

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“A person who has in the skin of his flesh [a discoloration that is potentially the skin condition called 'tzora'as,] is brought to Aharon the Kohain or to one of his sons [who are] Kohanim" (Vayikra 13:2). Chazal (Vayikra Rabbah 15:2-4) discuss why the noun used to refer to an individual who might have "tzora'as" is specifically "uh-dum" ("Adam"). One reason given is because it can be read as "oh dum," meaning "or blood," as a person's actions can change the internal balance between blood and water, and if the balance shifts too much towards blood, the result is "tzora'as." Another application of the word "dum" here (and therefore the reason this particular noun is employed) is that this internal balance (also) affects the color of the hair that grows within the blemish, which can determine if it is problematic (see, for example, Vayikra 13:20-21). It is the third explanation given, though, that caught my attention.

An example is given of a noble woman that enters the king's palace and notices whips and chains hanging on the walls, which frightens her. The king sees this and reassures her that they are only there for the servants (to keep them in line); she can "eat, drink and be happy." This, the Midrash (15:4) continues, is what happened when the Nation of Israel heard about the details of "tzora'as." They became frightened, so Moshe reassured them that this type of suffering is for the other nations, but as for you (Israel), "eat, drink, and be happy." Putting aside (temporarily) how this addresses the use of the noun "uh-dum," there is a more fundamental issue that needs to be resolved. The Mishnah (Nega'im 7:1, see Bartenura re: a convert that was afflicted before his conversion; see also Midrash Hagadol on 13:2) teaches us that the entire concept of "tzora'as" only applies to Jews (of whom more is expected), but not to non-Jews. How could Moshe have consoled the frightened nation by telling them that G-d is only going to bring these afflictions on others - but not them - if they were specifically meant for them?

One possibility could be based on the Yalkut Shimoni (586) on Zecharya 14:12, which calls the suffering our enemies will experience at the end of days "tzora'as." Even though our Parasha is discussing the kinds of "tzora'as" that are a message to religious Jews that they need to improve, what frightened the nation

was the hinted reference to the "melting skin" of the end-time. Moshe therefore reassured them that only our enemies would suffer that way; we will be able to "eat, drink, and be happy." Nevertheless, I would like to present another possibility.

Several years ago (in 5762, before Toras Aish was being archived at www.aishdas.org/ta), I discussed the use of the word "nefesh" regarding one who brings offerings. This noun is, by far, the one used most often (when a pronoun is not used) to describe the person bringing the offering. Yet, Rashi says that the term "nefesh" is used by the voluntary offering of a poor person because it is considered as if he offered his own "nefesh" to G-d. The Ralbag, in his explanation of the purpose of bringing karbanos (when Noach brought his offerings after the flood and in his concluding thoughts to Parshas Tzav), describes how spiritual growth is attained by concentrating on the growth of the intellect while minimizing things of a mundane nature. When we take an animal, which has no human intellect, but otherwise has the same mundane aspects as humans, and slaughter it as an offering, we are showing that we do not value the animalistic parts of our nature. Rather, we are attempting to mitigate its affects on us, allowing the human intellect to shine through.

The term "nefesh" is used to describe the life-force in all living, breathing things, both animals and humans. [We find the term "nefesh" referring specifically to animals during creation (Beraishis 1:20-24) and elsewhere (Vayikra 24:18). When the Ralbag describes subjugating our base tendencies, he uses the term "nefesh behamis," the "nefesh" of an animal that is part of every human being.] Therefore, when describing the sin-offerings, the Torah uses the term "nefesh," as it was this aspect of the person that led to sin, and it is precisely this aspect that the sinner is trying to subjugate when repenting. When the offering is not a sin-offering, however, this manifestation of our mundane nature is not evident, and the use of the term "nefesh" seems inappropriate. Rashi therefore points out that we never find the noun "nefesh" by a voluntary offering, with the exception of the grain offering. Usually "nefesh" refers to the mundane side of a person, but here, where the offering was not a result of animalistic tendencies, it signifies how much value G-d puts on the meager offering of the pauper.

The term "uh-dum," besides being a noun that refers to a person, is also the proper noun of the first

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human with a divine soul, Adam, and (unless used in a context that indicates otherwise) refers to all of humanity. While there are seven universal ("Noachide") laws that apply to all of humanity, the chosen people accepted upon themselves all 613 commandments of the Torah. Just as this doesn't preclude us from occasionally giving in to our more mundane, animalistic, nature, there are times when we act "human," using gifts given to humanity not given to the animal kingdom, in a manner contrary to the Torah's value system.

Chazal list the sins that "tzora'as" is a punishment for (see Vayikra Rabbah 17:2-3 and Tanchuma, Metzora, 4/10). One of the sins listed is "loshon hara," gossip. This is a prime example of a uniquely human gift, the power of speech, being used in a harmful way. The same can be said about the rest of the list, although none are as blatant. Using our ability to reason and think to figure out how to cheat others may make us even lower than animals, but can only be described as a human ability used for nefarious purposes. Focusing on the mundane brings out the "nefesh" within us; abusing our human advantages perverts our humanity.

Our mission as a nation may be to set an example for the rest of the world and make it a better, holier place, but our mission as individuals is to get as close to our Creator as possible; to become as spiritual as possible. Just following the commandments, the structure, is not enough (although a necessary start); we must grow within that structure. And we will be held accountable for not reaching levels we could have reached even if we follow the letter of the law completely. This is a very scary concept, as there is no "spiritual ceiling," no "minimum requirement" above which is only "extra credit." If I should focus more intently when I pray, the fact that I pray three times a day is not enough. If I should try to understand a Talmudic discussion more fully, just understanding it on a more simple level constitutes a measure of failure.

It is possible that when the Nation of Israel heard about "tzora'as," they were afraid that it was a form of punishment used for those that didn't fully realize their potential. And it scared them. Moshe therefore reassured them that it is reserved for those who are "uh-dum," someone who is commanded to

grow beyond mere humanity, but instead abuses the gifts that were given to humanity. He is not described as a "nefesh," but an "uh-dum," as even though "tzora'as" doesn't apply to non-Jews, it does apply to Jews that should have been able to use their uniquely human abilities to grow, but used them improperly instead. As for those who do not pervert their humanity but are still afraid that they haven't reached their full spiritual potential, there is no need to fear "tzora'as." True, they must continue to keep growing, but they can still "eat, drink and be happy" (in moderation, of course). Le'chayim! © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Leprosy, the subject of one of our parshiot this week, is traditionally associated with the sin of slander. Thus, there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for leprosy - metzora - and the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another - motzei shem ra. The Torah reminds us of the danger of bad speech.

The ability to speak has the capacity to raise a human being above the lower animal world. Hence, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi labels the human being as medaber, one who speaks. Speech is what sets the human being apart.

But, the greater the potential to do good, the greater the possibility for that potential to turn into evil. Speech can raise one to the highest level, but if abused, it can sink us to the lowest depth.

Indeed, injurious speech has enormous ramifications. Although when we were kids, we would say "sticks and bones can break my bones, but names can never harm me," it is actually not true. Words and name-calling can actually hurt deeply. It also should be remembered that while a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone.

A rabbinic tale: A rabbi was once asked, what is the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." And the next day the rabbi was asked what is the least expensive meat. Here too he responded, "tongue." Such is the challenge of speech. One that the Torah reminds us about this week, and that we should all take to heart. ©2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Advances in medical technology such as in vitro fertilisation have raised complex ethical and legal questions. In the case of surrogacy for example - where the ovum comes from one woman, but the

fertilised embryo is carried to term by another-who is the mother? On the one hand, the donor mother from whom the ovum is taken contributes her genetic endowment to the child. On the other, the host mother provides the womb in which the foetus grows, and is the one who actually gives birth. The mother may thus be [1] the genetic mother or [2] the host mother; or it could be that from a legal point of view [3] the child has no mother, or [4] two mothers, or [5] maternity may be adjudged to be a matter of doubt, requiring us to take into consideration all possibilities.

One of the first halakchic authorities to consider the question was the late Rabbi Shlomo Goren (1917-1994), senior chaplain to the Israel Defence Forces from 1948 onward and later Chief Rabbi of Israel (1972-1983). His view was that the genetic mother remains, in Jewish law, the mother of the child despite the fact that it was brought to term by someone else. Maternal identity, he held, is purely genetic. It is determined by conception, not birth. One of his proofs is the opening of this week's sedra:

"G-d spoke to Moses, telling him to speak to the Israelites, relating the following: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy..."

The word 'conceives' is-as commentators point out-seemingly superfluous. The 'uncleanliness' from which the mother must be cleansed has to do with the birth, not conception. According to Rabbi Goren, the term 'conceives' comes to supply additional information, namely that it is conception-the meeting of egg and sperm-that determines motherhood. Thus, if the egg donor is Jewish and the host mother not Jewish, the child is Jewish, and requires no act of conversion. If the donor is non-Jewish, and the host mother Jewish, the child is regarded as non-Jewish and will require conversion if it is to be brought up as a Jew.

Other authorities take the opposite view. The relationship between the host mother and the foetus is a dynamic one. She is not a mere incubator to the child developing within her womb. Though its genetic origins are elsewhere, the foetus becomes part of her as it develops.

An earlier question, relating to organ transplantation, had raised a similar issue. Does a donated organ retain its original identity as part of the donor, or does it become part of the recipient (legally, not just biologically)? The authorities considered the case of orlah-the fruit of a tree in its first three years, which is forbidden to be eaten. When the branch of a young tree is grafted to an old one, it takes on the identity of the tree as a whole. The fruit it bears is not considered orlah, even though the branch is less than three years old.

From this, the authorities concluded that a transplanted organ, like a grafted branch, loses its original identity and becomes part of the organism to which it has been joined. A similar logic would hold that

the embryo takes on the identity of the woman into whom it has been implanted. Thus the host mother is considered the mother in Jewish law.

In fact, the matter is more complex. There is a difference between transplantation and implantation; and between an organ and a foetus. An organ has no identity of its own; a foetus does. Eventually, at birth, it will separate and become a person in its own right. Even within the womb, it has its own distinct identity. An organ, successfully transplanted, becomes part of the biological system to which it is attached, whereas the foetus, though nourished and protected by the host mother, remains a separate biological system in its own right. There is a debate in Jewish law as to whether the foetus is, or is not, considered 'a limb of the mother', and that argument has a bearing on our question. If it is a limb of the mother, then once implanted it takes on the identity of the host; if not, not. The question of maternal identity therefore remains open.

Some authorities have recourse to a midrashic (i.e. non-legal) tradition about an episode in the lifetime of Jacob. Jacob fell in love with Rachel, but through Laban's deception, married her elder sister Leah. Eventually he married Rachel as well, but G-d, seeing that Leah was unloved, gave her children, while Rachel remained infertile. She bore Jacob six sons, and then became pregnant a seventh time, eventually giving birth to a daughter. The text at this point (Gen 30: 21) says:

"And afterwards, she gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Dinah."

The apparent redundancy of the phrase 'and afterwards' led the rabbis to the following reconstruction of events. Leah had six sons. The two handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, had two sons each. Leah knew through prophetic insight that Jacob was destined to have twelve sons, each of whom would become the ancestor of a tribe. If her seventh child were a boy, this would mean that her sister Rachel would have only one son, one tribe, and thus leave less to posterity than her own handmaid. Not wanting her sister to suffer this humiliation, Leah prayed that the child within her womb- a boy- be changed to a girl; and so it happened.

According to one of the ancient Aramaic translations, Targum Yonatan, a miracle occurred. The male foetus in Leah's womb and the female in Rachel's womb were transposed. As a result, Rachel gave birth to a boy, Joseph, and Leah to a daughter, Dinah. From this we can infer that maternity is determined by birth, not conception. Joseph-conceived by Leah and bearing her genes- is nonetheless regarded as Rachel's child, for it was she who gave birth to him. The host mother is the mother for all legal purposes.

Those who believe that maternal identity is genetic, not gestational, reject this proof on a number of grounds. First, there is an alternative tradition (Talmud Yerushalmi Berakhot 9:3), that Leah's child was

miraculously changed from male to female in the womb, rather than being transferred to Rachel. Second, a legal proof cannot be derived from a non-legal source. Third, miracles do not establish laws. Thus the matter remains in doubt, and most contemporary authorities act accordingly, taking both possibilities into consideration.

Which is decisive: nature or nurture? Medical science has developed in astonishing new directions since Mendel's 19th century research into genes, Crick and Watson's 1953 discovery of DNA, and the decoding of the human genome. In February 2001 it was announced that the human genome contains not 100,000 genes, as originally postulated, but only 30,000. This surprising result led scientists to conclude that there are not enough human genes to account for the different ways people behave. We are shaped by nurture as well as nature. The two are not separate, but interact in complex and still not yet fully understood ways (for an excellent survey, see Matt Ridley's *Nature via Nurture*, 2003). Contemporary science is thus writing a new commentary to the ancient phrase in this week's sedra: 'when a woman conceives and gives birth'. Conception (genetic endowment) and gestation (the foetus' pre-birth biological environment) both play a part in the formation of a child. There are two aspects of maternity, not one-genetic and gestational; nature and nurture. Thus does science reveal new depths of meaning in the ancient but ever-renewed word of G-d.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's double parsha presents to us a difficult set of rituals regarding a type of physical disease that evinced physical manifestations. The rabbis associated this disease with the sin of improper speech and personal slander. We no longer have any true knowledge of the disease, its true appearances and effects, its quarantine period and the healing process that restored the person to one's community and society.

The ritual laws of purity and impurity are no longer applicable in our post-Temple society and since there are no comments on these laws in a specific manner in the Babylonian Talmud these ritual laws are not subject to the usual intensive scholarship and study that pertain for instance to the laws of money and torts in the Talmud.

In the nineteenth century a great Chasidic rebbe and scholar composed a "Talmud" regarding the laws of purity and impurity. This feat of scholarship however met with criticism from other scholars and has remained controversial and relatively ignored in the modern yeshiva and scholarly world. So in effect the entire topic of this week's double parsha remains mysterious and unclear to us.

After all of the attempted explanations and reasons for these ritual laws of purity and impurity, they nevertheless remain mysterious and relatively inexplicable to us.

Especially when these two parshiyot occur, as they do this year and in most years, in tandem together, the question of their relevance becomes even more acute and perplexing. The Torah which always challenges us to understand it here retains its inscrutability.

Perhaps this is the message of the Torah itself to us. There is a world that is beyond our earthly eyes and rational vision. Modern man always dreams about space aliens and different universes than the one we inhabit. There is an almost innate sense that pervades us that there is more to creation than what we sense and feel.

It fuels our individual drive to immortality, our dreams and imaginations, and it allows us to imagine and invent. There is a popular belief that necessity is the mother of invention. But in reality I do not feel that this is accurate.

Imagination is the mother of invention. There was no real necessity for the unbelievable advances in technology that our past century has witnessed. But people lived in a world beyond our present real world and imagined the computer the wireless phone and the internet.

This capacity of human imagination and of being able to deal with an unseen world that nevertheless truly exists is one of the great traits of the human mind. The Torah indicates to us the existence of such another world, a world of purity and impurity, a special world of holiness and of the human quest for attachment to the Creator of all worlds.

Therefore even though we do not quite relate to that world with our finite mentality, the Torah wishes us to realize that such a world does exist beyond our limited human vision. And that is a very important and essential lesson in life. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

There is what appears to be at first blush an outlandish comment made in the Talmud, which suggests that Israel is the country in which the dead are the inheritors: "In other inheritances of the world, the living inherit the dead; in the Land of Israel, the dead inherit the living" (B.T. Baba Batra 117a).

I believe an in depth understanding of this Talmudic principle will explain for us the confluence of Yom Hashoa, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut and

provide extra meaning for Israel's Independence Day on its 61th anniversary next week.

Allow me to begin my explanation with a brief history of the Etzion bloc in which our city Efrat is located. In the 1940's there were four settlements in this area on barren, rocky land bought from Arabs in a registered sale by a Jew named Holtzman (holtz is Yiddish for etz or tree). Not only was its location south of Bethlehem strategic, protecting Jerusalem to the north, it was also scenic, for it was verdant with green vineyards, majestic hills and sweeping valleys; most important of all it was historic, geographically poised between Hebron, ancient City of our Patriarchs and Jerusalem, eventual city of Messianic peace. The farmers worked indefatigably to till the unfertile soil, for they were certain that the land worked by Boaz, Naomi and Ruth and the fields in which the shepherd-Psalmist David had grazed his flock, would flourish once again.

When the U.N. partition plan of Nov. 29, 1947 was not accepted by the Arabs, the fighting in this region became ferocious, a battle not only for this area but a battle for the survival of Jerusalem. Whoever controlled the hills of the Gush would ultimately rule the Holy City. The settlements suffered heavy losses, and it was decided in Jerusalem that a supportive group with arms and food must be dispatched to help the besieged area.

Setting out by foot, 35 men worked their way through darkness to reach the surrounded settlements. On the way they met an old Arab, captured him, and when he begged for his life they let him go. Legend has it that after he was released, he revealed their position. The 35 were all slaughtered. The remaining settlers - even without their much needed supplies and manpower - continued to fight bravely, but were ultimately massacred, almost to a man. The date was May 13th, 1948, and on the very next day Ben Gurion, declared the birth of the State of Israel and - in honor of the fallen heroes of the Gush - agreed to include a reference to G-d in the Declaration of Independence. The few survivors re-established their settlements in different parts of the country, Ashkelon, Petach Tikvah, Mt. Carmel-but never stopped dreaming of their eventual return to the Etzion Bloc. After the Six-Day war, when the area was once again in Jewish hands, children whose parents had been forced to evacuate the area or who had been killed by the Jordanian legion now returned. In the hills of Gush Etzion, the heirs to this land reconstructed the shattered dreams of their parents who were no longer alive to see how their vision had borne fruit.

That which occurred between 1948 and 1967 in the Gush is a paradigm for the 1900 years in which the Jews were separated from their national homeland after the Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. We were scattered to all four corners of the globe, but our forbears never stopped dreaming of our eventual

return to the Promised Land of our forefathers. Because of their teachings, sacrifices and suffering, the dream of Israel remained vital in the hearts of their children. Among other nations, the living inherit the dead. With us, it's exactly the opposite: the dead inherit the living.

This concept emerges in the course of a legal dispute between Rabbi Yoshiyah and Rabbi Yonatan in the Talmud (Baba Batra, 117a) concerning the meaning of several key verses regarding the initial inheritance and division of the Land of Israel.

"Among those people you shall divide the land as an inheritance according to the number of names. By lot shall the land be distributed, according to the names of your fathers shall they inherit it." (Numbers 26:53-56)

When the 40 years of wandering in the desert ended, should the method of apportioning the land be determined by the number of those who left Egypt or by the number of those who arrived in Israel?

For example, if I left Egypt with two sons, and one of my sons had only one son, while the other had five sons, then if the division is according to those who left Egypt, each one of my sons should get an equal portion. Thus we find that five grandsons must share among themselves the same portion which the grandson of the other son receives. But if we make our determination according to those who enter the land of Israel, we end up with six portions to be divided equally.

Rabbi Yoshiyah stresses verse 53, "According to the names of your fathers you shall inherit it," which to him indicates that the land is divided according to those who left Egypt, while Rabbi Yonatan emphasizes the verse, "Among these people you shall divide the land as an inheritance," and takes 'these people' to mean those who physically enter the land. The dispute is decided that the six grandsons receive six portions of land - but three portions go to the descendants of the one brother who left Egypt, and the other three are divided between the five sons of the second brother who left Egypt. Therefore, the Talmud declares: "In all other inheritances of the world, the living inherit the dead, but here the dead [the generation which died out in the desert] inherit the living [the generation which entered the land]." (Baba Batra 117a).

Knowing that they would die before entering Israel, where did the Jews find the strength to wander for 38 years in the desert? The only possible answer is that they believed that even if they wouldn't enter the Promised Land, at least their children would! And this is precisely what R. Yonatan means when he says that the dead inherit the living. We live in this land only because previous generations were willing to devote their lives to a dream that never materialized. But through us, they inherit land.

A famous midrash tells the tale of Hadrian meeting an old Jew after the fall of Judea and Samaria

planting a carob tree which, according to tradition, takes 70 years to bear fruit. Asked to explain his behavior, the Jew answers that just as his father and grandfather planted for him, he is planting for his child, and grandchildren, oblivious to the flag of the Roman eagle flying on Jewish soil.

The emperor then turns to his general and admits that with such resilience and faith, with such willingness to plant in the present that which will be reaped in the future, even the Roman armies don't stand a chance. Hadrian was 100% correct; our parents and grandparents inherit Israel through us!

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

Our sages have taught us that the malady of "tzara'at" which is discussed in this week's Torah portion (loosely translated as the sickness leprosy) comes on a person as a punishment for "lashon hara"-slander. We have been taught that this sin is a great one in that it causes the deaths of three people- the one who tells the slander, the one who listens, and the subject of the slander itself. It seems quite obvious why the last one in the list-the subject of the slander-is compared to one who has been "killed," but it is not clear at first glance why the comparison is valid for the other two. However, a deeper insight into the matter might indicate that the subject of the slander is the person who on fact is least harmed by the process. The sages are not concerned with external physical harm but rather with estimating the damage to the soul incurred by people who engage in evil, even going so far as expressing it verbally, either by speaking out loud or listening and accepting the words. From this point of view, the internal harm suffered by the speaker and the listener is so great that the shame the subject of the slander may feel is only a secondary harm (and this explains why this person appears last in the list of damage caused by lashon hara).

What is the source of this evil urge, gnawing away at us to malign other people and to fill our mouths with evil-According to the testimony of the verse, "The master of the tongue has no advantage" [Kohellet 10:11]. The slanderer is not motivated by a desire for money or some other material benefit but rather by a much deeper motive. Each and every one of us knows two basic facts that open up beneath us a bottomless pit from which we cannot escape. Everybody knows that he is not the source of his own life and also that no man is perfect, without any vestiges of sin. We do not always remember these facts explicitly, but they are always stored deep within our conscience, and the result is that we are constantly in a state of great tension.

Where does this tension lead? At this point, there are two divergent paths. Those who have faith use the tension as a gateway, an open path through which we can gain access to the Almighty, who guides His world with kindness and treats His creatures with mercy, including the fact that He is ever ready to welcome back even one who has made Him angry in the past. Such a person does not have possession of anything in a material sense, but the truth of this recognition brings him to realize that he can request anything that he lacks from the Almighty, who is the true embodiment of perfection. The slanderer, on the other hand, attempts to cover up his own failings, in order to forget his own shame. The only way open for him is to move the focus of attention from his own failings and those of his colleagues to the lack and the shame of all those around him. This also explains why other people are attracted to the chatter of a slanderer and are led to accept his words willingly.

The conclusion is that the only real cure for this malady of the tongue is to strengthen our links to G-d, with all the vitality and power that can be brought forth. Only when a person stands face to face with the one who created him and gave him life, the Almighty-who wants the existing complex mosaic of life even though it is full of missing links-will he be able to find consolation in his own soul and work on his own personality without being jealous of the "greener pastures" of his fellow man.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

“And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying, "When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, or a scab, or a bright spot and it becomes in the skin of his flesh the plague of tzora'as, then he shall be brought to Aharon the priest or unto one of his sons the priests" (Leviticus 13:1-2).

What is the significance and meaning of these different types of tzora'as?

The Chasan Sofer comments that the different types of tzora'as are illustrative of reasons why people might speak against others:

1) Sais (a rising): A person might speak against others to raise his own stature.

2) Sapachas (a scab): A person might join (sipuach) a group of people who speak against others. In ordinary circumstances, he would not speak loшон hora, but to be sociable or to fit in, he would.

3) Baheres (a bright spot): A person might have done something against someone else, and in an attempt to exonerate himself, he speaks against that person. He clarifies (bahir) the reason for his behavior. If one is aware of the motivation for his speaking loшон hora, he can work on correcting himself.

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, points out that from the severity of the tumah (spiritual uncleanness) of the metzora (the person afflicted with tzora'as), we have an indication of the severity of loshon hora. This is the only type of tumah in which the person is required to stay entirely out of the camp or city where other people live.

If one is careful not to speak negatively about others, he may never have to whisper again! *based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Both Parshat Tazria and Metzora discuss skin ailments on one's flesh, who to see about it (the Priest), how to treat it (isolate it), what to do if it spreads (isolate yourself), and so on. While we get caught up in the details of the treatments, we might fail to realize how strange all of this is. This is the first time the Torah discusses personal physical hygiene. Why would the Torah spend almost two entire Parshiot (multiple Parsha) on personal hygiene?

Rabbi Munk in The Call of The Torah explains that by giving these afflictions so much attention, the Torah points to them as examples of the spiritual causes at the root of many illnesses (In our case, Tzaraas-the affliction discussed in the Parsha-is caused by one of seven sins: Slander, murder, perjury, debauchery, pride, theft and jealousy (Talmud Arachim 16a)). As the Rambam (Maimonides) asserts, the best medication is based on ethical values, helping to re-establish harmonies between spiritual and physical forces (Guide to the Perplexed 3:27). This discussion in the Torah is meant to remind us that illness is sometimes spiritual, and that it's connected to our physical well-being. We should feed our bodies, so long as we nurture our souls. ©2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Holistic Healing

Tzora'as, the main discussion of the portions of Tazria and Metzora 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 Dvinsk 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. © 1998 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

HaMa'ayan

Rashi introduces this parashah with the statement that just as man was created after all of the animals, so the laws pertaining to man are discussed (in this and future parashot) after the laws of the animals (which were discussed in last week's parashah and those preceding it.)

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l (1890-1978; editor of the Encyclopedia Talmudit) notes that there are two possible reasons for why the last element in a list might hold that place. The last thing may be the "end," and everything preceding it, the means to that end. Alternatively, a thing may be the last on a list because it is incomplete without what came before.

Chazal give two reasons why man was created last in the order of creation. If man acts properly, we say to him, "The entire world was created before you so that everything would be ready for you when you arrived on the scene." In this case, man is the "end" and all other creations are the tools which serve man.

On the other hand, if a person is not worthy, we say to him, "Even the puny gnat was created before you." In such a case we may say that man is incomplete; only if he learns humility from the gnat that came before him does he redeem and "complete" himself. (Latorah U'lemoadim)

"She shall bring a sheep within its first year for an olah-offering, and a young dove or a turtledove for a sin-offering..." (12:6)

"But if she cannot afford a sheep, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young doves, one for an olah-offering and one for a sin-offering[.]" (12:8)

R' Yaakov "Ba'al Ha'turim" (14th century) observes that the Torah ordinarily mentions turtledoves before doves (as in the second verse quoted above). Why is the first verse quoted above an exception?

In most cases (again, as in the second verse) a bird sacrifice consists of two birds. However, when a

person brings only one bird (as in the first verse), one should preferably not bring a turtledove because that species of bird mates for life and mourns for its mate when it dies. Therefore, the turtledove is mentioned last in that verse. (On the other hand, when one brings two and this concern does not exist, one should bring turtledoves because they are bigger than doves.) (Ba'al Ha'turim, as elaborated upon in Shai La'Torah)

"Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Your judgments are like the vast deep waters." (Tehilim 36:7)

The gemara (Erachin 8b) states that the first part of this verse refers to tzara'at which afflicts a human, while the second part refers to tzara'at which afflicts houses. Rashi (in his commentary there) explains that G-d's kindness is more evident in the former type of tzara'at than in the latter. The reason is that the period of "hesger" (the initial quarantine before a final "diagnosis" is made and a full quarantine begins) is only one week for a human but is three weeks for a house.

Is it then good that the hesger period ends and the full quarantine begins? asks R' Isaac Sher z"l (Slobodka rosh yeshiva; died 1952). Furthermore, of all the acts of kindness that Hashem does for us, why is tzara'at singled out as evidence of G-d's "righteousness [which] is like the mighty mountains"?

R' Sher answers: when a person speaks lashon hara and is stricken with tzara'at, this demonstrates two things. On the one hand, it demonstrates that Hashem loves every Jew and defends his honor. Indeed, this is why lashon hara is prohibited. Every individual is beloved to Hashem like a child, and just as a father does not approve when someone speaks ill of his child, so G-d does not approve when someone speaks ill of His "child."

On the other hand, the fact that a person is stricken with tzara'at demonstrates Hashem's closeness to that person himself. Today, no one gets tzara'at because we no longer are close enough to Hashem that we can expect such a clear sign of His displeasure with us. It is in this sense that tzara'at is a sign of G-d's greatness and His kindness, for He lets us now when we have fallen so that we can repent. This is also why a shorter period of hesger is a greater kindness; the person to whom Hashem shows His displeasure sooner is presumably closer to Hashem. (Lekket Sichot Mussar I p. 246)

