the way the fetus is created. "Rabbi Yishmael says... a male is completely formed within forty-one days, while a female is formed in eighty-one days" [Mishna Nida 3:7, and see the comment by Ibn Ezra]. Another explanation is that this practice is related to the common preference of parents to have a son: "Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said... with respect to a boy, about which everybody rejoices, the woman regrets her oath (not to have any more children, because of the pain of childbirth) after one week, but with respect to a girl, about which everybody is unhappy, the woman regrets her oath after fourteen days." [Nida 31b, and see Ha'amek Davar]. A third explanation is related to the mother's recovery after the birth: "The suffering after birth of a female is greater than that after the birth of a male" [Nida 31a, and see Ramban].

It would seem at first glance that the rules for the birth of a girl are those which best match the natural events. From this point of view, the time of impurity should be about two weeks, since this is approximately the usual time of separation between man and woman every month and it corresponds roughly to the normal time needed for the initial recovery from giving birth. The second period of eighty days corresponds to what has been called the "fourth term of pregnancy" (which is usually divided into three "terms")

* a period of about three months which is required for the woman to return to full activity after giving birth. This also corresponds to the normal time of birth leave, 84 days. But then the question is: Why are the times after the birth of a boy substantially less than these limits? The answer is that the decrease in time is related to the circumcision, which is performed on the

eight day. This forces the family to leave the home and go out in public, within the community, after only one week has passed. In this way, the Brit Mila is similar to other Jewish life cycle events that take seven days: seven days of celebration after a wedding, seven days of mourning, and seven days between birth and circumcision.

Circumcision, as an obligation that the father must perform for his son, is an event that enhances the link between father and son. In the same way as the link between mother and child formed by the pregnancy itself, the Brit involves the formation of a physical connection, a link of blood, which involves pain and remains forever as a mark on the body. There is only one relationship which does not have this kind of link, that between father and daughter. It is clear that for every parent this physical link is only the first step in an intimate relationship that will develop through years of love, education, and shared experiences. However, a father and daughter have a special challenge to create a bond by a process which is slow, based on emotion and education, without the trigger of any physical event. The growing trend to leave the education of older sons to the father and to have the mother responsible for the education of the girls involves a danger that this challenge will not be fully met.

RABBI ARON TENDLER

Rabbi's Notebook

Parsha Tazria opens with a focus on childbirth and parenting. If the baby is a boy, the mother is Tameh (restricted status) for 7 days and Tahor (unrestricted status) for 33. On the eighth day the father must arrange for a Bris (circumcision). If the baby is a girl, the mother is Tameh for 14 days and Tahor for 66 days. The obvious question is, why is the father more so that the mother obligated to arrange the Bris and why does the mother double her times of Tumah and Taharah if her baby is a girl?

Rav Hirsch explains that the Torah is addressing the role of the father and mother in raising their children. Common sense and experience dictate that parents are the role models for their children. Beyond the love and care that parents lavish upon their children, regardless of gender, is the unique role modeling of an adult male toward a son and an adult female toward a daughter.

The Bris is the obligation of the father because it inculcates the baby boy into his national identity and responsibilities as a Jewish male. However, let's be honest. It is an identity that is imposed on the baby boy and an experience he will not remember. In and of itself it has little meaning or impact on the baby. Therefore, the Mitzvah must be more than its ceremonial value and celebration-it must be more for the father than the son. The Bris obligation imposed on the father is to focus the father on his obligation as a role model and teacher. It

means that a son will usually do what his father does. If the father wears Tzitzis (fringes), puts on Tefilin (phylacteries), learns Torah, treats his wife with respect and dignity, his son will do the same. The immediate commandment for the father is to circumcise his son. The life long message is the obligation to model for his son how to be to be an observant Jewish man. Is there a comparative ceremony and message for a mother to her daughter?

Rav Hirsch explains that the equation of 7 non-clean days and 33 clean days is the process necessary for a woman to deal with her profoundly personal involvement in the birthing of life. With the birth of a girl, the second series of 7 days and 33 days totaling 14 non-clean days and 66 clean days is to focus the mother on her obligation as the role model for her daughter. If she lights candles, attempts to understand and appreciate Jewish law, goes to the Mikveh (ritual bath), and treats her husband with dignity and respect, her daughter will do the same. The daughter does not know or remember that the mother waited the extra week and 33 days at the time of her birth; however, the mother knows what she did, and she knows that she did so for the sake of her newborn daughter.

This past week, I was challenged to defend Rav Hirsch's explanation of the doubled days of Tumah and Taharah with the birth of a girl. The stated concern was for the apparent lack of equability between the two declarations of assumed responsibility. On the one hand, the Bris-the father's assumption of obligation to raise his son as an observant Jewish man; and on the other, the mother's doubling the days of Tumah and Taharah that emphasize her obligation to raise her daughter as a observant Jewish woman. On the one hand the Bris with its ceremonious and devotional public trappings; and on the other hand, the private contemplation of the mother as she doubles the time of her Tumah and Taharah.

Initially, I directed my response to the presumption that mandated public displays of commitment and devotion are somehow more important than private moments of contemplation and focus. As such, the Bris is certainly a much stronger expression of assumed obligation on the part of the father than the doubled time of Tumah and Taharah would be for the mother. However, I believe that reasoning to be emotionally fueled and intellectually flawed. Public displays and ceremonies certainly seem to be more important; however, true commitment and devotion is far better proven in the private arena than the public. How often do we present our better selves in the limited and relatively occasional arena of the public while reserving our impatience and insensitivities for the privacy of our homes and loved ones? How often does a person display generosity and benevolence while in the public eye and self-centered judiciousness when removed from public scrutiny? No, I do not accept that

public displays and ceremonies necessarily add value to the individual Mitzvos.

Furthermore, the ceremonies or lack there of are not for the sake of the child. Neither boy-child nor girl-child understands or remembers the moment. The statements of purpose that both mother and father declare, each in their own prescribed way, is for themselves not their newly born babies. As such, each declaration reflects the nature of the devotion and commitment that the parent undertakes, and the nature of male mitzvos is different than female mitzvos. The nature of male Mitzvos is to emphasize devotion and commitment in the public arena. The nature of female Mitzvos is to emphasize the modesty of the person within the private context of hearth and home. Neither male nor female commandments are intended to the exclusion of the other; rather, they highlight different dimensions of our relationship with G-d.

Let's talk marriage. The Ashkenazik custom is for the bride to circle the groom seven times prior to the actual Kedushin-marriage. Some have suggested that this reflects the chauvinistic bend of the rabbis against females. It presumes that the circling female is to be dominated by her husband and bound to him and him alone. In part, there is truth to the notion of being bound, devoted, and committed to one's husband and only one's husband; however, that is equally true for the husband. He too is bound to his wife by Halacha (Jewish law). In fact, his monogamous devotion is more the product of rabbinic law than it is biblical mandate and underscores the profound honesty of the rabbis when it came to male vulnerability and weakness rather than their deprecation of the female role in marriage and society. The circling is done to show the very opposite. The bride does not circle her groom outside of the Chupah (marriage canopy). The circling is done within the confines of the symbolic marriage home. It says to the groom that he must tame his nature and accept the role of his bride in defining the context of their home and the value of its content-and he must do so before he offers her his ring! If he can accept her dominant role in defining their home-Mazal Tov! If he cannot accept her encompassing role and his central place within that home let him say so before the marriage ceremony! And where does the young couple make this statement? It is all done in public! The acceptance of this division of labor and role is proclaimed and celebrated before the prying eyes of extended family and friends.

The definition of human equality must be divinely mandated rather than intellectually or emotionally formulated; otherwise, it will be subject to the ever-changing whims of person and society. In last week's Parsha the extraordinary persons of Nadav and Avihu died because they did not accept the absolutes of G-d's commandments. They assumed positions that they had no right to assume. Regardless of their intentions and talents they lost sight of who they were

and what their purpose was. Their purpose was to serve G-d by administering to the nation as Kohanim (priests). Their purpose was to show all those seeking closeness with G-d that regardless of personal talents and greatness closeness is equally available to all who are willing to subject themselves to His will. They were in fact the best equipped to teach this lesson because they were personally so great and talented. Regardless of their personal greatness, their relationship with G-d was still defined by simple adherence to the will of G-d. No more or less than anyone else in the nation, if they did their mandated job they were true servants of G-d and could claim closeness to the Divine. If they did not do as G-d mandated, they were wrong and distant from G-d.

The same is true with marriage and family. It is the job of family that defines equality. That job is to build a home filled with adherence to the will of G-d. Whoever participates and does their part in creating and maintaining that environment is equal to anyone else who does the same. It has nothing with doing the same thing as anyone else. It only has to do with doing the job. For some the arena will be public and for others private; however, the focus and commitment to the shared ideal must be the same. Some will make public statements of devotion while others will strengthen their commitments in the privacy of home and heart. Some will circle seven times while others will be circled. Regardless, the Torah, not us, defines equality.

1st, 2nd, & 3rd Aliyot: The laws of purity and impurity as they pertain to childbirth are discussed. The basic laws of Tzaras, its diagnosis by a Kohain, the possibility of a quarantine, and the laws of Tzaras as it relates to healthy and infected skin are discussed.

4th, 5th, 6th, & 7th Aliyot: The laws of Tzaras as it relates to a burn, a bald patch, dull white spots, and the presence of a Tzaras blemish on clothing is detailed. © 2005 Rabbi A. Tandler & www.torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The bulk of our Parsha deals with the "metzora," one who develops a skin condition that results from a spiritual imperfection. The "metzora" must leave the "encampment," thereby preventing him from dwelling among others (unless they are in a similar predicament).

One might associate this situation with a leper colony, where lepers were forced to live separate from "healthy" people, in order to prevent their malady from spreading. However, since the "tzora'as" (skin condition) was caused by a spiritual blemish, even though it manifested itself as a physical symptom it was not medically contagious. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, z"l says that this is evidenced by the fact that the requirement to separate does not come until after the Kohain officially determines that it is "tzora'as." If it were

contagious, we wouldn't wait until after the Kohain examines it, nor would we ever purposely delay showing it to the Kohain to avoid the forced separation (such as during the first week of marriage or during a holiday-see Rambam's Laws of Tzora'as 9:8). If we allow the suspected "metzora" to interact with others for a whole week, whether it is among the crowds in Yerushalayim on Yom Tov or with friends and family gathered to celebrate the wedding, then it must not be a health issue, and we can wait until afterwards to separate him (or her) from the entire community.

The purpose of his "dwelling alone" (Vayikra 13:46), Rav Yaakov explains, is to provide some alone time, to consider what might have been the cause of the "tzora'as" and to repent. This is especially true if the problem was caused - or helped - by the company he keeps, as they cannot be around during this contemplative period. Rather than being similar to a leper colony, it seems to more closely resemble a rehab center - cutting the sinner off from his family and friends until he is cured.

This concept can be extended to the week (or two) that some need to be "closed in" by themselves (13:4-5) until it can be determined whether or not the skin condition is really "tzora'as." That time gives the potential "metzora" the opportunity to reflect on what may have caused his condition, perhaps even allowing him to prevent it from ever becoming "tzora'as" (with its further forced alone time).

Our sages list numerous sins (or bad character traits) that could bring about "tzora'as" (see Vayikra Rabbah 17:3 and Midrash Tanchuma 4, or 10, depending on the edition). While some of these might be easy to recognize and attempt to repent from (such as murder, theft, adultery and lying), others (such as haughtiness and having untruthful thoughts) would require serious introspection. The Ba'alay Mussar very strongly recommend "hisbodedus" (being alone to reflect and introspect) for every person; this forced "hisbodedus" is designed to tell the sinner that there is a problem that needs fixing, and now is the time that he must attempt to fix it.

This may provide further insight into the purpose of the "metzora" calling out "tamay, tamay" (13:45), which the Talmud (Shabbos 67a) tells us is not (just) to warn others to stay away, lest they too become "tamay" (ritually impure), but a plea for help - so that others will pray for him. I have previously discussed the theological problem with praying for others, as the purpose of prayer is to improve one's closeness and relationship with G-d; Another's prayer should not be able to help, since the one being prayed for is not improving via the prayer. Based on the Raibag (Shemos 32:10-11, 31-33 lesson #4 and 33/34, lesson #3), I suggested two possibilities. First of all, praying for another shows that what happens to the other affects the one praying as well; the prayer may therefore be answered in order to avoid adversely affecting the pray-

er. Secondly, included in praying for another is the notion that just as we are asking G-d to help, we would help too - if we could. Therefore, by asking G-d to help another, we are indirectly committing to trying to help that other ourselves.

When Moshe asked G-d to forgive the nation for the sin of the "golden calf," he didn't just offer a prayer. He destroyed the object of worship, had those that worshipped it killed, and had those that watched the worship without protesting watch the worshippers being tried and hung without protesting. He actively tried to "fix" what had been wrong before re-ascending Mt. Sinai to ask (again) for them to be forgiven. It is possible that the cry for help of "tamay, tamay" may be more than just a request to ask G-d to heal the "tzora'as." This "metzora" has been trying to figure out what improvements need to be made, possibly for weeks. It may be a plea to help him figure out what spiritual ailments he suffers from that caused the "tzora'as" in the first place.

By asking others (when he comes in contact with them) to help him improve (either directly or by offering a prayer that he be able to identify his flaws), the introspective state of the forced "hisbodedus" is magnified, helping the "metzora" identify and correct what had been impediments to his spiritual growth.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The major subject of this week's as well as next week's Torah portion is that of ritual purity and impurity, tuma and tahara, one of the most esoteric and puzzling aspects of our Scriptures for the modern mind. What is even more disturbing is that, in the very midst of the Biblical discussion of a child bearer's state of impurity, comes the command of circumcision—a subject which has little to do with the matter at hand. Its proper placement belongs in the book of Genesis, when the Almighty entered into a covenant with Abraham through the ritual of circumcision. As the Bible here records:

"When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be ritually impure for seven days, just as she is impure during the time of separation when she has her period. On the eighth day (the child's) foreskin shall be circumcised, then, for thirty-three additional days, she shall sit on blood of purity..." (Leviticus 12:2-4).

Why is the command of circumcision right between the impure and pure periods following child-birth? Moreover, our Sages specifically derive from this ordinance that the ritual of circumcision overrides the Sabbath:

"On the eighth day, (the child's) foreskin shall be circumcised, -- even if it falls out on the Sabbath" (B.T. Shabbat 132a). Why express this crucial significance of circumcision—it takes precedence even

over the Sabbath— within the context of ritual impurity? Is there a connection?

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

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

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

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

It seems to me, however, that the words of the midrash as well as the context of the commandment reveals a very different message. The human being is part of the physical creation of the world, a world which is subject to scientific rules of health and illness, life and death. The most obvious and tragic expression of our physicality is that, in line with all creatures of the universe, we humans as well are doomed to be born, disintegrate and die. And therefore the most radical example of ritual impurity is a human corpse, avi avot hatuma, and an animal carcass, a dead reptile, and the blood of the menstrual cycle (fall-out of the failed potential of fertilization) likewise cause ritual impurity. A woman in child-birth has a very close brush with

death—both in terms of her own mortality as well as during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

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

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

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

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion begins with discussing a mother's ritual status after childbirth. The Torah tells us that she becomes temeiah (commonly translated, spiritually impure) "as at the time of her menstruation (niddah)." (Leviticus 12:2) In the very next sentence, the Torah points out that if the child born is a male, circumcision is to take place on the eighth day.

This is not the only time that the laws of niddah intersect with circumcision. Consider the first time circumcision is mentioned in the Torah. There, God commands Avraham (Abraham) to circumcise all males of his household. (Genesis 17:9-14) Precisely at that time, God also reveals that a child will be born to Sarah, Avraham's wife. (Genesis 17:19) When Sarah hears the news, she laughs. The Torah explains her laughter by pointing out that Sarah had aged and she was no longer menstruating. In the words of the Torah, "Sarah was old, well on in years, the manner of women had ceased

to be with Sarah." (Genesis 18:11) Here again, there is a confluence between circumcision and niddah.

Circumcision is also prominent in the Moshe (Moses) narrative. While on his way to Pharaoh to demand that the Jews be freed, Moshe finds himself in a terrible predicament—one of his sons is close to death. Tziporah, Moshe's wife, steps in and saves the child by circumcising him. She then declares, "a bridegroom's bloodshed was because of circumcision." (Exodus 4:26) Note how circumcision is here linked to the blood of bridegroom. By definition, blood, for a groom, hints to the menstrual blood of the bride as well.

Not coincidentally, the circumcision of all of the males in Shechem, is in the very same narrative as the sexual violation of Dina. (Genesis 34)

Finally, the sentence from which it is deduced that the blood of circumcision was placed on the door posts of Jewish homes for the Exodus from Egypt deals with blood of birth (dam leidah) which, as noted, is treated as dam niddah -- the time of menstruation. (See Rashi on Exodus 12:6 and Ezekial 16:6)

While circumcision is well known, many wonder what is the counterpoint for circumcision relative to women. These texts seem to teach that the laws of niddah, the laws of family purity, are that counterpoint. Interestingly, milah (circumcision) and niddah are not only mentioned together, but they have similar meanings. The Hebrew for circumcision is milah, which according to Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch comes from the word mul, meaning "opposite." Niddah has a comparable meaning -- "separate."

The repetitive linkage of the male circumcision and the female status of niddah teaches us a clear message. The Torah sanctifies sexuality, whereas, on the other hand, the mores of the greater society, often pervert it. The words mul and niddah teach this strong difference and charge male and female alike to sanctify life even in the most powerful and intimate realms.

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RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

The Torah (Vayikra 12:3) instructs us to perform bris milah (circumcision) on a Jewish male baby, eight days after he is born. Correspondingly, the Torah (Bereishis 17:10) records that HaShem commanded our Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, regarding the Mitzvah of circumcision.

However, atypically, the injunction of circumcision awakened a great question in the heart of Avraham Avinu. He said to HaShem, "Before I circumcised myself, people came to me and joined me in my faith in You. Perhaps when people hear that I am advocating circumcision they will be deterred from embracing my faith." HaShem responded, "Avraham, even if people no longer come to learn about your faith,

let it suffice for you that I am your G-d; let it suffice that I am your patron."

Avraham expressed genuine concern that the Mitzvah of circumcision would hamper his efforts to bring others under the wings of the Divine Presence. HaShem answered him, "Even if you are the only man of faith-you alone are worthy of My loving kindness; the entire Torah; and the creation of the entire universe."

This is not to say that HaShem did not care about the spiritual welfare of others, rather He divulged that each individual is fully valid and worthy in the eyes of Heaven. Specifically, he informed Avraham that His love for him was not predicated upon Avraham's success to turn the hearts of man to G-d. Avraham's recognition of the Creator and his devotion to Him suffices, in and of itself, to earn him eternal favor.

As our Sages say: "Every person is obligated to say, 'The whole world was created for me.'" Meaning, that each individual is created with the potential of greatness to be worthy of the entire universe.

Moreover, HaShem revealed to Avraham that not only is he worthy of the creation of the cosmos, even more, he alone is worthy of all of HaShem's boundless goodness, holiness, and pleasure. May we merit walking in the ways of our Father Avraham, and merit enjoying all of HaShem's infinite and eternal love, compassion, and blessing.

Implement: Say aloud: "The whole world was created for me." © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah which we read in conjunction with Parshas Hachodesh portrays the upcoming month of Nissan in a brilliant light. It begins with an elaborate description of the special sacrifices which will introduce the Messianic era. The prophet Yechezkel focuses on the dedication of the third Bais Hamikdash and says, "On the first day of the first month (Nissan) take a perfect bullock and purify the Bais Hamikdash." (45 18) The Radak (ad loc.) notes that the Jewish nation will return to Eretz Yisroel long before this. During that time most of the construction of the Bais Hamikdash will be completed leaving only final stages for the month of Nissan. Radak suggests that the inaugural services will begin seven days prior to the month of Nissan and will conclude on Rosh Chodesh itself. He offers with this an interpretation to the classic saying of Chazal "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we are destined to be redeemed." These words, in his opinion, refer to the events of our Haftarah where in we are informed that the service in the Bais Hamikdash will begin in the month of Nissan.

As we follow these dates closely we discover a striking similarity between the dedication of the final Bais Hamikdash and of the Mishkan. Historically

speaking, each of them revolves around the month of Nissan. In fact as we have discovered, they are both completed on the exact same date, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But this specific date reveals a more meaningful dimension to these dedications. The month of Nissan, as we know, has special significance to the Jewish people; it marks our redemption from Egyptian bondage. In truth, this redemption process began on the first day of Nissan. Because, as we discover in this week's Maftir reading, Hashem began preparing the Jewish people for their redemption on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. All of this indicates a direct corollary between the Jewish people's redemption and the erection of the Sanctuary and the final Bais Hamikdash. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the date which introduced our redemption and afterwards our service in the Mishkan will ultimately introduce the service of the final Bais Hamikdash.

In search for an understanding of this we refer to Nachmanides' insightful overview to Sefer Shmos. In essence, the Sefer of Shmos spans the Jewish people's exile and redemption. It begins with the descent of Yaakov and his household to Egypt and concludes with the exodus of our entire nation. Yet, almost half of the sefer is devoted to the intricacies of the Sanctuary, something seemingly unrelated to redemption! Nachmanides explains that the Jewish redemption extended far beyond the physical boundaries of Egypt. Before they left the land of Israel, Yaakov and his sons enjoyed a close relationship with Hashem. The devotion of the Patriarchs had produced such an intense level of sanctity that Hashem's presence was commonplace amongst them. However with their descent to Egypt this experience faded away and, to some degree, distance developed between themselves and Hashem. Over the hundreds of years in Egypt this distance grew and they eventually lost all association with Him. Nachmanides explains that even after their liberation from Egyptian bondage scars of exile remained deeply imprinted on them. Having left Egypt, they began rebuilding their relationship with Hashem and prepared for a long journey homeward to Him. Finally, with the erection of the Sanctuary they reached their ultimate destiny and reunited with Hashem. The Sanctuary created a tangible experience of Hashem's presence amongst them, the clearest indication of His reunification with them. With this final development, the Jewish people's redemption was complete. They now returned to the status of the Patriarchs, and were totally bound to their Creator. All scars of their exile disappeared and they could now, enjoy the closest relationship with their beloved, Hashem.

This perspective is best reflected in the words of Chazal in P'sikta Rabsi. Our Chazal inform us that, in reality, all the segments of the Sanctuary were already completed in the month of Kislev. However, Hashem waited until Nissan which is called "the month of the Patriarchs", for the erection and inauguration of the

Mishkan. With the insight of Nachmanides we can appreciate the message of this P'sikta. As stated, the erection of the Sanctuary represented the completion of our Jewish redemption, their reunification with Hashem. In fact, this unification was so intense that it was tantamount to the glorious relationship of the Patriarchs and Hashem. In essence this present Jewish status reflected that of the Patriarchs in whose merit this relationship had been reinstated. It was therefore only proper to wait until Nissan for the dedication of the Sanctuary. Nissan which was the month of the Patriarchs was reserved for this dedication, because it reflected the Jewish people's parallel level to the Patriarchs themselves.

In this week's Haftorah we discover that this concept will continue into the Messianic era and the inauguration of the final Bais Hamikdash. Our ultimate redemption, as in our previous ones, will not be considered complete until we merit the Divine Presence in our midst. Even after our return to Eretz Yisroel, which will transpire long before Nissan, we will continue to bear the scar tissue of thousands of years of exile. Only after Hashem returns to us resting His presence amongst us will we truly be redeemed. This magnificent revelation will, quite obviously, occur in the month of Nissan. Our final redemption which reflects Hashem's return to His people will join the ranks of our redemptions and be introduced on that glorious day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

May we learn from them to totally subjugate ourselves to our Creator thereby meriting the final and total destruction of Amalek and his followers. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Kohen – Kohen – Gone!

Parshas Tazria deals predominantly with the physio-spiritual plague that primarily affects gossips and rumor mongers - tzoraas. Tzora'as appears as a white lesion on various parts of the body, and the status of the afflicted depends on its shade of white, its size, and its development. The afflicted does not go to a medical clinic to seek treatment, nor does he enter a hospital. He is quarantined and then reevaluated; if condemned he is sent out of the Jewish camp until he heals, a sign that he has repented his slanderous ways. Though a physician or medical expert does not evaluate him, he is evaluated, reevaluated, and his future determined, by non-other than a Kohen. Moreover, the Torah does not keep that detail a secret. In the 47 verses that discuss the bodily affliction of tzoraas, the Kohen is mentioned no less than 45 times! "He shall be brought to the Kohen"; "The Kohen shall look"; "The Kohen shall declare him contaminated"; "The Kohen shall quarantine him"; "The Kohen shall declare him tahor (pure)" (Leviticus 13:1-47). Why must the Torah include the Kohen's involvement in every aspect of the

process? Moreover, why does the Torah mention the Kohen's involvement in almost every verse? Would it not have been sufficient to have one encompassing edict: "The entire process is supervised and executed according to the advice of the Kohen."

The parents of a developmentally disabled child entered the study of Rabbi Shlomo Auerbach. They had decided to place their child in a special school in which he would live; the question was which one. "Have you asked the boy where he would like to go?" asked the sage. The parents were dumbfounded.

"Our child cannot be involved in the process! He hasn't the capacity to understand," explained the father. Reb Shlomo Zalman was not moved, "You are sinning against your child. You are removing him from his home, placing him in a foreign environment, and you don't even consult with the child? He will feel helpless and betrayed - I'd like to talk to him."

The couple quickly went home and brought the boy to the Torah sage. "My name is Shlomo Zalman," smiled the venerable scholar. "What's yours?"

"Akiva."

"Akiva," explained Rabbi Auerbach, "I am one of the leading Torah sages in the world and many people discuss their problems with me. Now, I need your help."

"You are about to enter a special school, and I need a representative to look after all the religious matters in the school. I would like to give you semicha, making you my official Rabbinical representative. You can freely discuss any issue with me whenever you want."

Reb Shlomo Zalman gave the boy a warm handshake and hug. The boy entered the dormitory school and flourished. In fact, due to his great sense of responsibility, he rarely wanted to leave the school, even for a weekend; after all, who would take care of any questions that would arise? (Adapted from *And From Jerusalem His Word*, by Hanoach Teller ©1995 NYC Publishing)

Part of the metzorah's (leper's) healing process is banishment from the Jewish camp. However, it is a delicate ordeal, one wrought with trauma, pain, and emotional distress. The Kohen, a man of peace, love, and compassion must be there for every part of the process. He must be there to guide the metzora through the tense incubation period as well as his discharge from the camp. Moreover, he is there again to ease him back into society.

The Torah teaches us, perhaps more than 50 times, that every traumatic decision needs spiritual guidance. It can turn a cold-hearted punishment into a process of spiritual redemption. It can transform a tough, seemingly dispassionate decision into a beautiful experience. For when the Kohen holds your hand, even if it is a stricken one, even if he is leading you outside the camp, you are definitely not gone and certainly not forgotten. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org